

Spotlight thrown on policing in East Africa

Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative releases five reports on policing in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania

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On the evening of Monday 12 June, the Director General of the East African Community Customs Union, Peter Kiguta, released five reports into policing in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, as part of a two-day roundtable on police and police reforms in East Africa hosted by Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) and the East Africa Law Society in Arusha, Tanzania.

Ms Maja Daruwala, Director of CHRI, was in Arusha for the launch. She said, "The people of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania are suffering under police forces that too often are corrupt, violent and brutal tools of government. This type of policing is at direct odds with the claims of democracy made by the governments of East Africa. It is time for each country to take a long, hard look at its police and aim towards reform; the reports launched tomorrow will point governments, communities and police in the right direction."

The first three reports launched by the Director General look at police accountability in the three East African countries. Each of the reports - *The police, the people, the politics: Police accountability in Kenya*, *The police, the people, the politics: Police accountability in Uganda* and *The police, the people, the politics: Police accountability in Tanzania* – look at the development of the police force in each country, examine the issues facing the police and consider the legislative and political frameworks that the police operate within. Each report also looks at the reforms that need to take place and sets out a roadmap for reform in each country. The Kenya report was published with the Kenya Human Rights Commission.

The Director General also released a report on the impact of government budgets on policing in Kenya, and another report on the impact of government budgets on policing in Uganda.

"The role of police is to protect the community," said Ms Daruwala, "In Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania, they protect the governments. You only need to look as far as the front page of your newspaper to see there is something very wrong with the police in East Africa – from the Kenya police building bonfires of newspapers in the street to stop the publication of articles critical of the government, to Ugandan police storming the High Court to prevent the release of an opposition Presidential candidate during recent elections, to reports of Tanzanian police torturing suspects to get confessions." Ms Daruwala also described the style of policing in place in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. "Each country inherited a colonial regime police force at independence," she explained, "and the independence governments quickly made use of the style of policing to keep themselves in power. Across the region, the police have been used to crush dissent and keep the government in power for decades."

Ms Daruwala said that the launch of the reports was an excellent first step on the path to police reform in East Africa. "The region is moving towards democracy. Old, regime style police forces have no place in the new countries of East Africa."

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The Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI) is an independent, non-partisan, international NGO working for the practical realisation of human rights in the countries of the Commonwealth.