



1 POLICING ASSEMBLIES

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL DUTCH SECTION

Police and Human Rights Program – Short paper series No. 1

AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL



December 2013

Amnesty International
Dutch section
Police and Human Rights Program
Short paper series No. 1

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Photo cover:

*Police officer communicating with demonstrators in front of the Parliament in Catalonia, Barcelona, Spain,
June 2011 © David Airob*

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Policing assemblies

A public assembly is a dynamic social process which often starts long before the actual assembly takes place. However, in particular when public assemblies turn into violence, what is usually seen is a photograph or a video of law enforcement officials (LEOs)* and demonstrators clashing in some way. Such a picture gives only a one-dimensional idea of what happened.

This paper aims to provide those who wish to monitor or analyse public assemblies – e.g. human rights and other civil society organisations, or journalists – with a broader view about them. It aims to provide them with an understanding about the planning and preparatory process undertaken by law enforcement agencies and enable them to identify causes and failures throughout the process where things may have gone wrong. It should in the end enable them to formulate constructive recommendations for the future which go beyond simply the necessary response of calling for investigation of incidents and bringing to justice those who commit human rights violations or abuses.

* Across the world, the handling of public assemblies is carried out by a large variety of security agencies; however, in line with Commentary a) to Art. 1 UN Code of Conduct for law enforcement officials, they all fall under the definition of law enforcement official and this is the term we mainly use in this paper. We use the term “police” in relation to specific country examples, where it was indeed the police agency of that country dealing with issues of public assemblies.

Introduction

Recent years have seen the emergence of new challenges and issues related to the policing of public assemblies. The world has seen a rise of global movements, and the widespread use of social media has transformed the style and form of many assemblies. Assemblies occur more spontaneously, have larger numbers of participants and/or are shaped by extremely emotional situations. People went on the streets to demand an end to corruption and repression in North Africa, the Middle East and Russia. At the same time people in Europe took to the streets against austerity measures and the lack of democracy and accountability of their governments and the financial sector. Greece in particular has been witnessing popular uprisings since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008, and in 2011 Spain saw the rise of the “Indignados”. In the first half of 2013, millions of Brazilians took to the streets to protest initially against a rise in bus fares and later against corruption and social inequality. At the same time tens of thousands of people on the streets in Turkey protested against their government.

Quite often such demonstrations end up in violence. There can be many reasons for this: While it is rare for an entire assembly to be violent from the outset – though occasionally that does happen – sometimes there are a few individuals within a public assembly who seek to engage in violent acts and who provoke a general outbreak of violence despite an initially peaceful assembly. Such individuals or small groups may be part of the assembly, but seeking to voice their opinion by means of violence; or they may have their own agenda distinct from the rest of the assembly (even being from a rival group); or they may even be agents provocateurs from the law enforcement agency. In other situations, it is the police who decide to disperse the assembly despite its peaceful character, and start to use – often excessive – force against peaceful protestors, leading to a generalized violent confrontation. In many cases it is rather something more complex, where individual actions – by demonstrators or by the police – lead to a vicious circle of action / reaction that ends up in violence. Counter-demonstrations with the risk of physical confrontation between the two opposing groups are another scenario of violence that police have to deal with.

In this environment, policing public assemblies is a very difficult and complex task. It is a challenge to achieve the right balance between human rights of the individual and the State’s obligation to maintain public order and safety as well as to protect the rights of others. This requires the police, individually and collectively, to act at all times in a professional and disciplined manner consistent with the high degree of responsibility of their function, and in carrying out their duties to respect and uphold the human rights of all persons, as set out in the Code of Conduct for LEOs. Often, however, law enforcement officials fail to incorporate a human rights approach while dealing with assemblies or act in breach of international law and standards by using more than only the minimum level of force necessary to deal with any instances of violence or other lawbreaking by demonstrators, or by breaking up an assembly because of outbreaks of violence by a few individuals, or even despite the assembly being entirely peaceful.

In other cases the problem is not unnecessary, excessive or arbitrary use of force by LEOs, but rather that they fail to protect participants in assemblies which cause public controversy, such as political demonstrations or lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex (LGBTI)-Pride events, against violence or other attacks by those who oppose them. LEOs are meant to remain neutral at all times and to protect every person, but we often see LEOs taking sides.

However, while violations of this kind by LEOs occur often and repeatedly, they are not the focus of this paper. There are, each and every day, also thousands of public assemblies taking place around the world where people can voice their opinion without fear, in a peaceful environment where their lives and safety are not at risk, and where the role of the police is indeed the one of a facilitator and protector of rights, even in difficult

circumstances. Drawing from such experiences, this short paper seeks to show that human rights and effective policing of assemblies are not opposites, but can and should align with each other.

This short paper documents some good practices found for the phase before, during and after demonstrations. We overall show some measures and methods that LEOs in different countries have deployed to effectively facilitate assemblies and to ensure that they take place in a peaceful manner. **The focus in this paper is thus not on the means and methods regarding use of force, but rather on all measures intended to facilitate the exercise of the right of peaceful assembly, to prevent the outbreak of violence and thus to avoid the need to resort to force.** We look at factors such as communication, facilitation and protection, decisions about equipment, and the use of police discretion. By directly linking good practices to the international standards we show that these standards can be achieved by LEOs in practice.

However, this document does not purport to be an operational guidebook on how law enforcement officials should do their job; nor is it meant to be a ready-to-use tool-box for facilitating public assemblies. We deliberately use the formulation “good practice” instead of the frequently employed “best practice”: copy-paste exercises do not work in policing; all choices need to be adapted to the particular context and all means and methods need to fit into the overall approach adopted. The examples presented here simply aim to illustrate some of the choices made by law enforcement agencies in some countries, which may contribute to the effective facilitation of assemblies, avoid the need to resort to any use of force (or reduce any such need to a minimum), while maintaining peace and order and protecting human rights. However, only when appropriate to the context, the general policing approach adopted, and as part of a set of appropriate measures, will they contribute to effective, good and human rights compliant policing of public assemblies. And certainly, some police tactics and methods described in this short paper would need more thorough investigation as to how and when they should concretely be implemented.

What this short paper is NOT about

It is not about the general question of freedom of peaceful assembly, e.g. the question of over-restrictive domestic legislation, political oppression or other forms of democratic deficits. In this regard the UN special rapporteur Maina Kiai has already produced a very useful report.* However, within the domestic legal framework police have and make choices (e.g. even where an assembly has been declared unlawful, they may choose NOT to disperse it), and it will be these choices we will be looking at.

This document will have limited relevance for situations where the approach of the authorities is intentionally to repress dissent or political opposition: Where the response to a public assembly is exclusively shaped by the motivation to quell protest and smash political opposition at whatever cost, i.e. where security forces as an extended arm of an oppressive political leadership deliberately use violence force to prevent the exercise of the right to public assembly and freedom of expression, there is little room for assessing such operations from the perspective of public order management, unless, even despite instances of unnecessary or excessive use of force, there are at least some signs of attempting proper public order management.

* Report of the Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, Maina Kiai (A/HRC/20/27).

International standards applicable to the policing of assemblies

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)

Article 21

The right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized. No restrictions may be placed on the exercise of this right other than those imposed in conformity with the law and which are necessary in a democratic society in the interests of national security or public safety, public order (ordre public), the protection of public health or morals or the protection of the rights and freedoms of others.

Basic Principles on the Use of Force and Firearms by Law Enforcement Officials (BPUFF)

Principle No. 2

Governments and law enforcement agencies should develop a range of means as broad as possible and equip law enforcement officials with various types of weapons and ammunition that would allow for a differentiated use of force and firearms. These should include the development of non-lethal incapacitating weapons for use in appropriate situations, with a view to increasingly restraining the application of means capable of causing death or injury to persons. For the same purpose, it should also be possible for law enforcement officials to be equipped with self-defensive equipment such as shields, helmets, bullet-proof vests and bullet-proof means of transportation, in order to decrease the need to use weapons of any kind.

Principle No. 4

Law enforcement officials, in carrying out their duty, shall, as far as possible, apply non-violent means before resorting to the use of force and firearms. They may use force and firearms only if other means remain ineffective or without any promise of achieving the intended result.

Principle No. 13

In the dispersal of assemblies that are unlawful but non-violent, law enforcement officials shall avoid the use of force or, where that is not practicable, shall restrict such force to the minimum extent necessary.

Principle No. 20

In the training of law enforcement officials, Governments and law enforcement agencies shall give special attention to issues of police ethics and human rights, especially in the investigative process, to alternatives to the use of force and firearms, including the peaceful settlement of conflicts, the understanding of crowd behaviour, and the methods of persuasion, negotiation and mediation, as well as to technical means, with a view to limiting the use of force and firearms. Law enforcement agencies should review their training programmes and operational procedures in the light of particular incidents.

Today's practical challenges for the policing of assemblies

Police are the visible arm of the State and easily become the target of public anger

It can be a challenge for the police to ensure that their role is understood by those protesting, particularly where the public assembly is protesting against (parts of) the government. The way they address the task of policing the public assembly must leave no doubt that they are doing their job of maintaining public order, and must not give the impression through their conduct and the restrictions imposed that they are taking sides against the protesters. Even where the restrictions imposed are lawful, or where in the course of an assembly law enforcement officials lawfully exercise their powers (e.g. the use of force or arrest), there is a high risk of the police becoming a target of public anger and it is in their own interests to prevent this as much as possible.

Political situation

Behaviour by the political leadership, for instance hate speech against minorities or aggressive discourse against dissent, can increase tensions and make the task of the police more difficult. This increases the need for early dialogue to channel public anger and frustration away from aggression and violence towards facilitation of peaceful protest. Unfortunately quite often the government, as well as other political actors, exert pressure on the police to act in a certain way, undermining the operational independence of the police, or even urge or instruct the police to use force. In such circumstances it can be a challenge for police agencies to maintain their operational independence. They should be aware of the risk to public order as well as to their own safety and security, if they agree or de facto allow themselves to become a tool in the hands of the political leadership.

A rapidly changing environment

Modern means of communication and in particular social media can create large public assemblies in a very short period of time. These can be triggered by events at the local level, as well as at the international level, where solidarity protests for people in other countries can take place at any time. During assemblies social media contribute to the rapid spread of information and rumours which can immediately influence the behaviour of participants. They distribute a huge quantity of information, true and false, and its relevance and reliability is difficult for the police and the demonstrators to analyse quickly. It might be necessary for the police to react using social media, e.g. to provide information, to dispel false rumours, to call for peaceful behaviour, or to warn about any hazards, etc. However, it is difficult to do this within the short

Female participant filming demonstration at Taksim Square in Istanbul, Turkey, June 2013 © Murad Sezer / Reuters





Large demonstration at Tahrir Square, Cairo, Egypt, November 2012 © Matic Zorman / Demotix

timeframe set by the overall speed of social media, given that police must ensure that their reaction is accurate based on confirmed information.

New forms of protest present new or greater challenges

Increasingly, people voice their protest for a longer period of time at a central place, such as occurred for instance with the teachers demonstrations in Zócalo, Mexico (lasting from April to September 2013). The situation becomes even more complex where it is combined with the establishment of semi-permanent structures such as in Cairo on Tahrir Square in 2013 or the “Occupy Wall Street” movement in New York in 2011. Prolonged protests of this kind put a considerable strain on police resources, and present enhanced challenges in terms of traffic management, safety and even public health. They are often a sign of political confrontation and deadlock and are characterized by a high level of emotions. While in most such cases not the target of public anger at the beginning, police can easily risk becoming the target, depending how they act in such a situation. Obviously, this is sure to happen if the police make use of any form of excessive force against peaceful demonstrators in such situations.

Crowds are not homogeneous / Violence of a few

Sometimes there are smaller groups of persons who have little or no interest in the issue the public assembly is about, but who want to misuse it for their own purposes and who fuel violence. The presence of such groups or individuals should not lead the police to restrict, prohibit or disperse the whole assembly. The police have to find ways of facilitating the assembly of those who want to assemble peacefully, while stopping those who want to engage in violence.

Polarized environment / counter-demonstrations

In a polarized environment, police often have to deal not only with one group organizing and participating in a public assembly – if there are counter-demonstrations, police have to facilitate both, while attempting to provide security for both. And if the message one public assembly wants to convey is directed at the other assembly, police should ensure they can take place within sight and sound of each other. This, however, becomes a problem when one side or the other has a clear intent to prevent the other side from holding the assembly successfully, i.e. preventing their full enjoyment of freedom of expression and assembly. Or, worse, one or both sides may be inclined to use violence against the other assembly, which the police will have to seek to prevent.

Law enforcement vs. public order

Where LEOs observe people breaking minor provisions of the law, they often have discretion whether to intervene or not. This discretion needs to be applied very carefully when policing assemblies: if police take action against certain minor offences it might provoke a counter-reaction on behalf of the individuals concerned and / or the rest of the public and ultimately contribute to a rapidly-escalating and uncontrollable reaction by the participants. The most appropriate approach might therefore be not to act immediately against the offender (possibly while taking measures that might allow for prosecution of offences at a later stage). At the same time, some minor offences, such as burning dustbins, may lead to agitation of the participants, and provoke other people to do something similar or worse. Striking the right balance between enforcing the law and preventing a deterioration of public order presents an important challenge to the police.

Effective planning and resources management

The policing of large assemblies, in particular any assembly where violence is expected or situations with multiple or counter-demonstrations, can require huge input of human and logistical resources by the police and others. Thorough planning and preparation are required, as well as putting in place all measures that contribute to a peaceful and trustful environment, in order to ensure respect and protection of human rights. Such preparation will also help limit the pressure on resources.

Anti-conflict-teams of the police accompanying demonstrators of the Green Party, Berlin, Germany 2010 © Flickr.com/raf191



Good practices in the policing of assemblies

Notice

The good practices presented in this section have been collected from various sources: Observations by Amnesty International, reports issued by commissions and international organisations, operational documents from police forces, direct consultations with police officials, etc. While we tried to gather information from a large variety of countries, the output was not meant to be geographically representative. Most of the examples identified here are from Europe and the Americas; however, we are convinced that the underlying considerations are generally applicable and should not be restricted to these two geographical regions.

It is furthermore important to underscore that where reference is made to a good practice in a country or at a specific event, that does not represent a judgment (and even less an appreciation) about the overall quality of the policing of assemblies in the respective country. Nor does it mean the practices presented are always used effectively in that country or by that specific law enforcement agency. The same applies when we refer to operational procedures or policies: this does not imply a statement as to whether these internal regulations are effectively put into practice.

The good practices presented merely aim to illustrate different options and considerations for law enforcement agencies in the planning for and the policing of an assembly with a focus on facilitation of the right of peaceful assembly and on prevention of violence.

4.1 Overall approach: dialogue is the first choice

The main conclusion when looking at the policing of assemblies around the world was that many police forces today place communication with organisers and participants at the centre of their approach. For example: The governing principles adopted by the council for internal security in Argentina for public order protocols states that all approaches should start with a dialogue with the organizers of a public assembly (paragraph 6). The overall credo of the Austrian police when policing assemblies is the so-called “3D”-approach, i.e. dialogue, de-escalation, direct action, which places dialogue at the forefront of the approach for all public assemblies. A specific task for police commanders of the Peruvian National Police in this regard is formulated in the booklet for police officials deployed in public order situations: *“Permanent coordination in police operations: with recognized authorities, leaders, representatives and responsible persons of the protesting groups, ... in order to prevent outbreaks of violence, to determine itineraries, schedules and measures to be taken, [and] to inform them about the rights of participants, including limitations and obligations in relation to the rights of others.”* [translation made by the author of this paper].

Some police agencies have even set up specialized departments or units for that purpose, such as the Peace Unit in Amsterdam, dialogue police officers with special vests in Sweden, anti-conflict teams in some states of Germany who are identifiable through special clothing. Liaison officers engage with organizers and demonstrators in, for instance, the UK and Hungary. Other police agencies have opted for a more generalized approach where any police officer should be trained in communication and dialogue and make use of that skill when policing an assembly.

Sweden - Dialogue Policing

After the violent demonstrations in Gothenburg in 2001, the Swedish police realized they needed a new tactical approach to manage protests and crowds, which would be more focused on communication instead of confrontation and repression. Starting in early 2002 the Swedish police now deploy specially trained dialogue police officers who deal with demonstrations.

Dialogue police play an important part in de-escalation. Their task is to establish contact with the demonstrators before, during, and after the demonstration and to act as a link between the organizers of the events and the police commanders. They wear specially designed fluorescent vests with ‘dialogue police’ written on the back which enhances their visibility. By negotiating, dialogue police officers facilitate compromises and agreements between police and demonstrators.

4.2 Pre-event negotiation and dialogue

Many public assemblies do not occur spontaneously or at very short notice: Important political events such as summits, special days, public mobilization around expected political decisions, anniversaries of past events – in all these situations, assemblies can be anticipated and thorough planning and preparation is possible. The same goes for assemblies where organizers include specific activities that require a level of preparation, e.g. where there will be speakers or music, or if organizers are trying to organize a large number of people in a certain way such as wearing a specific outfit, to take a specific road, or people coming from abroad. Police forces around the world have learned to use this time for engaging in dialogue with organizers.

These days, high level political summits, such as G8, G20 or NATO summits, are almost always accompanied by large-scale protest, and this knowledge allows for early planning and dialogue. For instance, in relation to the Economic Social Forum 2002 in Florence, negotiations with protest organizers started several months ahead; in Denmark, when expecting protests in relation to the 2002 G8-summit, law enforcement officials started dialogue with organizers one year ahead of the event; and in Canada, dialogue started six months ahead of the expected 2010 G-20 protest.

This dialogue can help to prevent problems and to find solutions to potential problems before they arise - determining the best possible routes for a march, finding an appropriate balance between conflicting interests of the demonstrators and others e.g. taking account of simultaneous events, traffic considerations, the need for security of a high-level summit, etc.

In Slovakia, in 2011, organizers of a pride event and the police agreed on a change in the operational measures so as to ensure that the participants did not feel excessively locked in: The fences which had been initially planned to protect participants against aggression from homophobic groups, were in the end not used; instead mobile protection was provided by police units themselves. This illustrates the importance of pre-event negotiation and dialogue between police and protesters, particularly in instances where there will be several different demonstrations or counter-demonstrations. In some instances this is provided for in the law, such as in Moldova, where the law on public assemblies provides for discussions between organizers of simultaneous events and the police.

In some instances such dialogue may even help to prevent foreseeable confrontation by negotiating with the demonstrators if they will agree to carry out a purely symbolic or theatrical action to make their point:

Denmark: EU Summit 2002

During the EU-summit in Copenhagen a group of protesters planned to disobey police orders by marching against the venue of the summit meeting, but they would be confronted by a solid wall of police cars, armoured vans and massed ranks of riot police. The potential for violent confrontation was averted thanks to a pre-negotiated compromise: The demonstrators raised their hands in the air, slowly walked towards the police lines, broke through a symbolic line of police tape and came to a stop several meters from the police cordon. The police responded by opening a corridor in the cordon and inviting protesters to walk through it to the metro station at the other side, allowing protesters to take a train back to the centre. This negotiated compromise allowed both sides to achieve their objectives, at least to some degree and prevented serious unrest.

Example retrieved from: Abby Peterson, Policing Contentious politics at Transnational Summits: Darth Vader or the Keystone Cops?, 2006.



In Hungary, such discussions led to arrangements with regard to timing that allowed for several events, including marches and static assemblies, taking place on the same day of 15 March 2012 (a national holiday) and even for some at the same place: a pro-governmental march, a large civic opposition protest, a demonstration by radical right-wing groups, marches and static assemblies organized by a nationalist party and others more.*

In Amsterdam, the Netherlands, a protest against the police was organized in response to an incident where a foreign national was killed by police. The dialogue between organizers and the Peace Unit of the Amsterdam police ensured that this demonstration against the police took place peacefully. Sometimes, often because of lack of trust, organizers might not wish to engage in dialogue with law enforcement officials. But this should not affect the willingness of the responsible law enforcement agency to plan for and facilitate the assembly as far as they possibly can. Indeed, in such situations some law enforcement agencies have even looked for and found new ways of engaging with such groups: e.g. in Bonn (Germany), the responsible police commander agreed to meet a political group informally without identity control and for the purpose of listening to their concerns with regard to the assembly. This helped the police develop appropriate planning for the event. In the Netherlands the Peace Unit in Amsterdam has sometimes sought contact with organizers through the media, inviting them for dialogue.

* OSCE/ODHIR Report Monitoring Freedom of peaceful Assembly, p. 42.

Police officer communicating with demonstrators in Shuwaikh, Kuwait, October 2012 © Stephanie Mcgehee / Reuters



4.3 Spontaneous and / or unlawful assemblies

Not all assemblies are planned and notified. An unexpected event or a political decision may give rise to a spontaneous assembly in support of or in protest against this event. It is for that specific reason that domestic legislation often allows for spontaneous assemblies without notification. And even where such notification or permit is required by law, law enforcement agencies - in accordance with international standards - have realized that it is wise to allow for public emotions to be expressed in the form of a peaceful assembly (which, if suppressed, might result in further and prolonged unrest with a risk that it might eventually lead to violent forms of protest).

We found examples for instance in Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands, Serbia, Sweden, Switzerland, and the USA, where police reportedly facilitated assemblies, that in one way or another did not comply with all the formal requirements with regard to notification or authorization.

Guatemala, July 2011:

The police reportedly facilitated an unannounced public assembly by a health workers syndicate, when approximately 150 persons were obstructing a major road, requesting them to keep at least one track of the road free for traffic and guiding them in their march to the hospital.

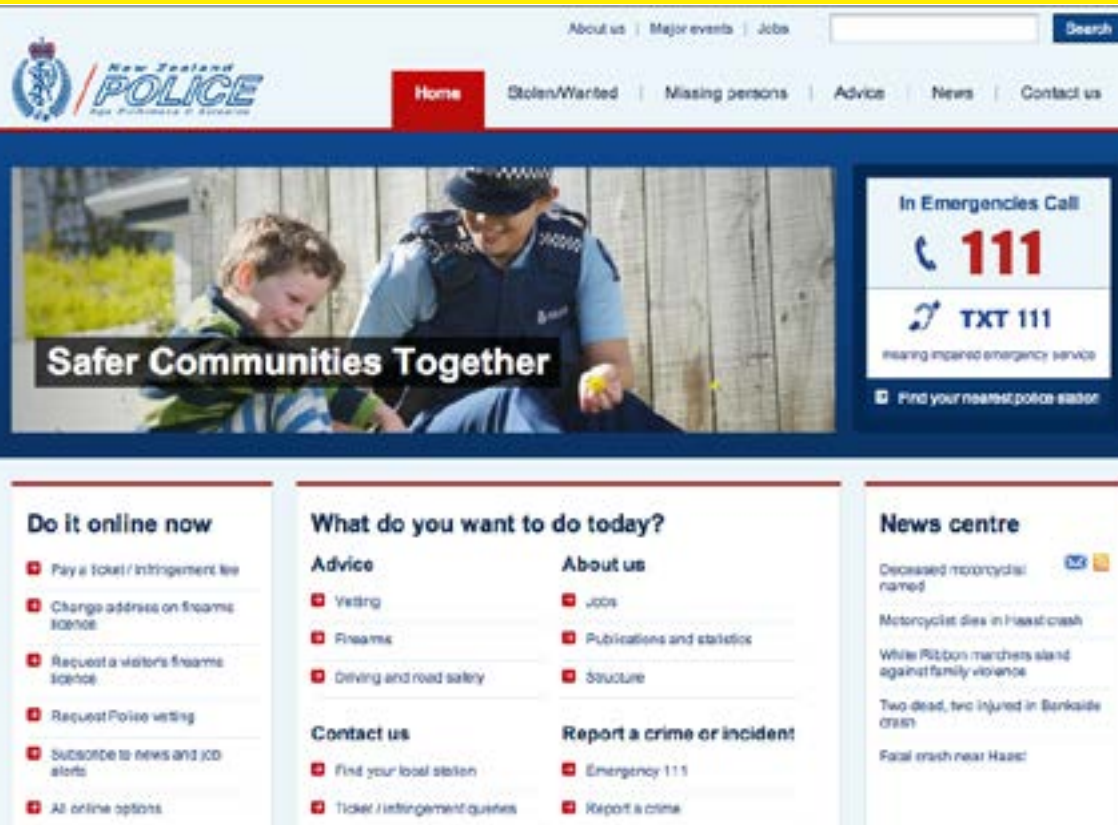
Reported by the Presidential Commission of Guatemala to the UN High commissioner of Human rights on 20th of January 2012.

In order to be able to react to such situations, the Dutch police have at their disposal real-time-intelligence centres: these centres are tasked with following the political situation inside and outside the country so as to identify the likelihood of spontaneous demonstrations occurring in the Netherlands in reaction to any incident or event occurring in the Netherlands or anywhere else. The centres also follow social media in order to find out where people are calling for or preparing to have an assembly.

4.4 Communication with the public

Law enforcement agencies generally use a range of means to communicate with the public (radio, TV, loudspeaker announcements even mobile cinemas for remote villages, etc.). This is used sometimes simply for information-sharing purposes, but also to proactively seek to prevent specific problems: For instance, in Croatia, prior to the Split Pride march in June 2012 the police distributed leaflets calling for tolerance.* Communication with the public is also often part of a more frequently adopted “no surprises”-approach, developed by, for instance, the Police Service of Northern Ireland: The underlying idea is that there should be no surprises for the police, for the protestors, or for the targets of the protest. In particular the general public and those participating in the assembly should be informed about the intentions of the police and the overall rules governing the assembly. In Cologne, Germany, prior to an assembly where a counter-demonstration was expected, the police carried out visits to schools to explain the rights of demonstrators and counter-demonstrators and the overall policing approach, and distributed information leaflets which included a free of charge phone number for issues related to the assembly.

* OSCE/ODIHR, *Report – Monitoring of Freedom of Peaceful Assembly*, p. 80.



Website of the New Zealand Police

In some countries police increasingly also use new communication tools to inform the public about relevant issues; many police forces have their own web sites and they often create specific web-sites in relation to large scale public events. They also increasingly make use of social media; we found examples in Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Greece, the Netherlands, Poland, UK, and the USA. While important challenges remain to be solved, police officers involved in communication through social media have said that the most important lesson learned is that police cannot afford not to use them, and many of them have started to develop policies on how they can use these media: e.g. for informing the public about assemblies that are going to take place, advising them on traffic and safety issues, dispelling rumours, calling for peaceful conduct etc. Some have even started to have a presence on the web sites of organizers, to ensure that such information is communicated to participants.



Amsterdam police website informing on a public order situation, Netherlands, April 2013

4.5 Internal communication

In most cases, there is a range of actors involved in the management of public assemblies: In view of the large number of law enforcement officials required, additional police may be brought in from units based in other parts of the country; there may be different police services present (ordinary police, crowd control units, traffic police etc.), and fire brigade, medical units and local authorities are often also involved. Thus,

it is crucial to establish good communication between all relevant agencies and services, as well as ensuring that personnel at all levels in the police hierarchy are informed of what is happening, what plans are being made, and what they are expected to do. It is essential for the good handling of the assembly to ensure that all police officers involved know and understand how the event is to be policed. The importance of good communication was stressed in, for example, the UK report “Adapting to protest”.^{*} Unfortunately, however the policing of assemblies has often been hampered by poor communication at different levels.

In view of this police agencies have started to put in place measures to improve internal and inter-agency coordination and communication: for instance, we found integrated communication systems or centres set up for events where various agencies were involved in Austria, Denmark, Hungary and the USA. In the Netherlands, officers received additional training for the use of a new internal communication system and in Wendland, Germany, a system was set up for police officers to receive a situation update via radio every thirty minutes on the day of the demonstration against the “Castor”-transport.

Wendland, Germany, November 2010

The transport of highly radioactive nuclear waste (so-called “Castor”-transport) on trains and trucks takes place every two years between France and Germany and many activist protest against it. In 2010, each police officer was given a booklet before the event, which explained the background of the transport and the protest, the goals of the operation and the potential tactics of the protesters. It stressed how important was the clear and professional police behaviour. The command emphasized the importance of the willingness to communicate, the proportionality of means, and differentiated interventions and stressed the need to explain actions as much as possible, making policing transparent and understandable.

Retrieved from: GODIAC Good practice for dialogue and communication as strategic principles for policing political manifestations in Europe: Recommendations for policing political manifestations in Europe, May 2013.

4.6 Police equipment for public assemblies: issues to be considered

When preparing for a public assembly, law enforcement agencies will have to take into consideration a number of things regarding equipment: these considerations relate to the protection of their officers, the overall image they project, the equipment for crowd control, including its possible harmful effects etc. It would go beyond the scope of this paper to look at all possible types of equipment, their use, the related risks and problems as well as the measures which law enforcement have taken in that regard. So we simply give some examples to illustrate some of the considerations that have influenced decisions of law enforcement agencies on the appropriate equipment:

- **Protection of officers**

UN BPUFF in its Principle No. 2 recommends that police officers should be equipped with self-defensive equipment such as shields, helmets, bullet-proof vests etc., in order to decrease the need to use weapons of any kind. Nowadays an increasing number of police forces have standard equipment intended to provide such protection, including helmets and shields, and, sometimes, flame-resistant clothing (e.g. in the public order manual of the Colombian police (Manual para el servicio de policía en la atención, manejo y control de multitudes), the correct use of such clothing is the subject of detailed description and regulations). Indeed, with better protection, the individual law enforcement official should have less need to resort to any use of force as a means of self-defence, and this can help to avoid a vicious circle of escalation.

^{*} *Adapting to protest – Her Majesty’s Chief Inspectorate Constabulary, July 2009, page 66.*

- **Appearance**

However, many police forces have also realized that appearance itself can have a strong influence on the way an assembly develops. A large number of police officers present at an assembly, in particular when wearing protective clothing or full anti-riot-gear can present a threatening and confrontational appearance, with a risk of unnecessary escalation. This requires a careful evaluation and balancing of the possible risks of either insufficient protection or an unnecessarily confrontational appearance. Accordingly, certain police forces therefore adopt a graduated approach: a limited number of officers in normal clothing in the area of the assembly, with reinforcement units on stand-by out of sight of the demonstrators: e.g. in Budapest, Hungary (2011), in Catalonia, Spain (2011), in Aarhus, Denmark (2012), in Florence, Italy (2002), and in Santiago de Chile, Chile (2011) anti-riot units and special intervention units were kept out of sight of the demonstrators. Instead, in some cases, volunteers on the side of the organizers (“stewards”) organized the assembly, advised participants and maintained contact with the police for exchange of information and problem solving. Another option is to wear colored vests over protective equipment, so that it is less visible and appears less threatening (e.g. used in London, UK 2011), or having helmets attached to the belt to be worn only if needed. Similar considerations led to the use of bicycle units in Seattle (2012) and in Miami (2003 – both USA) i.e. giving the police good mobility while projecting a relaxed, non-threatening attitude, in particular when compared with the use of horses, which can be perceived by the public as threatening; for this reason the use of horses is reportedly no longer part of the public order training of the Peruvian police.

Another relevant aspect is visible identification of police officers: For instance, in Argentina, since 2004 the use of a tag with full name and number is obligatory for police officials involved in public order. More and more States in Germany (Berlin, Brandenburg, Baden Wurttemberg, Rhineland-Palatinate) have accepted that police officials deployed in public assemblies should be identifiable by means of name tags or numbers.

Police bicycle patrol, Seattle, USA, May 2012 © Anthony Bolante / Reuters



In the UK Metropolitan police service, such tags are even required to be embroidered so as to prevent them becoming dislodged. Individual identification numbers or name tags are of course an important element of accountability. Moreover, the fact that individual officers are identifiable also passes an important message of transparency, displaying the willingness of the police to be scrutinized for their actions. This may enhance trust of the participants and contribute to an environment where dialogue is possible.

- **Preventing unnecessary damage and escalation**

According to BPUFF No. 3, the [development and] deployment of non-lethal incapacitating weapons should be carefully evaluated in order to minimize the risk of endangering uninvolved persons, and the use of such weapons should be carefully controlled. This principle needs to be taken into account when authorities are determining what equipment should be used in public assemblies (including for the purpose of dispersing assemblies). The accuracy of weapons or other equipment and the risks for demonstrators as well as uninvolved persons are important considerations to that end: For instance, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police reportedly decided to cease the use of certain acoustic weapons which produce high volume sounds at various frequencies as they were found to be inaccurate and thus to present an unwarranted and uncontrollable risk to uninvolved persons. For the same reason, the Peruvian police decided to prohibit the use of teargas in areas where particular vulnerable persons could be affected, e.g. close to hospitals and schools.



Booklet of the Peruvian National Police on maintenance of public order, p. 15: Use of teargas © Screenshot from website of Ministry of Interior (<http://dgsd.mininter.gob.pe/dpdfg/capacitaciondhh.htm>)

Principle No. 9 of the BPUFF sets out strict limitations on the use of firearms, which may be used only where strictly necessary in defence against an imminent threat of death or serious injury; this applies in all circumstances, including public assemblies (cf. BPUFF No. 14). Accordingly, international human rights law and standards do not permit firearms to be considered as a tactical tool for policing assemblies. Nonetheless, firearms are still frequently used by law enforcement agencies in public assemblies, including – and contrary to BPUFF No. 14 – for dispersal of assemblies. However, there are also instances of police forces coming in line with international standards: For instance, firearms are not mentioned within the equipment of law enforcement officials in the public order manual of the Colombian police; and in Argentina, the use of firearms in public assemblies has been completely prohibited by presidential decision of 2004. Apart from the legal aspects with regard to the police duty to respect life, such decisions may also, from a practical standpoint, be the result of a learning exercise that when it comes to the objective of restoring public order, firearms are quite unlikely to serve the purpose, but on the contrary, more often than not have the effect of worsening an already chaotic situation. For example, when commenting to us about the very chaotic situation of the so-called “London riots” in August 2011, where there was widespread violence in large areas of the city (including looting and buildings set on fire), one police officer stated that in his view it would have been impossible – quite apart from the legal considerations - to control such a situation through the use of firearms.

4.7 Communication and dialogue during the assembly

During the assembly it is very important to keep participants informed of police actions and intentions, as well as to solve problems as they arise. Police forces in many countries have developed a range of means and approaches for that purpose, such as tactical loudspeaker units, megaphones, use of interpreters and public communication in various languages, free of charge phone lines, information points for the public, special phone numbers for communication between authorities and organizers, as well as communication by individual officers in contact with demonstrators.

One example of this is the “just talk approach” of the Merseyside police (UK): It is a general policing approach which emphasizes the significance and importance of dialogue between individuals and the need for officers to communicate with the public in order to establish trust between police and the population. It was explicitly referred to in the policing directives for the Cairde Na hÉireann parade in Liverpool in 2012.

During our research we found and listened to many anecdotes as to how dialogue had successfully prevented escalation and violence:

During a public assembly in Germany, rumors were spreading that large police units were drawn together for heavy handed intervention, but immediate communication between organizers and the police clarified that the police units on the move were in fact heading to the canteen; using modern means of communications, the rumors could be dispelled immediately and prevent demonstrators from becoming agitated. At the World Economic forum in Davos in 2012, the local municipal authorities and the Landammann of Davos in particular played an important role in ensuring communication with the organizers and in facilitating the protest (including by identifying a suitable location acceptable to both organizers and security bodies) and thus forestalling the likelihood of the escalation of tensions.* A particular interesting situation occurred in Spain, where the reaction of the demonstrators and the observing photographer illustrate that dialogue can be successful (see page 21).

4.8 Dealing with unlawful acts and violence

When law enforcement agencies identify a group of people among the participants who intend to resort to violence, or where such signs of violence have already started, the challenge is how to stop this violence, how to ensure that it does not spread among the rest of the participants, and to continue to facilitate the assembly of those who are demonstrating peacefully.

First of all, it should be noted that not all situations of unlawful behaviour require intervention from the police – for example if there are no further risks involved and if the police intervention is likely to make things worse. Such a consideration is part of the operational “concept of opportunity” of the Geneva Gendarmerie (Switzerland), i.e. to decide in which situations it is or is not opportune to intervene. A concrete example can also be found in 2011 during the Catalan National Day in Barcelona, Spain, when demonstrators were burning the Spanish flag: In some situations, fire can not only present a danger to other people, but also lead to an escalation of a tense situation, and so may lead the police to intervene. However, in this particular situation the police recognized that the burning of the flag was a symbolic act and part of the tradition on that day, and they decided not to intervene, so as to avoid provoking any escalation of tensions in what was a generally peaceful demonstration.**

* OSCE, *Monitoring freedom of Assembly*, p. 81.

** *Godiac, Recommendations*, p. 22.



Police officer communicating with demonstrators in front of the Parliament in Catalonia, Barcelona, Spain, June 2011 © David Airol

Spain: Communication with protesters during demonstration (retrieved from the blog of a photographer)

On 15 June 2011, after protesting outside the Catalan regional Parliament against austerity measures, some of the protesters tried to prevent parliamentarians entering the building.

One of the police officials got on a bench and started to speak to the demonstrators. He could barely be heard and so he was given a megaphone by the demonstrators. He took the megaphone and said: "Please, step back a few meters. We do not want to charge but if we receive the order we'll have to do it". There was no charge and the participants stayed in their place.

"It was a brief moment but that demonstrated that through speaking and listening it is possible at least to try to solve issues." (Comment made by a blogger present at the scene – translation from the author of this paper).



Protestor throwing a bottle at police, Athens, Greece 2012 © Yorgos Karahalios / Reuters

In other situations, it is possible to have very pinpointed actions by specially trained police such as targeted arrests to remove from the crowd the specific individuals identified as acting in a violent manner: In Mexico, the new protocol from March 2013 (Protocolo de actuación policial de la secretaría de seguridad pública del distrito federal para el control de multitudes) explicitly states that where aggressive persons are identified, an order will be given to separate those individuals from the crowd as a preventive measure to protect participants. The training of the Geneva Gendarmerie in Switzerland includes such specific pinpointed actions where a small number of police officials make a quick move into the crowd to apprehend persons in the assembly who are clearly acting in a violent manner and endangering others. Where this would be impossible due to the size of the group, law enforcement agencies have in the past resorted to the technique of containment (also known as “kettling”). While, from a legal point of view, some courts have considered this technique to be lawful under very specific and strict conditions*, the way it is applied in practice has quite often proven to be highly problematic. It is a technique quite opposite to facilitating an assembly, as the people kept in containment are hindered from getting their voices heard. It is difficult to ensure that uninvolved people (bystanders or peaceful demonstrators) are not affected by this measure. And there have often been instances where it was implemented in a way that

* E.g House of Lords decision of *Austin & another v Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis* [2009]; European Court of Human Rights, *Case of Austin and others vs. the United Kingdom* (Applications nos. 39692/09, 40713/09 and 41008/09).

was clearly disproportionate in terms of the number of people affected, for what length of time, aggravated by insufficient planning and preparation. It can give rise to problematic hygiene conditions, or people suffering due to lack of protection from climate conditions such as heat or rain. In addition, this measure carries a risk of provoking solidarity reactions from other participants which may lead to an escalation of tension between police and demonstrators.

In view of such considerations, this technique has reportedly been completely given up for instance in Toronto, Canada*, after a much-criticized operation for policing protests around the G-20 summit in 2010. In some other countries it is only contemplated as a very exceptional measure for a very short period of time, as a means to protect the rest of the assembly from being disturbed and to facilitate its peaceful continuation. In our conversations in Germany and the Netherlands LEOs have underscored the importance of continuous dialogue with organizers and participants in such a situation, so that it is clearly understood that the measure to contain a group of persons is taken for the sole purpose of preventing the spread of violence and to ensure the rest of the assembly can carry on peacefully; and that it should only last for the shortest time possible with all possible safeguards for the well-being of the persons contained and exit-routes for those who wish to leave the assembly.

4.9 Protecting peaceful assemblies / dealing with counter-demonstrations

Numerous experiences can be found where police have successfully facilitated demonstrations and counter-demonstrations, while at the same time providing demonstrators with appropriate protection where needed. People have the right to voice dissenting opinions about an assembly by means of a counter-demonstration; however, they do not have the right to prevent others enjoying their right to freedom of expression and assembly, and they certainly do not have a right to violently attack them. Very frequently, pride marches and parades, as well as other political demonstrations such as anti-racism demonstrations, provide a context where such situations arise. While there continue to be situations where police do not fulfill their duty to protect peaceful demonstrators, Pride marches which have taken place in recent years provide an increasing number of examples where police have successfully protected the demonstrators, while at the same time facilitating counter-demonstrations:

- In Bratislava, Slovakia (2011), counter-protestors against a pride march were kept by the police in the vicinity of the pride, but separate from it. Police also protected participants of the Pride march when leaving the assembly.
- The Equality Parade 2011 in Poland took place almost at the same time and place as a counter-demonstration.
- In Split, Croatia (2012) police successfully created a buffer zone to protect participants of the Pride.
- In Budapest, Hungary (2012) good communication between Pride organizers and police allowed for a smooth running of the assembly. Counter-demonstrators were kept 50m away from the route of the Pride march and police successfully intervened and contained counter-demonstrators who wanted to break through. Police also provided security after the assembly for Pride participants leaving the area.
- In Riga, Lithuania (2012), police managed to deal with some violent counter-demonstrators without putting fences on most of the route, enabling passers-by to watch the march.
- In 2013, police in Ukraine arrested counter-demonstrators who were harassing participants of a pride march, including tearing down their banners, but peaceful counter-demonstrators were allowed to stay in the area.

* http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2011/06/22/exclusive_toronto_police_swear_off_g20_kettling_tactic.html.



Baltic Price, Riga, Latvia, May 2012 © Michel Banz / Amnesty International

4.10 After the event

Policing of assemblies often takes place in a highly dynamic environment and needs to be constantly adapted. An essential element of such policing is to learn lessons from each event in order to adapt and to improve the future policing of assemblies. Many countries have undertaken very thorough exercises in this regard:

- In Sweden, the Gothenburg Commission was tasked with the review of the events during the EU-summit from 14-16 June 2001, that are known as the “Gothenburg riots”, where three people were shot by the police, several hundreds arrested, and both demonstrators and police were heavily criticized after the event.
- In the UK, the HMIC report “Adapting to Protest” analyses the events during the G-20 summit of 1 April 2009, when a member of the public died as a result of excessive and unlawful use of force by police.*
- Canada: The Chief of the Toronto police service commissioned an After-Action Review of the G20 Summit in June 2010, where police had to respond to a combination of a large peaceful assembly and violence and vandalism at the same time.

* The report was an overall analysis of the events and the policing methods used. The investigation into the death of the member of the public was the subject of separate investigations by other bodies.

However, it must also be noted that implementation of the lessons learned still often fail for a variety of reasons. A good example of how lessons learned can prevent violence is the Economic Social Forum in Florence, Italy in 2002. The previous year (2001) had seen violent protests in Genoa, where excessive force was used by the police and a demonstrator was killed. In Florence in 2002, there was a clear intent to prevent a recurrence, and this was done through a range of different measures: e.g. starting negotiations with organizers at an early stage, specific training focusing on prevention, direct communication lines between the authorities and organizers, reduced visibility of police, and a firm commitment from both sides (police and organizers) for holding a peaceful demonstration. All this allowed the very large anti-war assembly to take place in a peaceful manner, despite highly alarmist rumors prior to the event.

An important issue is also how authorities relate to the public after an event, in particular if problems have occurred. It is crucial to maintain dialogue with organizers and others affected, so as to prevent problems that arose in one event having a negative impact on future assemblies. Law enforcement agencies have become very sensitive to how easily trust and confidence can be lost. For instance, an anecdote reported by a Dutch police officer referred to a situation where the police had intervened during a demonstration contrary to previous agreements made with organizers. After the event, the Peace unit of the Amsterdam police sought a dialogue with organizers explaining that the intervention had been the response to an individual incident where a police officer was in danger. This helped to maintain a relationship of confidence where agreements will still be possible in the future.

4.11 Other aspects

Training / professionalization

During our research, we have come across a number of new or revised laws, operational procedures and protocols, as well as training manuals in relation to the use of force and / or the policing of public assemblies (in Latin America alone, and without claiming to be exhaustive even for that region, we found very recent documents of this type in seven countries: Argentina (2011), Brazil (Sao Paulo, 2011); Chile, (2012); Colombia (2010); Mexico (2013); Paraguay (2011); Peru (2009)).

The development of such documents is an indispensable element of any process of professionalization that can be considered a good practice on its own – always provided the relevant documents comply with international human rights rules and standards (which is not so in all cases, though many of them nonetheless show considerable progress in that regard). However, it must also be recognized that often the most difficult step is their effective implementation and in many cases there are considerable shortcomings and deficiencies in that regard.

Based on a solid foundation of domestic legislation and operational procedures, training on the policing of assemblies needs to be as realistic as possible. It should not only focus on the use of force, but include development of communication skills and measures for de-escalation. One very simple example of this is the joint training of the Geneva Gendarmerie (Switzerland) together with the fire brigade in order to be able to extinguish fires as quickly as possible so as to decrease tension and prevent escalation. Training should also include modules on anti-discrimination and diversity, which is particularly relevant when policing demonstrations held by minorities at risk of being victims of hate crime. For instance, the Croatian Ministry of Interior, in cooperation with Croatian LGBTI organizations, organizes training for police forces on tackling homophobic and transphobic hate crimes.

Well being of police officers

Disturbingly, when analyzing evaluation reports and planning processes for public assemblies, and even when talking to police officers about the management of public assemblies, we found very little consideration given to the well-being of police officers. This is quite worrisome: Law enforcement officials are expected at all times to conduct themselves, including in reaction to stressful situations, in a calm, professional manner; it goes without saying that this becomes increasingly difficult if they are on duty for fifteen hours or more, with no or insufficient rest, food and water. When asking commanding police officers how they ensured that police officers were getting sufficient rest, they stated that it was indeed an aspect taken into consideration in the planning of assemblies. However, they also confirmed that during protracted public events periods of duty as long as eighteen hours can easily occur due to lack of resources or planning problems.

Resting public order police officers, Seoul, South Korea, June 2008 © Jo Yong-Hak / Reuters



Miami, Florida (USA), 2003:

During the FTAA [Free Trade Area of the Americas] meetings in Florida, the Miami Police Department appointed a logistics team to coordinate ordering, acquisition and delivery of approximately 3,000 meals for officers per day. In addition, the team obtained 25 pallets of water, 10 pallets of drinks and 10,000 energy bars. Six mobile logistic vans per shift were used to deliver food and water, with ten golf carts rented for the same purpose in case traffic congestion prevented the use of larger vehicles. For those who could leave their posts, the team set up two de-escalation posts as break out points for rest.

Retrieved from: Police Management of Mass Demonstrations: Identifying Issues and Successful Approaches, Police executive research forum, 2006.

In particular, when consulting evaluation reports of public assemblies, we were surprised to find that not one of them contained a section specifically dedicated to the working conditions of law enforcement officials and how that may have affected their capacity to carry out their duties. Nonetheless, we did find some positive examples on this issue:

The Ministry of Security in Argentina calls for protocols related to public demonstrations to include necessary provision for adequate food and for health services for police, taking into account the expected duration and conditions of the event.

One of the GODIAC* recommendations highlights the importance of the provision of good quality and quantity of food and water for LEOs in such situations.

* GODIAC: *Good practice for dialogue and communication as strategic principles for policing political manifestations in Europe: Recommendations for policing political manifestations in Europe, May 2013.*

Monitoring and analyzing public assemblies

When NGOs, civil society groups, or others aim to monitor or to analyse a public order situation in terms of respect for human rights, they should attempt to understand the whole situation as a dynamic social process to be addressed by a planned police operation from the outset (including the period of the run-up to the actual day of the assembly). It is not sufficient to look just at the moment of an assembly when demonstrators and police clash, and whether at that moment any sort of use of force was necessary and proportionate to the given situation. It is important to find out what measures police have taken (or have omitted to take) ahead of the demonstration itself as well as during the demonstration in the attempt to prevent violence, damage, injury and loss of life – and also what role organizers and participants have played in that process.

Photographers taking pictures of police intervention, St. Petersburg, Russia, July 2013 © Alexander Demianchuk / Reuters



This would include a close look at the following aspects:

1. Was it an announced event and how much time did the police have to prepare for it? And if yes, are there indicators that might lead to the conclusion that the police did or did not effectively make use of the opportunity for dialogue, planning and preparation?
2. The situation and communication before the event: Was there any hostility on either side (authorities and organizers)? What is the general level of respect for the rule of law on both sides? Did (attempts at) dialogue take place and if yes, were they successful in terms of agreements made? What about previous events? Is it an anniversary? What happened last time? Any attempts to ensure that it would be handled better this time? What is the role of political authorities? Did they make statements or act in a way that fuelled tension and anger or did they try to calm things down? What position did the police take in the political discussion?
3. In case of a spontaneous assembly, what were the challenges for the police in dealing with such an assembly (e.g. with regard to traffic, safety and security of others)? Did they try to facilitate this assembly? If not, why not?
4. What was the overall approach of the police with regard to the assembly and what were the applicable laws, regulations and orders? Were they all compliant with international human rights standards? How was the appearance of the law enforcement officials: was it threatening or intimidating or likely to provoke demonstrators? What was the availability and effective use of means of communication with the organizers and participants?
5. How was the appearance and behaviour of demonstrators and counter-demonstrators: was it threatening, provoking or violent? If there was any violence or threat of violence by demonstrators: was that large-scale or generalized or were there just a few violent individuals or smaller groups?
6. What were other factors of escalation or de-escalation?: Social media? Media reports? Individual behaviour of participants or of police officers? Were police dressed in protective gear or not?
7. Were there actions or reactions by individual LEOs which should be considered unprofessional - if so what were they? Was individual wrongful behaviour of a LEO the result of poor planning, command structure or communication? Regarding working conditions, how long were officers on duty? Were they able to rest, to get food and water etc.? Did they have enough experience or were too young / not adequately trained or prepared?
8. After the event: one event that went wrong might trigger further reaction in the future on both sides. So, what are the authorities doing to try to ensure this does not happen (e.g. in terms transparency of investigations, debriefing, dialogue and conflict resolution)? Recommendations should include a proper "lessons learned" process with improvement measures for the future, including post-event measures such as establishment of dialogue with organizers, victims and participants. The prosecution of individuals responsible for unlawful acts (e.g. police officer having resorted to excessive use of force) is only ONE of the necessary responses to an event that went wrong.

In addition, it is worth mentioning here that the OSCE Handbook on Monitoring Freedom of Peaceful Assembly contains useful information on how to monitor assemblies.

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A photographer takes pictures of Interior Ministry officers during a protest rally to defend Article 31 of the Russian constitution, which guarantees the right of assembly, in St. Petersburg October 31, 2012. © Alexander Demianchuk / Reuters



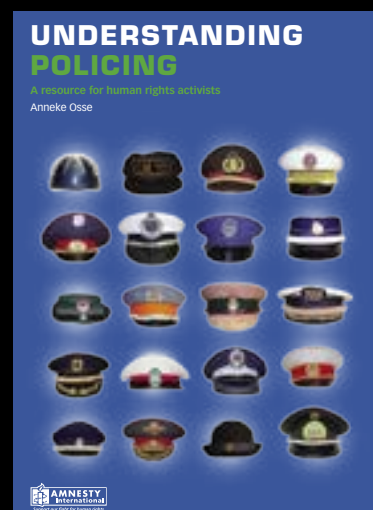
The Police and Human Rights Program of the Dutch section of Amnesty International

The area of policing and human rights presents a dynamic and constantly evolving field of study. The human rights discourse has in recent years broadened its attention to include not only the negative functions of the State and its agents as human rights violators but also the positive obligations of the State. This presents an opportunity for the police to be seen as human rights protectors. At the same time, the notion has developed that human rights are not only abused by State officials, including the police, but by non-State actors as well. Both police and human rights advocates are (should be) striving for societies characterized by security and safety. This insight has opened up the possibility of police and NGOs working together rather than opposing each other.

However, the idea of police and NGOs working together is fraught with difficulties. Police officers tend to have a different perspective from that of most human rights advocates. They sometimes use different language when speaking of the same issue and will reach different conclusions about cause and effect. Sometimes this is the obvious result of the different roles they have in society; sometimes they may be the result of stereotypic assumptions.

The Police and Human Rights Program aims to enhance knowledge and understanding of the police & policing within the Amnesty International movement – and the wider human rights community - in order to become more effective when targeting the police or police related issues. We also offer training to human rights advocates on Police and Human Rights and facilitate strategy workshops.

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