



**Promoting Human Rights Professionalism  
in the Liberian Police Force**

by Cecil Griffiths  
edited by Liam Mahony



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Finally, I want to thank the staff at LINLEA's Secretariat for their contributions towards the development of this work, particularly Moses G. Sinneh, co-founder of LINLEA, for his constructive comments; the secretarial staff and other personnel, for their valued time and effort; and members and executives of LINLEA, for their feedback during the trial presentation of the tactic.

## Cecil Griffiths

Following his graduation from the police academy in 1980, Cecil Griffiths served as patrol officer, traffic officer, and detective in the Liberian police. Upon completion of a course in statistics from the University of Liberia, Mr. Griffiths convinced the Director of Police that the department needed more reliable crime statistics, was appointed Chief Statistician of a new Central Statistics Unit, and was later promoted to the rank of Captain. In 1986 he was transferred to the police training academy, and later appointed Chief of Research and Curriculum Development.

Though having criticized the unprofessional conduct of some police administrators, in 1987 Griffiths was appointed Administrative Assistant to the Director, a sign of the professional caliber of the Chief of Police, Wilfred E. Clark. As the war intensified in 1989-90, Clark left the country, and the subsequent Acting Director of Police and other senior staff members were killed by soldiers loyal to Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe, head of the People's Redemption Council. Griffiths attempted to flee the country, but was trapped for six weeks in rebel-held areas before reaching Ghana, where he remained for more than two years.

He returned to Liberia in August 1992, and was again appointed instructor at the Police Academy. In January 1993, he was made Chief of Planning and Research, with the mandate of developing a short-range plan to provide nationwide police services and security coverage until inauguration day. In creating this plan he discovered that the problems confronting the department were primarily administrative in cause, and that a competent core of administrators with the professional will to take appropriate actions was needed to commence police department reform.

Since 1995, Griffiths has been the President of the Liberian National Law Enforcement Association, which he helped create.

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September 2004

Dear Friend,

Welcome to the New Tactics in Human Rights Tactical Notebook Series! In each notebook a human rights practitioner describes an innovative tactic used successfully in advancing human rights. The authors are part of the broad and diverse human rights movement, including non-government and government perspectives, educators, law enforcement personnel, truth and reconciliation processes, and women's rights and mental health advocates. They have both adapted and pioneered tactics that have contributed to human rights in their home countries. In addition, they have utilized tactics that, when adapted, can be applied in other countries and situations to address a variety of issues.

Each notebook contains detailed information on *how* the author and his or her organization achieved what they did. We want to inspire other human rights practitioners to think *tactically*—and to broaden the realm of tactics considered to effectively advance human rights.

In this notebook, we learn about the efforts, ability, and commitment of law enforcement personnel—one of the most difficult groups to reach regarding human rights—to address and confront human rights issues and violations from their own perspective and within their own ranks. The Liberian National Law Enforcement Association (LINLEA) was established by law enforcement personnel themselves to address issues of poor leadership, blind loyalty, and lack of professional training, each of which have contributed to a poor quality of services and a high incidence of human rights abuses. LINLEA has worked to promote professionalism as a way to enhance human rights standards and reduce incidences of abuse. This tactics provides insights into how the law enforcement profession itself can understand the connection between professionalism and human rights—exposing abuses when they occur—to send signals to government and civil society that action can and must be taken to address abuses.

The entire series of Tactical Notebooks is available online at [www.newtactics.org](http://www.newtactics.org). Additional notebooks are already available and others will continue to be added over time. On our web site you will also find other tools, including a searchable database of tactics, a discussion forum for human rights practitioners, and information about our workshops and symposia. To subscribe to the New Tactics newsletter, please send an e-mail to [tcornell@cvt.org](mailto:tcornell@cvt.org).

The New Tactics in Human Rights Project is an international initiative led by a diverse group of organizations and practitioners from around the world. The project is coordinated by the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT), and grew out of our experiences as a creator of new tactics and as a treatment center that also advocates for the protection of human rights from a unique position—one of healing and of reclaiming civic leadership.

We hope that you will find these notebooks informational and thought provoking.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kate Kelsch".

Kate Kelsch  
New Tactics Project Manager

## Introduction

As dictated by canons of police ethics, which instruct officers to respect the constitutional rights of all people to liberty, equality, and justice, law enforcement officers are supposed to be the leading human rights protectors and promoters everywhere in the world. Unfortunately, due to lack of training and discipline, poor leadership, and political manipulation, law enforcement personnel often engage in unprofessional conduct that leads to abuses of human rights.

In 1993, after the war in Liberia, we evaluated the situation within the police department. An estimated 40 percent of law enforcement personnel had not received basic training. Discipline levels were very low. More recently, we have seen how a regime can appoint law enforcement officials who can be manipulated to perpetuate, through oppression, suppression, and intimidation, the regime's tenure.

To address these issues of unprofessionalism and human rights abuses, we decided to establish a professional association: The Liberian National Law Enforcement Association, or LINLEA. LINLEA promotes training opportunities for law enforcement officers; advocates for a merit-based system of promotion, the appointment of qualified administrators, and fair and impartial adjudication of complaints against officers; and discourages partisanship and political manipulation of law enforcement agencies.

At LINLEA we use a variety of means to achieve our objectives. We host professional training workshops for law enforcement officers, and organize public lecture forums and radio programs to discuss issues related to the administration of justice. We publish a journal to educate readers on the role of the criminal justice system, its problems and challenges, and issues of democracy and human rights. In addition, we advocate for reforms of law enforcement and criminal justice institutions, conduct research on the causes of crime and the responses of the criminal justice system, and publish our findings and recommendations.

As our organization has grown in size and credibility, we have also been able to call attention to internal problems and unprofessional behavior in the department, and demand justice for victims—including unfairly accused police officers. We are beginning to monitor and catalogue police abuses.

LINLEA now has over 500 members, including nearly 20 percent of the police force, as well as many members of other law enforcement institutions. Through our Center for Criminal Justice Research and Education, we have been able to provide leadership and human rights training for 223 senior law enforcement officers. The Center has also conducted a training workshop for law enforcement trainers and curricu-

lum specialists of law enforcement agencies, and a workshop on Policy Formulation and Development for law enforcement planners and administrators.

We believe that an association of this sort is the most effective way to bring about change in police behavior. Human rights organizations can raise awareness of the nature and incidents of human rights abuses in society. But when a professional body related to law enforcement becomes involved in highlighting and exposing these abuses, it sends a different signal to the government and to the police department itself, a signal they are more likely to heed.

In this notebook I describe the creation of our police association, and the development of our work supporting within the police force a professional attitude that is respectful of human rights. I then discuss some of the questions relevant to the use of this tactic in other contexts. Whether you are a concerned law enforcement professional or a human rights activist, it is my hope that this analysis will help you consider how steps can be taken to professionalize the police and improve its human rights record in your own situation.

## The Liberian context & the birth of LINLEA

### LIBERIA & ITS POLICE: POLITICAL BACKGROUND

The oldest independent African country, Liberia was founded by freed American slaves, and its governmental system was modeled on that of the U.S. Prior to 1980, Liberia was one of the most peaceful and stable countries in Africa. Its criminal justice system was functioning fairly well. The police and other law enforcement agencies benefited from quality training. Standards in these agencies were high. Promotions were competitive. Discipline was solid. The country had a modern prison and well-functioning courts.

The population, however, was divided between indigenous Liberians and those descended from freed slaves, who had ruled since 1847. Discontent exploded onto the scene with a bloody military coup in 1980, which brought into power the People's Redemption Council (PRC), led by Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe.

The early years of the coup era saw a series of summary executions, extrajudicial killings and disappearances, and torture of political opponents. Law enforcement agencies absorbed many unqualified personnel selected on tribal and political grounds. Promotions were politicized, rather than based on merit. The quality of services deteriorated significantly. Law enforcement officers became corrupt, and the previous high level of discipline was undermined by poor supervision and control.

In 1982, after a scandalous corruption incident, Doe brought in a police administrator to rebuild the department's credibility. Chief Wilfred E. Clark created a strong professional sense of direction that helped regain the confidence of the public.

Clark made significant progress in terms of manpower and organizational development during his tenure (1982–1990). The first duty manual, for example, was developed and published in March 1984. Officers were encouraged to pursue higher education, and those earning bachelor's degrees were given pay raises and promotions. Three officers benefited from scholarships provided by the Atlanta University Criminal Justice Institute to pursue postgraduate studies in criminal justice.

Clark discouraged officers from joining political parties. Executives and command personnel were allowed input into the decision-making process, and could discuss issues of serious concern at weekly senior staff meetings. Clark encouraged discussion of any issue that might undermine the professional integrity of the department. After an aborted coup attempt in 1985, President Doe had the military and other security forces viciously tracking down his opponents, but Clark was able to control behavior within the department, even exercising a moderating influence over relatives of the president who were under his leadership. During the height of the war in 1990, when his own life was at risk, he took steps to ensure that tribal or political divisions would not take root in the department.

Throughout this period, violations of human rights were attributed mainly to the military and other security forces, not the police. Sadly, as the war escalated in 1989–1990, scores of police officers were killed, including seven high-level police officials, and Clark was forced to flee the country. In combination with corruption and bad governance, the serious human rights abuses committed by the military and a group of security officers helped lead to a seven-year civil conflict (1990–1997), the collapse of the government, and the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Liberians—including many law enforcement professionals.

The rebellion of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in December 1989 led to the intervention of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and brought about the establishment of an interim administration in 1991. The police and other law enforcement agencies were reactivated, but many of the problems experienced during the coups of the 1980s resurfaced—including the employment, promotion, and assignment of personnel without reference to departmental policy guidelines. Seeing these problems, some of us who had served with Chief Clark began looking for a way to improve the situation.

### **WHY FORM A POLICE ASSOCIATION?**

Ironically, those who killed police officers during the civil crisis were often absorbed into the police or other security agencies. When the police department and other law enforcement units were reactivated in 1991, considerable damage had been done to both their infrastructure and manpower resources. Many officers had fled to other countries; some were in rebel-controlled territories, involved in law enforcement duties or active combat with the rebel force; others simply refused to report for duty.

To fill vacant positions the police administration began to promote and assign officers in haphazard or politicized ways. Few new employees met the educational standards prescribed by the department. Specialized tasks were given to people without the requisite professional competence or experience. Morale became low, and a lack of discipline followed. A significant number of trained and experienced officers were reluctant to render courtesy to superiors they felt lacked leadership ability, supervisory skills, and technical know-how. It became more and more difficult to get the administration to apply sound managerial principles in managing the police department. Professionalism deteriorated, and with it, public respect and trust.

After frustrated attempts to promote internal reform proposals, in my role as the chief of Planning and Research I met with the Chief of Personnel in late 1993 to discuss how to place pressure on police administrators to adhere to the police handbook and administer the force in a more professional manner. Motivated by the impact of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) in promoting professionalism, we decided to establish a professional association for law enforcement personnel and support staff. Since it was difficult to correct the ills of the department from within, we felt that a professional body operating outside the scope of police administrators would be more effective.

The Law Enforcement Association was thus conceived with the following objectives:

- to bring together all law enforcement agencies and personnel to constitute a consolidated association or consortium;
- to ensure that the ethics and canons of the law enforcement profession are strictly observed and adhered to;
- to liaise with appropriate government authorities to ensure the passage of legislation that will from time to time improve the practice of law enforcement; improve the living standard of participants of the profession; and guarantee the safety and well-being of the men and women of the profession;

- to ensure community participation and cooperation in meeting the challenges of crime and disorder;
- to seek, encourage, and promote law enforcement education and training opportunities and programs for members of the profession;
- to assist as a consortium in the decision-making process in public and private law enforcement institutions; and
- to ensure that the rights of law-abiding citizens and those accused of crimes are protected at all times;
- To establish ties and affiliations with national and international law enforcement and criminal justice institutions.

## STEPS TO FORMATION

### *Initial invitation*

The idea of this association was well-received among professionals in other law enforcement agencies. We first communicated with the Acting Director of Police, Rudolf B. Flowers, and members of the senior staff, informing them of our intent. The Director had benefited from professional workshops during Clark's administration, and was a registered member of the IACP. Thus, although he may have felt some political misgivings about our motives, he understood that from a professional perspective he could not oppose the formation of the organization without damaging his own credibility.

Since we were still at war and our association would have to deal with law enforcement and security personnel, and in order not to be misrepresented, we wrote to the heads of major law enforcement agencies, informing them of our intent to establish the Association and requesting them to send two representatives to form part of the organizing committee. The following institutions were contacted: National Security Agency, Special Security Service, Monrovia City Police, the Fire Service Bureau, the Bureau of Corrections, and two major private security firms (Inter-Con and REGSA); we also contacted a lawyer and a former police planning chief then attending the law school. We felt it was crucial to create this level of participation at the beginning of the process. This was to be their organization, not something brought in by outsiders. All of the agencies responded and nominated two officers to be part of the organizing committee. By December 29, 1993, the first meeting was convened at the Monrovia City Hall.

The initial meetings were professional forums to discuss what impact we could make in addressing unprofessional conduct. Although participants were nominated by their agencies, they were free to speak as individuals; the agencies did not influence the deliberation processes. The constitution of Liberia provided for freedom of association, so there were no legal

barriers, and we moved quickly to solidify the formal legal existence of the organization. We invited the Minister of Justice to publicly launch the organization on May 14, 1994 at the Monrovia City Hall.

The formation of the Law Enforcement Association was unique and very attractive to many officers. We stressed that other professionals had organized associations (the Bar Associations, the Medical and Dental Association, the Teachers Association). Why shouldn't we have our own? We also emphasized the role of associations in serving as a strong voice in advocating for reforms. Between 1994 and 1996 we continued our campaign for members. The more members, the louder our voice. We hosted workshops, sports tournaments, beauty pageants, and other events to bring law enforcement personnel together. In 1996 we launched the first public lecture forum, in which members of the law enforcement community and the public met to discuss the administration of justice in Liberia, and ways to create peace, reconciliation, and stability. Several law enforcement officials were invited to present papers, including the Director of the National Security Agency, the senior Inspector of Police, and the Legal Aid Officer of the Justice and Peace Commission.

### *External support*

To build professionalism, and to promote cross-training and professional education, Chief Clark had encouraged interaction between Liberian officers and those of other countries. He encouraged senior officers to join the IACP, and built a relationship with the Atlanta University Criminal Justice Institute, resulting in a jointly sponsored conference in 1988 that brought many notable international professionals to Liberia. His work laid the foundation for our own understanding and promotion of professional ethics and conduct.

In 1996 we received a small grant from the U.S. Embassy to host a symposium on restructuring Liberian security agencies. The workshop was well attended, with the Head of State, the US Ambassador, the Minister of Justice, and heads of law enforcement agencies—with the exception of Police Director Joseph B. Tate—coming to the opening program. Heads of law enforcement agencies and other criminal justice experts spoke on the need to restructure various security institutions in Liberia. Coincidentally, a team from the U.S. State Department was visiting Liberia at the time, and was invited to the opening program. The team was impressed that a group of officers could organize such a forum to discuss how to improve law enforcement services.

The symposium was a major achievement for LINLEA, and brought the Association and its activities into the limelight. At the close of the opening program the U.S. ambassador announced that the U.S. government



had allocated about \$1.9 million to assist the judiciary and the police in the reform process as they prepared for the following year's elections.

This support did have its costs. The money was conditional on the removal of Chief Tate, who had been accused by the U.S. government of being involved in atrocities during the war. Desperate to receive the funds and to gain U.S. support, other members of the Liberia National Transitional Government (LNTG) pressured Charles Taylor, one of the faction heads, to have his nominee replaced, which he did. Tate accused the Association of masterminding his removal by organizing the workshop, and within a year he took his revenge.

### **A police association working for human rights**

With a population of 2.7 million, Liberia has only 3,500–4,000 police officers, a very low per capita presence. Of these, 500 belong to LINLEA. The organization has a two-tiered membership structure: Regular members must be trained police, while associate members may join without training. We believe that the organization should not be run by an officer in the department; such officers are under the disciplinary control of the Chief of Police, and thus inhibited in their reactions to sensitive issues. LINLEA's constitution also prohibits officers from being members of political parties. Members can vote, but cannot attend political meetings or be partisan. Party control of police destroys independence and continuity.

Initially, LINLEA did not have a direct human rights advocacy focus. It was implied that if law enforcement officers were professional in the discharge of their duties, and good leadership kept in check those who deviated from professional standards, human rights violations would be at a minimum.

We did, however, conduct an analysis of factors responsible for these violations. We found that issues contributing to human rights abuses by officers included lack of training and discipline, poor leadership, and deliberate manipulation of law enforcement agencies by the regime in power, resulting in the suppression of freedom and the intimidation of the populace. We also concluded that the laws establishing law enforcement agencies, the policies and procedural mechanisms for managing these agencies, the leadership styles and abilities of executives, the officers' conduct and attitudes, and the citizens' attitudes toward criminal justice institutions contributed to the poor performance and poor human rights records of the agencies. We decided, therefore, to prioritize human rights as a core policy issue.

To do so, LINLEA carries out the following activities:

- training of officers in human rights, ethics, leadership, and basic police skills

- research and publications
- public education
- advocacy regarding policies and legislation
- advocacy regarding the appointment of qualified administrators.
- advocacy for adjudication of complaints (fair and impartial) and actions against officers who violate

We have organized these into three major programs:

- Law Enforcement Training and Education
- Human Rights Promotion and Advocacy
- Welfare and Labor Relations

### **GENERAL PROFESSIONAL TRAINING: IMPLICATION FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**

Although LINLEA addresses human rights as a deliberate part of its mandate, this falls within a broader mission and program of promoting overall professionalism, which we believe has many benefits for the police beyond its impact on human rights. We believe that improvements in human rights performance are a logical consequence of improved professionalism, and we articulate this link in our trainings.

The association seeks to improve the leadership styles of administrators of law enforcement agencies, encourage a participatory decision-making process, and develop policies and procedural guidelines for managing agency resources. We also seek to improve the attitude and conduct of individual officers, which results in improved services, a better image for the profession and its members, a reduction in human rights abuses and other acts of unprofessionalism, and, as a result, increased support and cooperation from the public.

In LINLEA's Human Rights and Leadership training, we cover the following topics:

- principles of management and law enforcement administration
- constitutional provisions as they relate to the administration of justice and the rule of law
- human rights as it relates to law enforcement
- leadership and supervision
- human relations

Our training and outreach also has a multiplier effect. Following the publication of our research report on the Liberian criminal justice system, some agencies began their own training and set up committees to develop policy manuals to guide their organizations. We are now conducting a training of trainers: a one-week training for curriculum development to promote professionalism. The participants will research the training needs of their own institutions, and we are working with a teacher's college to provide instruction on basic techniques of curriculum development and evaluation. We will also conduct a training on basic policy development and procedural manuals.



### **RESEARCH ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE**

In March 2002 we established the Center for Criminal Justice Research and Education to conduct research on problems of criminal justice. Through this center, we have carried out research on the structure, functions, and problems of the criminal justice system and a survey of public perception of the operations and effectiveness of criminal justice institutions in Liberia.

A report on these studies was published in December 2002, and circulated to heads of law enforcement and criminal justice institutions. The Minister of Justice mandated a deputy to review the report and advise him on possible actions; a meeting between the Justice Minister and LINLEA is pending. After publication of the report some agencies recommended in-service training for their personnel, and one created a new committee to develop policy guidelines for the department.

### **PUBLIC EDUCATION**

Since the attainment of our goals is intricately connected to the relationship between the police and the public, we also have formed programs to educate citizens, through workshops, literature, and lectures, about their rights and responsibilities as related to the law, about the role of criminal justice institutions in society, and about actions that can bring pressure on the government to initiate reforms and improve human rights records. We are also working with human rights groups and other civil society organizations to address human rights issues and the culture of impunity. We host a monthly radio program called the Criminal Justice Forum, organize a quarterly public lecture forum (the Wilfred E. Clark Lecture Forum on Social Justice and the Rule of Law), and publish the quarterly *Criminal Justice Review Journal*.

### **ADVOCATING POLICIES AND LEGISLATION**

We have assisted several law enforcement agencies in the creation of coherent internal procedures and standards. Having noticed that the laws establishing these agencies did not specify qualifications or criteria for the appointment of agency heads, allowing arbitrary choices by the president, we have also reviewed the laws and proposed amendments to improve the selection process, advance the practice of law enforcement, and enhance the living standards and guarantee the rights, safety, and well-being of members of the profession. In addition, observing that some agencies had duplicate functions, we recommended that the National Legislature review the acts creating law enforcement agencies and rectify any discrepancies.

### **INFLUENCING LEADERSHIP SELECTION**

Our hope is that our organization will become strong enough to influence the selection and appointment of law enforcement executives, either through consulting with the President, working with the legislature during confirmation hearings of those nominated by the President, or lobbying legislators to pass a bill requiring the President to nominate competent and qualified administrators to key positions in law enforcement institutions. Once sound administrators are appointed, LINLEA can then work with them to provide technical assistance for their respective agencies.

In a law enforcement agency, a good administrator is one who administers the affairs of the department through written policy and procedural guidelines, who encourages suggestions and ideas from men and women of the department, who consults with other executives on key issues before making decisions, who allows due process to prevail in the adjudication of complaints against officers, and who understands that the primary objective of the law enforcement profession is the upholding of the rule of law and respect for the Constitution. We believe that if we can achieve our goal of having such administrators appointed to the agencies, we will have gone a long way towards addressing the problem of human rights abuses by police. Unfortunately, President Taylor's practice of appointing persons loyal to him regardless of their qualifications, and his refusal to entertain discussions regarding the replacement of unqualified administrators, will delay the achievement of some of these objectives.

### **DEALING WITH COMPLAINTS AGAINST SECURITY FORCES OR INDIVIDUAL OFFICERS**

As a professional association of law enforcement personnel we have a dual role in dealing with complaints against these personnel: on the one hand, we have an obligation to defend the rights of our profession's members, who may be unfairly accused of misbehavior and who, even in the event of misbehavior, have a right to due process. At the same time, we must maintain the highest possible ethical standards within the profession, and we cannot allow law enforcement practitioners to commit crimes with impunity.

In Liberia, however, there are presently no official disciplinary or investigative procedures in place for officer violations. People are afraid even to file complaints, and complaints are not handled professionally. We are trying to persuade the Ministry of Justice to issue a standard of conduct, and will then challenge them to investigate charges against officers. As part of this process, LINLEA has a line-up of ten programs, including one on internal discipline which addresses the process for receiving complaints from the public, investigating and processing them, and monitoring their outcomes and resolutions.

Due to lack of funding, we have not yet been able to effectively and thoroughly monitor and catalogue police abuses. We are, however, developing a Law Enforcement Professional Standards and Human Rights Office, to be fully responsible for monitoring complaints of abuses and overseeing the handling of these complaints. We do have an ethics committee that investigates complaints against our own members, who accept the possibility of investigation when they join LINLEA.

Despite the lack of effective official mechanisms, we have been able to use our influence and activities to intervene and stop abuses. Human rights organizations had long found it difficult, for example, to persuade the courts to compel law enforcement executives to honor the writ of habeas corpus. Several persons arrested by law enforcement agencies, particularly for alleged offenses committed against the state, were held without being taken to the court within the 48 hours prescribed by the Constitution. Concerned about this flagrant violation, LINLEA hosted a forum to discuss the significance of the writ of habeas corpus in upholding the rule of law and protecting the rights of accused persons. We invited representatives of the Bar Association, the Justice Ministry, and the Catholic Church Justice and Peace Commission to serve as panelists. Since the forum, law enforcement agencies have begun adhering to the constitutional provision regarding the writ and are now complying with related court orders. A few days after the forum, in fact, a human rights lawyer was arrested and surprisingly, within the 48-hour period, was charged and brought to court.

In 2000, a member of our Association was arrested and detained for 100 days for allegedly communicating with a military official in neighboring Guinea. We felt that if the officer was indeed involved, he should be forwarded to court rather than indefinitely detained without trial. After we wrote a letter inquiring into his case, he was accused of espionage. We went to the judge to ask that the man be charged and tried, but the police still refused to charge him. We returned to the judge, and finally threatened to go to the Supreme Court. The following Saturday, the man was released. We wanted to further protest this mistreatment, but the man concerned felt it would be too risky for him, and he ultimately fled the country.

In 2002, Director of Police Paul E. Mulbah personally arrested the head of the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission. He also had two officers publicly flogged without due cause, as vengeance for their having questioned his decisions in a meeting, and was responsible for the flogging and torture of human rights advocate Tiawon Gongloe while in police custody. These actions prompted us to criticize him during a live radio talk show. The chief did not take well to this criticism, and vowed to discontinue his support for our programs and activities. For several months, contact was bro-

ken between the police and LINLEA. We chose to ignore him, avoid officially inviting the police department to our functions, and deal only with our members who were in the service. Since other institutions were attending and benefiting from our training programs, the police began to feel isolated. Eventually Mulbah allowed eight officers to participate in a training workshop held at our center, and permitted training officers from the Police Academy to participate in a training of trainers workshop. We hope to take advantage of this change of heart and intensify our training workshops for police officers.

This aspect of our work clearly carries inherent risks. Public condemnation of human rights abuses by law enforcement executives may trigger a backlash, creating situations in which support for our programs is withheld and executives prohibit officers from officially participating in the activities and programs of LINLEA.

#### **STANDING UP FOR THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT WORKERS**

As just described, police officers themselves are sometimes victims of abuse by officials. In these cases we assist in grievance procedures. If officers are detained or wrongfully charged, we advocate for their release or for justice. LINLEA is trying to develop a law enforcement officer's Bill of Rights for Liberian Officers to be enacted into law. With the passage of this bill, and our inclusion of this topic as part of our training, officers will be aware of their rights and able to claim them.

#### **Repression against LINLEA**

LINLEA had a particularly difficult time after the 1997 elections, due to our outspoken stance in support of the restructuring of the security forces, and our criticisms of Chief Tate. As described earlier, Tate was accused of war crimes by the U.S., and removed from office as a condition of U.S. security assistance. Because of the timing of a LINLEA conference on police



Participants at a policy formation and development workshop held at CCJRE, April 9-12, 2003.



Panelists at the Wilfred E. Clark lecture forum, discussing the role of the law enforcement community in promoting peace, reconciliation, and security for all; August 15, 2002.



LINLEA President Cecil B. Griffiths in office.



professionalism, and the enthusiastic U.S. support for LINLEA, Tate blamed us for the loss of his position.

With the 1997 election of Charles Taylor and the NPP, Tate was again named Chief of Police. In addition to harboring historic resentment for LINLEA, the NPP was also concerned about our support for implementing the restructuring called for in the Abuja accord. Tate, considered the second most powerful man in Liberia, launched an aggressive campaign of intimidation against LINLEA.

His first step was to fire me from my position as Chief of Planning and Research, just as we were holding a national workshop on restructuring the security forces. The workshop, however, went ahead as planned, and participants overwhelmingly called for law enforcement agencies to be restructured in keeping with the Abuja accords. LINLEA protested my dismissal and held press conferences exposing the unprofessional manner in which the police department was being run. This prompted Tate to order my arrest and detention. I was arrested in December 1997, but managed to escape. Tate also had our meetings monitored, and our members watched, threatened, and arrested. He spread propaganda questioning our association's motives and creating the impression that we were agents of the U.S. government, since the U.S. and Liberian governments were at loggerheads. LINLEA declared a state of siege, and advised members who felt threatened to keep away until conditions improved. A few officers did brave the storm and continued to be active.

In 1999 Director Tate was killed in a crash, after which many police officers reactivated their membership, and our relationship with the department began to improve. Nevertheless, the department still suffers greatly from the transition. Because of the prevailing situation in the country, particularly the issue of impunity, many LINLEA members are not willing to file complaints against their bosses for fear of reprisal.

Tate's replacement as chief of police, Paul E. Mulbah, did not warm to us quickly. When we publicly criticized the arrest and detention of a human rights activist and the flogging of two police officers upon his orders, he vowed not to cooperate with us, and notified heads of other law enforcement agencies of his decision. This relationship has since improved somewhat, in part due to the seriousness and credibility of our work and publications.

Although opposition to LINLEA still exists, it is limited to executives with very close connections to the president. One agency head continues to intimidate and threaten members with dismissal for associating with LINLEA. Quite recently, three of our members resigned from this agency to work full time with us; the agency head is now refusing to cooperate with LINLEA.

## Discussion I: Causes of police abuse

Consider the majority of violations of civil and political rights: extrajudicial killings, summary executions, disappearances, torture, impunity, unlawful detention, violation of the right to protest or express oneself, discrimination against minorities, police brutality, trafficking in human beings. The list goes on, but clearly most of these abuses are directly related to law enforcement—either to abuses by security officials, or to the lack of protection and enforcement of the law. Law enforcement is crucially linked to democracy, good governance, and the rule of law. I believe that most of the wars in Africa are related to the lack of the rule of law, and to a lack of justice. People have nowhere to seek redress. If human rights abuses and omissions by law enforcement and the criminal justice system were addressed, and the system worked, most abuses and violent conflicts would be reduced or minimized.

Why do law enforcement officers violate the law or commit abuses? We believe three factors are responsible:

First, a lack of training or inadequate training. Officers do not know what to do in certain instances, and are often ignorant of the law. In Liberia, more than 60 percent of current officers are completely untrained.

A second key cause is the lack of discipline. Law enforcement officers must be guided in their actions by principles and standards of conduct. Professional organizations such as LINLEA endeavor to remind officers of their responsibility to adhere to these standards, and of the effects of unprofessional conduct on the image of law enforcement agencies. Officers who disregard rules of conduct must be sanctioned in order to deter others. Violations that are internally motivated (such as lack of training, lack of discipline, or poor leadership) can be handled by convincing political leaders that the problems of the police are undermining the image of the country and hence require corrective measures.

The third factor is the political manipulation of law enforcement institutions for political gain. Political leaders appoint those loyal to them, those they can trust to do their bidding. This leads to violations that are externally motivated. To address this we must persuade the law enforcement community to reflect on its role in society through interaction with law enforcement professionals from other countries. Police need to be encouraged to see their role as serving the citizenry, not the regime in power. By building a sense of pride in the profession, agencies can build up greater internal resistance to the kind of political manipulation that can turn a good police force into a tool for repression.

We believe that most human rights violations by police in Liberia, especially those occurring between 1991

and 1997, could be attributed to unprofessional errors caused by a lack of training and discipline. After the 1997 elections brought the NPP into power, however, many rebel commanders and fighters were absorbed into law enforcement agencies, and commanders were appointed heads of security units at vital public installations and facilities, such as the Freeport of Monrovia, the Telecommunications Corporation, the Electricity Corporation, the International Airport, and the law enforcement agencies. At this point, the level of human rights violations began to take on new dimensions.

In 1997, for instance, a few months after the new government took office, prominent politician Sam Dokie, his wife, and a close relative were killed, allegedly by members of the Special Security Service, the agency responsible for protecting the President and other VIPs. To date, those accused are yet to face justice. The conduct of the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), a military force created by the president, has also increased the level of human rights violations. This unit has been accused of torture, and of inhumane treatment of civilians detained at their bases.

One of the greatest concerns of LINLEA and of the human rights organizations in Liberia is the issue of impunity. Many acts of lawlessness, unprofessionalism, and human rights violations go unpunished, and the actions of the ATU and Special Operation Division (SOD), the para-military wing of the police, continue to go unchecked.

The SOD, which should be analogous to the "SWAT" (Special Weapons And Tactics) teams of U.S police departments, was reorganized and staffed with ex-combatants. A para-military Border Patrol Unit was also established within the Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization and staffed with ex-fighters. Because of the loyalty of the men and commanders of these units, they are fully involved in the war. Acts of unprofessional conduct or repressive behavior are not adequately addressed by heads of agencies because of their relationship with the president.

This not an easy situation to tackle. In our radio programs, public lecture forums, and literature, we continue to discuss the need to improve enforcement agencies through training and education, and to encourage civil society to pressure the government to reform.

## Discussion II: Necessary resources

### HUMAN RESOURCES

Our most critical resource is police officers who believe in professionalism. Every police department has them, but they are not always visible when a department is affected by political or armed conflict, or by corruption. They are, however, the people needed to

build an effective and legitimate association. The founders of our association were law enforcement personnel who had seen, under Chief Clark, how a professional department should be run. We had contacts within public and private law enforcement agencies, and we had the support of a lawyer as well, who was invited to join the organizing committee to obtain first-hand knowledge of our aims and objectives. We were also able to gain support from the Minister of Justice and other high-level law enforcement officials. This support has not always been consistent, for political reasons, and at times we experienced harassment from officials, but currently some of that initial level of support is being restored.

### FINANCIAL RESOURCES

We requested from our members annual dues of one hundred Liberian dollars. Because of the economic constraints facing workers, we also hosted fundraisers to augment these dues. We received some funding from the U.S. government (support for the law enforcement restructuring workshops in 1996 and 1997, and support for the publication of the criminal justice review journal), and during the period of intense intimidation, office space and financial support were provided by the Association of Liberian Professional Organizations (ALPO), a civil society organization. We now receive funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), based in Washington, D.C., for our Center for Criminal Justice Research and Education program, and the Norwegian Human Rights Funds provide funding for our Professional Standards and Human Rights Office.

## Discussion III: The police & the military

The Liberian police and military had historically remained separate, but after the 1980 coup and the ongoing conflict they began to overlap in their "security" functions, and to carry out some joint operations. Most devastatingly, since 1997 the police have had to



Female chapter of LINLEA celebrating first anniversary, December 12, 2001.



Professor Anthony D. Kromah, Associate Director of CCJRE, lecturing on the significance of training during the training of trainers workshop.



Participants at leadership and human rights workshop, December 12, 2002, Monrovia City Hall.

absorb a large number of untrained former combatants. Former rebel soldiers were absorbed into all security forces, including the police and the armed forces. But the existing army was comprised of soldiers who had fought against the rebels. In the transition very few rebel commanders obtained command positions in the army. Instead, Taylor created a new military force, the Anti-Terrorist Unit (ATU), comprised primarily of former rebels. Taylor has favored the ATU—his personal army—with resources, weapons, and responsibility for controlling dissidents. Meanwhile, the police department absorbed 400—500 former rebel combatants, with the SOD taking on an increasingly repressive role. These ex-combatants are still war-traumatized, and received no professional training.

The fact that the military's and former rebels' abuses have benefited from impunity clearly does not create a public sense of respect or faith in the state's commitment to the rule of law. With the existing ambiguity of formal "separation" yet practical "mixing" of military and civilian security forces, it is difficult for military officers to be investigated or held accountable for their actions. Policies regarding the investigation of military personnel for unlawful actions are not consistent. Although most offenses committed by military officers are handled by the military police and sometimes referred to a tribunal, there are few instances in which military officers have been prosecuted in civilian courts.

Through our radio programs and publications, LINLEA has been vocal against acts of lawlessness by members of the ATU and other security forces. In 2001, for example, an officer of the Defense Intelligence Service was detained more than eighteen months by Defense Ministry authorities for unsubstantiated allegations. LINLEA sought clarification from Defense Ministry officials and, when no response was received, collaborated with the Justice and Peace Commission to have the officer released. A case involving a commanding officer of the AFL, a former NPFL commander alleged to have stabbed and killed another military officer, is currently being investigated by LINLEA upon request from victim's relative. The JPC has also highlighted the case.

LINLEA's has hopes to advocate for the creation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to review all such cases that are not addressed by the government, and has submitted funding proposals to support preparatory work in that direction. Unfortunately, the current fighting in Liberia at the time of this writing has made it impossible to pursue this objective.

#### **Discussion IV: Police & human rights organizations**

In the beginning, perhaps not surprisingly, LINLEA did not have a close relationship with civil society human rights groups. Since the idea of law enforcement of-

ficers organizing to promote professionalism among themselves was strange, some groups were simply skeptical about our intent. Some felt that our intention in joining the consortium of human rights organizations was to infiltrate and expose decisions and plans to the government. It was thus difficult at first for LINLEA to secure international support or funding for our programs.

However, there has been a remarkable improvement in the relationships over time, especially after LINLEA itself suffered police repression. We now collaborate with the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission and others who invite us to lecture on criminal justice, prisoners' rights, the correctional system, police community relations, and other topics. International funders, such as the National Endowment for Democracy, have helped us build links with other groups. And our monthly radio program on human rights issues has also strengthened our credibility.

It is natural that some distance exist between the NGO human rights movement and a police association, even one with a human rights agenda. This distance might even have positive consequences: our primary target constituency and audience are police themselves, and the institutional hierarchy. Given the historic distrust and often adversarial relationship between human rights groups and security forces, a police association might have difficulty maintaining its credibility and access inside the law enforcement universe if it is perceived to be too closely linked to human rights groups.

#### **Transferability I: How police associations can promote human rights** **STARTING A POLICE ASSOCIATION**

Our tactic can be successfully implemented only by professional law enforcement officers (whether in active service or not). These officers know the culture of their agencies and can make a tremendous impact if they initiate efforts to improve the quality of service. To encourage fellow officers to see the value in such an association, the following motivations should be encouraged:

- Most people have a longing to be a part of an organization or fraternity. Other professions have such associations, so why not ours? Police in other countries have such associations, so why not us?
- Most law enforcement practitioners want to feel pride in their work. They want to be regarded as professionals. They are not proud of abuses committed by their institution or individuals within it, and they want the respect of the public.
- Law enforcement practitioners can benefit from the training and education that an association can offer. Training opportunities can also mean promotion opportunities.
- Law enforcement officials are mostly normal citizens with the same desire for peace, stability, and respect for human rights as others in society.

- In a situation where some security forces or individuals are engaged in unprofessional behavior or politically motivated human rights abuses, the reputation of all practitioners is damaged. They need an association to assert their commitment to professionalism and separate themselves from the crimes committed by others.
- Law enforcement practitioners work under a hierarchy of obedience to discipline, but they also have a right to benefit from an independent space to discuss issues and voice concerns among colleagues.
- Law enforcement officers can be victimized by their institutions—unfairly accused, detained, punished, denied promotions, and discriminated against. They need an independent body that will stand up and advocate for their needs.
- If a law enforcement agency is going through a difficult time, in which discipline and professionalism have broken down or political manipulation is intense, calling attention to role models and time periods in which a higher level of professionalism was achieved can encourage colleagues to maintain hope that the situation can be improved.

If you have a group of officers interested in forming such an organization, consider the following questions:

- Do other professional organizations, such as the Bar Association or Teachers Association, exist in your country? What can you learn from them about the process of establishing such an organization?
- Are there any laws prohibiting law enforcement officers from becoming members of professional organizations? If so, you may first need to campaign to change such laws. You may be aided by international support, given that independent police associations are common in many countries, and can play a very positive role in assisting law enforcement.
- What is the government's attitude towards human rights activism and independent civil society? Has the government shown willingness to improve the human rights situation or is it hostile towards human rights advocates?
- What is the nature of human rights violations in your country? What has been the involvement of your law enforcement institution in these violations? Has this involvement, or lack of it, been internally or externally motivated?
- Depending on the political situation, where can you find allies? If, for instance, a breakdown in discipline or professionalism has caused scandals or situations which create a bad image for the country, you may find that high government officials, parliament members, and others are very supportive of any campaign to address the problem. On the other hand, if the police department is suffering from excessive political control by a repressive regime, you may need to choose a

lower profile, looking for allies among your colleagues, within civil society, and in the international community.

There are a number of steps that can be initiated to prepare law enforcement officers to establish a network to promote human rights among themselves:

- Contact international organizations of law enforcement professionals. The IACP, for instance, tackles unprofessionalism by developing training programs in collaboration with law enforcement training institutions and universities. It also addresses the issue of leadership through annual international and regional conferences. The IACP has been successful in its programs because it has sufficient funding, and because the caliber and status of members give the organization prominence.
- Host regional conferences for heads of law enforcement agencies to discuss administrative and human rights issues. During such conferences, the role of unions and professional associations can be discussed. Delegates can be encouraged to become members of the IACP or other international law enforcement association. Such awareness will be necessary to generate support whenever a local law enforcement association is to be established.
- Set up regional professional law enforcement associations such as the "West African Association of Chiefs of Police" or the "West African Union of Law Enforcement Associations." With the support of the IACP and international human rights organizations, these regional bodies may be able to develop awareness of the professional role of the police and other law enforcement agencies in a democracy.
- Establish criminal justice research centers to conduct studies on the causes of crime and on the criminal justice system, opinion surveys on public perceptions of the police system, and other studies to provide data that could help law enforcement agencies reflect on their performances, while recommending actions to address the situation. Such research helps demonstrate the important role that an association may play. The centers could conduct workshops for law enforcement officers on human rights, ethics, democracy, and other topics. These initiatives should not be antagonistic in nature, and criticisms should be constructive and limited.

#### **ENSURING A HUMAN RIGHTS AGENDA**

Once you have established an association, or if you already have one, how can you ensure that it carries out a strong agenda in support of human rights?

Despite the frequent use of police for repression, and the adversarial relationship that often exists between law enforcement and human rights groups, it is fun-

damental to recognize that the essential mandate of all policing is to protect citizens and their rights. Any program pursuing professional integrity without promoting human rights is internally inconsistent. Human rights education is therefore essential for law enforcement practitioners, and an association can play an important role in offering such education, and advocating to ensure that human rights education becomes part of official police training and education.

If fellow officers are committing abuses, there may be a hesitance to criticize “one of our own.” In this case, an association needs to be encouraged to recognize the cost to the reputation and public image of all police if offenders are allowed to commit abuses with impunity. An association can advocate for effective investigative and disciplinary procedures inside the department, while also maintaining the role of external watchdog. It is also essential that the organization has its own mechanisms for investigating infringements of professional ethics by its members. Without this, the professional reputation of the organization itself will be questioned.

In situations where police are subjected to political manipulation, the police association itself may be vulnerable to intimidation, infiltration, or cooptation. Cognizant of this fact, LINLEA, for example, has put in place mechanisms to prevent political manipulation. To prevent conflict of interest, law enforcement officers appointed by the president to executive positions in law enforcement agencies are prohibited from holding office in the Association. Likewise, LINLEA officers appointed by the president to serve in law enforcement agencies must resign their positions within the Association if they accept the presidential appointment.

Affiliations with international law enforcement groups can help to give associations an international profile and signal international support. Members, particularly the executive committee, must be alert and vigilant in detecting any attempts by the government to infiltrate the organization or co-opt members.

### **Transferability II: Promoting human rights engagement in police associations**

Any attempt by human rights activists to promote positive engagement with the police must be done with an attitude, a style of communication, and an approach that take into account the political and diplomatic realities of the two groups. Human rights activists need to respect that the law enforcement profession has its own culture, professional standards, and modes of expression, which may be different than those of many human rights NGOs. The law enforcement community, even under the best of circum-

stances, is vulnerable to attack—both physical attack from some of the violent situations it is obligated to confront, and political attack from allies of any targets of law enforcement activities. This vulnerability naturally creates a resistance to criticism from the outside, and a highly developed sense of collegial respect within the profession, a respect based on shared risks and stresses.

In a situation where law enforcement has been accused of misbehavior, or human rights groups have been vociferously critical of law enforcement, this dynamic will further complicate communication and collaboration.

In any case, human rights groups need to approach and seek out allies within the law enforcement community, conveying sensitivity to the difficult situation the police face, and support for the professional aspirations they have. As in any profession, law enforcement practitioners are more likely to respond to new ideas if those ideas arise from one of their own. Human rights workers should thus not try to convince the police in general to change their approach to human rights, but rather seek out influential allies inside the institution who can convince others. These allies need to be professionals capable of influencing others, and independent thinkers willing to question the status quo.

How does one find these allies with aspirations to improve the professional and moral integrity of their institution? There are several avenues. In many places civil society groups already have close contact with the police and may be interested in your work. For instance, NGOs that work with victims or offenders have frequent contact with police, and will already have developed trusting relationships with some officers. University professors that do educational work with the police will also have built up relationships with the institution, and may have good advice about influential individuals in the department who might promote such thinking.

Human rights organizations can also encourage collaborative relationships with law enforcement professionals in their other activities—by inviting them, for instance, to human rights conferences and forums, and by organizing seminars on topics of interest to the police. Such forums may serve as a catalyst in persuading professionals to organize themselves and influence their colleagues. Individuals with legal and research backgrounds may establish institutes to conduct research on the prevailing laws, crime, and criminal justice polices and practices, and liaise with law enforcement authorities to discuss findings and recommendations. Such institutions may also have a training component to provide technical or advanced training for law enforcement practitioners.



Human rights organizations can also encourage their international counterparts to organize forums involving law enforcement. If local police chiefs are invited to an international forum co-sponsored by international human rights groups as well as international law enforcement associations, the link between the two communities gains further credibility, and the local law enforcement professional is given a special opportunity to learn and share with other professionals in both fields.



## NOTES

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