



Workshop on Civil Society and Journalists' Perspectives on Police Work and Police Reform

A Yemen Polling Center Workshop

Tuesday, January 28, 2013

On January 28, 2013, the Yemen Polling Center organized a workshop as part of a wider YPC project on security sector governance, funded by the European Union within the framework of its Stability Instrument. As this project aims at bringing society into the ongoing reform of the security sector within the Yemeni transition process, the main objective of the workshop was to facilitate information exchange between the Restructuring Committee of the Ministry of Interior and civil society activists as well as journalists who have been working in the field of security provision in Yemen as well as public oversight of the security sector. This information exchange was intended to a) allow workshop participants to understand the nature of work of the Restructuring Committee and the current state of their reform efforts, and b) allow workshop participants to feed their understanding of the nature of security provision in Yemen and public security sector oversight into the ongoing work of the Restructuring Committee.

The event was attended by 21 civil society representatives from various governorates of Yemen as well as 14 journalists. In addition, representatives from the Restructuring Committee of the Ministry of Interior attended and gave a brief update on the committee's tasks and ongoing work. One of its members, Dr. Abd al-Monem al-Shaibani, explained the role this committee plays in the reform of the Ministry within the framework of the Yemeni transition process. One of the tasks of the Committee in this regards has been to investigate where the current police system went wrong and whether the current deficiencies are legislative or structural. In order to answer the previous questions, the committee formed academic teams to study the following issues:

- The rules and regulations of the Ministry of Interior (Mol).
- The organizational structure of the Mol as well as the system defining specializations and duties.
- Human and financial resources, especially given the fact that there are approximately 70.000 non-working individuals in the police force. Also, most of the forces are concentrated in the capital with an obvious shortage of security in other governorates.

In addition, Dr. Nadeem al-Tarzi of the Restructuring Committee summarized the content of an academic symposium of the Restructuring Committee that was held last month and highlighted the importance of building independent security forces whose only loyalty is to Yemen and its citizens and not to political parties. This symposium, according to al-Tarzi, also discussed deficiencies in police structure and its possible causes.

Participants from civil society as well as journalists listed their **observations** on past police performance of the past as follows:

- 1- There is a common conception in society that security forces and police are there to protect the regime and not the people.
- 2- There is an unbalanced distribution of security forces in the country as most of the security forces and police are concentrated in the capital city to the detriment of security in other governorates.
- 3- Promotions and ranks are given according to political alliances and loyalties and not on the basis of skills and experience.
- 4- There is corruption in its various forms, starting with bribery and ending with high-ranking officers' theft of public funds.
- 5- Both Political and National Security still exist even though both institutions are illegal and both do not follow the Ministry of Interior's authority, not to mention their illegal arrests of citizens in a way that makes it difficult for civil society organizations and lawyers to locate them.
- 6- Reforming the police alone without making real changes to improve the judiciary system, which is perceived as extremely corrupt, is useless.
- 7- There is mistreatment of prison inmates, the disappearance of their files, as well as the detention of illegal immigrants from the Horn of Africa for years without contacting their embassies or looking into their cases.
- 8- There is a lack of health services, good nutrition, training, and qualifying opportunities in prisons.
- 9- There are illegal prisons owned by tribal sheikhs.
- 10- Low wages for policemen reduce the quality of their performance especially given the difficulties of trying to make a living and dealing with the risks of the profession.
- 11- There is a lack of awareness of the role of civil society and the importance of its possible cooperation with the Ministry of interior in training police on human rights.
- 12- There is an absence of media coverage of those areas where security is not always good and where violations occur.
- 13- Most human rights organizations are focused on working in the capital and the rural areas don't get enough documentation and awareness.
- 14- Journalists are not allowed to cover violations carried out by members of the police.

Participants also gave a number of **recommendations** regarding the restructuring of the MoI and the police, the relationship of civil society and the media with these state institutions, as well as the monitoring of their work by civil society activists and journalists.

A: Restructuring of the Police:

- 1- Clarify the structures, duties, and job descriptions within the police to avoid violations that occur due to vaguely defined duties and specializations.
- 2- Balance the distribution of security forces in all regions of the country, especially in areas where citizens feel that their security is not the state's priority given the presence of armed conflicts and a general absence of security.
- 3- Neutralize police and security forces away from political and regional alliances.
- 4- Grant promotions and ranks due to competencies and not favoritism, political affiliation, regionalism, etc.
- 5- Assign the Minister of the Interior's position to civilians only.
- 6- Put Political Security and National Security under the authority of the MoI.
- 7- Shut down all illegal private prisons that belong to tribal sheikhs etc.
- 8- Reconsider wages and give policemen/policewomen their right to a secure and decent life in a way that allows them to perform their duties well.
- 9- Enact laws that regulate the trade in and the possession of small arms to reduce their proliferation in the country.

B: Civil Society and the Police:

- 1- Provide human rights awareness training programs.
- 2- Organize more seminars and discussions that bring civil society and the media together with the police periodically to bridge the existing gap and to provide the opportunity for both sides to give constructive criticism, to reduce violations, and to restore trust between citizens and the police.
- 3- Conduct more quantitative and qualitative studies regarding security imbalances and problems in Yemen in order to come up with practical recommendations to improve the performance of the police forces and their relationship with citizens.

C: Media and the Police:

- 1- Place emphasis on the importance of having independent media that convey information impartially and independently.
- 2- Implement the law on the right to access of information.
- 3- Appoint a media spokesman/point of media contact in the MoI who will disseminate data and whom journalists can contact in cases of information requests relating to police work and that of the MoI in order to ease communication between the the MoI and the media.
- 4- Support the role of the media in spreading awareness in society on the role of the police and its duties in an attempt to restore people’s trust in the police.

D: Oversight of the Police:

- 1- Grant local authorities the necessary powers to control the police.
- 2- Empower both legislative and judicial authorities in controlling the police.
- 3- Encourage citizens to report violations committed by the police through media awareness programs that give citizens the necessary knowledge of their rights and duties as well as information on the subsequent steps that must be taken by the police and the judiciary in the case of violations reported.
- 4- Form an independent committee from civil society to monitor the performance of the police.