



Communiqué of the International Council of Police Representative Associations

Cape Town, South Africa 20th June 2014

Preamble

At the 2014 meeting of the International Council of Police Representative Associations, hosted by the South African Police Union, the following police representative groups were represented;

Fraternal Order of Police, USA
Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association, USA
The Police Union in Denmark
The South African Policing Union
British Transport Police Federation
Police Federation of Northern Ireland
Scottish Police Federation
Canadian Police Association
The Kenya Police Union
New Zealand Police Association
Police Federation of Australia
European Confederation of Police (EuroCOP)
Organização Internacional de Policiais - Community of Portuguese Language Countries (OIP/CPLP)

jointly representing in excess of 2 million police and law enforcement officers.

Policing and Mental Health

Delegates heard from Inspector Michael Brown, West Midlands Police (United Kingdom) on the myriad of issues associated with policing and mental health. Michael Brown is a guest lecturer at the University of Worcester and writes an award winning blog under the name MentalHealthCop. He is also on twitter @mentalhealthcop.

Council was advised;

Half of fatal police shootings are thought to involve vulnerable people in distress.

Half of deaths in police custody, often whilst under restraint, involve vulnerable people in distress.

More than half of deaths following police contact, often by suicide, involve vulnerable people in distress.



A third to a half of people arrested have mental health problems, learning difficulties or disabilities.

Delegates recognised that citizens across the world view and regard the police and law enforcement community as a one stop shop for all issues that are unable to be resolved by any other public body or individual.

Delegates discussed the decline in investment in health provision for citizens with mental health needs and that police and law enforcement officers, as the service of last resort often find themselves dealing with what should be health priorities. A recent enquiry by the House of Lords in the UK estimated 40% of police demand was driven by mental health related issues.

Council recognises that mental health issues are amongst the most sensitive and demanding issues affecting police services and police officers today; that police and law enforcement officers are the service of last resort and will always be called to deal with mental health related issues.

Council notes the criminalisation and incarceration of citizens with mental health issues is increasing at the same time as investment in mental health services are decreasing; that attending to and dealing with calls involving those with mental health issues takes up an ever increasing and disproportionate amount of police time. Further notes that education and training for police officers dealing with mental health issues is inadequate and that lack of training hinders the ability to deal with mental health patients appropriately.

Council calls upon governments to reverse the clear trend of the last fifty years whereby prison systems have become an ineffective proxy for adequate mental health care; for greater recognition of the demands faced by police services in responding to mental health related incidents and for more research into this misunderstood area of policing.

Further calls upon senior police and law enforcement officers to ensure their officers have sufficient training in mental health issues and mental health law to respond to incidents and manage partnerships effectively; for all police officers and staff to assist in safeguarding the mental wellbeing of police officers by creating a culture of understanding where experience of mental distress is not stigmatised by prejudice, ignorance or fear.

Further calls upon mental health providers to ensure that police officers have sufficient access to health, social care and addiction services to divert vulnerable people in crisis away from the criminal justice system.

Greg O'Connor, Chairman
on behalf of the International Council of Police Representative Associations