

Opening Remarks by Professor Imtiaz Ahmed, ED, RCSS, at the International Conference on “Future Policing: Prospects and Challenges for South Asia,” Colombo, 4-6 October 2016.

The Honorable Chief Guest, His Excellency Maithripala Sirisena, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka; my good friend, Professor Siri Hettige, Chairman, National Police Commission; Mr. Pujith Jayasundara, Inspector General of Sri Lanka Police; Mr. Wijeweera, Secretary, Ministry of Law and Order; Distinguished Guests and Delegates; Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a historic moment. Not only because so many practitioners, policymakers, scholars, activists, eminent personalities and dignitaries of this region and beyond have gathered in this room, but that they have gathered in the presence of a person who is leading a regime which has brought so much hope not only to the people of Sri Lanka but also to the people of South Asia and beyond, particularly when it comes to democratic aspirations and people-centric initiatives, including people-centric policing. Many thanks and congratulations to you: Your Excellency Maithripala Sirisena, President of the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka. We are deeply honoured by your presence.

This is a collective effort of four institutions, the National Police Commission, Sri Lanka Police, which is celebrating 150th year of its birth, the UN office based in Sri Lanka, and my centre, the Regional Centre for Strategic Studies, the only centre of its kind in whole of South Asia. Truly South Asian, not only in terms of its organization and personnel (myself coming from Bangladesh), but also in terms of its activities. Established in 1992, RCSS is proud to collaborate with the National Police Commission, Sri Lanka Police, and the UN on this novel yet very significant venture concerning the life and living of millions of South Asians.

A question is bound to arise, why future policing? The answer incidentally lies in our being human. In fact, humans are the only beings that can imagine, design, and consciously pursue the change they want. But then humans are restricted to bring change only to the future, they cannot do so with the past nor with the present. When it comes to the 'past,' humans can revisit, reinterpret, review, retrospect, even reexamine, but cannot change. About the 'present' also humans cannot do much about; they can either enjoy or suffer from it. Indeed, like the morning dew, no being can ever hold on to the present; one simply has to let it go. It is precisely for this reason that many of the post-structuralists went on writing 'present' by crossing it. This is because the word 'present' cannot help being *sous rature* – 'under erasure,' it is 'inadequate yet necessary'! 'Future' is the only thing that is in the hands of the humans; the latter can imagine, design, and creatively work to make a difference to it. And there lies the rationale for a conference of this kind.

Interestingly, some two thousand five hundred years back Confucius expounded the central role of humans in clear terms, "It is human being who is able to extend 'the way' (*dao* or 'creativity'), not the 'creativity' or *dao* that is able to extend the human being." In this context, I cannot help recalling the debate that took place between two Nobel laureates - a physicist and a mystic poet - in the middle of the last century. I am indeed referring to the debate between Einstein and Tagore on the question of whether there can be 'beauty,' 'truth,' 'table,' and by implication, 'the moon,' without human beings? Tagore answered with an emphatic 'no'! No human being, no beauty, no truth, no table, not even the moon! Einstein understood the relationship between human being and 'beauty' very quickly, because we really do not know whether dogs and elephants look at the Taj Mahal or the Sigiriya rock or the moon, and say, 'Look, how beautiful it is!' But then Einstein differed with Tagore on the question of 'truth' and remarked, "I agree with regard to this conception of Beauty, but not with regard to Truth." Tagore quickly responded, "Why not? Truth is realized through human beings." Indeed, a fly or an ant is not going to come and whisper to us, 'You know, you are not being truthful today!' Only human beings can realize and say that. At the very end, Einstein, the physicist, resigned by saying to the

mystic poet: “It seems that I am more religious than you are!”

Tagore’s unflinching faith in humans came from the *bauls* of Bengal, the mystic minstrels, whose divinity rested in human beings and still to this day roam around freely in the villages of Bangladesh and the Indian State of West Bengal, singing songs of love and harmony among all beings, irrespective of race, religion, ethnicity, class, caste or gender.

The implication of Tagore-Einstein debate is enormous. What it means is that without human being there is no ‘future policing,’ no ‘National Police Commission,’ no ‘Sri Lanka Police,’ no ‘South Asia,’ not even ‘The Kingsbury’! This is particularly relevant for contemporary South Asia where we have an abundance of human beings – literally 1.5 billion of them!

The theory of abundance has played a major role in deciding the fate of human beings throughout its civilizational quest. The abundance of water in rivers, for instance, has led to the growth of civilizations near river banks, some of which have continued to awe humans even today. In recent times, Europe too made a difference with abundance, particularly in getting France and Germany to collaborate on coal and steel, something which they had in abundance, and which gradually contributed to the birth of Europe Union and getting Europe out of centuries of divisive politics and genocidal conflicts.

In South Asia, what we have in abundance is human capital. If earlier civilizations and in recent times Europe could make a difference with abundance (river water for one, coal and steel for another) then there is no reason why South Asia cannot do the same, indeed, with an abundance of population. The strategy ought to be *investing* in the population and *empowering* each and every person - not only politically but also economically, culturally, technologically, and, more importantly, educationally or psychologically - both within and beyond national boundaries. And this is where future policing, creatively managing and ensuring the empowering of the person, could make a difference to the dismal state now prevailing in South Asia.

Let there be no mistake that the goal of future policing is to empower the person. The conference is geared towards this endeavor with four key objectives:

Firstly, sharing good practices. Sri Lanka's *independent* National Police Commission, currently headed by Professor Siri Hettige, is unique in South Asia. Some of the works that NPC is engaged in, particularly in areas of people-centric policing, is remarkable. This ought to be flagged so that other South Asian countries can learn from it and establish something similar. Similarly, India's 'SMART' police force, which is Strict and Sensitive, Modern and Mobile, Alert and Accountable, Reliable and Responsive; Techno-savvy and Trained, deserve attention for it to be reproduced elsewhere. So is the case with Bangladesh's experiment with community policing, a praiseworthy effort which is increasingly getting attention within South Asia and beyond. Indeed, the conference will provide a platform where scholars and practitioners will share and critically assess the good practices of policing.

Secondly, developing a South Asian approach to policing, with the avowed objective of overcoming the colonial legacies and making it service-oriented, catering to the requirements of the public, including the disempowered and laypersons. It is indeed a shame that Police Acts evolved during the colonial times in mid-nineteenth century continue to define and dictate policing in South Asia. The conference will make an effort to shift the gaze so that a newer discourse on police reforms and fresh legislations could evolve.

Thirdly, creating newer structures of policing in the age of globalization. This is warranted from the fact that security threats and bodily harm now emanate not only from the statist machineries but also from the non-state. Smuggling, piracy, women trafficking, proliferation of illicit weapons and illicit drugs, even the contemporary face of terrorism, none of these are now limited to a national state. These have all become regional and global or post-national in their growth and scope of operation. Indeed, nothing short of newer structures can overcome the inadequacy of national policing in the age of globalization. The sooner the South Asians

realize this the sooner will they be able to overcome the menace of the non-state that has come to haunt them more than ever.

Finally, establishing a network among those dealing with policing, indeed, with the hope that the issue of policing will not be limited to the police alone but will also include the active participation of scholars, researchers, activists, and the public. And that again, not only nationally but across the region and beyond. Let the Colombo Conference on Future Policing be only a beginning and not the end in creating a discourse for organizing and reproducing a people-centric policing in South Asia and beyond. Let us keep our dreams alive!