



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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BOUTELLIS: Today is the sixth of May 2008 and I am now with Mr. Kabiru Ibrahim, the UNPOL (United Nations Police) Elections Advisor with UNIOSIL (United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone), the UN mission in Sierra Leone and we're now in Freetown at the UNIOSIL headquarters. Thank you for your time. Before we start I'd like you to please confirm that you've given your consent to the interview.

IBRAHIM: *Thank you, you're welcome. I've already signed and given my consent and I've done it voluntarily.*

BOUTELLIS: I'd like to start the interview by learning a little more about your personal background, the jobs you held before this position and particularly how did you get into police work and policing work overseas?

IBRAHIM: *That's a very long history, but if I might shorten it, I was in the military because I went to Nigerian Military School, Zaria. From there I felt that the job satisfaction I needed I was not getting in the military. The military sent me to the university and at the end of my career I decided to change and joined the police. I have been a police officer for almost 22 years now.*

The second part of the question, my involvement in the international police started as far back as 2000, March 2000 to be exact when I was deployed as a UN police officer in Kosovo. I was there from March 2000 to 2001. I was there for a year. After that I was also deployed to Burundi in June 2004. I was there up to December 2005. Then I've been here in Sierra Leone from February 2007 until now. Hopefully I may be here until September 2008.

BOUTELLIS: Thank you. Can you describe for us briefly your position in each mission and within the mandate of your mission, what was your particular role?

IBRAHIM: *Yes, in my first mission in Kosovo I worked as a patrol officer. I also worked in the Special Operations and I was equally involved in training the KPS, Kosovo Police Service officers.*

BOUTELLIS: Any particular specialty?

IBRAHIM: *General policing. In Burundi, I was the chief of staff. There I worked more or less as an administrator with very little contact with the Burundian police, perhaps due to the language barrier, because my French is not so good. Here in Sierra Leone, I have been working primarily as election security advisor for the presidential election which we did last year and now for the local government elections which are coming up in two or three months time. I have also worked here as a crime adviser to the Sierra Leone Police, but that I have relinquished to another officer.*

BOUTELLIS: Advising on crime?

IBRAHIM: Yes.

BOUTELLIS: In the CID (Criminal Investigation Division)?

IBRAHIM: Yes, *crime management.*

BOUTELLIS: When you first arrived, can you give us your first impression, your first assessment of the status of crime and public order in Sierra Leone and maybe some of the major challenges the Sierra Leone Police were facing.

IBRAHIM: *When I first came here to Sierra Leone in February, I found the country generally to be relatively stable, or could I say, very stable. The crime rate may be, in comparison to where I was coming from, Nigeria, it was very, very low. Occasionally, we do have an upsurge where you record within two days, two, three, or four armed robberies. But generally, I want to say it has been very stable.*

BOUTELLIS: What were some of the areas that you focused on when you worked as an advisor in crime management?

IBRAHIM: *The area I was particularly focusing on was in the investigation and prosecution of cases. I was quick to discover that an investigator, once he makes an arrest, the investigations are not thorough. It is like they are always in a hurry to charge these cases to court. Once these cases are charged to court, he thinks he has completed his assignment. So, many cases come to discussion or have been charged to the court but there is no follow up. In fact, when the case goes to the court it is more or less left to the prosecutor to do what he likes. So the police are not after convictions. I always tell them that the essence of any investigation is to make sure after the arrest you conduct a very thorough investigation, charge the case to court, follow it to the logical conclusion and see that at the end of the day you are able to present your case in an organized and orderly manner that you could achieve convictions.*

You may want to know during my stay there I did voluntarily, on my own, just in trying to encourage them that whichever team has the highest convictions, whichever IPO, Investigation Police Officer, has convictions, I was willing to give them some mobile phones so that the police would know it's not just charging the case, but you must ensure that you investigate very well and you're able to convict. During this time the IPO, the ambition is to say look it's not just the number of cases I have charged but the number of convictions I have been able to achieve. Who is proud to say that? But here, unfortunately it is not the case.

BOUTELLIS: To get a rough idea, how many of the cases actually lead to convictions and how much of this is related to how well the case is prepared by the police and have you seen some improvements also?

IBRAHIM: *I must be frank with you. Up to the time, I was there for three months; I did not see much improvement in the convictions. It was like nobody was able to say, "Oh, this person has been able to—" It is like they're always in a hurry to charge these cases to court. Apart from cases where maybe the suspects plead guilty and he is sentenced by the magistrates, but for cases to be convicted based on the investigation, based on evidence provided by the police, up to the time I left, I cannot boast of any from them.*

BOUTELLIS: Before we enter some technical areas of police reform I was wondering if you could describe for us what a typical day was for you. Now you work primarily focused on preparing for election and advising for election security. Can you describe for us what your regular day of work would look like and what your function is?

IBRAHIM: *Generally, as the election security advisor, we have our men outside in the regions, together with the SLP counterparts, threat assessment of all politically-*

related offences. They have been monitored. Threat registers have been compiled. And it is this register, this threat register where we classify them into three divisions; the high threats, the medium threats and the low threats.

So as the election comes nearer, our deployment of security is going to be strictly dependent on our threat assessment. Those areas where we have high threats we are going to deploy a lot of manpower there so that in the event of any disturbance, they'll be able to move and take care of it. Also, considering the level of the state's finances, the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) is financing most of the deployment and the operations. So we have to get the number of men that would be deployed for UNDP, to pay them money out of the basket fund, provide rations for the police officers. Also to provide money for the training of the police officers to be able to perform effectively during any operation and to compile the number of vehicles they have because UNDP also has to repair those vehicles and provide fuel for the operations. So this we do on a daily basis: training, continuous training, threat assessment, compiling names.

BOUTELLIS: The last question before we get into functional areas is how much deployment training did you receive and did you receive any induction training when you first arrived on the mission or the past missions with the UN as well. Did you get a hand-over briefing from your predecessor and so on?

IBRAHIM: *Yes, for induction training. In all the missions I visited; Kosovo and also Burundi, we received adequate induction training. But what I want to say here is it is like the level of induction training compared to what—. Let me say this; in Kosovo we were given induction training I think for five days or one week if I can remember. In Burundi I think the induction training was about two days. And here, I think it was a day. So it is like level of induction training, the intensity which in the past was— is reducing. I may want to observe here also, maybe the intensity of the induction training is based on the delicate nature of the nation; Kosovo was much more volatile than my two previous missions. So maybe that explains it. But there was induction training. What was the other part of the question?*

BOUTELLIS: The handover from predecessors.

IBRAHIM: *As for handover, there was none. In Kosovo when it was so new, the mission was just starting. The mission was an armed mission and it was being administered by—it was new. The same thing with Burundi. In fact, we set up the Burundi mission, so there was no handover; we had to start everything. But here again there was no handover. The reason probably was when I came here, I was assigned a different function and nobody was doing it before. So I want to believe that is maybe why there is no handover.*

I know before I left Burundi, I handed over to the person who was occupying my office based on the best practices. In fact then, the best practice office was introduced. We had documents which we used to hand over.

BOUTELLIS: The first technical area I'd like to talk about is training and professionalization. You mentioned you'd been involved in training with KPS, the Kosovo Police Force in Kosovo and here as well, some mentoring. Can you describe some of the training programs and particularly the techniques used and how you developed curriculum and so on? Any specific examples?

IBRAHIM: *You see the training I was involved in Kosovo was more or less direct training because the KPS is assigned to you. You do what is practical.*

BOUTELLIS: On-the-job?

IBRAHIM: On the job, so that once there is any case you go together, you respond together and you want to see the action he is taking. You use your own past experience and tell him he should do it this way or that way, on a daily basis. That was some part of the job. So it is not like a classroom where you have to prepare your lesson plan. Like I told you, in Burundi, apart from the induction training, which I was directly in charge of for the new officers coming in, both military and the UN police, I was not directly training the Burundian police because of the French factor.

Here again, I have not been—we had a training cell who are the ones conducting the training. We direct them, the training he has been more or less on crowd control, investigations, prosecution of cases, then of course indoor training which has been organized by the security section, which from time to time ask us to give them lectures.

BOUTELLIS: In terms of the crowd control? Some UNPOL officers here are assigned to that task?

IBRAHIM: Yes, we have a training department and we have about three officers there. It is within their schedule to organize and provide training for the Sierra Leone Police. We have four officers, we have the traffic and the crowd control. Considering the volatile nature of the country, there were manners, some spontaneous cases come up, we met and felt that each division should have a PSU (Police Support Unit) CCU (Crowd Control Unit), MARG (Mobile Armed Response Group) almost in a ready position that could be able to respond to any challenge.

BOUTELLIS: From your experience in training, have there been some particular ways of training that have been successful? I'm thinking in terms of training especially when led by internationals is quite expensive. Do you have some suggestions on cost saving in training?

IBRAHIM: Yes. I think that especially for a country like here, which is relatively poor, the best training methods would be to select a few Sierra Leone police officers, train them as trainers and assist them with some logistics to be able to train other officers. That, I think is one of the few methods in reducing costs, training trainers so that those trainers can train others.

BOUTELLIS: Currently in terms of both crowd control and training for election security, are you training trainers, or training larger groups of police?

IBRAHIM: Yes. I know that for the general crowd control training a lot of officers, Sierra Leone police have been trained. Also in the traffic, a lot of officers have been trained and for the investigation and prosecution of cases, a lot of training has been conducted. So I think in terms of training the Sierra Leone Police are benefited a lot, not only from the UN but also from other NGOs, from other countries, they have been trained. So the problem they always encounter is that these training departments are never adequately funded for the trainers to either organize the training themselves here in Freetown or moving into the different regions to be able to train. Always the problem is logistics.

So if the UN can first square away the training department of the Sierra Leone Police, provide adequate support and logistics for them, I'm sure they have enough trained manpower to be able to train all the officers.

BOUTELLIS: When looking at the broader reform process, I understand your current role is focusing on the elections, the past elections and the coming elections, but if you look at the broader reform process, what are some of the broader reform challenges that the Sierra Leone Police are facing? In your opinion, what should be the priorities?

IBRAHIM: Basically I would say three major issues. One is finances. You'll discover that they know what to do, the police officers, they have been trained. Because of the poor welfare packages, poor logistics at the station level. Almost in every aspect of the police the response to the public is always very slow. If you go to the nearest police station where I think you should go, and say you're there to make a complaint, you see in most of the stations the manpower is not there. Or where the manpower is there, but there is no vehicle to take the complainant or suspects for further investigation. Or where there are vehicles, the vehicles may not have fuel. Even where there is fuel at the station level they may tell you they don't have paper. So you are the complainant, you are asked to provide paper, to pay money for paper, to provide fuel for the vehicle or you have to take a taxi. So you see the finances and the welfare packages of the police are affecting all the reforms. Right now some recruitment has been conducted since April. Training is supposed to have started but nothing has been heard about it. The reason is there is no money to provide for the trainees, for the training to start. So you see how the finances are affecting almost every aspect of the reform.

Secondly, the command and control of the Sierra Leone Police is virtually not there. I mean, the bedrock of any police force or any uniformed force is discipline. You discover that here, the officers do not appear to have control over them. Every person appears to be operating on his own. So some of us really wonder if the UN leaves, what is going to happen.

The third aspect of the challenges facing the SLP is the dichotomy, the division between the armed OSD (Operational Support Division) section and the Sierra Leone Police general duty. This leads to distrust or lack of understanding or lack of communication between the OSD and the general duty. The OSD, they feel marginalized by the senior cadre of the SLP. So this dichotomy has to be soft. I would want to suggest that until a day when there is free mobility for the officers to move into either of the two sections, either general duty or OSD after some time, and vice versa, until that is done, there is a big challenge there.

BOUTELLIS: Is that the third point?

IBRAHIM: Yes, it is the third point.

BOUTELLIS: Are there any innovations or experiments that have been tried in Sierra Leone that you think merit attention that we could learn from? Any innovations or experiments in Sierra Leone that you have observed in the Sierra Leone Police that you think are interesting? As part of the reform?

IBRAHIM: Yes. The Family Support Unit section is very, very vibrant. Given adequate finances, adequate logistics I think it is worth emulating anywhere.

BOUTELLIS: One last question. On the UN side, regarding your experience with three different UN missions, are there any two or three suggestions that you would make on changes in either UN management or policy that would help you do your job better?

IBRAHIM: Can you repeat the question?

BOUTELLIS: Do you have any suggestions to the UN based on your experience in three different missions that for you would help you do your job better, make it easier?

IBRAHIM: Here?

BOUTELLIS: Or from your experience in Kosovo or Burundi. Things that you were thinking if this could be changed, if this could be different, it would be better for the UN.

IBRAHIM: Yes. This could be rather difficult for the UN system and procedure, but I would love to see the UN police in a position, in a strong financial position, to recommend and be allowed to carry out reforms and changes without passing through the bureaucracy of the UNDP. You know, as we work with all these police, you can see certain things that are really needed by them, and if done, would bring the police, all of them to you, because they would know you are there to assist them. Reforms, changes that are not much in terms of money. But to make these proposals, you have to go to the UNDP and it's at the mercy of whoever is there. If he says no, then it is no, you have no finances to do anything.

I will give you an example. When I was in the crime management, they listened to us, they're eager to learn, they see you as somebody who is coming to assist them. But you see some basic things that are needed. They ask you for that. Maybe you see the shortcomings and say, "But, why not like this, this thing is not there. I know these things are essential for any good policing." You say okay, don't worry, I will come back and discuss with my bosses and I'm sure we'll get these things done. Then you come back and discuss and it is taken forward because you are not financially capable to do it. Then somebody rejects it, we cannot do this, we cannot do this. You may even at times have to lobby to get certain things done. It shouldn't be. I do hope that someday that UNPOL will be financially strong and have a budget of their own so that they can write and recommend, help the police they are working with because they see what is happening, not being subjected to having to go all the time to donors, to see if they like what they do, or if they don't. So I think that will help the UN a lot. That will remove the accusations that the UN is just here to spend money, drive big cars. When you ask them to do small things, they cannot.

BOUTELLIS: Any final comment?

IBRAHIM: We're gradually succeeding. I'm sure with more resources we shall make a difference.

BOUTELLIS: Mr. Kabiru Ibrahim, thank you very much.

IBRAHIM: You are welcome.