



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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BOUTELLIS: Today is May 6th 2008 and I am now sitting with Mr. Vincent Dzakpata who is the UNPOL (United Nations Police) Chief of Staff in the UNIOSIL (United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone) building mission in Sierra Leone. First thank you for your time. Before we start the interview I'd like you to please confirm that you've given your consent.

DZAKPATA: Yes, thank you for having me.

BOUTELLIS: I'd like to start the interview by learning more about your personal background. How did you get involved in police work first and particularly how did you get involved in police work overseas?

DZAKPATA: *I have been a police officer in Ghana for about thirty years. I got enlisted in the service after leaving teacher training college. I have served in almost all departments of the Ghanaian Police Service including the criminal investigations department, the operations department and of course, I had been a divisional police commander and a regional police commander. Before coming here to Sierra Leone, I was the Director General in charge of Professional Standards. We call it Police Intelligence and Professional Standards Unit.*

BOUTELLIS: In Ghana?

DZAKPATA: *In Ghana. I came here on the 15th of January, 2006 as the UN police adviser on professional standards initially. Later on I became the Chief of Staff of the UN police. I had had previous UN experience in 1996, 1997. I was part of the first Ghanaian contingent of officers to serve with the United Nations Police Task Force in Bosnia as a governor. During that mission I served as a District Human Rights Officer for a district called Breza that is about 20 km from Sarajevo, and getting to the tail end of the service when they were having the elections, I became the District Elections Officer. I think that's about that.*

BOUTELLIS: Can you describe briefly the context in which you arrived in Bosnia, the mandates of the mission in particular and maybe what was your first impression of the challenges before the UN?

DZAKPATA: *Remember in 1996 or thereabout, the country was just getting out of the brutal war that was fought between the Serbs, the Muslims and the Croats. We had the mandate of maintaining peace among these three ethnic communities as well as monitoring the activities of the police and ensuring that the human rights of the people were not violated by the people. They were just going to the polls to conduct elections also that year for the tripartite government. So we had a mandate to police the elections, to make it as peaceful as possible for the people to vote. That was my first experience in a peace mission. I can tell you it was very traumatic.*

BOUTELLIS: Very traumatic?

DZAKPATA: *Very traumatic.*

BOUTELLIS: In terms of what?

DZAKPATA: *In terms of the weather. Coming from the tropics and just arriving during the winter in Bosnia it was like—.*

BOUTELLIS: Were you the first UNPOLs to arrive in Bosnia at the time?

DZAKPATA: *Yes, we were the first forty Ghanaian officers to arrive there. It was like a strange world. But later on the mission became more interesting because we started relating to the police and talking to the people. Sometimes you feel fulfilled to get these Bosniaks wanting to listen to you as a police officer from outside Europe. You also realize that our presence there had given the people a lot of confidence. They feel very, very secure. Sometimes, our landlord would ask us to accompany him to town just to meet a group of people who want to listen to us and then know your impressions about them. So it was an interesting experience in a way.*

BOUTELLIS: You mentioned that part of your mandate was monitoring and policing the elections. Was there also some mentoring of police and training?

DZAKPATA: *Of course, that was a major aspect of our mandate. We mentored the police, the local police, we visited them. Sometimes we inspected their records and then assisted them in bringing them up to standards, making sure that things were recorded appropriately and professionally. We also did some training. We had colleagues who were in the training department and they trained a lot of Bosnian police and Serb police officers in various areas.*

BOUTELLIS: We're going to come back to your Bosnian experience in the interview as we go into technical functional areas, but before that, you've been in Sierra Leone for over two years now.

DZAKPATA: Yes.

BOUTELLIS: Can you describe for us your first assessment of the status of public order and crime, the status of the Sierra Leone police and again, what the mandate of UNPOL was at the time. Maybe compare—and you've also lived through the transition between the peacekeeping and the peace-building mission. So if you could also explain to us a little bit about that.

DZAKPATA: *I came on the 15th of January. I think I was the first police officer to arrive for the peace-building mission, UNIOSIL. I noticed that the Sierra Leone Police had had a lot of training. There had been a lot of capacity building activities by UNAMSIL (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone) that we were taking over from. Our mandate also required that we continue with the capacity-building effort, make sure that we improved the capacity of the Sierra Leone Police to be able to handle external and internal threats against the country. I must say that a lot had gone through the training of the Sierra Leone Police and I looked at them as a very professional force in the sense that you've got a lot of officers in the Sierra Leone Police who are very well trained. They can be relied upon to deliver. All the same, there are certain constraints. We try as much as possible to remove those constraints so that we can support them to deliver.*

So as I said, the major mandate that we had was to build their capacity so that they can become a very professional police force. Then we were required to also support them by way of mentoring. Then getting them to do things the right way. By that, I mean become more professional than before. We did that by forging closer relationships with them. We visited their police stations, we saw how they did things. We taught them how to do it more professionally and followed it up to make sure that they were doing it the way we want them to do it. I think it has paid dividends.

We had another mandate that required that we assist them and support them so they could organize the elections, the parliamentary and presidential elections,

which we did very successfully last year. We have the follow up local government elections coming in about two months from now.

BOUTELLIS: Can you describe a typical day? You explained that you came here first as a professional standards advisor and then became the Chief of Staff. Can you describe for us a regular day, the daily routine of the UNPOL officer here?

DZAKPATA: *Yes. You recognize there has been a very brutal war in this country, Sierra Leone and the police service was completely disorganized. There was a need for the service to be brought together. One area of concern was discipline in the police service. Discipline was a major concern because there were no tangible mechanisms in place to hold officers accountable for their actions. So as the professional standards adviser that was my first preoccupation; to advise the management of the Sierra Leone Police to put in place mechanisms that would regulate the activities of Sierra Leone police officers. Even though there was an office that had been created to do that, it did not appear as if anything concrete was being done.*

BOUTELLIS: The CDIID (Complaints Division and Internal Investigation Department)?

DZAKPATA: *The CDIID. So I tried to ensure that that office was made capable of handling issues involving police officers who ran afoul of the law. I can say that it is working satisfactorily now, albeit with a few constraints as well. That is normal in police organizations. I changed over to the Chief of Staff because we were expecting a new officer to come and take over from me and he did come. So I handed it over to him and became the Chief of Staff.*

As the Chief of Staff, I am responsible to the Senior Police Adviser. I act for him if he is not around. I would say that I am responsible for the general administration of the unit. I see to it that every one of the advisers is performing his role.

BOUTELLIS: Could you describe your induction training for either mission prior to deployment on the UN missions? Also if you received any sort of in-service training or handover from your predecessor?

DZAKPATA: *Actually, before you are deployed your home country gives you some training. You are introduced to the environment in which you are going to work. They tell you what the problems are and what your role is going to be. You are introduced to the culture and the beliefs of the people so that you will be able to operate within the environment. They'll tell you all the likely problems you might be faced with so that you can learn before getting there. We make sure that we do that before officers are deployed to mission areas. I also undertook that training. It is normal to do so, we always do it.*

Here I told you when I came on mission UNAMSIL was folding up when I came. So there was no question of me taking over from anyone.

BOUTELLIS: It was a new mandate.

DZAKPATA: *Most of the officers had left. Leaving the acting head of the department and two others. One was the intelligence officer, the other was the crime management adviser. So I came to meet them. They also [indecipherable 18:16] one after the other. Rudy came to meet me and so we started establishing the UNIOSIL. So we put in place the arrangements to start work.*

BOUTELLIS: In both of your UN experiences, English was the language of communication of the mission. In terms of communication with the local police and the local population, as you mentioned in Bosnia you had interactions, how much of a language barrier was there?

DZAKPATA: *There was a language barrier in Bosnia because we couldn't speak the language and most of the people also did not speak English so we had to use interpreters. Sometimes you were not sure if what the interpreter told you was said by the party was true. So that was a limitation. Interestingly as we moved along, some of us started speaking a bit of the Bosnian and it was nice, it was interesting. So the language was initially a problem, but as we moved along we started speaking a little bit of it and it made our work fine. After one year some of us did not want to leave Bosnia again because we had almost integrated into the system.*

Here for instance, having come from the same sub-region in West Africa, I don't have a major problem with communicating. I am communicating with them freely. I think that in a way I enjoy working here more than in Bosnia because here I can deal with the people directly. They find it easier to understand my program than there because there I was talking through an interpreter and here I am communicating directly. Our culture and beliefs are almost similar, so my chances of making a mistake are less here because I know what I'm talking about. Most of the things they do here are the same as we do it in Ghana. So I can just say this thing is wrong and you understand that it is wrong, because there are so many similarities in the way we behave. So that is one aspect of it.

Again, there are also problems here because the people are used to a certain way of behavior. One would say for what they went through they find it very, very difficult to change, to depart from that way of doing things. So here you have to keep on saying it. That is not right, that is not the way to do it so you will not do it again. But the next time you go you see it is the same thing, they do it the same way they did it before. It is a very difficult problem for us to handle. It makes the work very difficult. You have to reinforce it. You have to be going in there almost every day to make sure that what you say should be done, is done. It puts off a lot of our advisors, especially those from Europe. They can't have the nerve for this kind of thing because to them it is—you can understand that if you tell a police officer don't do it this way and you turn around come back and he is doing the same thing. They don't understand because it doesn't happen there. But it happens here. They still have many—

I used to tell my friend that when I was in the professional standards, I went to a very high ranking officer and told him, we had a lot of conversations and I told him about a certain problem that I had found with the SLP. I thought that we could find a way of addressing that problem because it had a negative effect on the image of the SLP. He said, "Yes, it's true, it's true. So we will do it. As long as you are here, whatever you tell us to do we shall do it, but when you leave here we shall do it the way we know to do it."

I said "No, you can't say this." So I said to him, "A small boy should be thinking like this. Everybody wants to develop. One must be learning new things always. So you can't say that you would continue to behave the way you have been even when you know that there is a need for change, you can't do that." So these are some of the problems we see with them.

BOUTELLIS: Now I'll go through a number of areas talking about the local police as you work with them. If you haven't been involved in these areas we'll just move on to the

next one. The first area is recruitment. Have you ever been involved in recruitment?

DZAKPATA: *No. Personally I have not.*

BOUTELLIS: So training and professionalization. Can you describe for us maybe some of the training programs you've been involved in either designing or delivering?

DZAKPATA: *I used to give talks to the personnel of the professional standards. On a few occasions I ran some one-day courses for them in the headquarters and then also in the divisions just to let them know their role and the impact their activities had on the service. In fact my stay there was brief so I did not do a lot of work with them but they were very receptive.*

BOUTELLIS: You mentioned and others have mentioned that discipline and [indecipherable 25:55] is an issue here and remains an issue. How do you evaluate the impact you may have? After you described the previous examples, how do you evaluate the impact of the talks on professional standards and do you see any changes? How do you ensure that there is follow up on this? First, maybe what kinds of things do you tell them, specific examples?

DZAKPATA: *What I tried to do is start from the top. I clearly identified supervision, management supervision as a major problem. The first project was to get the managers themselves to understand that they have a role to play in the maintenance of discipline in the force. Apart from they themselves being disciplined, they must also ensure that all others are disciplined. So that was a starting point. I can tell you that now you see a very big change in the attitude of the AIGs (Assistant Inspector-General of Police), the Deputy Inspector-General of Police and the Inspector-General of Police. If you see them they are refined officers. They are determined to make sure that things happen, and good things do happen. They are always hammering in the issue of discipline and are trying hard to discipline themselves so that they can serve as a role model to the ranks. That is where we have gotten.*

But the major problem is the middle level management, which is a big problem for executive management now because they themselves have seen that it is a role they must play. But without the support of the middle level, the divisional commanders, they have 29 police divisions in this country, all of them are there, 29, plus the chief superintendents who are unit commanders. These are the people who are supposed to make sure that discipline is enforced at their levels but they have problems, they have big problems with these people.

One problem is lack of confidence in themselves. They are not confident. I don't know whether it is because of lack of knowledge or because of some other things, but they don't have the courage to rebuke ranks when it is under themselves. I can only guess that one reason is that they have fraternized with the other ranks and they do a lot of cases with them so they don't have the moral courage now to rebuke them if they think the boys are misbehaving. Or they send the boys to do certain things which they knew perfectly are not right for them. They benefit from it. So if the boy is doing the same thing you cannot query like this. That is my assumption, I just assume that is part of the issue.

Then also sometimes I think that there is a lot of fear in them. They fear for their personal security because they have seen a whole lot of things. They live in fear so they cannot perform. So these are the areas where I think they have problems. Then we have been trying to see what we can do to transform them

also by organizing very frequent courses for them. So my training team, I have a training team, that is one of the things they do. Even now the training is going on. The first batch was trained two days ago. Then the other ranks, the subordinates, the inspectors and below. The boys are not motivated. There is a complete lack of motivation. Their salary is nothing to talk about. Their living accommodations are terrible. Their health needs are not properly taken care of. Their families don't have any support. Anybody finding himself in that situation, even if they come from the Pope's house, might be tempted sometimes to misbehave. So there is a very high level of misbehavior in the lower ranks. It has become a matter of survival. This is a big problem, a big problem.

When you talk to them they hear you but they tell you that it is not realistic what you are asking them to do. It's not practical. Sometimes it is worrisome. A person breaks down his take home pay for you and you realize he cannot even have money for transportation, to take a vehicle, from his house to the office. So if he doesn't come to work you ask him "What happened?" He tells you straight away "I did not have money to take a boda boda [motorcycle taxi] to the office" and you know it is true. So what can you do to him?

I'll tell you about an incident where I went to Congo Cross there, I checked their books and for one week an inspector had not reported for duty. The LUC did not know so we tried to find out. Then they went and brought him in the following day. He said he didn't have money. His wife was sick and he had to go to his village in the north and ask his parents to support him with money, to come and take the wife to the hospital. These are some of the situations that make our job a little bit frustrating like I said.

BOUTELLIS: What are some of the initiatives of strengthening internal management that have been taken and that have been effective? You mentioned in earlier representations you've been directly involved in the disciplinary system—so making the CDIID effective. Can you develop for us what this entailed and if there were other initiatives that you think—?

DZAKPATA: *The CDIID is supposed to be a self-policing mechanism that is for the SLP. They are charged primarily—.*

BOUTELLIS: Complaints Disciplinary Internal Investigations Department.

DZAKPATA: *So they are charged primarily to investigate serious cases of corruption, of extortion, of human rights abuse and other malfeasance that might be reported against any serving police officer. They have been doing that very effectively. It is on course. Except that you always hear me talking about constraints. They are located now only in Freetown because they don't have the logistics to expand. It is now that they have started recruiting so they can have officers located in the other regions.*

The operations are okay, they are investigating their cases. When they investigate the management takes a position as to what to do, which of our police officers are involved, and it has resulted in the dismissal of a whole lot of police officers, some were even sent to court for wrongdoing against the public. It has actually boosted the confidence of the public in the police because [Indecipherable 36:52] policemen did very atrocious things and nobody had the courage to complain about it but now the awareness has been brought to people, to complain when policemen misbehave towards them. That is working well.

Then for the other step we wanted to progress into another area which is the civilian oversight commission which regulates the conduct of police officers and also investigates cases against senior police officers who themselves get involved in some of these things. If you look at the CDIID carefully, the structure of it, if there should be allegations against the Inspector-General of Police, or the Deputy Inspector-General of Police for having committed some serious breach, the head of the CDIID is a Superintendent, or Chief Superintendent. It would be preposterous for him to tell the IG "Come, I will take your statement." He can't do that. So that is another limitation. Maybe the lower ranks are being held in check, but other people above a certain level would not be subject to this.

BOUTELLIS: To clarify this, the Civilian Oversight Commission would be directly under Parliament versus the CDIID that is within the police.

DZAKPATA: *Yes, the CDIID is the Internal Investigation Unit.*

BOUTELLIS: Internal?

DZAKPATA: *Yes, inside the police.*

BOUTELLIS: Civilian is external—

DZAKPATA: *-- that one would be outside the police. And it's a Commission so they will hold the police adequately in check.*

BOUTELLIS: How far away is the development?

DZAKPATA: *There must be a law backing it, so maybe the Minister for Internal Affairs and the Vice President's office are taking over. There must be a law to take effect for a thing like that to happen. That is the next level. Until that is done, some people will be operating outside the reach of the CDIID.*

BOUTELLIS: In terms of external accountability to the community are there other mechanisms that are already in place and how has, you mentioned that the CDIID had a positive impact in the confidence of the public, how has the public perception evolved in the past few years?

DZAKPATA: *Recently the SLP themselves commissioned consultants to do a survey and it was a very positive report. Over 60, 70, nearly 70% of the people of this country have full confidence in the police. They believe that the police can actually guarantee their safety. They also believe that the police have the capacity to be able to guarantee safe elections, as they had seen during the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections.*

BOUTELLIS: Are there any concerns about possible politicization of the police? There was an issue prior to the restructuring. What are the concerns currently after the restructuring?

DZAKPATA: *You would hear a lot of the police officers complaining but not on political grounds. Most of them believe that politics is out of the police now but they complain about ethnicity. The President is from the north. The Inspector-General of the Police is from the north and there are a few other AIGs who are from the north. They think that a lot of the, a chunk of the good things are going to officers from that region at the expense of the other tribesmen. That is a major concern.*

BOUTELLIS: Is this reflected in terms of the allocation of resources, vehicles?

DZAKPATA: *No, no. You would see it maybe in the area of postings, police officers. There are certain areas of the service that are soft grounds and there are some areas that are dry land. So they would complain "Because I don't come from the north that is why they send me to this place."*

BOUTELLIS: As an individual—

DZAKPATA: *Yes. You here some people say that. But it is a difficult thing for the administration. This is my personal—for a very long time it looked like the northerners felt like they were sidelined so they were sent to difficult areas where they had time to go to school to learn. Now that the thing has shifted, they are so qualified, more qualified, they are good, you see. So the IGP just picked them from there, "You two come." They are qualified, very well qualified to hold those positions. So they see it but you cannot say anything against the decision.*

BOUTELLIS: So we discussed a few technical areas, now looking from a step back at the reform process in general, what do you think are the broader challenges? Are there some tasks that should be prioritized over others?

DZAKPATA: *The challenges for the Sierra Leone police. One is the ability of the government to fund the operations. It is becoming very, very difficult for them to assess funding for their operations. Even salaries sometimes, they take it in arrears and no police service can operate effectively without funding. So that is the biggest challenge for them. Then the other challenge will be in the area of maybe commitment. If you look at the ordinary police officer here, you will see that he is not motivated so there is no commitment there at all. So there must be a way of getting the police officer to devote his time to the job. They do the work if they like. If they don't like it, then they don't do it. You can't do police work like that. So the challenge will be for the administration to try and get the boys and girls to get committed. How they do that, I don't know.*

Then there is the issue of the OSD (Operations Support Division).

BOUTELLIS: The armed branch of the police.

DZAKPATA: *The armed branch of the police. It is another demotivating factor for the general police officer because they have become an elite group in the police. To me it is doing more harm to the police than good. One thing it has done is that the ordinary general duty police officer feels inadequate if he doesn't have an OSD police officer with a weapon walking by him. Then, the ordinary general duty police officer is useless. He can't do anything. If we send him to go and they get asked to go and they say "I cannot go because I don't have a weapon." To me, I think every ordinary police officer should be confident in himself and be able to do something for himself. If the public knows that the police constable is just as weak, perhaps weaker than he is, that is not good. And that is what we see. Criminals can attack a constable and molest them because they know that the OSD man who controls the weapon is not around.*

Besides that, the OSD police officer also feels superior. If you have a police officer who is superior to the other people and he feels more powerful, and I can tell you, I don't have statistics but if you go into the books, the number of police OSD officers who breach the law who did outrageous deeds against people are more than the general duty officers. Because, once they have weapons and they feel that they can do anything and go scott free. So there must be a level, a way

to bridge that gap. Just like the OSD police officers are confident in themselves, every other policeman should also have that confidence so that when he is walking, he is walking with his chest out. But if you see them they are feeble, they are afraid. He feels he hasn't got the strength, the power behind him.

I'm not in any way advocating that they should all be armed. No, but the general duty policeman whether he is going to be armed or not, he must also be made to feel very confident. Where I come from it is not every police officer who is armed, but if you ask him to go out, he is going and he is going to come with results. Whether he is escorted by an OSD policeman or not he will go out and bring the results to you. That is what I expected from here.

So to me, these are the three major challenges for this country. If they want to go ahead and maintain the peace that has been so expensively established, then they must be looking at these three areas.

BOUTELLIS: Are there particular innovations or experiments that have been tried in Sierra Leone to your knowledge that merit particular attention from which we could learn?

DZAKPATA: *No. This OSD concept is the brainchild of DFID (Department for International Development) and they have been superintending it. It is outside our jurisdiction so it is difficult for us to even talk about it. Because if you say it, they will challenge you; they want it like that. They are looking at it from a different perspective than mine. So they might think that it is working but to some of us it is not working at all. It is not working in the interest of the service.*

BOUTELLIS: The last question, you had two missions, very different, in two different regions. I was wondering if you had to make a wish list of two or three changes in the internal management or the policy of the UN what would they be that would help you do your job more effectively?

DZAKPATA: *One thing I wish the UN would do is in the mandate of the missions, particularly for the UN police, there should be that compelling [Indecipherable 54:22]. The UN police should have the mandate to take disciplinary action against police officers who do not listen to advice. In Bosnia it was a task force until we visited police stations to inspect their books. Then we didn't have the mandate—.*

BOUTELLIS: – take action.

DZAKPATA: *An inspector who has kept somebody for more than the stipulated should be punished. We didn't have it. Similarly it is the same thing here. So the feeling is that "after all I will do what I like." That's why I told you once the man told me that because we are here they will do it, if we are gone they will do it their own way. It means that they think that we are not effective. It is true. That is exactly what has put a whole lot of our colleagues, some of them who didn't want to end their mission prematurely because they don't have the capacity, the power, to at least suggest that an officer who has not performed well should be disciplined. So that is one thing I would like to see happening in the next missions.*

BOUTELLIS: Is there any advice that you would offer to your successor, somebody coming in similar—?

DZAKPATA: *I would advise him to just take things easy because of people's way of life, especially culture; the background of the people. You certainly will meet some frustrating situations but since you are working and achieving results you just*

have to go ahead. Mostly it has to do with peace, the peace of the people. I feel fulfilled, I feel happy that I am part of this whole thing; bringing peace to the people of this country. So anybody who is coming just forget about the frustrations and do their best so that we sustain peace, it is very important.

BOUTELLIS: Do you have any final comments?

DZAKPATA: *Just about your project, I can say it is a very good project, keep it up because we need to be doing some of this and keep updating ourselves. When these documents are finally up, let us also have access to it. Maybe that time I may not be a police officer but I can use it to be telling stories. So thank you very much.*

BOUTELLIS: So Mr. Vincent Dzakpata, thank you.