

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

International concern regarding insecurity in refugee camps¹ has heightened during the past decade. In an effort to grapple with this complex problem, the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade hosted a workshop in Ottawa from 22-23 March 2000, focusing specifically on the potential roles which could be played by international police². Participants included representatives of the international police community, military personnel with peacekeeping experience, specialists with immigration and refugee claims backgrounds, diplomatic and legal experts, and officials from humanitarian and human rights organizations.

In refugee camps, the primary responsibility for ensuring the physical security of refugees rests with the host government, in accordance with relevant international law and regional instruments. It has been recognized, however, that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other UN system actors, other states, NGOs and the refugees themselves may also have a role to play in creating conditions which minimize threats within camp environments.

Workshop participants focused on identifying circumstances where the presence of international police might be employed to assist humanitarian agencies responsible for camp management. Participants suggested that in order for international police to be deployed as a security presence in refugee camp environments, they must have a mandate and defined tasks. International police have most frequently been deployed in contingents as part of a UN authorized peace support operation implemented by the UN or a regional organization. In the absence of an appropriate UN resolution, a negotiated arrangement is possible. Such arrangements can be made between the country hosting the refugees and a donor country, or between the host country and an appropriate organization, such as the UNHCR.

Once a mandate is secured, the spectrum of tasks assigned to international police in refugee camp security is potentially quite broad. The participants of the workshop concluded, however, that support of the local police should be the primary and most visible role. In this capacity, international police would provide advice, training, technical and logistical support, and would assume a mentoring and/or monitoring role where appropriate. Support of this type should reinforce the efforts of the host country to provide security for its refugee population.

Workshop participants identified several key areas of difficulty in employing international police to a refugee camp environment. For example, it was felt that international police would face significant legal hurdles if they were to undertake such tasks as basic law enforcement and crowd control in situations where local authorities exist. Moreover, the lack of available, trained,

¹ Under the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is a person who, "owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country". Civilians become internationally recognized as refugees when they cross a national border to seek sanctuary in another state. A refugee camp is an area or locale where refugees reside.

² International police are professional police officers from various countries operating in a United Nations authorized peace support operation. By extension in the context of refugee camps, international police are those police from countries other than that of the refugees or the host country, who provide policing and security advice or assistance in refugee camps managed under the auspices of the UNHCR or another international agency.