# *Community Policing Article*

# The Role of Community Policing in
# Building a Resilient Society in Australia
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In the wake of recent developments on terrorism in the international arena and their implications on Australian security, the Australian Government published a Counter-Terrorism White Paper in 2010 (Commonwealth of Australia [CA] 2010). Building the 'resilience' of the community was one of the key elements discussed in this White Paper (***Securing Australia: Protecting Our Community***) (CA 2010). The document stressed the importance of "building a strong and resilient Australian community to resist the development of any form of violent extremism and terrorism on the home front" (CA 2010, Barker 2015). It was proposed that the resilience of the community be built in a number of ways (CA 2010). These include engaging with communities to improve social cohesion (through local meetings and focus groups), providing grants to non-profit organizations, and establishing new seats of learning in Islamic Studies (CA 2010). An additional way in which the resilience of the society in this context could be developed is through the effective implementation of a program of community policing. Australia's state and federal governments currently incorporate community policing in various ways, but there is potential to further utilize this concept throughout the community.

It is broadly recognized that there is a disconnect between Australian Muslims and the Australian state. Muslims suspect, in many cases rightly so, that they are wrongly perceived by a large number of other Australians. Muslims may feel that they are seen as being removed and separate from what are described as 'Australian values', and considered unable to integrate into Australian society. This narrative alienates Australian Muslims from the larger community. The issue is further exacerbated by the comparatively greater unemployment and poverty of Australian Muslims relative to their non-Muslim counterparts, as well as the under-representation of Muslims in Australia's important state institutions.

Such perceived social and cultural isolation, combined with a sense of political disempowerment, have contributed to the feeling of being 'outsiders' that is experienced by some Muslims, particularly Muslim youth (Akbarzadeh, 2013). As a result, it is considered that a sizable section of the younger Muslim Australian community is subject to exploitation by an ideologically vested propaganda. Indeed, the alienation of some Muslim youths has led to extremism in some cases, with young Muslim Australians becoming involved in terrorist activities both at home and abroad.

The Australian Government needs to minimize this impact and ensure the Muslim Australian community feels better aligned with the democratic mainstream, and vice-versa. To achieve this, the state needs to initiate special measures. A comprehensive program of community policing is one such measure that can help to bridge the gap between the Muslim Australian community (along with other minorities) and the Australian society as a whole. Community policing activities have the potential to genuinely instill resilience in all sections of the Australian community, and to decrease the gap between different communities, without being interpreted as merely an empty gesture.

Police are the face of the state in action. Their approach to interacting with people offers the first glimpse into the fairness, legitimacy and accountability of the criminal justice system. Communication and engagement between the community and the police force is a two-way process. Community policing includes deploying officers to interact with the public in non-emergency situations. This allows police to communicate closely with community members in a positive environment that is non-threatening. The benefits of supporting such interaction are numerous. For example, involvement with the community in this way fosters a favorable public opinion of the police and the criminal justice system. It can also satisfy demands to implement community-friendly and inclusive solutions to problems that have been identified at a local level (Bartkowiak-Theron & Crehan 2010). Additionally, such interaction can assist police by providing greater on-ground intelligence that may help keep a tab on anti-social behaviours, enabling these to be addressed before they escalate into criminal activity (Bartkowiak-Theron & Crehan 2010).

There are many ways in which community policing can be incorporated into Australian society. One of the principle responsibilities of the police is to manage community events. With the consultation of community leaders, it would be beneficial for police to also actively participate in these events. Involvement with community events, however small, can provide the police with a good opportunity to gain insight into the cultural nuances of a community, identifying its sensibilities and expectations. This knowledge can then be shared with other government departments to assist in informing policy formulation. Active solicitation by the police of requests for services not involving criminal matters can also be helpful in building relationships between the public and the police force. For example, the Japanese Koban model, in which police attend to community members' everyday needs and assist in finding solutions, as well as dealing with criminal matters, has been proven so effective that it is now being adopted in other countries (The Economist 1999).

Perception of the police force by minority groups is often problematic within larger society. It generally poses a greater challenge in societies with considerable migration. In Australia, difficulties can sometimes arise due to the unfamiliarity of minority groups with Australian laws. Similarly, a lack of knowledge from police officers regarding less common cultural practices, along with the influence of negative stereotypes, can result in avoidable issues. On the other hand, inadequate policing of minority groups can lead to a lack of responsive action from the police in some instances. For example, some people may feel that their concerns have been underplayed by the police due to cultural stereotypes, or that complaints of harassment and violence have not been taken seriously (Larson 2010). Such situations further distance minority victims of crime from the justice system, as they no longer trust it to provide an effective remedy in times of crisis (Larson 2010).

Police in Australia have taken note of these gaps and have taken measures to address the situation. Police resources aimed at helping bridge the gap between the police and minority groups include, for example, multicultural advisory units, community diversity officers, and ethnic community liaison officers. A

noteworthy program has also been created by Australia's Victoria Police. Victoria Police undertook a community consultation in December 2013 and published its first annual report on the subject soon after. This report, titled ***Equality Is Not The Same… Year One Report - 2014***, outlines a Three Year Action Plan that focuses on five key areas: community engagement, communication and respect, field contact policy and process, complaints process and cross-cultural training (Victoria Police [VP] 2014). The program covers a range of policies, strategies and tools, to allow the police "to adapt and work more effectively within our ever changing and dynamic community" (VP 2014). It states that this will enable all members of Victoria Police to treat every individual with dignity and respect (VP 2014).

Many communities that consider themselves on the fringe of the Australian justice system encounter barriers in accessing police services. Constructive engagement by the police with such communities will help identify those barriers. The resultant insight offers an important tool in improving relations between the police and minority communities, fostering improved knowledge and mutual respect. This process will also help these more vulnerable communities to gain confidence in the police force, encouraging shared understanding, and a united approach to identifying problems, combining feedback and offering suggestions to the appropriate bodies to improve policy formulation. These measures will go a long way to build the community resilience that is required for Australia to function as a cohesive society.

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