



The African Human Security Initiative Secretariat and the West African Network for Peace building in Nigeria hosted a seminar on Crime and Criminal Justice Systems in Africa on the 8th of October, 2009 at the Dennis Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria, from 8:30 am to 16:45pm. The seminar was attended by 62 participants drawn from state criminal justice institutions, civil society, academics and diplomats. There was very good representation of the Nigerian criminal justice institutions especially the police and the prisons top officials who attended.

The seminar was designed to further publicise AHSI's work on country reviews on crime and criminal justice in selected countries and to articulate policy reforms by presenting empirical evidence that supported AHSI's hypothetical stance that the defects within the criminal justice systems on the continent are a public problem meriting action. The discussion hinged on presentations by the following colleagues: Prof Etannibi Alemika, a criminologist from the University of Jos who spoke on the need to define crime in a wider context from a human security perspective. Emphasis was thus on skills development and advocacy in the areas of crime and criminal justice. The rather laid back approach of African governments with regard to providing facilities for crime studies and research and the importance of Afrocentric literature on the issue was identified as one of the reasons for the low institutional capacity exhibited by regimes in combating crimes. Innocent Chukwuma pointed out that mapping crime is almost non-existent in policing in West Africa and there is need to examine this with the hope of assisting policing institutions within the sub region.

Professor Ameze Guobadia made a comparative analysis of some of the policing structures and framework within the Anglophone countries. Prof Christophe Kougniazonde pointed out that the dual judicial system in Francophone countries makes access to justice a problem. The French colonization system was based on assimilation and indirect rule. The French system tried to undermine the customary system but there seems to be more reliance on the customary system within the Francophone countries.

Dr. Tony Karbo and Dr. David Zounmenou both emphasized the need to harmonise criminal justice systems on the continent due to the challenges posed by the trans-boundary nature of some crimes. All the presenters pointed out that customary law should be viewed seriously and that there is need for systems to

create space for the acceptance and recognition of customary justice systems though the utility of customary law needs to be handled carefully as it is open to abuse.

See www.africareview.org for the forthcoming presentations.