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Bringing humanity back to police



Discussing the causes and cures for police brutality were Moses Dlamini (Spokesperson: IPID), Lieutenant General Mzwandile Petros (Gauteng Provincial Commissioner: SAPS), and Dr Johan Burger (Senior Researcher: ISS and Professor Extraordinarius: Unisa Department of Police Practice).

According to the Independent Police Investigative Directorate (IPID), nearly five thousand cases of police corruption and brutality were received from 2011 to 2012. Incidents like the death of Mido Macia who was dragged behind a police vehicle and the so called “Cato Manor hit squad” has damaged the public’s confidence in and credibility of the men and women in blue. This in turn, has divided sentiment as to how the police should treat criminals and suspects as well as ordinary citizens.

The [Institute for Security Studies](#) (ISS) recognises that there are underlying issues within the police department that may be the reason behind this brutality and the abuse of power. The institute, in conjunction with Unisa, held a seminar on *Understanding police brutality in South Africa: Challenges and solutions* on 11 April 2013 to discuss some of those concerns. ISS works closely with police, developing strategies and conducting research on subjects that directly or indirectly affect the force.



According to Gareth Neham (Head: Governance, Crime and Justice Division, ISS) the seminar came at an opportune time, given the debate surrounding police brutality being highlighted in the media.

Dr Johan Burger, a senior researcher at ISS and a Professor Extraordinarius at Unisa's Department of Police Practice, **broke down** how and why police brutality persisted and what measures could be put in place to deal with it. The current South African Police Service (SAPS) code of conduct was something Burger drew frequent attention to, questioning whether officers were well versed in their own rules and regulations. Another talking point has been the militarisation of the police force and whether this had contributed to an attitude change and subsequently, an increase in brutality. Burger said statistics debunked that myth. "Deaths in police custody and criminal cases against officers had increased from 2002 to 2010. When the force was militarised three years ago the numbers started levelling out, then coming down," he said.

Despite those figures, Burger was of the opinion that the psychology of police had changed to a more militant attitude because of the rhetoric from public figures. He cited the speech from then Deputy Minister of Police, Susan Shabangu, in 2008, when she used derogatory terminology asking police to shoot criminals and the language used by former police commissioner Bheki Cele when addressing officers. "This type of language militarised the thinking of police officers. Changing the rank will not change the police," Burger said.



A presentation by Dr Johan Burger (Senior researcher at Institute for Security Studies and a Professor Extraordinarius at Unisa's Department of Police Practice) provided a great deal of insight into police practices and the possible reasons for brutality in the force.

But if the statistics show that police brutality is on a downward trend, why do damning incidents such as Macia's brutal death persist? **Independent Police Investigative Directorate** (IPID) spokesperson, Moses Dlamini, **presented** several cases where officers were imprisoned for severe brutality, which sometimes resulted in the deaths of their victims. He said one of the major problems had been the stark contrast when sentences were handed down through internal and external disciplinary processes. "The police force's disciplinary verdicts are sometimes shocking, such as a R500 fine for an officer after a person has died, or they will receive a final written warning or a suspended dismissal. This contrasts with South Africa's courts, which hand out heavy sentences,"

Dlamini said.

For this to be rectified, Dlamini said there needs to be a concerted effort by senior officials to deal with problematic staff and an effective internal oversight mechanism. "IPID is not the solution for police brutality because we are a reactive agency. SAPS needs to review its disciplinary processes and the sanctions and suspensions it imposes," he explained.

Burger's assessment of the pressures that police faced included the threat of danger, their impossible mandate and public perception, among others. To remedy this, he recommended a new code of ethics, competency tests and a police board to set standards for recruitment and promotions.

Those recommendations are exactly what Gauteng Provincial Commissioner, Lieutenant General Mzwandile Petros, alluded to during his [presentation](#). The Minister of Police, Nathi Mthethwa, has prioritised the transformation of police and the improvement of the quality of training and recruitment. Petros said there had been a concerted effort by police to deal with their members who break the law. "In just one province we arrested 965 people and that shows we have a commitment to address this," he said. The provincial commissioner is not of the opinion that training would change the mindset of certain individuals but that policy changes could have a strong impact on how SAPS operates. "Being a policeman should be a calling and we need members who have a passion for the job. If I'm driving back to office and an armed robbery is taking place, I can't ignore it," Petros said.

**Written by Rajiv Kamal*