

**Speech by the Commissioner of Police, Mr Tsang Yam-pui
“The Community and the Police - The Question of Trust”**

Thank you Mr. Chairman, Good Morning distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am honoured to be given the opportunity of speaking at this seminar.

In opening my address today I wish to state clearly that we in the Hong Kong Police fully recognise that effective policing requires the respect, trust and support of the community. The manner in which we receive complaints or criticisms and subsequently act upon them, is crucial in securing this response.

First of all, I would like to emphasise that Hong Kong is a safe city. We have a large police force comprising over 39,000 regular and auxiliary police officers, as well as civilian staff. We serve a socially diverse population of almost 7 million residents.

On a daily basis the Force have an average of some 14,000 interactions with this population. This includes receiving 210 reports of crime, making over 100 crime arrests and taking out some 2,500 traffic summonses and fixed penalty tickets. Overall, these interactions arise from a multitude of varied situations, each with its own level of complexity. The Hong Kong police is therefore highly visible. It is thankfully also always available.

Community support is an essential part of providing an efficient and effective service to the public. This support is achieved through trust. Only when a system is in place that addresses public grievances and ensures appropriate behaviour and integrity of police officers, will this trust be secured.

Such a system saw its origins established in 1974 with the creation of the Complaints Against Police Office, commonly known as CAPO. Officers attached to CAPO have always been individually selected for their integrity, honesty and strong character. They are neither easily swayed nor influenced in their investigations. In practice their guiding principle is that

they work independently, ensuring transparency at all times. The office enjoys a good reputation for high quality, impartial investigation, as does the established checks and balance system operating within the complaints process. Overseeing the work of this CAPO process is an effective, independent civil oversight body, the Independent Police Complaints Council.

CAPO itself has 120 police officers, split between three Regional offices. All have a background in criminal investigation which ensures that CAPO personnel are suitably trained in all aspects of investigation.

Apart from their investigative charter, CAPO also plays an important and pro-active role in complaint prevention. CAPO officers analyse and monitor trends of incidents or practices that may give rise to complaints. With the benefit of being police officers themselves they are quick to identify problems or defects in police procedures. This has resulted in changes to the manner in which we conduct our business, and changes in the attitude of front-line officers as they approach the public in everyday situations.

CAPO maintains close liaison with various police formations to prevent complaints and enhance management accountability of those officers at supervisory level.

CAPO has its own mission statement which promotes the fact that every citizen is entitled to fair and impartial service from the police. The office encourages interaction with the public. All CAPO premises are in non-police buildings, with open access to all. These offices are equipped with video interview rooms for the recording of complaints as they are made, and subsequent interviews. An observer scheme is also in place whereby members of the Independent Police Complaints Council are allowed to observe any part of the complaint investigation process. This can be done at any time and may be either pre-arranged or unannounced. This monitoring may focus on statement taking, interviews, or actual visits to scenes of incidents. This I feel greatly engenders transparency, which in turn leads to greater trust.

But what of the cases dealt with by CAPO? The three CAPO offices received a total of 3673 complaints last year. This averaged out at 10 a day or one per 1,400 interactions between police and the public. Given the

number of actual interactions as measured against the number of complaints received, I remain satisfied that the figures are manageable. I am however committed to reducing complaints to the lowest possible levels.

One obstacle to achieving this is public perception. This is particularly so with "neglect of duty" allegations. 33% of all complaints relates to "neglect of duty" allegations. A breakdown of these allegations has shown that in the majority of cases officers haven't actually deviated from procedure, but rather the complainant has a different perception of how a situation should have been handled. A case in point occurred in August last year when a member of the public went to Pat Heung Divisonal Report Room to make a report. The report concerned the informant entering into an agreement three years previously with a friend. Together they would invest in the purchase of Mark 6 tickets. They did not win the Mark 6 and the informant wanted to report that his friend had not contributed money to the fund. There was no agreement document or indeed any witnesses and thus no evidence of any crime having been committed. As such the officer receiving the report refused to classify the case as a crime. Consequently the informant made a complaint against the officer for "neglect of duty". This member of the public had the incorrect perception that a crime had been committed and that the police were refusing to investigate.

I have quoted this case example in order to highlight the fact that complaints are always taken seriously no matter how trivial or apparently flawed they may seem. Ultimately this complaint was resolved by way of a process known as Informal Resolution. This process allows for a complainant to be interviewed by a Senior Police Officer whereby the complaint is discussed and relevant Police procedures explained. I am pleased to note that over 800 cases were successfully resolved in this manner last year, with both complainant and the Force satisfied with the outcome.

I personally have long held the belief that "It is not good enough for us to say how good we are. It is how the public see us." In this regard the Police have, since 1995, invited the community to tell us how they feel about what we are doing. This has come through a series of Public Opinion and Customer Satisfaction Surveys which have focused on many aspects of our work. These include how we interact with the public and how the public feels we can improve.

We take all comments from the public about the service we provide very seriously. We see each and every complaint as a potential opportunity for improvement. The current complaints handling system is a mechanism designed to motivate front-line officers to learn from these mistakes. It is an invaluable process.

The Hong Kong Police have a Vision and Mission statement which was introduced in late 1996. It depicts shared values and is not merely a one-way street. It goes beyond honesty and integrity, and reaches right to the core of fairness and impartiality. Through this we uphold the rights of individuals. We have introduced service quality and an improvement ethic which is very much orientated towards service to the public. This has manifested itself in the form of various projects and developments. These include a large scale station improvement project which aims to physically update police stations to allow easier and more user friendly access. This initiative encompasses facilities for members of the public to access databases of the services we provide.

A "living the values" package was introduced in 1997. This was undertaken to identify barriers to living the values as set out in our vision and mission statement. It's goal was to change behaviour and attitude and it has taken the form of 1/2 day workshops attended by all officers from Constable to Chief Superintendent rank. This included auxiliary police officers and our civilian counterparts. Staff feedback was sought on areas of the public's concern in a case study approach. These workshops have proven to be a valuable forum for the improvement of trust and communication and have been re-introduced once every eighteen months since their inception.

To meet future challenges, the Hong Kong Police, like many police services in developed countries, has focused on embedding a management culture of continuous learning. With this continuous learning process in mind, I have issued a strategic direction for policing beyond the year 2001. I will be requiring every officer in the Force to firstly adopt a positive stance in both their working and private lives, secondly, to be wholeheartedly supportive of our values of integrity, and finally be fully committed to respect the rights of members of the public.

It is what we are doing to address public concerns that matters. These concerns have been identified through the complaints made and surveys conducted. Our shortcomings to both internal and external customers are being fully addressed.

To conclude, the Hong Kong Police Force is pro-active in its desire to establish greater communication with the public. This in turn will lead to greater trust. The current system of CAPO works for the Hong Kong public, as it does for the Hong Kong Police.

There is trust within the community and within the police - I believe we have a partnership.