

CRIME PREVENTION-THE SINGAPORE APPROACH

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I. INTRODUCTION

Singapore, being a city state dependant on trade and with business links to all parts of the world, is a very open country. Further, its strategic location makes it a natural hub for airlines and ships. In view of the very many varied cultures and historical attractions in the region surrounding it, large numbers of tourists and business travelers pass through it. It is hence open to varied influences, and is also vulnerable to passing crooks who can easily pass of as locals or tourists.

As most of its occupants are descendents of immigration stock, mainly from the Peninsula Malaysia, the Indonesia archipelago, China, India and Europe, it is heterogeneous. There are hence sensitivities relating to race, religion, language and nationality. These need to be safeguarded against exploitation by bigots and anti-national elements. Nevertheless, their common destiny and the need to work among and with each other have led to the establishment of a generally similar outlook relating to their physical self and property. As all value these rights, crime which attacks these rights is obviously abhorred and is always a highly topical subject of concern inspite of Singapore having one of the lowest crime rates in the world.

The low crime rate has been achieved by the combination of deterrence, enforcement and rehabilitation under a very effective criminal justice system. Deterrence is provided by tough laws,

pushed by a strong executive and enacted by a very responsive legislature; a very robust and efficient world class court system; a police force also aspiring to be world class in its total policing capabilities, which includes at its bedrock, community policing in a strong, symbiotic partnership with the community it polices, strong enforcement by incorruptible officers and an austere but humane correctional system which aids rehabilitation whenever possible.

The main thrust of the police-community partnership is based on mutual help, with the public being persuaded and encouraged to take personal responsibility both individually and in partnership with others in safeguarding themselves, their property and their neighbourhood with the advice and assistance of the police. It is based on the principle that prevention is a community responsibility and crime prevention measures taken by the community can limit and reduce opportunities for the commission of crime. Further, the community has a role in mitigating the impact of crime on unintended victims, such as the dependents of victims, offenders and others who suffer collateral damage from these crimes. The community also has a role in reintegrating people into society.

Since 1988, Singapore has been enjoying a decreasing crime rate for 9 consecutive years. This would not have been possible if not for cooperation from the public, brought about by community-policing. About 1/3 of all arrest cases are solved as a result of public-spiritedness shown by members of the public, assisting or giving vital information leading to the

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apprehension of the criminal.

In the last two decades, Singapore has become highly industrialised and urbanised. The SPF has become an organisation fully committed to serving the needs of and protecting the people living in Singapore. In response to these changes, the SPF has also undergone a period of transformation in terms of its organisational structure and policing strategies.

The SPF has moved from reactive policing to proactive policing based on the concept of community policing and adapted from the very successful Japanese Koban model. This led to the establishment of 91 neighbourhood police posts (NPPs) under the supervision of 7 land division headquarters. The NPPs primary role is creating a sense of security in the neighbourhood through easily accessible counter service, close liaison with the public, high visibility patrols, house visits and crime prevention education.

II. CRIME PREVENTION CONCEPTS AND STRUCTURES

A. Concepts

Accompanying community policing, is the development of a proactive approach to crime prevention. The most strenuous efforts by the police alone will not produce the desired results if the community stands by passively in the erroneous belief that crime is purely a police responsibility. The community must accept that the task of crime prevention is as much a community responsibility as it is a police responsibility, and must join hands with the police to make crime prevention effective. The failure of public involvement in crime prevention may be attributed to ignorance. It is the police responsibility to overcome this ignorance through a sustained programme of education that brings about crime prevention awareness throughout

the community. Crime prevention education make people aware that:

- (i) They are personally responsible for the safety of their property and themselves, and for the safety of their neighbourhoods.
- (ii) Many crimes are opportunistic in nature and are committed through the negligence and carelessness of the victims. Crime is prevented if the opportunity is denied or delayed.
- (iii) They can prevent crimes by taking simple and effective measures on their own or in cooperation with their neighbours. Crime prevention measures must be commensurate with the threat. Effective protection will not come from any single measure but from the sum total of all practical and possible measures.

B. Formation of a Crime Prevention Branch

The Crime Prevention Branch of the SPF was formed in 1977 under the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) to cater for the needs of a specialised branch devoted exclusively to crime prevention activities. The main task of the branch was to inform the public that they have a significant role to play in safeguarding themselves and their properties against crime. For that purpose, the branch embarked on an extensive programme of crime prevention activities, which includes talks, exhibitions and personal calls to disseminate advice on measures that could be adopted to prevent crime.

In view of the economic growth and industrial development in Singapore, the branch was expanded to that of a Crime Prevention Division (CPD) in 1981, so as to provide a more thorough and efficient crime prevention programme for the public.

The formation of the CPD signaled the beginning of the community-oriented policing strategy in Singapore. Since its inception, the CPD has initiated several projects in crime prevention, namely the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (NWS), Crime Prevention Committees (CPCs), Crime Risk Surveys, Operation Identification, crime prevention exhibitions, crime prevention campaigns; and youth programmes like the Crime Proficiency Badge Scheme for uniformed groups like the National Police Cadet Corps, Scouts and Girl Guides etc.

The Division was later to work closely with the National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) which was formed on 4 July 1981. The formation of the Council marked an extremely important event in the history of crime prevention work and development in Singapore.

C. National Crime Prevention Council

The National Crime Prevention Council (NCPC) was set up in 1981 to act as a catalyst and partner to mobilise the support of groups and individuals from the community to work closely with the police on crime prevention. It is a non-profit making organisation which depends entirely on donations to run their activities. The NCPC objectives are:

- (i) To raise the level of public awareness and concern about crime;
- (ii) To encourage self-help in crime prevention;
- (iii) To study, develop and improve crime prevention measures suitable for adoption by the public; and
- (iv) To co-ordinate the efforts of organisations interested in such activities.

The NCPC comprises of persons from both the private and public sector. Members include business and social leaders, professionals and police officers. It is involved with other organisations and government departments in promoting crime prevention. It works closely with the police and organises exhibitions, workshops, courses, contests and talks to involve and educate individuals and organisations on crime prevention. It also conducts research into various aspects of crime prevention. Research is also commissioned to measure the effectiveness of crime prevention programmes. Various subcommittees are also formed under the NCPC to address problems related to crime within various trades and concerns. They include:

- (i) Hotel Security Committee
- (ii) Security at Construction Worksites Committee
- (iii) Children & Youth Committee
- (iv) Security at Commercial Premises Committee
- (v) Security in Housing Committee
- (vi) Focus Group Committee

III. CRIME PREVENTION SCHEMES

A. Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (NWS)

In 1981, the SPF introduced the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme (NWS) to tap on the resources of the community, especially the residents of high-rise apartments, in line with its community, policing concept. The Scheme was originally conceived to encourage mutual care and help among neighbours, through residents keeping an eye out for each other's premises, and it was hoped that civic-mindedness, neighbourliness and social responsibility in the context of crime prevention would be enhanced. This would contribute to keeping neighbourhoods safe from crime.

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By 1993, the NWS had 10,000 groups of about 5 households located on the same floor of a block of apartments, and led by a group leader. Such a group is called a Neighbourhood Watch Group (NWG). The goals of the NWG are:

- (i) To encourage residents to keep an eye for their neighbours' premises, so as to enhance the physical security of their estate.
- (ii) To disseminate, through the NWG leader, awareness of potential threats to resident's safety in their estate.
- (iii) Instill, through the NWG leader, an awareness of potential threats to residents' safety in that estate.

Despite the large number of NWGs formed, the scheme met with limited success. The activities of the NWGs have been minimal or, in some cases, non-existent. This is due to the following factors:

- (i) Lack of leadership by NWG leaders;
- (ii) Lack of participation by NWG members;
- (iii) Limited scope of activity for NWGs;
- (iv) Existence of alternative channels of communication.

In the light of the above factors, a review of the NWS in 1996 was made with a view to ensuring that it continues to remain effective and to complement the work of the Residents Committees (RCs), Residents Associations (RAs) and the police. The RCs and RAs are grassroots community-based civic organisations that are all over Singapore. The principal considerations on the revised NWS form an integral part of the police's overall strategy of community policing, working in conjunction with attempts to reach out to the community-

at-large (through initiatives such as problem-solving), and to the individual (through house visits). In order to achieve this, the following was addressed:

- (i) The need for the aims, structure and activities of the revised NWS to be congruent with the priorities of community agencies, thus underscoring the relevance of community-based cooperation at the grassroots level.
- (ii) The need to leverage on the strengths of the existing grassroots network such as Residents Committees (RCs) / Residents Associations (RAs).
- (iii) The need for activities under the revised NWS to cause individuals to develop a greater sense of belonging to and responsible for the neighbourhood they live in.

B. Neighbourhood Watch Zone (NWZ)

The new model for the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme envisages a strategic partnership between the SPF and Residents' Committee (RC) for Public Housing and Resident's Association (RA) for Private Housing (the key community agency at the grassroots level). The SPF no longer attempts to build up a network of community relationships in isolation. Instead, it will work with and through the RCs and RAs, in order to achieve the objective of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. This is done primarily through the creation of "Neighbourhood Watch Zones" in each of the 456 RC and 65 RA Zones. NWZs will form an integral part of the RC and RA structure, and will be led by the Liaison Officer (LO) of the RC or RA Zone, assisted by their Assistance Liaison Officers (ALOs). They can be the vehicle through which the RC's and RA's aim of engendering a strong community spirit can be achieved. Their focus, unlike the NWGs,

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is not on crime-related concerns alone, but on all issues that interest or affect the community.

RCs and RAs have been strengthened as the pre-eminent community organisations at the precinct level. They have the mandate not only to discuss, but also to deal with all aspects of concerns that have crime or law and order implications. Key areas of community concern will be focused on the RCs and RAs. This gives the community an identity to rally to. Since the RCs and RAs have more substantial areas of focus, the possibility of active and meaningful participation in RC/RA activities by residents will be raised.

The transformation from Neighbourhood Watch Groups to Neighbourhood Watch Zones (NWZ) is a move from quantity to quality. With a more manageable number of NWZs to work with, NPPs can concentrate on working more closely with each NWZ, thus strengthening its leadership and administration. A total of 25 NWZs were launched at the pilot phase in April 1997. To date the SPF has established 191 NWZs. A typical NWZ is made up of a Liaison Officer (LO) and is assisted by Assistant Liaison Officers (ALOs). The LOs and ALOs of the NWZ work very closely with the NPP officers to coordinate crime prevention activities and programmes to foster community bonding. They will also disseminate information to the residents and channel feedback from residents to Resident Committees (RCs)/Resident Associations (RAs) and NPPs. The role of our NPP officers in NWZs are to work in close partnership with the members of RCs/RAs in promoting neighbourhood watch. Typically, they will:

- (i) Actively support RC and RA activities;
- (ii) Disseminate crime prevention information through house visits,

- leaflets and posters;
- (iii) Work jointly with RC and RA members to discuss and propose solutions to crime concerns;
- (iv) Seek residents' feedback on police issues during house visits;
- (v) Meet NWZ LOs for information on RC/RA events;
- (vi) Identify RC/RA activities as platforms to promote crime prevention awareness;
- (vii) Organise activities at a 'small group' level to provide opportunities for NWZ members to meet and get to know each other;
- (viii) Customise police publications with community level messages for dissemination to residents; and
- (ix) Work with the community on crime prevention publications.

The role of Liaison Officers (LOs) in NWZs are as follows:

- (i) Promote neighbourliness, harmony and cohesiveness within the NWZ;
- (ii) Conduct NWZ programmes to raise the crime prevention awareness of the residents;
- (iii) Acting through the ALOs, disseminate information to and channel feedback from the residents to the neighbourhood police post/RC/RA.
- (iv) Coordinate and promote a wide range of activities eg, social and cultural, etc, to engender a strong community spirit among residents and to raise crime prevention awareness;
- (v) Attend to neighbourhood and community crime prevention matters;
- (vi) Promote and encourage resident participation in crime awareness

- programmes;
- (vii) Mobilise community resources to address residents' crime concerns
 - (viii) Resolve, with the support of NPPs, disputes among residents; and
 - (ix) Foster civic consciousness amongst residents.

The SPF, in building a strong community support, had created the Neighbourhood Watch Zones in 25 RC Zones for its pilot scheme launched in April 1997. A survey was conducted a year later to find out the level of awareness of the NWZ scheme and the crime prevention knowledge of the residents. The findings were that more than 90% of the respondents wanted the scheme to continue or be implemented in their estates. They also felt that the scheme was effective in helping to prevent crime. With the success of this scheme, the SPF is embarking to expand it island-wide. To date, the SPF has established 191 NWZs.

IV. CRIME PREVENTION PROGRAMMES AND PROJECTS

With community policing firmly in place, and strategic networks established with public organisations such as grassroots organisations, and private bodies such as various trade associations, it becomes possible to leverage on their cooperation and expertise in crime prevention. The reach of crime prevention programmes initiated by the SPF is greatly enhanced through these collaborations with leading public and private organisations that aim to enhance security-awareness and security within their respective trades and spheres of operation. The following are some of the crime prevention programmes being implemented by the police in collaboration with the community.

V. CRIME PREVENTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

A. Crime Prevention Exhibitions and Talks

To stimulate greater public interest and instill crime prevention awareness, crime prevention exhibitions are held throughout the year at shopping centres, community centres and void decks of apartments to reach out to the general public. The police also conduct talks at grassroots and private organisations. Crime prevention pamphlets, posters and handbooks are also produced and distributed to the general public during exhibitions or talks and are easily available at the Neighbourhood Police Centres/Posts.

B. Annual Crime Prevention Campaign

To focus attention on crimes which affect the public at large, the police, together with the NCPC, jointly organise the Year-End Festive Season Crime Prevention Campaign. The mass media such as television, cinema, posters etc, would also be employed to communicate crime prevention messages to the general public.

C. Crime Risk Surveys

To determine security weaknesses, the police conduct Crime Risks Surveys for both residential and commercial premises upon request (by appointment or registration at crime prevention exhibitions). The police also visit scenes of crime to advise the victims of means of improving the structural security features of their premises. The aims of the surveys are:

- (i) To provide specialised advisory services on crime prevention to the public at no cost;
- (ii) To help improve the physical security features of premises; and

- (iii) To encourage the use of various crime prevention measures and devices to enhance the security of premises.

D. Crime Watch TV Programme

To educate the general public through the television, the police and the NCPC also jointly produce the Crime Watch TV Programme Series. The programme features crime awareness including solved and unsolved cases, appealing for information and witnesses and public education segments on crime prevention measures or road safety. This TV programme is shown monthly during prime-time in both the English and Chinese languages.

E. Crime Prevention for Senior Citizens

Senior citizens being vulnerable and trusting, can easily become victims of unscrupulous criminals. Crime Prevention Talks are conducted by Crime Prevention Officers (CPOs) to various senior citizen associations or groups. This also involves police liaison with the People's Association and related organisations on the organising of crime prevention programmes and exhibitions.

F. Crime Prevention for the Young and Youths

1. School Security Committees (SSCs)

The Committee is headed by teachers in the schools themselves. The programme was formed to enhance crime prevention and fire safety in the schools. The police officers at the NPPs act as liaison officers to these SSCs. Meetings are held with SSCs to update them on the latest crime trends and advice. The police also render assistance, such as arranging and conducting crime prevention talks to the students.

2. Crime Prevention for Uniformed Groups

To reinforce crime prevention messages among uniformed youth groups in schools such as the National Police Cadet Corps, the Scouts and Girl Guides, participation in crime prevention activities are encouraged. These activities include crime prevention knowledge tests, visits to NPPs and the Crime Prevention Display Room. Upon completion of these activities, students would be awarded the Crime Prevention Proficiency Badge. The police intend to extend the award to all other uniformed groups in schools.

3. Textbook for Students

To educate our students on crime prevention, a series of crime prevention textbooks called "Dear Mr Policeman" were brought into the school curriculums in 1986 to teach students from upper primary to lower secondary levels the importance of crime prevention. This series, which is still currently being taught, will soon be replaced in 1999 by an enhanced series called "Safe and Secure: That's Our Singapore", which will carry not only crime prevention messages from the police, but also road safety, and fire safety messages from the Singapore Civil Defence Force, and drug abuse prevention messages from the Central Narcotics Bureau.

4. Crime Prevention CDs for Schools

A crime prevention interactive multi-media CD targeting students and youths have been developed. The CD contains the messages of crime prevention, fire safety/emergency preparedness, anti-drug abuse and road safety, from the police, Singapore Civil Defence Force and the Central Narcotics Bureau respectively. The CD comes complete with digitised images and good audio and visual animation to make learning fun and interactive for students and youths alike.

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5. Crime Prevention Videos

An educational video called "Gangfile" warning teenagers of the dangers of joining gangs; and a handbook called "Say No To Gangs", has been produced and distributed to all schools. Another video, entitled "Prison Me? No Way!" has been produced for students and youths to steer them away from crime. The video recounts the prison life of 2 youth offenders, and conveys the severity, harshness and consequences of a prison sentence. The video, which is distributed to all schools, comes complete with a teachers' guide.

6. Joint School Talks on Crime and Drug Abuse Prevention

To maximise the benefits of combined preventive drug and crime education among students, the police and the Central Narcotics Bureau (CNB) have integrated and coordinated joint school talks on crime, secret society activities and drug abuse prevention. The police, CNB and Ministry of Education (MOE) also work together to draw up a year-long lecture schedule for schools. This schedule ensures that every school will be visited by the officers and benefit from their talks. Apart from the schedule, schools can also request special talks to small group of students who have been singled-out for any kind of infractions. This helps the police and CNB to establish better ties with discipline masters and with schools in general.

7. Streetwise Programme

In addition to preventive education in schools, the National Youth Council (NYC) has initiated the "StreetWise Programme" -a programme designed to change the behaviour of youths who have unwittingly drifted into gang activities. Three key components in the programme are:

- (i) Counselling;
- (ii) Development training to inculcate life skills and provide

academic and recreation support;
and

- (iii) Voluntary curfew.

Participants in the voluntary curfew scheme will have to undertake not to visit certain entertainment outlets and likely gang hangouts. They must also stay at home during certain times of the day. Their parents will have to agree to supervise them and ensure that they observe the curfew for the duration of the programme.

8. Visits to Penal Institutions

The police and CNB will continue to organise institutional visits for youths identified to be involved in petty crimes and other delinquent activities at the prisons and Drug Rehabilitation Centres respectively. This would enable the youths to have direct exposure to the deprivations in the drug and penal regimes.

9. Organisation of Police Youth Camps

Youth camps for high-risk students will be organised by the police to serve as an outlet for energy and imagination, to steer youths away from crime or associating with bad elements. This will also instill some confidence as well as social skills in them.

10. Honorary Volunteer Special Constabulary (VSC) Scheme

As juvenile delinquents have become increasingly defiant and aggressive over the years, the police alone cannot tackle the problem effectively. The Honorary VSC scheme was introduced in 1997 to strengthen the links between schools and the police in an effort to keep juvenile delinquency problems and youth-gang influences away from schools. Teachers are appointed as Honorary VSC Senior Officers.

The appointment symbolises police presence and authority in schools and enhances teachers' position as the overseer

of school discipline. The Honorary VSC Senior Officers carry warrant cards which enables them to make arrests when there are serious breaches of the peace within, or in the immediate vicinity of, the school compound or during school activities.

The Honorary VSC Senior Officers play the role of the liaison officer between the respective schools and the police. Police will work closely with them to curb juvenile delinquency. They will contact the police should the need arise and assist in scheduling talks on topics related to secret society activities or crime prevention. They also help to organise police-youth activities such as visits to prisons and monitor the behaviour of delinquent students in schools.

As they are part of the SPF, they are conferred powers of arrest, and can offer advice on police procedures and police-related matters to staff and students in their schools. They also counsel recalcitrant students on the consequences of criminal or gang activities.

G. Commercial and Industrial Sectors

1. Crime Presentation for Crime Prevention Committees (CPCs)

To look after the commercial and industrial sectors, the police in 1982 introduced Crime Prevention Committees (CPCs). CPCs serve as an organised body where the police can work closely with both the commercial and industrial sectors on crime prevention. They are equivalent to the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme in public/private residential estates and are responsible for monitoring and looking after the security of their respective commercial/shopping or industrial complexes; organising crime prevention activities and implementing the recommended security measures in consultation with police representatives.

To date, 145 CPCs have been formed all over Singapore.

2. Crime Prevention for Construction Sites

Security audits of construction sites are conducted jointly by the Singapore Contractors Association Limited (SCAL), the NCPC and the police. The objectives are to promote and encourage crime prevention awareness, enhance work site security and to deter unauthorised visitors and illegal immigrants. To educate foreign workers, a crime prevention video for construction workers in 7 different languages was also produced and incorporated as part of the orientation programme for foreign workers. Every year, seminars on construction safety and security are also jointly organised by the police, NCPC and SCAL.

3. Crime Prevention for Hotels

The Singapore Hotel Association (SHA), the NCPC and the police work closely in organising the annual Hotel Security Conference and Awards Presentation. Together with SHA, the police also conduct security audits at hotels to ensure their standard of security. The objectives are to promote an urgent sense of security in the hotels, to encourage and assist installation of mechanised security systems such as closed-circuit television (CCTV) and to endorse security training programmes for the hotels.

VI. EVALUATING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMUNITY POLICING STRATEGY / CRIME PREVENTION PROGRAMMES

The effectiveness of any country's policing strategy and crime prevention programmes is best gauged by a public perception survey on the overall crime levels, sense of security and police

presence. To this end, such a survey was conducted by the police in 1997. Of those surveyed, 62% of the respondents believed that major crimes were declining, and 46% perceived that minor crimes were declining. Comparing the general security of Singapore with most countries in the world, 93% of the respondents felt it was better. 86% of the respondents also felt that the security in Singapore at present (1996) was better than 5 years ago (1991). More than 95% of respondents felt that, on the whole, the NPP system, and the police in general have met their expectations.

In terms of the effectiveness of crime prevention programmes, television programmes such as crime watch continue to top the list, with 93% of respondents having known of it. Of the respondents who expressed knowledge of the crime watch programmes, 75% have watched it before. Other crime prevention activities which the public are aware of include posters (73%), leaflets and newsletters (69%), and exhibitions (68%).

VII. FUTURE CHALLENGES

A. Expansion of Neighbourhood Watch Zones

The strategy of engaging the community in crime prevention awareness will continue. The police are looking into the expansion of the NWZ Scheme. The aim is to foster the idea of neighbourhood watch and the concept of self-help in crime prevention to residents via the Residents' Committee (RC) and the Residents' Association (RA). With close partnership in the community, the NWZ Scheme will become more effective in reaching out to residents island-wide.

B. Enhancing Strategic Alliances with Community Groups

The SPF intends to enhance the strategic alliances with community groups

and grassroots organisations to raise crime prevention awareness. To do this, the police will continue to establish close partnerships with community-based organisations and self-help groups to leverage on mutual strengths and expertise to combat crime.

C. Enhancing Crime Prevention Awareness among Police Officers

To continue enhancing crime prevention awareness among its officers, the SPF aims to further enhance the expertise of Crime Prevention Officers, by upgrading the general crime prevention knowledge (including technical and highly specialised aspects) and awareness of officers through training. Police will, together with the NCPC, generate initiatives for crime prevention and build strategic alliances with organisations in the private and public sector to raise crime prevention awareness in their respective fields.

VIII. CONCLUSION

To manage the expectations of the public, and to meet the challenges of the 21st century, the police will continue to improve and fine-tune the system of community policing and to continuously involve the public. Internally, the police will continuously hone and improve the existing infrastructure of community policing to keep in step with the complexity of the crime scene in the years to come. No effort is spared as our officers are continuously trained with the latest technology and know how. Laterally, the police will also venture to establish strategic alliances and partnerships with grassroots bodies, private organisations, various trade associations, public institutions, etc, to curb crime. In this regard, work on the NWZ Scheme will be carried out in earnest so that it is implemented island-wide. The future of our policing strategy is embodied in our crime prevention slogan for 1998/

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99, which is “Together We Can Prevent Crime”. Thus, as we enter into the 21st century, the police-public partnership will remain a vital chemistry for any success in combating crime.