

Statement by Mr Hubert René Schillinger, Resident Representative of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung in Namibia, at the NUNW Consultative Workshop on Police and Correctional Service Labour Relations, Windhoek, 23.09.2008

The Honourable Dr Nicky Iyambo, Minister of Safety & Security of the Republic of Namibia,
Representatives of the Namibian Police Service and the City Police of Windhoek,
Cde Evilastus Kaaronda, Secretary General of NUNW and Cde Elias Manga, 2nd Vice – President of NUNW
Representative of the International Labour Organisation, Pretoria Office,
Distinguished guests from Lesotho, South Africa and Swaziland,
Judge Pio Teek, Retired Judge of Appeal and Rapporteur of this Workshop
Colleagues from the Trade Unions,
Ladies & Gentlemen,

It is my honour and privilege to also welcome you this morning to this first ever consultative workshop on police and correctional service labour relations in Namibia.

For us at FES, like for everybody else here, except for our guests from outside the Namibian borders, the theme of today's and tomorrow's workshop is something new. Although we have been actively supporting NUNW and its affiliates in the area of capacity building and public dialogue for many many years, the issue of police labour relations has never come up as priority. Presumably, it has never come up because it was viewed as too sensitive a matter.

While in most Western countries, such as in my own country, Germany, it is viewed as completely normal that members of the police force, like other workers in the private and the public sector, have the right to form and join representative organisations such as trade unions and associations, this has traditionally not been the case in many countries of the developing world.

A notable exception in this region has been South Africa, where police unions were formally recognised in 1993. Unlike in Namibia at present, in South Africa the police are also covered by the Labour Act. Members of the police and the prison services have the right to form representative organisations. These representative organisations, while not permitted to engage in strike actions, are permitted to engage in collective bargaining and political pressure activities. More recently, Lesotho and Swaziland have also joined those countries where members of the police forces have obtained the right to proper representation and proper channels to defend their rights as workers and air their grievances.

This is why the organisers have thought it to be important to bring over representatives from both police management as well as police unions from those three countries to share their experience with us. Moreover, we are lucky to have here a representative of the International Labour Organisation, to give us an overview of what today constitutes international experience and international good practice.

This workshop today and tomorrow in our view is of an explorative nature. It tries to explore possible avenues and legal ways of improving the rights of workers in both police and correctional services here in Namibia. The idea, which we at FES happily support, is to provide a platform of open and honest debate with a view to kick-start a further discussion process.

Although we understand some of the concerns and recognize that there may be challenges, especially legal ones, we believe that the opportunities of establishing regulated and orderly labour relations in both services will by far outweigh these challenges. We believe, among other things, that the participation of workers representatives in determining the conditions of their daily working lives can build morale and commitment to the service in both the police and the prison service. Representative organisations, such as trade unions or staff associations, in our view, thus have the potential to contribute positively to the overall effectiveness and professionalism of their services.

It is in this spirit that I wish us all fruitful deliberations over the next two days and I am already looking forward to listen to the resolutions or recommendations at the end of the workshop.

I THANK YOU