IBERIAN MUN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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*The question of the use of authority as a method to safeguard civilians and maintain peace.*

Authority is a broad concept that encompasses the power to give orders, usually granted to an individual, a group or an organization. In this context, authority is referring to the establishment of organizations aiming to maintain peace and order, such as the police or the military. These organizations exist in virtually every Member State, but the extent to which they are used and enforce their authority onto others differs wildly at a regional and international level.

The concept of the use of police and of authority in general for the greater good has been around since the dawn of modern civilization. The question as to why such authority based law and peacekeeping systems exist has remained of interest in the social sciences. One of the most commonly cited and influential theories is that of the “social contract”, which was theorized by several philosophers in the 17th and 18th centuries. This contract hypothesizes that in order to move away from anarchy, the people should surrender individual rights and freedoms in exchange for the security and safety provided by a higher authority. Certain power figures would then enforce the rules in the social contract, which nowadays is the equivalent of the police. The issue that could arise from this is that if the higher authority is left unchecked, it can revert to corruption and other negatives associated with the abuse of power.

The abuse of power in law enforcement agencies has long been an issue all throughout the world. Police misconduct is often associated with discrimination against marginalized groups, but can happen towards any citizen.

An example of where people have protested against excessive police violence is in the USA with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement. It is an organization that was created in 2013 to protest the killing of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his killer. This organization also fights against any form of racism, but mostly state-sanctioned violence. BLM is relevant because they believe that the justice system needs to be reformed in order for the police to have less authority and power over citizens since it has caused problems to the largest minority in the USA, black people.

This ties into the belief of ACAB, which is an acronym for “All Cops are Bastards”. This arises from the anarchist ideology that police officers are class traitors due to them enforcing laws that are created by the upper class to suppress their rights. It is not meant to be an attack on individual police officers, but the law enforcement system. George Orwell stated this about the police: “I have no particular love for the idealised worker …but when I see an actual flesh-and-blood worker in conflict with her natural enemy, the policeman, I do not have to ask myself which side I am on.”

Police brutality is not just an issue in the United States where it is heavily publicized, but also around the world, so Member States should look for solutions in order to ensure that authority does not remain unchecked in order to ensure security for all. The United Nations have a code of conduct that all law enforcement organizations should abide by: the GA resolution 34/169 of 17th of December of 1979. This should form the groundwork with which Member States base their law enforcement agencies on while making sue to abide by international human rights.

In countries that have an authoritarian form of government, the police and other authorities play quite an important role since that is how the government tends to exerts its power. A recent example of a state that has used its law enforcement to exert its power and agenda on the people is Belarus. This has occurred because protestors want President Alexander Lukashenko to resign due to a belief in rigged elections, due to him having been in power since 1994. Lukashenko and his government have in response to the protests, used the police force to shut them down and arrest protestors. A protestor was quoted with saying “They talk about the brutality of the Belarusian police, and I want to say this: there are no more humane, restrained and cool-headed police anywhere in the world.” Lukashenko’s actions are controversial but due to the amount of protests, are probably not in accordance with the people. The government is using police as a means to silence those protesting for a better future.

In a more liberal government, the police have less importance since their main purpose is to maintain law and order, often believing in Sir Robert Peele’s Policing Principles, which aims to prevent crime by garnering public support. Nevertheless, there are many distinct ideologies with varying ideas of the role authority should play in maintaining peace and safeguarding civilians, some including that the police should be abolished.

Many different Member States also have different interpretations of what safeguarding civilians and maintaining peace entails. Whichever the interpretation, they should always promote and protect basic human rights.

Besides the use of law enforcement agencies, the justification of safeguarding civilians and the maintenance of peace has been used to justify human rights violations such as the suppression of freedom of speech or the right to protest. A widespread example of this is broad implementation of several counter-terrorism measures in many nations around the world, which could be interpreted as, but are not always, human rights or international law violations. This reflects what was theorized with the social contract regarding certain rights being compromised for security. In our modern-day society, we should seek to maximize both our rights and our security as much as possible.

There are two main fields of solutions in which Member States could fall in. In more liberal countries, the belief is that the root causes of crime and authority misconduct should be addressed by solving the root issues of these problems, such as reducing poverty or the impact or racism. The second type of solution believes that more authority should be used in order to keep the peace and safeguard citizens, such as increasing the resources of the police force. The former believes in the role of authority being lessened while the latter believes that it should be increased. Each system has its advantages and disadvantages and the implementation of each depends on the role that Member States believe citizens should play within the government and its rule.

Several NGOs are currently working on this issue. Amnesty International is involved because police brutality and the suppression of basic rights through authority is a human rights issue. Black Lives Matter can be considered an NGO, despite not having the same prominence, due to them being based internationally, not just in the USA. Many national organization exist within each country. The UNOHCHR and UNODC both work on this issue due to them dealing with human rights and crime respectively. Besides this, many different nations have national movements within their own borders that are either for or against the use of authority, which can have an impact on the government.

 Many solutions have been dreamt up in the aftermath of the recent BLM protests in order to minimize or prevent the abuse of power of authority. The most popular one is the defund the police, diverting its funds to education and other social services that can solve issues more efficiently without the use of the police. Other solutions are to implement laws in order to make police forces more accountable for their actions by removing their immunity or removing their abilities to use excessive force.

Delegates should look at previous solutions that have been implemented around the world and their efficacy, putting their own spin on these solutions in order to further the debate. The discussion of this topic should focus around the concept of keeping peace and safeguarding citizens with the use of authority being debated on its effectiveness, efficiency and other important factors in a successful system. Delegates should research further into the topic and determine their Member State’s position on the issue in order to find solutions associated with improving current authoritarian systems or finding better solutions to keep peace and safeguard civilians (with an emphasis on its effectiveness and efficiency).

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