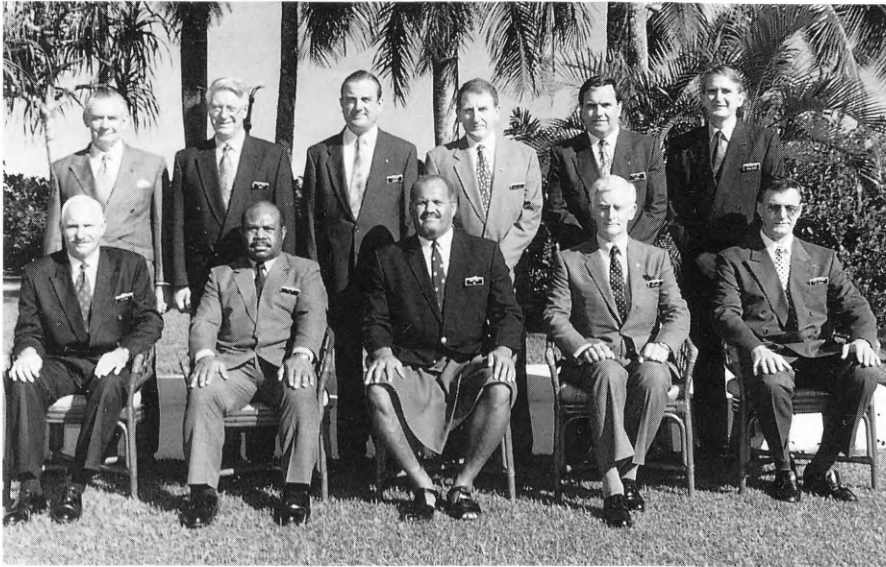


Commissioners Conference - Fiji

Social and environmental planning a key to crime reduction



Pictured are the Commissioners who attended the Conference of Commissioners of Police of Australasia and the South West Pacific Region held in Fiji.

Back row (l to r): Tony Lauer (NSW), John Johnson (Tas), Jim O'Sullivan (Qld), Bob Falconer (WA), Neil Comrie (Vic), Brian Bates (NT),
Front row (l to r): Richard Macdonald (NZ), Henry Tokam (PNG), Isikia Savua (Fiji), David Hunt (SA), Mick Palmer (AFP).

Police Commissioners from Australia, Fiji, Papua New Guinea, and New Zealand met in Fiji in early May and resolved to present an integrated regional action plan for crime reduction to their respective police ministers to seek a commitment to a co-ordinated approach to regional crime reduction through such strategies as social planning and environmental planning and design.

In this context, the conference recognised that crime prevention and public safety were vital to continuing social and economic development.

The commissioners agreed to produce a strategic assessment to put to their governments on the economic value, diversity and implications of crime prevention and public safety strategies.

Fiji Police Commissioner Isikia Savua said: "This was a major outcome of a conference of Commissioners of Police of Australasia and the South West Pacific Region which was hosted by the Fiji Police."

The theme of the conference was "Safer Streets – Crimes Against the Person". It focused on community safety and street safety, emphasising the need for a better partnership with the community and improved co-operation among police services within the region. Commissioner Savua strongly emphasised that crime prevention and control were community problems which could be

only properly addressed with the active participation of the community. It was not merely a matter for police," he said.

The delegates heard how crime had been reduced in some jurisdictions by co-ordinated urban and social planning, involving such measures as improved landscaping and lighting, better public amenities, and better information sharing among key agencies and the community. The action plan will bring these initiatives to ministers in a co-ordinated manner.

The commissioners also discussed strategies to reduce street crime. They heard that successful strategies included intelligence monitoring of street gang trends, maintaining close relationships with community leaders, educating the community and law enforcement agencies on cultural issues and promoting interaction between community groups and welfare agencies.

The commissioners called for a further report on these strategies with a view to their adoption where

relevant, throughout the region.

Commissioner Savua said all commissioners were concerned at the growing trend in the use of knives in street crime. They decided all jurisdictions should consider initiating campaigns similar to that in Victoria to reduce the use of such weapons. The campaign consisted of advertising, primarily targeted at youth to highlight the risks of carrying knives. It also involved amendments to legislation, tightening restrictions on the carriage and possession of knives. The commissioners are also considering recommending complementary legislation in all jurisdictions prohibiting the unlawful carriage and possession of offensive weapons in a public place.

The commissioners also expressed concern at the availability to the general public of chemical or organic sprays. While a useful defensive tool in some circumstances, they would clearly be of advantage to anyone intending to undertake criminal activity. They strongly opposed legislation permitting the possession of incapacitating sprays.

The conference addressed the issues of family violence and women's safety. It heard about initiatives taken in Queensland for safety audits of community facilities and a crime prevention program designed especially for women. The commissioners agreed all jurisdictions would continue to give these issues a high level of attention, including using existing networks. The conference endorsed the holding of a seminar for investigators dealing with child sexual abuse enquiries.

Commissioner Savua stated the safety and security of the population of the region was dependent upon the increasing need for continuous improvement in mutually beneficial relationships between all law enforcement agencies. A decision by the Australian Federal Police to review the operation of its international liaison network to enhance its value to the region was a direct response.



The conference was officially opened by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Fiji, Hon. Major General Sitiveni Rabuka. He was presented with the conference plaque by Commissioner Palmer on behalf of the conference delegates.

The review will be directed at ensuring the AFP international liaison officers are able to enhance their ability to supply effective, accurate and timely advice to jurisdictions and all members of the conference were invited to provide input to the review.

The conference also recognised the importance of ensuring law enforcement aid and assistance within the region was fully and effectively prioritised and co-ordinated. The commissioners agreed arrangements between police agencies and advice and support to AUSAID and other aid agencies would be directed to achieving this result.

The commissioners agreed the use of inter-agency and multi-lateral investigation teams was an important means to combat organised criminal networks, also agreeing that skilled investigation teams with the capability to target criminal enterprises, individuals, or groups would be created, with underpinning legislative provisions.

The conference agreed law enforcement partnerships which utilised the skills and expertise of the different law enforcement agencies and optimised the use of resources were a key strategy to best equip police agencies within and beyond the region to investigate cross jurisdictional crime. In addition, Australian police ministers were to be

asked to consider a proposal to introduce guidelines for the provision of assistance to neighbouring States and Territories.

The conference also addressed how to combat major fraud. The commissioners affirmed the importance of police agencies taking the lead-authority role in fraud investigations and strongly endorsed the appropriate use of multi-disciplinary teams and cross jurisdictional co-operation to effectively investigate many serious frauds. Commissioners reaffirmed that improved training and investigational methodologies were a priority for all police agencies within the region. They agreed to set up a working party to consider the feasibility of introducing a fraud database. They also resolved to seek the support of the public sector in introducing fraud prevention plans and sought strategic assessment to examine the potential for major fraud to damage the economy of regional countries. A strategic assessment was desired.

Other decisions taken by the conference included: endorsement of the National Police Community Drug Education guidelines; support for security coding of electronic equipment as a crime prevention measure; and action to stem the emerging problems of theft and fraud associated with mobile phones.