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*Interview by Alexandra George*

**Police Commissioner Christopher Albiston**

On January 11 a new Police Commissioner for UNMIK Police was appointed. Christopher Albiston, was previously Assistant Chief Constable with the Royal Ulster Constabulary in Northern Ireland.

**Q. How did your work in Ulster prepare you for being Chief Police Commissioner in Kosovo? After all many similarities exist between the two regions - a divided society, the prevalence of violence, rancour**

**CA:** Yes similarities exist, but I wouldn't wish to exaggerate the parallels between the two places. Divisions in society about politics, national aspirations, religious and cultural differences prevail, but that doesn't mean that the two countries are similar in other respects. I think that long experience of practical policing problems in any environment is good for a police officer. I have that experience. The experience of Northern Ireland I think will stand me in good stead because the standards of policing there are very, very high. The police in Kosovo are unique: it's a unique mission, and a unique combination of international officers under the UN mandate exists, all working with local officers, to protect the community.

**Q  Is there anything that you learned from your unique position in Ulster that could be applied here, even though the two situations might be different?**

**CA** Yes, I think the fact that I was police officer where the community disagreed about the structures of society, about its political direction, about loyalties, in which the merits and values of the criminal justice system were not universally shared - it was a useful preparation.  It means that you have to tread very carefully, that you can't make presumptions about people's views, that many are   living in fear because a lack of consensus exists on societal values. I think those parallels can be drawn.

**Q. What do you consider to be your main priority for Kosovo? What are the main policing functions? Do you think any change in policing priorities has occurred since mid-1999?**

In 18 months significant advances have been made. The international police who arrived here 18 months ago can take great credit for the work done. They came into a society recovering from a terrible trauma of daily violence in everybody's lives. The police established a form of law and order alongside the developing KPS. I would say the KPS must take pride in the contribution made to the progress achieved.

The 18 months which elapsed since the war were one of dramatic change. Today a period of consolidation may be needed in which we build a framework whereby people here recognize the need for a rule of law system. This means that everybody is the same under the law, everybody has to obey the law, not just those people being policed in towns and villages, but also those exercising civil, economic or general influence in society.  If we can agree on this point, people will recognize the authority of the police service as the first line in the chain of the criminal justice system. If people will talk to their police officers, international or local police, if they will give information to police, report crime and are willing to make statements about crime, and give evidence to the prosecutors and courts about crime, then the future for law and order in Kosovo looks very good.

**Q. Caches of weapons continue to be found. Do you think that you're finding the tip of the iceberg? Where do these weapons come from? Is it police priority to have complete disarmament. If not, why not?**

I can't speak for KFOR policy except where UNMIK and KFOR policy on joint patrols and law and order come together. So far as police is concerned no room exists in a modern society for great caches of arms which are not either used by the security forces for their lawful purposes, or licensed to individuals for specific purposes. A weapons certification system exists supervised by the security forces. We cannot have large numbers of weapons whose purpose is to kill being held by people who have not subjected themselves to any form of scrutiny, who have not gone through a licensing process, and whose holding of these weapons is illegal. This does not need to be a society in which private weapon-holding is some kind of symbol or cultural norm. If Kosovars want to enjoy law and order they must accept that the private holding of assault rifles, hand grenades, rocket launchers by individuals not part of the security forces - that there's no place for that in a modern civil society.

**Q. Referring to minority policing, how do you think communities can be better protected-if not by UNMIK police then by KFOR-so all communities can feel secure, so law and order prevails throughout society?**

I'm very sympathetic to the fears of Serbs who feel isolated and under threat, but its not only Serbs and Ashkalis who are threatened. As in any mixed society the majority in one place are sometimes a minority elsewhere. It is the duty of the police and security forces to assist those people, to reassure them, to deter those who seek to attack them, and to disrupt those launching attacks on their neighbours, or on people in the next village, or in the next town. I can assure you a programme of police patrols exists, KFOR has a programme of army patrols. We have also a programme of joint police and KFOR patrols designed specifically to prevent attacks between different ethnic communities, to prevent attacks within single communities by groups with differing views, or with diverging  political aspirations.

But there are only a little over 8,000 police and around 40,000 KFOR troops, many of whom have duties at the border unconnected with internal Kosovo matter, so the security forces cannot be everywhere all the time. It is our responsibility to use our professional skills to place the number of maximum number of patrols in the places that matters, at the time when it matters. We do this using our own intelligence but we could be more effective by the citizens telling us what their fears are, when and where attacks take place, so we may be better able to determine if patterns or indicators exist . Thus we could time and place our patrols more accurately. Sometimes the attacks seem to be fairly random, sometimes sporadic - it's very difficult to have a patrolling pattern catering to that variety. We are determined to play our part to end these attacks, to provide the maximum of security for everyone in Kosovo.

**Q. Could you talk about some of the investigation units established in the past few months - for example, the organized crime and anti-trafficking units.**

Certain types of crime exist where the criminals do not recognize local administrative boundaries, police boundaries, or boundaries between provinces or nations. Police is responsible for tackling those crimes which undermine confidence in civil society, civil government and in the police, rule of law and judicial system. I mean the crimes which generate very large amounts of money, known as organized crime, because the gangs involved have quite sophisticated organizational structures, have quite a clear purpose and are running their crimes at quite a high level of business professionalism. For example, in Kosovo that sort of crime is found in trafficking  people and drugs, a significant organizational element is found in auto crime. And we're also concerned with those engaging in violent crime for political purposes, whether connected with the political direction inside Kosovo or with the ethnic differences.

So we're keen to tackle those problems. The best way is to look at the perpetrators from some kind of centralized police unit. So prior to my arrival a unit was established seeking to gather, analyse, collate and assess available intelligence information about organized gangs so we can ask our police to launch operations against the people making such large amounts of money on the backs of the population.

**Q. Regarding the rise in violence since November, most people believe it to be the work of Albanian, as well as Serb extremists. Can you comment on how the police would tackle that?**

Yes, violence connected to politics is a particularly insidious danger in any civil society. I accept that Kosovo is only 18 months out of a war, a civil war, and therefore for society to determine its future entirely free from the threat of violence is a high aspiration. But it is an aspiration, which I believe the citizens of Kosovo, UNMIK with its civil and police missions and KFOR, must all jointly seek to establish. It is not surprising that the level of violence connected with politics rose as we approached the election, and in the few weeks since Christmas the level of violence has attenuated. As Police Commissioner I have to say that it is unacceptable that a hand grenade should be thrown into the yard where a 63-year old woman is standing, that shots should be fired, hand grenades thrown in towns, that crowds should gather to oppose each other, that people engaging in civil politics should feel intimidated about expressing their views.

I am not able to guarantee that no such violence will occur, but I unreservedly condemn violence to achieve political ends. I do guarantee that the police will be tireless in their efforts to help Kosovars to build a society where political decisions are made by politicians acting on the basis of their declared programmes and not because of threats made to them or their supporters.

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