



THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE: CANADIAN POLICING IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Date: November 14, 2023

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KEY EVENTS

On November 14, 2023, Devon Clunis presented *The Pursuit of Excellence: Canadian Policing in The 21st Century* for this year's West Coast Security Conference. The presentation was followed by a question-and-answer period with questions from the audience and CASIS Vancouver executives. The key points discussed were that Canadian policing must evolve to stay relevant in a changing society and focus on addressing socio-cultural narratives and embracing change agents; Canadian policing must adapt to serve a variety of cultures and ethnicities, emphasizing cultural sensitivity; and enhancing collaboration, community engagement, and training focused on social justice and human rights to improve policing effectiveness and community trust.

NATURE OF DISCUSSION

Canadian policing must continuously evolve to address socio-cultural challenges and adapt to a diversifying population. Emphasizing empathy and understanding historical injustices is crucial for fostering a more inclusive policing paradigm. Adapting strategies to modern societal complexities, such as mental health and domestic violence, while enhancing community engagement are key to effective policing. This approach necessitates improved collaboration, diverse recruitment, and training focused on social justice and human rights.

BACKGROUND

Mr. Clunis stated that although Canadian policing in its modern state does maintain a standard of excellence, it is imperative that practitioners continue to actively pursue it as this allows departments and practices to maintain relevance as the threat landscape evolves. He noted that as law enforcement operates in an increasingly divisive social paradigm, they must courageously and constructively

address the prevailing socio-cultural narrative in order to create a better world for all. He suggested that a small, dedicated group of people can be agents of change in this regard.

Mr. Clunis stated that, in considering the social and cultural contexts of policing, some difficult truths must be confronted, including that policing has not traditionally been friendly toward marginalized communities. He asserted that although current police officers are not responsible for the mistakes of their predecessors, they must understand the ongoing impacts of this truth. People working in the policing space today should show empathy and take action to correct historical wrongdoing and create a better policing paradigm.

Canada has seen a massive population boom in its recent years, primarily from international migration, and this highlights the increasing importance of cultural sensitivity in modern policing. Canada's population growth rate is currently at 2.7 % per year, which is the highest it's been since 1957, and the population of Indigenous people in Canada is growing at a rate four times faster than that of the general population. As the makeup of Canadian communities changes, community policing must evolve as well.

Mr. Clunis noted that by 2031, a quarter of the country's population is expected to be foreign-born, and in contrast to the primarily-European immigration of the past, communities are presently seeing an increasing variety of cultures and ethnicities, including those that have had conflicts with each other in other parts of the world. These cultures may also not be familiar with Canadian policing values in their current context, and this presents a challenge to police as well as the general population. Although many Canadians recognize the country's diversity, they sometimes fail to recognize the current lack of cultural unity present in the country.

Canadian society has also seen large shifts in its fabric due to issues including mental health, homelessness, drug abuse, domestic and gender-based violence, social isolation, and growing incivility; and these issues affect how police officers interact with their communities. Some of these challenges are new, while others have been present historically but are heavily amplified in modern society. These challenges are not borne out of faults within modern policing, but modern police, as well as collective society, must take steps to address them. Discussing the future of modern policing without taking into account today's social and societal challenges will result in ineffective solutions.

Mr. Clunis suggested that the issues we are seeing today can help inform new policing perspectives and strategies, and these include increasing collaboration

and communication between police governance boards, increasing public education about policing strategies, sharing successes and failures, and articulating the purpose and the power of policing to create safe and healthy communities. By forming better relationships with other departments and the communities that they serve, police departments can more effectively meet their mandates and improve social cohesion.

Mr. Clunis outlined some of the ways that this can be achieved include an evolution of the leadership paradigm in policing and increasing diversity in the recruitment process. Although many front-line officers are often admonished by society and the media when an issue occurs, many of these issues can be solved by stronger, more attentive leadership practices. Further, increasing representation within policing can help increase community trust.

The training process is another area for improvement in the pursuit of policing excellence, as current training focuses heavily on tactics to fight crime and Mr. Clunis suggested that it should focus more on how to bring about social justice. Training should be focused on human rights, procedural justice, and critical thinking, and modern training should also focus on community-building and combating gender-based violence. Officers should strive not just toward fighting crime, but strengthening the fabric of their communities. Some organizations, including the Coalition for Canadian Police Reform, are taking steps toward this goal through advocacy for improved police training and country-wide standards for policing and police training.

Addressing the current cultural paradigm, not only for police but as citizens of Canada, Mr. Clunis suggested changing the narrative around terms like white privilege, which can cause more division than unity. Instead of looking at privilege in terms of racial or ethnic groups, we should look instead at socioeconomic privilege. Instead of teaching anti-racism, we should look instead at building cultural understanding. By doing this, we can focus on building character before reinforcing human constructs such as race and social class. This will allow the pursuit of policing excellence to continue to move forward in the midst of an ever-changing Canada.

KEY POINTS OF DISCUSSION

- Canadian policing must evolve to stay relevant in a changing society, with a focus on addressing socio-cultural narratives and embracing change agents.

- Current police officers need to understand and rectify historical wrongs against marginalized communities by fostering a more empathetic and inclusive policing paradigm.
- With Canada's diverse and growing population, policing must adapt to serve a variety of cultures and ethnicities, emphasizing cultural sensitivity.
- Societal challenges like mental health and domestic violence necessitate an adaptation of policing strategies to effectively address these modern complexities.
- Enhancing collaboration, community engagement, and training focused on social justice and human rights is essential for improving policing effectiveness and community trust.



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