

# 'Police can't cope with violent crime'

Aug. 17, 2009

Yaakov Lappin , THE JERUSALEM POST

The Israel Police in its present form is incapable of effectively coping with violent crime, two senior ex-police officers have warned.

Former police Insp.-Gen. Assaf Hefetz and South-African-born security expert Marc Kahlberg told *The Jerusalem Post* recently that the recent wave of high profile murders that have rocked the country cannot be effectively tackled by a woefully under-resourced centralized national police force that is out of touch with local communities.

During the Safe City 2009 conference on urban crime, to be held at Tel Aviv's Intercontinental Hotel from November 30 to December 2, Hefetz and Kahlberg will tell police officials, mayors and cabinet ministers from Israel and around the world that municipal police forces operating under the control of mayors are the way forward.

"The burden on the national police is just too great. With no decent salaries or retirement packages, incentives for good career police officers are lacking. Some first-responders are not real career policemen. They don't want to put their families at risk. They want to finish their shifts, get their pay checks and go home," said Kahlberg, who served in the Israel Police for 12 years.

Even worse, "lower ranks or those just before retirement have no incentive... and do nothing but intimidate the newer police officers into not doing anything."

While the Israel Police did have many professionals "who are among the best in the world, there are too many who basically do not want to get involved or take risks, and who therefore cannot carry out their jobs effectively," Kahlberg added.

The senseless murder of 59-year-old Leonard Karp at Tel Aviv's Tel Baruch Beach on Friday night by an intoxicated gang underlined the need to train community officers and to send them out on patrol, Hefetz argued.

On Saturday night, Channel 2 News said a Tel Aviv municipal inspector had already warned police about previous offences committed in the area by the same youths who killed Karp, but to no avail.

"The lack of effective coordination between police and local authorities has once again been exposed by the beach murder," Hefetz said. "Police alone are not strong enough to deal with crime and violence. More complex policing models are more successful, as we have seen in New York."

"We saw how New York went from being the rotten apple to a clean city because the mayor was in charge. Mayors understand where crime and violence exist in their cities," he said.

"One of the aims of this conference is to showcase models that have worked in US cities so that we can learn from them," Hefetz said.

Failure to implement immediate structural reform in the Israel Police would result in a bleak future, Kahlberg said. "Value for life in Israel is gone. It's not going to stop, it's going to get worse. We are losing the sense of being a united Israeli nation."

"Codes between gangsters and police, which existed when I was a detective, are gone. Today, the criminals open fire. I foresee that police will walk around with body armor like they do in the US. It's coming," he added.

"The municipal police deal specifically with cities and towns, and [once on the beat] will get to know everyone. The national police cannot know everybody," Kahlberg said.

Community policing would also yield far better intelligence in investigations into murder cases like the discovery of the two mutilated and dismembered bodies of women in central Israel last week, the police veterans say.

"If there were good municipal policing, a community officer would hear about someone who was missing. My gut feeling is that the victims are either from a single family, or are completely foreign to Israel, meaning that no one knew they were here," Kahlberg said.

He has assisted US police departments in Florida and New York to create what he describes as "secure zones," where close cooperation between civilians, local government and community police officers develops.

One of the stumbling blocks to creating municipal police departments is concern by critics over the large numbers of Israeli

mayors who have been investigated, arrested or charged for corruption-related offenses.

Opponents of the reform fear that corrupt mayors could turn police departments into their personal armed forces. One of the most vocal critics of transferring full control to mayors has been Public Security Minister Yitzhak Aharonovitch (Israel Beiteinu), a former Israel Police No. 2 who will also attend the Safe City conference.

"A program that is right does not have to be stopped because mayors are investigated for corruption," Hefetz said. "Most mayors are responsible individuals who are law-abiding and loyal to their offices. We have to create checks and balances to prevent mayors from exploiting the system. The principle is still right."

Kahlberg added, "I don't think it will be like giving birth, that after nine months you will have a municipal police. I believe once something like this is introduced in Israel, we will have to ensure that people running for mayor have a clean slate. That must be the criteria. And if they do get criminal records while in power, they will have to leave their post."

Another hurdle to creating local police forces is a lack of funding.

A special panel will examine ways of coming up with money for the reform during the Safe City conference, Kahlberg said.

With Aharonovitch struggling to obtain a bigger budget for the Israel Police, some are pessimistic over the prospects of paying for the creation of municipal police departments.

The symposium is the brainchild of entrepreneur Oded Kapitolnik, president of the Globus Gate Group, and his wife, Ilana, who is

managing director. Globus Group has been organizing annual foreign trade summits for several years.

"This year we are looking at the city as an international business environment," Oded Kapitolnik said.