



PNTL and Human Security in Timor-Leste

Mahein's Voice No. 155, 26 August 2021



Photo: PNTL 2021



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Introduction

Security threats in today's world are more complex than ever before. Natural disasters, violence and political conflict, poverty, public health crises, international terrorism, and economic and financial crises challenge development, peace and stability. These complex crises bring risks and insecurity to people's lives. In September 2012, the United Nations General Assembly passed Resolution 66/290 on human security, which indicated the growing consensus that human security is an approach which can aid member states to identify and address challenges to the basic survival, livelihoods and dignity of their people.

The concept of human security focuses on people's lives, rights, freedoms and dignity, including freedom from poverty, fear, and equal opportunity to enjoy their rights. In other words, human security refers to the comprehensive needs of the human being within their specific context and the responses required to strengthen protection and empowerment for individuals and whole communities. Thus, the concept of human security recognises the interconnection between peace, development and human rights, and considerations such as civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights (UN General Assembly Resolution 66/290, 10 September 2012).

Timor-Leste as a UN member state took part in the resolution in question. To respond to the complex challenges discussed above requires integrated actions from various institutions, including the National Police of Timor-Leste (PNTL). This report focuses on the role of PNTL in advancing human security, with reference to the challenges and lessons emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, and particularly examining policing practices deployed by PNTL with reference to its philosophy and strategy.

Methodology

This report is the result of Fundasaun Mahein (FM) monitoring of PNTL's role in human security in Timor-Leste, including examination of relevant documents such as laws and reports from Government and civil society organisations related to PNTL's activities in general and related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The report also draws from the results of *Security Sector Discussions* (SSD) involving FM researchers and key stakeholders in the security sector to further elaborate on the documents analysed.

PNTL's policing strategy and human security

PNTL's Organic Law 2009 defines PNTL's mission as: to defend democracy and rule of law, guarantee citizen security and wellbeing and protect citizen's rights according to the terms established in the Constitution and in Laws. PNTL's strategy and philosophy are characterised by community policing.

Community policing is an organizational philosophy and strategy which encourages partnerships between the police and communities. PNTL and communities work together proactively to prevent crime and conflict, and to respond to problems which occur within the community (PNTL, 2014).

As a key part of the community policing philosophy, PNTL has also adopted the VIP doctrine (Visibility, Involvement and Professionalism). Visibility means to show the police presence through activities within in the community, in order to promote feelings of safety and security. Involvement means to involve the community in security activities, thereby



educating community members in such issues and also to promote the community's sense of ownership of security issues. In this way, security becomes not only PNTL's responsibility, but the responsibility of all, which strengthens the spirit of partnership even further. Finally, professionalism means to demonstrate good sense and intelligence in police actions and service, including strong discipline and understanding of how to conduct oneself in the community. This also includes respect for Command hierarchy to ensure the integrity, credibility and prestige of PNTL as an institution. Policing which is proactive and preventative is the basis of community policing, and the police cannot work separately as the community itself is the base of the police's existence (PNTL, 2014).

Under the framework of human security which focuses on people's livelihoods, freedoms, security and rights, PNTL adopted its philosophy and doctrine to involve the community in security activities and organise community security through the Community Policing Council (KPK) structure.

KPK is a forum in which police and community members can sit together to identify, discuss and address problems which arise within the community, particularly socio-economic problems and other issues which bring risks to the community's life, such as criminality. Up to 2021, PNTL together with its partner established KPK structures in more than half the Suku in Timor-Leste.

KPKs are composed of the Suku Chief (who serves as the KPK head), Suku Police Official (OPS – vice-head of KPK), and members composed of Aldeia Chiefs, delegates, *lia na'in* and traditional leaders, youth (male and female), veterans and others. KPK's responsibilities are shared between several key sections, including the identification and prevention section, and the mediation and negotiation section (PNTL, 2017).

Community problems are identified and resolved through regular meetings and discussions. FM's monitoring noted that several key points emerged from KPK meetings, including lack of access to clean water, reduced food, land disputes between community members, public health issues, insufficient teachers and school facilities, as well as other social and economic problems which directly impact community lives. Also identified were communal problems which pose a risk of violent conflict, including youth, martial arts groups and violence against vulnerable groups.

Suku Police Officials (OPS) who participate in the KPK structure continue to maintain PNTL's work according to the OPS organizational norms and procedures, including going house-to-house to identify community security concerns, visiting schools and carrying out usual police functions such as crime prevention.

When KPK identifies problems, its members immediately search for solutions, such as mediating in disputes over land, plantations and animals, as well as cases of semi-public crimes. However, in cases of public crimes such as domestic violence, sexual violence and others, KPK together with OPS take action to refer the case to the relevant authorities according to the formal justice process.

For resolution of civil case disputes and semi-public crimes, policing sometimes incorporates traditional local practices. An example from Ermera Municipality is *Kablehan*, a traditional environmental conservation practice which uses existing traditional cultural structures to protect the natural environment and resolve disputes related to land, plantations and animals. The *Tara Bandu* rules are used to sanction people who violate

the rules put in place. *Tara Bandu* is also used in crime prevention and resolution of disputes which could lead to violence or other criminal behaviour.

These practices illustrate the ways in which policing relates to human security, especially how PNTL's actions can directly prevent threats to people's lives, freedom and security.

PNTL's role during the Covid-19 pandemic

As Covid-19 threatens human security, the Timor-Leste Government has adopted several measures to combat the pandemic, and has authorised PNTL to implement and oversee these measures. FM's monitoring provides the following observations of PNTL's actions during Covid-19:

- a) Socialization of the Covid-19 rules and prevention methods to communities, motorists and public transport drivers through regular police patrols by Municipal Command, Special Police Unit, Maritime Police Unit (UPM), Border Patrol Unit (UPF), Police Training Centre (CFP), Transit Police and Suku Police Officials at the national and municipal levels. These units have also supported health teams and volunteers involved in disinfecting public and private transport and public installations.
- b) Providing 24-hour guard of quarantine and isolation facilities in the capital Dili and Municipalities and assisting health teams when evacuating citizens testing positive for Covid-19 to isolation facilities.
- c) Establishing guard posts in areas where illegal border crossings were detected in Bobonaro, Covalima and Oe-cusse, and identifying citizens who cross the border illegally to ensure they comply with Covid-19 prevention measures such as quarantine.
- d) Conducting UPF patrols in border areas to prevent illegal crossings and socialisation of the rules and measures to communities living in the border regions in Bobonaro, Covalima and Oe-cusse.
- e) Conducting UPM patrols in coastal areas to ensure that fishermen and communities in these areas comply with rules and prevention measures.
- f) Policing national and municipal roads to ensure that citizens comply with rules and prevention measures.
- g) Providing security for Government officials during distribution of *sesta basica* (basic basket) goods and delivering other assistance for communities living in remote areas.
- h) In Dili, PNTL's CFP provided assistance to poor people during the State of Emergency identified during PNTL patrols.
- i) The Medical Team of PNTL's General Command shared information about Covid-19 with PNTL members and also to the Border Patrol Unit, Maritime Police Unit and Migration Service.

Despite PNTL suffering from various limitations, including a lack of clear policy and specific support for orienting its policing towards a human security approach, the above

observations illustrate how PNTL has incorporated the human security concerns of the Covid-19 pandemic into its work.

Policing lessons in the Covid-19 situation

The Covid-19 situation has forced communities to adapt to a new reality with various limitations on socio-economic activity. At the same time, PNTL has also adjusted its policing practices to ensure implementation of new rules and prevention methods. A critical point is that PNTL now plays a dual role – PNTL must now implement not only its normal responsibilities but additional duties under the scope of preventing Covid-19. PNTL also lacks relevant infrastructure, logistics and human resources. In the border areas which are currently critical due to illegal movement, there is a lack of guard posts and logistics.

Furthermore, although PNTL has served as ‘frontline’ staff during the pandemic situation, socializing rules and prevention methods to communities, its own members themselves often do not fully understand or follow the rules. To take one example related to use of masks and other personal protective equipment, as PNTL members supported health teams they often did not use personal protective equipment (RDDU Report 2020).

An additional challenge has been the use of unnecessary force. As cited in the report by the Human Rights Ombudsman and Human Right Defenders Network, several PNTL members violated citizens’ rights during the Covid-19 pandemic (PDHJ Report 2021).

Conclusion and recommendation

PNTL is already oriented by its philosophy and doctrine towards human security, especially policing strategies which are oriented towards communities’ security and can identify problems and solutions related to people’s lives, freedom, security and rights.

Thus, to examine and respond more deeply to the question of human security, Timor-Leste requires a National Security Policy to comprehensively address this issue, including incorporating human security into the National Security Policy and responsibilities of the security sector relating to human security. Covid-19 has provided important lessons for the security sector, particularly PNTL as a ‘frontline’ actor in human security issues.

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