

CABRAMATTA POLICE- COMMUNITY LIAISON COMMITTEE

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In July of 1983, members of the Organized Crime Squad raided several Vietnamese homes in Cabramatta, ostensibly looking for drugs. In those raids the police broke down doors, subjected residents to racial abuse and obscenities, held them at gunpoint for several hours and ransacked their homes. The police were in plain clothes, did not identify themselves or show any warrants.

The Council of Vietnamese Organisations responded by calling a public meeting at the Cabramatta Community Centre on the 16th August. At that meeting, members of the Vietnamese community expressed concern at: the racist attitudes of the police; the police reluctance to use interpreters; the inadequacy of the Ombudsman's office in dealing with police-related complaints; and the lack of monetary compensation for the families whose homes were ransacked. A representative of the Cabramatta Community Centre told how the police had placed her under surveillance after she had sought assistance from the Council for Civil Liberties.

As an interim measure, the meeting agreed to the formation of a Police Working Party comprising representatives from the Council of Vietnamese Organisations, the Cabramatta Community Centre, Ethnic Communities Council, Council for Civil Liberties, Ethnic Affairs Commission, Anti-Discrimination Board and Fairfield Council. A delegation from the Working Party met with the State Member for Cabramatta and the Minister for Police to bring to their attention the problems that were occurring with the police, and to seek action. The Police Minister said that he would aim to promote a dialogue between the local police and the Vietnamese community. He also promised compensation for the Vietnamese families involved in the raids.

The Working Party then met with representatives of the Aboriginal Legal Service and the head of Training Development of the Police Department to determine whether the Aboriginal Liaison

Unit could serve as a model for a similar unit within the ethnic communities. Although the stated aim of the Aboriginal Liaison Unit is to work towards an improved relationship between police and Aborigines and to conciliate in minor misunderstandings of a local nature, the Unit does not have any power. It cannot prevent, and has no foreknowledge of, police raids and it has no influence at the policy level of the Police Department. It is often used for the purpose of intelligence gathering by the police. The Working Party came away from its consultations with a firm conviction that the Aboriginal Liaison Unit is not a suitable model for the ethnic communities.

At a second public meeting at Cabramatta on 7th December, 1983, the Working Party was expanded to include several members of the local ethnic communities, and was renamed the "Police-Community Liaison Committee". The Committee's role is to: meet on a regular basis with the police; monitor police activity in the Fairfield local government area; conduct community education programmes; and pursue issues relating to the use of interpreters, police training and the formal investigation of complaints.

In the immediate future the Committee intends to publicise itself widely in the Cabramatta-Fairfield area, with a view to raising public awareness of the poor relationship between the police and certain ethnic communities. It is envisaged that a wholly community-based committee will be formed before the end of the year.

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