

# Elements for the Ministry of Interior Communications Strategy

## Background

A new communications strategy is an essential element of the restructuring plans of the Ministry of Interior. In all modern police forces communication has become of paramount importance, not a side activity. The future Yemeni Ministry of Interior, according to the vision of the Restructuring Committee, will be oriented towards **maintaining public safety and security, upholding the rule of law, the safeguarding of human rights and the prevention and investigation of crimes.**

To achieve these goals, and to obtain general support of Yemenis for the restructuring process, the police and the other sectors of the Ministry must **obtain the cooperation of the population.**

There are currently two systems of contact between the Yemeni population and the Ministry:

1. The daily contact with the police (and with other public-oriented departments of the MoI, such as the civil registration department) .
2. Communications by the Ministry towards the population.

1. We must admit that the population's perception of the Ministry of Interior is not entirely positive. We are awaiting the results of the first nation-wide survey of public attitudes towards the police since the transitional process started. But from previous surveys and informal discussions we know that the population is not happy with the provision of services by the Ministry of Interior. Corruption (the requirement to pay bribes), nepotism ('Vitamin Wow' standing for 'wasita', connections) and inefficiency (lack of capacity and training) have created a relatively bad image of the police.

If the restructuring process is successful, it might still take many years (or a generation) to change this perception because it involves transforming the political culture of the police. **The attention of the population must thus be focused on what's improving, not on what's still wrong.** This is one of the goals of the communication strategy.

2. The Restructuring Committee of the MoI has realized the importance of improved communications with the public, and has presented its efforts to the population at large through TV and the press. This is a positive development, but it can be developed much further, on the one hand by using new communication technologies, and on the other by using old technologies in new ways. We will draw on comparative experiences in other countries where the police is undergoing a huge transformation process, and on techniques used in developed countries in the West and in the Gulf region.

**Note:** we must distinguish between internal and external communications. This paper focuses on external communications without ignoring their internal effect (as civil servants of the MoI also receive the external communications). Internal communications must be dealt with comprehensively under the restructuring process (shared values, systems, style of management...)

## 1: Elements of the MoI Strategic Communication Plan

**Core message:** *the Ministry of Interior is at the forefront of the national effort to make the Yemeni government more citizen-friendly. We are ahead of the rest.*

The core message does not relate to the expected end-state of the MoI restructuring process, because that may raise unattainable expectations among the population, and within the MoI itself. It relates to the other government agencies which are slower, reforming less fast. **The message is: ‘we are getting better’, not ‘we are good’.** The message can be consistent with the deeds of the MoI as it goes through the restructuring process, however slowly. Each complaint about the MoI can be met by the reaction: ‘you are right, the situation is not good, but we are getting better’. The element of competition may also be positive for other government agencies. The key phrase is ‘*becoming more citizen-friendly*’ as the experience of most Yemenis of the government is that it is predatory.

**Goals:** Strategic communication goals should be **specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time bound (SMART)**

1. Inform the Yemeni population at large of the restructuring efforts, to create patience and a well-willing attitude among the population.
2. Provide a sense of ownership to Yemeni’s citizens, so that they believe that the Ministry of Interior of the future will truly be oriented towards its citizens. This means providing several levels of input to citizens, from surveys to interactive online communications and ‘suggestion boxes’.
3. Provide evidence of the gradual professionalization of the police force and other departments of the MoI. Yemenis want a technocratic, non-partisan government, and this expectation must gradually be met.
4. Present success stories showing the results of the restructuring process. Insist on all the short-term successes, notably in providing better security and services to the population.

Each police success story must be widely disseminated. The local branches of the police must be encouraged to report and document success stories. These can appear on the MoI website and in its newspaper, thus also motivating the police itself. A system whereby medals of honor are awarded to police officers / stations can be useful for this (see 2.2). Every success must be celebrated as publicly as possible. Local success stories should become national news. Of course a risk exists of contrast between the experience of the population, which may well experience more insecurity (due to factors beyond the MoI’s control); but they might still be comforted by the success stories.

Each major development in the MoI (prospective and during the implementation phase) must be accompanied by a communication effort through all the available channels mentioned below.

**Guiding principle:** A shared value that emerged during the analysis of the Ministry of Interior’s restructuring committee is the need for greater transparency. This will be the guiding principle of the new communications strategy.

## **2. Communication channels, specific strategies and examples**

### **2.1 Creating new role models for the police – a TV series** (see appendix)

As the members of the Restructuring Committee have pointed out, the restructuring of the Ministry of Interior implies an overhaul of the political culture within the Ministry. Civil servants in the Ministry today may be primarily interested in exploiting their current position to enrich themselves and obtain more power, and using their connections to climb in the hierarchy and find jobs for their kin; or if they lack ambition they may just be content with receiving their salary and doing the minimal amount of work in return. But there are also people in the Ministry who have the national interest in mind, who gain satisfaction from performing well and being appreciated by the population that they serve. These people, who were not successful in the old system, must become the role models for the new Ministry.

The vast majority of the Yemeni population, if not 100%, would like the police and the other departments of the Ministry of Interior to function like this. We suggest to build upon this consensus to create and project new role models for the police.

The best way to do this is by making a television series in which the hero represents the new role model. He is surrounded by characters which either represent the old regime that he is in conflict with, or other role models of the new police. The series would be modeled on Crime Scene Investigation, the most-watched TV series in the world and The Wire. The purpose is to make it the most famous TV series in Yemen, produced locally with the best film-makers, actors, musicians etc. The series could even become a hit in other Arab countries.

The script would be coordinated closely with the communications team of the Restructuring Committee, who will suggest subject matters (according to their own priorities) and provide feedback on the character development. International funding could be found for this. There must be a commitment to work with the best artists in Yemen, to make the series a success. Some artistic freedom must also be allowed for the director of the series, so that it doesn't look like propaganda. The MoI/police support does not even need to be mentioned in the TV's titles (principle of psy-ops).

**2.2 Public Awards Ceremonies.** The restructuring committee could set up an awards selection committee, that gives a monthly award to a police officer who best embodies the new police force. A yearly prize can also be awarded to the best police station, along the same criteria. The population of the district where that station is should provide input. For example a shortlist can be made and then the population consulted to choose the best one. Each awards ceremony should be surrounded with the maximum national publicity. A balanced regional representation is essential.

**2.3 Website.** It seems the Ministry of Interior currently has no website. This should be resolved. An agreement should be reached with the PTC to avoid disruption of the service (this should apply to all government agencies, really). The website should feature all news items, allow interactivity (comments)

and feature an anonymous suggestion box with mandatory tags. This part of the website must then be read on a daily basis by the audit and monitoring department within the MoI – and targets be set for how many suggestions receive replies. The website, eventually complemented with a facebook and twitter account, should allow maximum interactivity and not be construed as one-way communication channels (to inform only).

**2.4 Call-in radio programs.** Local FM stations, ideally in all major cities (or governorates) can carry a daily program (of 30 min) where they tackle a rule of law issue, present the point of view of the restructuring committee, contrast it with local news, and then allow the local audience to call in, with a professional policeman sitting at the radio table fielding questions. This work can largely be done by local radio-stations, the role of the MoI consisting of feeding issues and standpoints on a weekly CD to the radio stations and ensuring the best local policeman is answering questions. Themes would include the MoI code of conduct, the restructuring efforts and the news generated by that, and informing the citizens of other rights they have vis-à-vis the police (e.g. habeas corpus). This program can easily be financed by a foreign donor.

**2.5 Sponsoring public events.** The Ministry of Interior can enhance its image by sponsoring public events, typically sport and culture. A small amount of sponsorship can generate a huge amount of positive publicity. It can show what kind of society the MoI wishes to help generate (a peaceful, healthy and informed society). The budget would have to be distributed even-handedly among Yemen's governorates/main population centers. The role as sponsor can be emphasized by a short speech or written/broadcast statement by the local responsible of the MoI.

**2.6 A TV debate program.** Preferably covering the whole Rule of Law sector. A weekly discussion of laws, the activities of the police and the judiciary and reform processes. With invited specialists representing the future Yemeni society (youth, technocrats, educated and non-corrupt people). This TV program should be independent from the MoI, but the MoI can prompt and facilitate it and maintain good relations with the program makers.

**What should be avoided:** police in uniform appearing on national TV or in the radio to read a statement. This one-way communication is authoritarian in nature, because there is no effort to address or otherwise convince the audience. It will remind people of the old regime. There should always be an opportunity to question, to engage in dialogue, because that will allow the MoI to better disseminate its core message and strategic communication goals.