Speech for "Police Advisory Committee' meeting at City Hall Wednesday, Sept 19th at 9am

By: Noelle DePape
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- Intro
  - My name is Noelle DePape and I work as the Executive Director at the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba
  - We are a non-profit organization, based in the West Alexander neighbourhood, that provides transitional housing and support services to over 250 newcomers to Canada

- Position
  - First of all, I would like to state my position in favour of the Police Advisory Board.
  - Initially, my recommendation to Council was to oppose a Police Advisory board, as I am in favour of a Civilian Police Commission model of governance for our city police.
  - However, in light of recent events and in the spirit of problem solving, IRCOM would now like to support the Police Advisory board as a **first step** toward a more inclusive and accountable approach to governance.

- The main reason I am here today is to advocate, on behalf of the newcomer population I serve at IRCOM. Newcomers, and all community members for that matter, need to have a voice in police governance in order to ensure that their needs and unique issues are recognized and represented.

- If indeed the police are there to best serve the community, they need to take into consideration the specific needs of different groups through on-going dialogue and consultation. But simple consultation is not enough - citizens should be involved in every stage of police governance, not simply given token roles in this process.

- The diverse citizens, representing the multi-cultural demographic of our population, need to be key stakeholders in deciding the type of police service that will best serve our society.

- In addition, the consultation and governance processes need to remain transparent. All community members and leaders should be aware of the current debate and be encouraged to participate and have their voices heard. As a democratic and free society, it is our duty to ensure that such important issues as police governance are discussed openly and honestly.

- Furthermore, in order for us to make good decisions around governance, the community and government must have a better understanding of the different governance models that are available. It is for this reason, that I would like to recommend that the City actively take part in a community forum on best practices of civilian commissions this fall, co-sponsoring the event with the Province of Manitoba and other community groups seeking to find the best model of governance for our police force and our citizens.

- As an active member of the Inner City Safety Coalition, I would also like to encourage Council to work closely with the Province, through the establishment of an inter-governmental committee, to review the findings of the best practices conference and based on these conclusions, recommend next steps in determining a model for police governance. This inter-governmental committee can then work along side community groups and citizens to pave the way for an inclusive, well thought-out framework for governance.

- Before I conclude, I would like to give you a clearer picture of some of the unique security issues that we are facing at IRCOM:

    - First - Newcomers, particularly those from conflict zones, sometimes have **negative association with people in uniform** – as in their home countries these officials are not always trustworthy – and rather may have abused or taken advantage of their civilians (ie: military, rebel groups or police) – Therefore, newcomers need to build trust with police and understand their role to protect and help citizens in times of need.
    - Second - Newcomers are **easy targets for exploitation**, as they are unfamiliar with Canadian culture and systems and are therefore easily taken in by fraud, sexual exploitation and other forms of violation.

- Finally - Newcomers, especially teenagers, are **susceptible to being recruited by gangs** as they are isolated when they first arrive and are seeking inclusion, friendship, purpose and ways to improve their lot economically. In fact, this summer we have been facing a number of challenges with our newcomer youth being approached by gangs and we require the support of our police to act as positive role models, protect and assist these young people.

To address some of these issues at a community level, there is a need for more officers who are visible minorities and who understand the issues that newcomers face and can connect with their struggles. Furthermore, we need to continue to expand the community policing programs, so that these officers can utilize diverse conflict resolution tools to handle complex situations and so they can build trust with communities, with the goal of building safer neighbourhoods. **Policing should be about peacemaking and peacebuilding, not simply about enforcement and suppression.**

In conclusion, I would like to support the work of the Inner City Safety Coalition by encouraging the Council to vote in favour of the Police Advisory Board – as a first step toward stronger, more inclusive governance of our Police Service. Once established, ~~this~~ board ~~should support the occurrence of~~ a best practices forum and the institution of an inter-governmental committee.

As Wanda Yamamoto said in her article to the Free Press in July, moving toward a more accountable governance structure will ensure a balance between police independence and public accountability – something we need to strive for. We need to work together – government, non-profits, citizen groups, the private sector and individuals to take a multi-pronged approach to dealing with crime effectively, utilizing a transformative approach.

Thank you for your time today. I hope that you will make the right decision by supporting the Police Advisory Board as a first step…