

Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces Programme

Overview

Ombuds institutions for the armed forces are an essential part of any transparent and accountable security sector. Ombuds institutions for the armed forces are organisations that have a common mandate to receive and investigate complaints from within or relating to the armed forces. These institutions are responsible for the protection of human rights and the prevention of maladministration, and they are characterised by their independence from the bodies they are tasked to oversee and their impartiality in carrying out their duties. There is a rich variety of institutions that are mandated to address such issues, something that is reflected in the titles of these bodies, which can include, for example, commissioner, inspector general, ombudsman and people's advocate. They can, however, be grouped into three distinct categories: integrated within the armed forces, with exclusive jurisdiction over the armed forces and general ombuds institutions.

Objective

The overarching objective of the programme is to promote the important role played by ombuds institutions with the armed forces and international actors, and to work directly with ombuds institutions to enhance their effectiveness and capacity in carrying out their work.

Ombuds Institutions Programme Snapshot

- 53 States participating in ICOAF
- 8 Languages in which the flagship publication *Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces: A Handbook* has been published
- 7 International Conferences of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces co-hosted by DCAF
- 2 Regional mapping studies produced (OSCE region and Francophone Africa)

Activities

DCAF has traditionally provided support to the project through three main activity lines: the promotion of norms and good practice; knowledge products; and advisory and operational support.

Promotion of norms and good practice

DCAF supports the **International Conference of Ombuds institutions for the Armed Forces (ICOAF)** that annually brings together representatives of such institutions from various countries with the purpose of exchanging information and experiences about their functioning and good practice. The initiative also reaches out to states that do not have such an institution but have expressed an interest in learning from the experiences of other states.

DCAF regularly supports **thematic workshops** that explore different topics that have proven to be particularly challenging or relevant for ombuds institutions. Themes of these workshops have ranged from gender to capacity building. They have also been organized to explore pertinent regional issues, such as in sub-Saharan Africa or in Central Asia.

Knowledge products

The flagship publication of the programme – ***Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces: A Handbook*** – which was requested by the ICOAF participating states, was published to bring together good practices and examples from ombuds institutions for the armed forces. It was the first publication of its kind to explore this issue, and has been used extensively by long-established ombuds institutions, newly formed institutions and by their staff, as well as academics and policy-makers interested in creating such bodies in their own states.

The *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* (OIF) mandated DCAF to produce several publications exploring **the role of ombuds institutions for the armed forces in Francophone Africa**. The studies highlighted good practices and offered practical measures on how to improve the functioning and effectiveness of the existing institutions.

The OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODHIR) mandated DCAF to produce a **mapping study of ombuds institutions for the armed forces in OSCE participating States**, share good practices, and identify gaps in capacity.

NATO's Science for Peace and Security Programme supported DCAF in producing ***Gender and Complaints Mechanisms***, a handbook that brings together knowledge and experience as regards prevention of misconduct and handling and monitoring of complaints within armed forces, with particular regard to gender. It is a resource for armed forces, ministries of defence, ombuds institutions and others that manage and oversee armed forces in: establishing a safe and non-discriminatory environment for men and women in the armed forces; dealing with instances and complaints of gender-related discrimination, harassment, bullying and abuse in the armed forces; and monitoring and overseeing the handling of instances of gender-related complaints.

DCAF has also begun work to produce a **guide on the use and misuse of social media** within the armed forces. The guide is intended to be a practical tool for ombuds institutions to be more prepared to use and respond to new technologies.

Advisory and Operational Support

DCAF has also provided **policy advice** to a number of countries interested in establishing their own ombuds institution. Drawing upon its extensive experience and networks, DCAF has offered tailored support to, for example, Georgia, Kosovo, South Africa, Switzerland and Tunisia on the different forms of ombuds institutions that exist, and models that would best suit each country's specific needs. DCAF also provides support to institutions seeking to expand their mandates, and training to ombuds institutions.

Results

The programme has elevated the profile of ombuds institutions within international organisations; NATO, OIF and OSCE have acknowledged the importance of ombuds institutions and promoted them in their work plans.

A number of countries have directly benefitted from DCAF's advisory support, and some have gone on to establish ombuds institutions or strengthen existing legislation.

ICOAF has expanded in size and scope annually since its inception. Representatives from more than 50 states and six continents have attended. ICOAF has proven to be an important tool for enhancing international cooperation between ombuds institutions. As a result of ICOAF, the Dutch Inspector General and the German Parliamentary Commissioner have collaborated during field visits to troops stationed abroad in peacekeeping missions.



(Pictured L-R: Reinhold Robbe, then German Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, Ambassador Theodor Winkler, Director DCAF, and Werner Faymann, Federal Chancellor Austria, at ICOAF)

Resources

- Benjamin S. Buckland and William McDermott, *Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces: A Handbook*, DCAF, 2012.
- Megan Bastick, *Gender and Complaints Mechanisms: A Handbook for Armed Forces and Ombuds Institutions*, DCAF, 2015.
- Hans Born and Ian Leigh, *Handbook on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Armed Forces Personnel*, OSCE ODIHR/DCAF, 2008.
- Hans Born, Benjamin S. Buckland and William McDermott, *Capacity Development and Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces*, DCAF, 2014.
- Kim Piaget and Rina Turtio, *Mapping Study: Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces in the OSCE Region*, OSCE ODIHR/DCAF, 2015.
- DCAF, *Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces in Francophone Countries of Sub-Saharan Africa*, OIF/DCAF, 2015.

The **Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF)** is an international foundation established on the initiative of the Swiss government. It is one of the world's leading institutions in promoting good governance, with focus on a specific public sector niche – the security sector. DCAF's mission is to assist partner states and international actors supporting these states in improving the governance of their security sectors through inclusive and participatory reforms

based on international norms and good practices and in response to specific local contexts and challenges.

The **Research Division (RD)** is one of the seven departments/offices of the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF). It engages in cutting-edge applied research conducted in consultation with key stakeholders. It also has an operational branch which provides support to nationally-led SSR processes in South

East Asia. All of its work is demand driven, relevant to needs, and guided by the reality on the ground. Its dual research and operational functions enable it to play a strong role in lessons learning which contribute to both stronger empirically-based research and programming.

Contact

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