

## **A DECADE FROM POLICE REFORMS IN JAPAN, HAS A POLICE FOR THE PEOPLE BEEN REALIZED?**

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### **Introduction**

The Japanese police came under criticism at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because of a series of scandals and cases of misconduct that involved officers ranking as high as Chief of Local Police. Seriously concerned about these events, the National Public Safety Committee and the National Police Agency established the Charter of Police Reforms that aimed at improving the accountability of the Japanese police forces through self-redress and by conducting citizen oriented activities in readiness for the 2000s. Soon after that, all local police forces in Japan initiated reforms in accordance with this Charter.

At that same period, Japan was facing a sharp increase in crime. The number of penal code crimes(1) had increased during seven consecutive years and in 2002 were over a million. This was a 60% increase compared to the seven previous years.

As a result, the Japanese police had to fight on two fronts. In this paper, police reforms are reviewed and the outcomes of certain reform programs are discussed. Moreover, the restoration of public confidence in the police, resulting from these reforms and crime prevention activities is explored.

### **Structure of the Japanese Police**

In Japan, there are 47 local and one national police force. There are also 47 Prefectural Public Safety Commission (PPSC), as well as a National Public Safety Commission (NPSC) to ensure the democratic control and political neutrality of the police forces (Tamura). The prefectural governors, through the PPSC maintain indirect control of local police forces, also known the prefectural police forces, which are under the jurisdiction of each prefecture.

A PPSC consists of three to five members depending on the size of the prefecture, appointed by the governors of the prefectures. The NPSC consists of six members that are nominated by the Prime Minister with the approval of the Diet. The chairperson of this committee is a cabinet minister.

The national police force is known as the National Police Agency (NPA). The

head of the agency is appointed by the NPSC with the consent of the Prime Minister. The NPA is engaged in planning and budgeting public safety policies and in coordinating local police activities. Local police forces are fundamentally independent from the NPA, however, the NPSC has the right to appoint and dismiss senior local police officers above the rank of Senior Superintendent, including the heads of prefectural police forces. In addition, the NPSC has the authority to regulate police activities. NPA also has the authority to allocate the budget of local police forces<sup>1</sup> and to inspect them. Thus, the NPSC and NPA are influential in local police forces through personnel and budget management. (Bayley)

### **A Series of Misconducts—the trigger for police reform**

Approaching the end of the second millennium, in the years between 1999 and 2000, a series of serious scandals involving local police forces were uncovered. One was an illegal investigative maneuver to conceal a drug offence committed by a police officer. The case involved the commissioner and the assistant commissioner of Kanagawa police headquarters and it led to the prosecution of the commissioner. The other case was a serious misconduct committed by the commissioner of Niigata police headquarters and the Director-General of the Kanto regional police bureau. The Niigata police chief, whose force was being inspected and the Director-General conducting the inspection had dinner, sitting at the same table. This case resulted in the voluntary resignation of the two heads. Disciplinary measures were taken by the NPSC against the commissioner-general of NPA, which is a rare occurrence. In addition to the above, a number of investigations on the deaths of crime victims had been criticized for the negative attitude of individual investigators. Police officers responsible for these cases were disciplined and some were prosecuted (Yoshimura).

### **Police Reform Commission and its urgent recommendation**

Concerned about the above problems, in March 2000, the NPSC established the Police Reform Committee (PRC) that consisted of six prominent citizens including former vice Prime minister, CEO of TV media and former chairman of Japan national bar association. By July 2000, the PRC conducted hearings and intensive discussions<sup>(2)</sup> and adopted urgent recommendations on police reform<sup>(3)</sup>. In these recommendations, the PRC pointed out the lack of transparency, self-righteousness and the lack of adaptability to social changes. They recommend eight reforms.

#### **(1) Remove red tape**

The PRC recommended enhancing the disclosure of information, especially

concerning negative information such as information on disciplinary actions on police personnel.

**(2) Sincerity in handling complaints**

The PRC emphasized the need to respond positively to complaints made by citizens. The PRC urged the police to establish a response system that facilitated the reporting of all complaints about field officers to commissioners. Such a system was considered to be indispensable to remedy the problem of police misconduct.

**(3) Strict inspections**

The PRC recommended the enhancement of the inspection system. As the Niigata case had demonstrated, the inspection system did not function well, because inspectors and those that were inspected were closely connected.

**(4) Let the PPSC work**

The PRC pointed out the need for active public safety commissions, with enhanced powers of democratic control over local police forces to promote the interests of citizens.

**(5) Citizen Friendly**

The PRC proposed that the police should be ready to accept citizens' consultations about problems with other citizens and to enhance trouble-shooting activities. The investigative misconducts have shown that the police tended to refrain from intervening in conflicts among citizens before a criminal charge had been made. Many police officers were traditionally, averse to such interventions, out of concern for the privacy and rights of citizens. However, social changes, including the emerging idea of victim support, require the police to act affirmatively to prevent crime.

**(6) Maintain discipline**

The PRC proposed that the acceptance of sense of responsibility should be increased among all police personnel. Intensive education on police ethics was to be undertaken. Moreover the wearing of nameplates was made mandatory.

**(7) Face the community**

The PRC proposed that meetings should be established between police stations and the community to give an opportunity for community member's opinions and ideas to be voiced at the police station. The meeting is named "Police Station Council" which modeled on "the Police/Community Consulting Group" in England.

**(8) Adaptability to a changing society**

Lastly, the PRC recommend that the police force should be adaptable to social changes. This was to be achieved through reforming the education and promotion system of executive officers and through the reformation of organizations.

## **The Charter of Police Reform**

After receiving urgent recommendations for reforming the police force from the PRC, the NPSC and the NPA established the Charter of Police Reform (the Charter) in order to proclaim the principles of police reforms.(4)

The Charter consisted of four major sections.

The first part of the Charter was concerned with issues such as the enhancement of transparency, self-improvement, disclosure, affirmative responses to citizen's complaints, strict inspection, as well as enhancement of the control by the PSC over the police.

The second part of the Charter declared the establishment of a "police for the people." In order to realize this goal, the police were urged to listen to citizens' needs and genuinely respond to these needs, reinforce activities to ease citizens' fears about crime, and support the victims of crime.

The third part of the Charter was a response to the demands of the new age, including strong measures against organized crime groups, enhancement of international cooperation to cope with transnational crime and cyber crime.

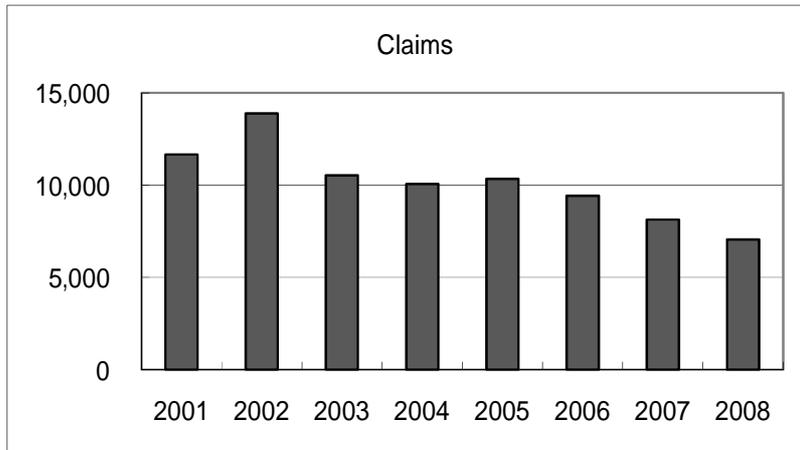
The final part of the Charter was concerned with the development of human resources including education and training, as well as burden reduction through new technologies and increase in personnel.

## **Evaluation of the police reform program**

### ***Part 1 of the Charter***

Along with the Charter, the NPA and the 47 local police forces promoted various police reform programs. With regard to the first part of the Charter, the NPA and local police forces established guidelines for information disclosure. As a result, the NPA disclosed 1652 internal regulations in 2009 compared to 356 in 2001. An article about complaints against the police was inserted in the Police Law in 2000 which that people may claim the police activities to PPSC at section 79. The number of complaints received by the police can be seen in Figure 1.

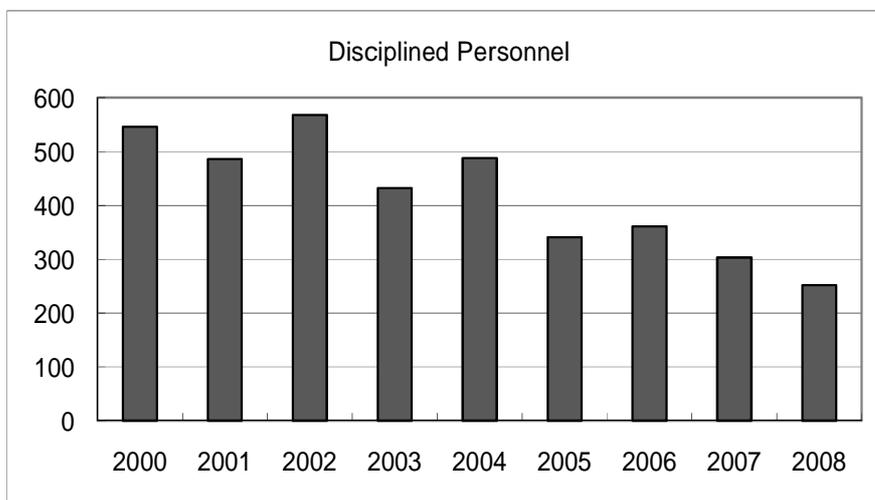
**Figure 1: Number of complaints received by the police**



Source: NPA(5)

NPSC established regulations for inspections including enhancement of both the framework and methods, such as the establishment of an inspection divisions in regional police bureaus. The frequency of inspecting the local police by the NPA was doubled in 2001 compared to 2000. As can be seen in Figure 2, the number of personnel that were disciplined according to the law governing public officials gradually declined.

**Figure 2: Number of disciplined personnel**



Source: NPA(6)

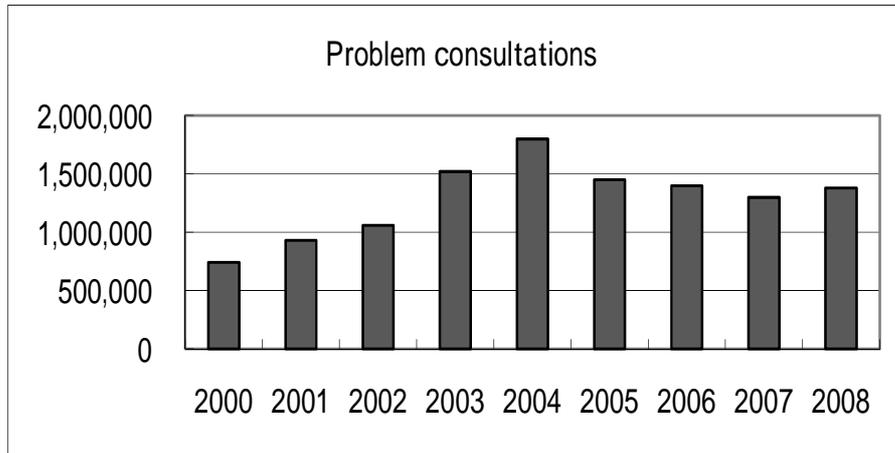
### ***Part 2 of the Charter***

Part 2 of the Charter deals with responding appropriately to citizens' needs and the easing of citizens' fear of crime.

In order to respond appropriately to citizens' needs, the police established a consultation system at every police headquarters and police station, which was more comprehensive

than former systems. As can be seen in Figure 3, the number of consultations more than doubled in five years.

**Figure 3: The number of problem consultations**

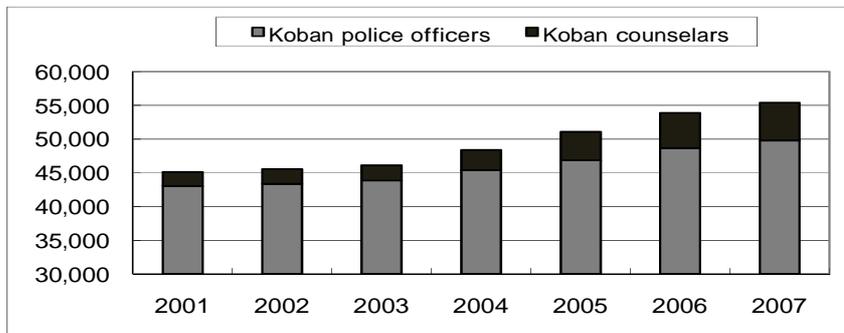


Source: NPA(7)

Just before the initiation of police reforms, Japan was faced with a sharp increase in crime that made citizens fear a further worsening of crime(Ono). In order to ease these fears, the police enhanced the *Koban* police activities that included community policing, as well as law enforcement against street crimes such as car theft. A *Koban* is a police box and the base of community policing, where several policemen are on duty, or go out to patrol, as well as a place to eat and sleep. *Chuzai* is a residential police box in which the police officer lives with the family and do similar work to officers in a *Koban*. In 2009, the number of *Koban* and *Chuzai* were 6216 and 6926. *Koban* and *Chuzai* system is a unique character of the Japanese police which has long tradition and is famous for its community friendly activities. (Bayley)

The outcome of the initiative to enhance *Koban* police activities was as follows.

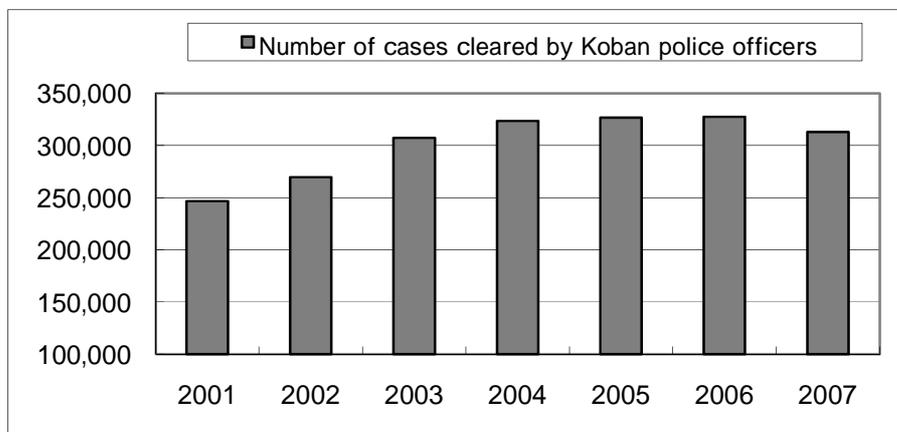
**Figure 4: Number of police personnel deployed at *Koban***



Source: NPA(8)

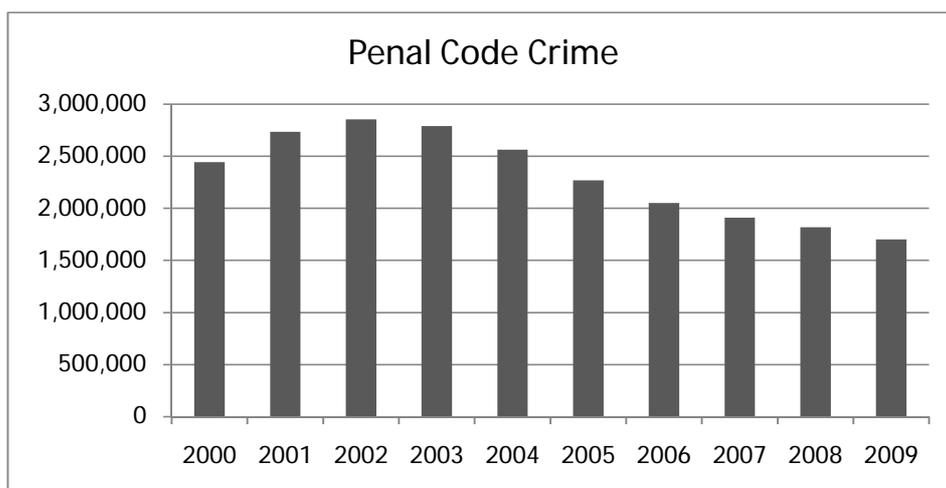
The number of police personnel deployed at *Koban*, which included police officers and *Koban* counselors increased from 45,160 in 2001 to 55,435 in 2007 (Figure 4). *Koban* counselors are civilian deployed at a *Koban* and are in charge of *Koban* works, with the exception of law enforcement. Along with the enhancement of *Koban* police activities, the number of crimes that were solved by community police officers, including *Koban* police officers, increased (Figure 5). Moreover, the number of reported penal code crimes decreased simultaneously (Figure 6).

**Figure 5: Number of crimes solved by community police officers**



Source:NPA(9)

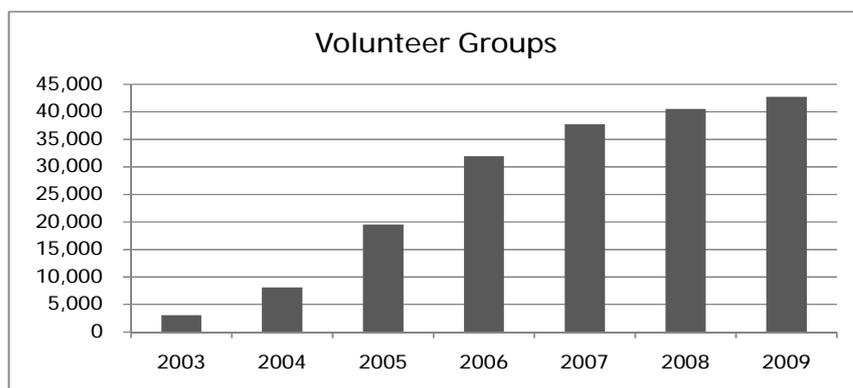
**Figure 6: Number of reported penal code crimes**



Source: NPA(10)

Enhancement of community policing resulted in a number of significant outcomes. Namely, the number of voluntary crime prevention groups increased from 3,056 in 2003 to 40,538 in 2008. In addition, people participating in these programs were 2.34 million in 2007 compared to 0.18 million in 2003 (Figure 7).

**Figure 7 : Volunteer groups involved in crime prevention (2003-2009)**



Source: NPA(11)

### ***Part 3 and 4 of the Charter***

Part 3 and the final part of the Charter reinforced the ability of the police to cope with new criminal phenomenon, such as the globalization of crime and expansion of cyber crime and to increase basic resources such as personnel and technology. The number of local police officers in 2009 is 254,305 which increased 23,549 from 230,756 in 2000.

### **Public confidence in the police**

According to a national poll on the police conducted in 2005 (12), public confidence rate in the police is 60.9% including those who somewhat trust in the police (45.0%). Reasons why they trust or don't trust in the police and practical activities which are deemed to improve public confidence in the police are as follows.

#### a) Reasons to trust in the police

- Positive responses to citizens' needs by the police (56.3%)
- Improvement of accountability of the police (49.0%)
- Improvement of transparency of the police (48.8%)
- New efforts to improve public safety (33.6%)
- Improvement of police officers' manner to citizens (20.6%)

#### b) Reasons not to trust in the police

- Police officers' misconducts (69.3%)

- Worsening public safety (55.2%)
- Poor transparency of the police (54.5%)
- Poor responses to citizens' various needs (35.0%)
- Insufficient responses to citizens' requirements (20.9%)
- c) Practical activities deemed to improve public confidence in the police
  - Reinforcement of patrols in the community (38.3%)
  - Development of problem consultation (21.9%)
  - Enhancement of measures on juvenile delinquency (18.5%)
  - Prompt response by community police officers at police boxes (17.3%)
  - Sincere responses to citizen's claims on police activities (15.6%)

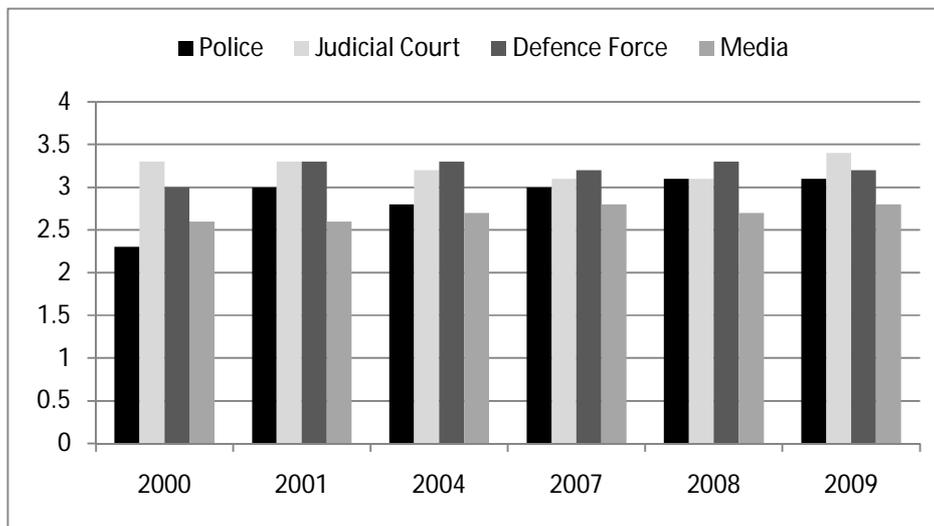
As the poll shows, major item of the reform programs such as enhancement of transparency and affirmative response to citizens contributed to improvement of citizens' confidence in the police, however, two third of those who do not trust in the police claim police officers' misconducts as a reason not to trust the police.

Considered the result of the poll, NPSC and NPA issued the guideline named "Continuous accomplishment of police reforms" in December 2005. The guideline includes five items such as fulfillment of the Charter, improvement of public safety, raise of awareness of police personnel, prevention of misconducts and repetitious reviews of police reforms. Along with the guideline, NPA and all local police forces continue to promote police reform programs to restore public confidence in the police and public safety that existed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Conclusion**

According to the poll about public confidence in public organizations, public confidence in the police has improved. (Figure 8) Other statistics also support the above result. First, the number of complaints against the police is in decline (Figure 1). After the police reform program began, the police introduced an intensive system of recording citizens' complaints and every complaint was carefully handled. Moreover the police were obliged to respond to individual complaints. This complaint recording system was effective in improving the quality of police activities, and has resulted in a decrease in complaints.

**Figure 8: Public confidence in public organizations**



Source: Central research Inc(13)

Second, as the poll in 2005 showed that the most desired police activity to improve public confidence was reinforcement of patrols in community, the increase in the number of community police officers and the enhancement of street activities including patrols has given the public and community members confidence. (Figure 4)

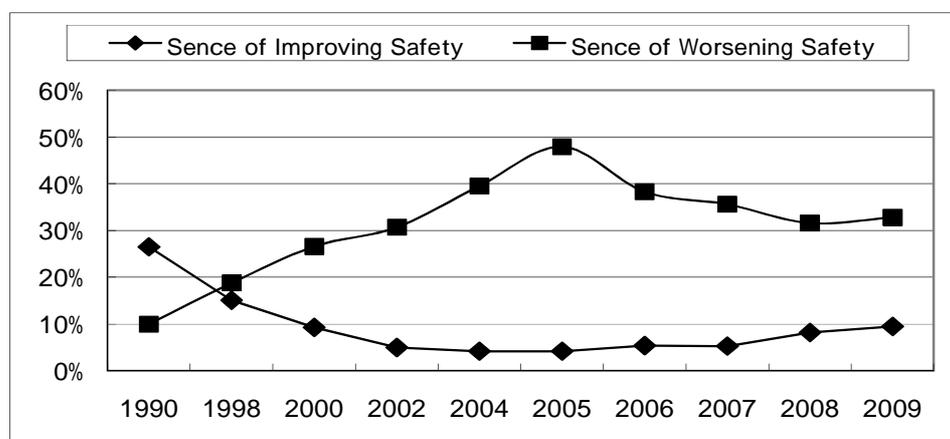
Third, the rapid increase in the number of community members involved in volunteer crime prevention activities has enhanced the intimate cooperation between the police and communities, through community safety information sharing and joint patrols. In 2009, there were over 2.4 million of these volunteers. (Figure 7)

Finally, according to a national poll in 2009(14), the number of people stating that they felt public safety improving has consecutively increased since 2005, however, the absolute rate of those who felt public safety improving is one third of the rate of those who felt public safety worsening in 2009 (Figure 9).

Findings above suggest that an important factor to improve public confidence in the police is development of police forces themselves rather than improvement of public safety and the most negative factor is misconducts of police personnel. Thus, efforts made by the Japanese police force in the last decade have restored public confidence in the police. However, a single serious scandal of police personnel could easily blow away decade long efforts.

It is obvious that the Japanese police forces should continue to make further efforts to maintain and improve public confidence.

**Figure 9: People's sense of safety which is improving or worsening (National Poll 1990-2009)**



Source: Cabinet Office(15)

#### Notes

- (1) Offences provided in the Penal Code and recorded by the police except injury or death caused by negligent driving of motor vehicle.
- (2) <http://www.npsc.go.jp/sasshin/gaiyou/index.html> (accessed 25 March 2010)
- (3) Urgent recommendation for police reform was presented to NPSC on 13 July 2000. <http://www.npsc.go.jp/sasshin/suggestion/index.html> (accessed 25 March 2010)
- (4) <http://www.npsc.go.jp/kaikaku/youkou.pdf> (accessed 25 March 2010)
- (5) <http://www.npa.go.jp/syokai/soumu3/h21kaikaku.pdf> (accessed 25 March 2010)
- (6) <http://www.npa.go.jp/syokai/soumu3/h21kaikaku.pdf> (accessed 25 March 2010)
- (7) <http://www.npa.go.jp/syokai/soumu3/h21kaikaku.pdf> (accessed 25 March 2010)
- (8) [http://www.npa.go.jp/seisaku\\_hyoka/soumu34/19sougou.pdf](http://www.npa.go.jp/seisaku_hyoka/soumu34/19sougou.pdf) (accessed 25 March 2010)
- (9) <http://www.npa.go.jp/syokai/soumu3/h21kaikaku.pdf> (accessed 25 March 2010)
- (10) <http://www.e-stat.go.jp/SG1/estat/List.do?bid=000001025087&cycode=0> (accessed 25 March 2010)
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- (12) “Monitor survey on police reforms” conducted by the Cabinet Office September 2003 [http://www8.cao.go.jp/monitor/kadai/1511\\_keisatu.html](http://www8.cao.go.jp/monitor/kadai/1511_keisatu.html) (accessed March 25 2010)
- (13) <http://www.crs.or.jp/pdf/trust09.pdf> (accessed 25 March 2010)
- (14) Annual national poll on people's social sense conducted by the cabinet office. <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/> (accessed 25 March 2010)
- (15) <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/index-sha.html> (accessed 25 March 2010)

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