The Right to Life and the Power to Use Force

Introduction

This section examines the right to life in relation to the use of force by police although, clearly, other issues such as abortion and euthanasia also arise in connection with this right.

Relevant aspects of the nature and scope of the right to life are discussed in the commentary, as are some police functions and responsibilities in relation to the right to life, the right to life of police officials, and the power to use force.

The text under the sub-heading ‘Essential Information for a Presentation’ sets out the global and regional treaty provisions on the right to life, some examples of comments and findings of treaty bodies, and provisions of non-treaty instruments on the right to life and on the use of force.

Key Points

The key points to this topic are:

- the right to life is to be respected;
- arbitrary deprivation of life is prohibited;
- police are to respect and enforce the law that protects the right to life;
- before force is used, peaceful means are to be attempted first;
- force is only to be used when strictly necessary and to the extent required for the performance of police duties;