

Graduation Speech by Barry Gilligan

Friday 3rd November 2006

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Chief Constable, Graduated Officers, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to be here on behalf of the Policing Board to welcome you, a group of people who have made the exceptional choice to serve the community through the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Tomorrow marks a very important milestone on the policing calendar – on that date (4th November) 5 years ago, the Police Service of Northern Ireland was established and a programme of unique change commenced. We all know that the history of policing has been at times difficult and when it comes to politics, there are still difficult issues to be resolved. However, what I know is that since 2001 policing has changed, changes designed to encourage greater levels of diversity and changes that are grounded in a

culture where equality for all is offered and where respect for cultural diversity and for individual dignity is the order of the day.

The Police Service has a moral, social and legal obligation to value individual and community views and to take these opinions into account when making decisions. Everyone, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation or race, expects, and is entitled to expect a safer society; with the delivery of an effective service from the police. And equally, police officers are entitled to the very same levels of respect and help from the community.

The PSNI has made huge strides in policing reform and has acquired a reputation throughout the world for setting the agenda in terms of good policing practice. That is evidenced by the number of international visitors and police officers from services around the world who come to Northern Ireland to find out first hand what has happened in policing here. In the last few weeks we have had visitors from Pakistan, * Kyrgyzstan, Israel, Latvia and Slovenia. Indeed we have also hosted a high powered delegation of politicians and police officers from Kazakhstan and, I can assure you they were not here to attend the current

screening of Borat. I suspect Chief Constable if they have come across Sacha Baron Cohen on your patch you might have had a major diplomatic incident on your hands.

Each and every one of you, along with your new policing colleagues, should be very proud to be part of policing here in Northern Ireland.

Today is a personal milestone for you all. It is a day you should always remember with great pride as it is a celebration of your ambition and achievement.

Over the past few months you will have faced challenges and new experiences. Your training has not been easy - I can imagine that there have been times when you may have thought you would not make it to this point; but with the expert guidance of your trainers you have made it and in doing so you have shown commitment, perseverance and dedication.

You have successfully completed your training and displayed the qualities necessary to become a police officer and although today's ceremony marks the end of your

training; this is just the beginning. Whilst you have learnt a lot over the past 40 weeks the learning process is far from over. Now is the chance to put your knowledge, training and instincts to the test but it is important to remember that it is only by continually striving to learn that you and your career will grow and develop.

In choosing to become police officers you have chosen to serve your community. A life dedicated to serving others is far from easy, and you will only succeed if you have the right attitude. You are fortunate in one sense however ... you have the opportunity of making a real difference a difference to people's lives through policing with the community.

Today you have taken a unique oath. You swore to faithfully discharge the duties of the office of Constable with fairness, integrity, diligence and impartiality, upholding fundamental human rights and according equal respect to all individuals and their traditions and beliefs, and to discharge all duties according to the law.

I have no doubt that as professional police officers you will always remember that oath, because it is only by upholding it that the Police Service will continue to gain the trust, confidence and support of the community. And that is fundamental to policing – trust and support.

5 years on from the establishment of the PSNI we are facing another historical shift in the policing landscape. The Agreement made between the political parties in Scotland last month has the potential to secure the support of Sinn Fein – until now the only party which has failed to endorse and support policing. It is absolutely vital that our police service is supported by the entire community so that it can best serve that community.

I hope that the discussions and agreements reached in Scotland and actions in the coming weeks will deliver full and unequivocal political support for policing, for everyone's benefit. With all parties on board and with the devolution of government kick started, we will move ever closer to a normal society.

None of us want to go backwards – we must move forward and look forward. Of course, there are those who don't want to move forward and the recent firebombing of businesses in Belfast is evidence of that. Despite that we have a society that is flourishing – you only have to look at the development across Northern Ireland to see that as a society we have changed for the better. On your behalf I do urge our political parties to secure from the Chancellor the funding needed for our New Police College and I am sure after 40 weeks here you will also subscribe to that.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is now the job of your sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, along with their colleagues in the Police Service to serve the best interests of our community.

If we are to achieve the Police Service, which we all deserve, and need, we must work hard at securing the trust and support of the whole community through interaction with them.

The emphasis on community for us as a Board, and for the Police Service itself, is hugely significant, as Community

Policing is a statutory core policing function that is now – and always will be - at the very heart of today's police service.

Never forget that you are part of this community and the wearing of your uniform changes nothing in that respect.

As PSNI's newest officers you are the future of the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

So as you begin your policing duties, remember that you will be judged by your actions. In all situations strive to give your best impartially, in fairness and with integrity I hope that each one of you has a long and successful career ahead of you and we may even have a future Chief Constable amongst us.

I suspect that after a session with Ian Paisley Jnr and Alex Attwood the Chief might say you are welcome to it!

I congratulate you all again on your achievement, and on behalf of the Policing Board wish you well for the future as you have the Board's best wishes and support at heart.

Thank you.