

## **Speaking Note for Brian Rea – Lessons from tackling extremism and terrorism within and across communities for several decades – Experience from Northern Ireland**

Good morning ladies and gentleman. It is a privilege to be here on behalf of the Northern Ireland Policing Board to talk to you about the lessons learned in tackling extremism and terrorism in Northern Ireland over the last 4 decades.

Here in Great Britain you have had your own experiences of terrorism, Brighton, Guildford, Warrington and Canary Wharf come to mind and more recently, the 7/7 bombings in London in 2005, when 52 innocent people were murdered, being still very much in peoples' memories.

In Northern Ireland, at the height of what is referred to as 'the troubles', terrorist attacks took place virtually on a daily basis. In the last 40 years 3717 people have died as a result of terrorism and this includes 302 police officers.

'The troubles' are now believed to be over and peace has been secured, but the threat of terrorism remains, coming mainly from dissident republican groups whose sole intent is to disrupt the peace by murdering police officers and by destroying the developing normality which society is now beginning to enjoy. Indeed the Chief Constable has reported that the level of threat is now at its highest since the end of the terrorist campaign of the last 40 years.

Terrorism plunged Northern Ireland back into the national and international news headlines on 7 March this year when dissident republicans shot dead two British Soldiers, Sappers Patrick Azimkar and Mark Quinsey and injured 4 civilians in an attack outside Massereene Army Barracks in Antrim. They were the first soldiers to be killed in Northern Ireland since 12 February 1997. Two days later on 9 March 2009 Constable Stephen Carroll was shot dead in Craigavon. He was the first member of the PSNI to be murdered.

Constable Frank O'Reilly, the last member of the RUC George Cross to be killed, died from his injuries on 6 October 1998. To all those Officers of the RUC GC and the PSNI who served our community and to those who made the supreme sacrifice, we owe an enormous debt of gratitude.

These recent murders sent shockwaves throughout the entire community bringing an unwelcome reminder of our troubled past. However, the universal condemnations from right across the community and the political spectrum demonstrated a unity and resolve that those who carried out these murders be hunted down and brought to justice for their evil deeds. It was particularly symbolic that Northern Ireland's First Minister, The Rt Hon Peter Robinson MP, MLA and Deputy First Minister, Martin McGuinness MP MLA stood side by side with the Chief Constable of the PSNI, Sir Hugh Orde to voice their condemnation of these terrible acts of violence.

Despite these recent terrorist attacks much has been achieved, particularly in the last decade, in tackling extremism and terrorism

in Northern Ireland. Critical to this has been political engagement and dialogue – but the changes effected to policing have played a major part in securing the peace process.

April 1998 marked a milestone, when through intense multi-party negotiations, the Belfast Agreement, commonly known as the Good Friday Agreement, was signed by the British and Irish Governments – and given the mandate of the people, in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland following the referendum in May 1998.

The Agreement recognised that policing was a central issue to the resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland and spoke of “*a new beginning to policing in Northern Ireland with a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole.*”

This ‘new beginning’ saw the establishment of an ‘Independent Commission on Policing’ chaired by Lord Patten and included members with local, national and international expertise. The Commission embarked on a process of consultation, discussion and fact finding which allowed the published report to be fully informed by public, political and policing perspectives.

The Patten Report translated the vision of the Good Friday Agreement into 175 recommendations to deliver some fundamental changes to policing structures, processes and practices. It provided a blueprint for modern policing worldwide which put ‘Policing with the Community’ at the heart of its work,

allowing the service, through renaming, rebranding, restructuring and review, to better meet community needs.

The Commission's proposal for a new structure of accountability was designed to ensure effective and democratically based oversight of policing and the creation of a close partnership between the police and local communities. Central to this was the establishment of the Northern Ireland Policing Board to replace the Police Authority, which did not have any democratic basis. The new Board would have a new clear statutory primary function to hold the Chief Constable and police service publicly to account. In that democratic oversight, Patten was very clear that there should not be political interference in policing; and that the Chief Constable should retain operational independence. Also endorsed by the Patten Report was the establishment of a Police Ombudsman's Office in Northern Ireland which would provide an independent, impartial police complaints system for the people and police.

The creation of the new Board was a signal of a new beginning for police accountability in Northern Ireland. To succeed as the new policing accountability body it was recognized that it must command respect and gain credibility from the community and have real power and responsibility.

The Board was established in November 2001 and has played a key role as an enabler for building stability and enabling the politics to develop. During this time it has had to deal with a number of complex, challenging and sensitive issues not least the police investigation into the Omagh bombing.

On 15 August 1998 – within 4 months of the Good Friday Agreement, the Omagh bomb exploded with the loss of 29 people and 2 unborn children and 220 people injured, some very seriously. It was the largest single loss of life in 30 years of the troubles.

A Police Ombudsman report, published in 2001, was highly critical of the police investigation into the bombing and in summary, the Board accepted the Ombudsman's findings, and put in place and implemented a series of recommendations that demonstrated it didn't just 'talk' about ensuring police accountability. In dealing with any terrorist threat, intelligence gathering and management of intelligence by the police is critical. The Board therefore commissioned former Chief Constable Sir Dan Crompton to conduct a review into intelligence sharing and handling within the PSNI. . The Board's review of the dissemination of intelligence between Special Branch and other parts of the police service has formed a major change in how the police shares intelligence and policies, processes and practices for the management of intelligence and these now comply with national standards.

Another key change has been the transfer of responsibility for National Security from the PSNI to MI5 in October 2007. In order to ensure that the accountability for how intelligence was protected, 5 key principles were inserted into protocols between the PSNI and the Security Services. These are:

1. All Security Service intelligence relating to terrorism in Northern Ireland will be visible to PSNI.
2. PSNI will be informed of all Security Service counter terrorist investigations and operations relating to Northern Ireland.
3. Security Service intelligence will be disseminated within PSNI according to the current PSNI dissemination policy, and using police procedures.
4. The great majority of National Security CHIS in Northern Ireland will continue to be run by PSNI officers under existing police handling protocols.
5. There will be no diminution of the PSNI's ability to comply with the Human Rights Act 1998 or the Policing Board's ability to monitor said compliance.

The Board has really pushed the boundaries of accountability in this sensitive area but it has been essential for building confidence in policing across communities, particularly those who historically did not engage on policing and lacked confidence in how the police obtained and used intelligence material.

Police have been working closely with the Security Services to deal with the dissident threat and with disrupting their activity. There has been a series of unsuccessful murder bids on PSNI officers in the last 18 months and in January a 300lb car bomb was abandoned near a primary school in the Co Down village of Castlewellan and another in County Fermanagh. There have also been threats to politicians, including the Deputy First Minister.

In an effort to disrupt the terrorist threat in Northern Ireland there has been a substantial increase in the use of Stop and Search powers. Statistics show that in the final 3 months of 2008 there was a 245% increase in the number of persons stopped and searched under Section 44 of the Terrorism Act compared to the same period in 2007. This is a concern for the Board and it has also been highlighted by Lord Carlile, who recently stated that he believed that Section 44 is used too much in England and Wales.

Whilst the Board recognises the need for the police to have access to and use of such powers to deal with the threat, there is a danger that communities could become further marginalised if these are used inappropriately. In that respect the Board has played an important part in ensuring oversight and accountability on police use of such powers – appointing Human Rights Advisors to scrutinise how the police ensures the rights of all – police and public alike – are protected.

There is also the financial cost of dealing with the threat in terms of Officers involved in surveillance work and back up for Officers delivering the front line service. In the next 2 years in Northern Ireland it is estimated that an additional £60m is required to enable the PSNI to deal effectively with the matter.

Getting Policing with the Community right is key to enabling the PSNI to effectively police the terrorist threat. In dealing with the current threat police must ensure that they do not further marginalise communities by reducing the provision of a community based service.

Whilst police officers are still mindful of the existing threat they continue to provide a community based service. For example, police officers out and about on 'bicycle patrol' would have been unthinkable 10 years ago – but right across Northern Ireland that is now a regular occurrence subject to a risk assessment having been carried out.

A key part of relationship building with communities has been through the establishment of District Policing Partnerships (DPPs). Designed to give local people a voice on the policing of their area, DPPs have played an important role, providing people throughout Northern Ireland with a platform from which to work alongside the police. As a Board, we have been working closely and building relationships with key groups and individuals to encourage co-operation with the police including those representing the growing Minority Ethnic and Language Groups, Older People, People with Disability, Women and Young people along with others listed in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act.

The Board is also committed to building its relationship with republican and loyalist communities so that their voices are heard in the most appropriate way. Traditionally these groups would not have engaged with the Board or policing and this work is essential for ensuring that future radicalisation of communities, and more specifically our young people, does not take place.

There is of course yet work to be done in loyalist and republican communities – but the commitment from policing to do this exists – as does the commitment from the Board to ensure that everyone

has access to a good service.

Very positive developments have just taken place with recent statements being made from the loyalist paramilitary groups, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), and the Red Hand Commando (RHC) confirming that they have decommissioned a significant quantity of their guns, explosives and other forms of weaponry. The Ulster Defence Association (UDA) has also confirmed it has started to decommission its arsenal and these statements have been verified by the IICD. This follows months of increasing pressure from the government, and talks amongst loyalist groups and political representatives.

This type of dialogue has played a big part in the peace process now in place in Northern Ireland. Long before the signing of the Good Friday Agreement talks were being held between the British and Irish Governments and paramilitary organisations in a bid to tackle terrorism and extremism in our part of the world.

In relation to Community Outreach, I am aware of the good work that is being done in England and Wales to combat extremism and radicalisation and Paul Morrison has just given a very informative presentation on what the government's agenda and expectations are in this area.

Interestingly the Greater Manchester Police Authority contacted the Policing Board's Community Engagement Branch seeking help in organising an information gathering visit to Northern Ireland for young people involved in an 18 month counter terrorist project, as

part of the Government's 'Preventing Violent Extremism' (PVE) agenda.

Recognising that a lot of excellent work has taken place in Belfast to address this serious issue, the GMPA wanted to give their Young People an opportunity to talk to both loyalists and republicans who had been actively involved in the conflict but are now working for, and positively contributing to their peace in their communities.

The group also had the opportunity to speak other young people about the pressure they faced to become actively involved in terrorism and the support they received which prevented them from going down this destructive road.

I understand the aim of the project is to produce a DVD/Teaching Resource pack which will be used in secondary schools as part of the citizenship curriculum and will be designed to explore religion and identity as well as why people become radicalised and the effect that terrorism has on community cohesion.

I think this is an excellent example of how the experience of dealing with the conflict in communities in Northern Ireland is being used to help others learn lessons in tackling sectarianism and extremism.

During my presentation I have concentrated on the Northern Ireland experience but we too are mindful of the global threat. In Northern Ireland we had the first Al Qaeda trial. In an interview in

2008 Chief Constable Sir Hugh Orde, President elect of the Association of Chief Police Officers expressed a view on the need for engagement and dialogue with terrorist leaders. This view was of course one shared by former Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the late Mo Mowlam MP.

History has now shown that engagement and dialogue provided the platform for peace to move forward in Northern Ireland and placed policing with the community at the centre of the police service. This enables the building of trusting relationships with communities to ensure and encourage their support to combat all types of crimes and to work with the police to help make their neighbourhoods safer.

The police have a key role to play and their organisation and structure should be such that the maximum policing support is available to communities and all other officers in supporting roles know this- whether they are dealing with counter terrorism work or community policing work. In doing so, there is an opportunity for policing to play its part in dealing with radicalisation towards terrorist aims. However policing is only a part of this issue, the larger and most significant part is to be played by the communities themselves.

Thank you