

Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Graduation speech by Brian Rea.

Friday 17th August 2007

Please note that delivery of this speech may have deviated slightly from the following text. For further information please contact the Board's Press and Public Relations Office.

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

It gives me great pleasure to be here today on behalf of the Northern Ireland Policing Board and also to welcome you, on behalf of the Board, to this graduation ceremony.

The Graduating Officers here today are a group of people who have made the exceptional career choice to serve our community by joining the Police Service of Northern Ireland. I also want, at this time, to pay tribute to you, the parents and friends of these new Officers for standing by them as they made their decision to serve us all as Police Officers.

This is a very special time to begin your career in policing.

Policing in Northern Ireland, as we all know, has been in the headlines for many years and has, at times, been extremely difficult and dangerous.

We, as citizens of this country, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to all those Officers of both the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross and the Police Service of Northern Ireland who have served us with courage and distinction over those difficult years that became known worldwide as “the troubles”.

Commenting on this the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair, in a letter to The Chief Constable on 8th May this year said in relation to the Devolution of powers at Stormont, “I want to pay tribute to the men and women of the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the RUC GC before them who played such a significant role in bringing us to this moment in history”.

He continued, “For years they did their duty, reaching out to individuals and neighbourhoods, often in the face of extreme violence, determined to deliver a service to everyone. It is that commitment which has now helped

convince all sections of the community in Northern Ireland to embrace and support policing and the rule of law”.

He also said, “It is important that as we move forward we don’t forget those experiences and sacrifices”.

The newly constituted Policing Board which sat for the first time in public in June past is now well under way with a programme of work.

This was the first time we had elected representatives from across the whole political spectrum sitting around the table making a contribution and I trust that now, we can continue to make policing in and with the community our priority.

As members of the community, not only will developments in policing affect us in our daily work, it will also affect us in our daily lives in a positive manner.

It is in everyone’s interests that our community is policed as effectively and efficiently as possible; and all those who have played a positive role in policing to date, to help achieve this, are to be commended.

As we all know, Northern Ireland has had a turbulent past and dealing with the past is not an issue that can be solved by the police alone. It is an issue for the wider community, for political parties and most importantly, for Government. Since its inception in 2001, the Policing Board and the Police Service of Northern Ireland have driven forward a significant programme of changes:

- Changes that have brought policing closer to the community and thankfully in many instances, though unfortunately not yet all, the community closer to policing;
- Changes which have provided a blueprint for policing worldwide;
- Changes which, through the work of the Policing Board, ensure a greater degree of accountability through strong independent oversight.

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, and I emphasise everyone, is entitled to expect to live in a peaceful and safe society, with the delivery of an effective and efficient service from the police. Equally, police officers are entitled to the very same levels of respect and help from the community.

The PSNI, as you will know, 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 forces around the world who come to Northern Ireland to find out first hand what has happened in policing here.

Many of these visitors – such as the delegations from Pakistan, Venezuela and the Basque region of Spain – have sought out and been briefed on the good practice that has been developed and applied here.

This international reputation was further evidenced by the International Policing Conference which took place at the end of February. The very fact that a range of distinguished speakers and international experts in policing addressed

and debated the future of policing at a Conference in Belfast speaks volumes.

In fact, as a direct result of the conference, representatives of the PSNI, the Policing Board and District Policing Partnerships were invited to address over 300 US Police Chiefs at a conference on the sub-theme;

'Policing in a Divided Society and Managing Public Order – Lessons Learnt from Northern Ireland'. We should all be very proud of the contribution our policing structures are making and the reputation the PSNI has developed around the world.

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.

On a personal level, today is a 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 of that ambition.

Over the past few months you will have faced challenges and new experiences. Your training has not been easy – it is not designed to be! It will have tested you, challenged you and helped you push yourself to the limit. There will 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 and in doing so you have shown commitment, perseverance and dedication.

You have successfully completed this phase of your training and displayed the qualities necessary to become a police officer. Today's ceremony marks the completion of your initial training. This is not the end, just the beginning. Whilst you have learnt a lot over the past 21 weeks the learning process is far from over.

It was Vidal Sassoon who was reported to have said, "The only time success comes before work is in the dictionary", so I say to you that you have worked to achieve your ambition of becoming a police officer and you have been successful. Congratulations.

Now you have the opportunity 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 but you are fortunate to have the opportunity to make a real 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, 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.

It is absolutely vital that our police service is supported by the entire community so that it can best serve that community. With all parties now involved and with the devolved government in place, we trust we will move ever closer to a normal society.

None of us wants to go backwards – we must move forward and look forward. We have a society that is flourishing, materially; – you only have to look out over Belfast from the car park and indeed over all of Northern Ireland, at the developments that are taking place to see that we have changed for the better.

Officers, it is now your job, along with your colleagues 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 and I am sure you will find that prospect an exciting one.

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, fairly and with integrity. I hope that each one of you has a long and successful career ahead of you.

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

Thank you.