

**Graduation speech by Professor Sir Desmond Rea**  
**Friday 22nd May 2009**

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 chosen to serve the community through the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

This ceremony is particularly poignant for me as it is my last speech to graduates as Chairman of the Northern Ireland Policing Board. I will be stepping down from this role at the end of the month, and will be handing the baton over to Barry Gilligan.

I took up the post of Chairman when the Board was first established in 2001 and huge strides have been made since then. During this time both the PSNI and the Board have driven forward on a unique programme of change. I was here just over 7 years ago at the first graduation ceremony for PSNI officers.

Since that time, there have been significant reforms to policing – making policing in Northern Ireland one of the most accountable services in the world; with a policing model that is recognised internationally as incorporating what is best in policing policy, process and 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. Only recently we have had delegations from both Turkey and Iraq visiting the Board headquarters to learn from our policing experiences.

It is also hugely significant that in Northern Ireland we now have complete political support for policing. We have a Board and DPPs that represent all the political parties and I am delighted that this came to pass during my Chairmanship.

We have seen radical and complex change in policing on a road to a normal future and the significant progress made, I believe, has laid a solid foundation for those that follow.

Representation of the service has changed and we are on track to achieve the targets set.

Although policing has progressed tremendously over the last decade, unfortunately the recent murders of Constable Carroll and the two soldiers at Massereene Barracks, Sappers Mark Quinsey and Patrick Azimkar, are a stark reminder that we are not yet a normal society. This attack sent shockwaves across our community bringing an unwelcome reminder of our troubled past. However, the condemnations from right across the community and political spectrum demonstrated unity and resolve that those who carried out these acts will not be allowed to undermine the peace process; or the progress that has been made in building a better future for all the people of Northern Ireland in recent times.

In the last recruitment campaign 10,000 people wanted to join policing. This is the highest number to date and shows that policing is an attractive career – and sends a powerful message that threats and intimidation are not working.

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. Each of you has made the exceptional choice to serve the community through the PSNI. So many people from so many different walks of life have passed through these doors over the last 7 years.

For you on a personal level, today is a milestone. 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 – 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 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. Although today's ceremony marks the end of your training;

this is just the beginning. Whilst you have learnt a lot over the past 21 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 but you are fortunate to have the opportunity of making 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 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.

Officers, it is now your job, along with your colleagues to serve the best interests of our community and deliver good policing.

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 PSNI itself, is hugely significant, as Community Policing is at the very heart of today's policing service and the work of all officers.

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 ahead of you is a challenging and rewarding career.

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.

You will no doubt be aware that there will be major changes to the top team over the next few months. Deputy Chief Constable, Paul Leighton will be retiring at the end of this month and Chief Constable, Sir Hugh Orde, will be moving on in September to take up the post of President of the Association of Chief Police Officers.

I believe we have been very fortunate as a Board to have had such a stable senior officer team over the last few years. We are also fortunate to retain a wealth of experience in the remaining senior officer team and the Board is moving to fill these appointments so there are plans now in place.

Deputy, as this is your last graduation ceremony I would also like to wish you well in the future on behalf of the Board; and thank you on behalf of the community for your contributions to policing over the last 29 years.

For me, it has been a true privilege and honour to have served as Chairman of the Policing Board since its inception in 2001, and I believe that the progress made over the last number of years in policing has been truly historic.

I would like to finish by congratulating 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.