

# **Graduation speech by Professor Sir Desmond Rea**

## **Friday 30<sup>th</sup> March 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.***

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 prudent choice to serve the community through the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

We have reached a critical moment in our political history, the results of which will have a significant impact on and for policing.

The Policing Board has consistently called for full political and community support for. I sincerely welcome the political settlement agreed earlier this week which, I hope, will ensure this is the case. The announcement by the DUP and Sinn Fein that they agree to work together in a

devolved government is a most welcome one. That Sinn Fein have now committed to participating fully in policing structures by signing up to the Policing Board and the District Policing Partnerships is also most welcome.

Yesterday Bono received an Honorary KBE from David Reddaway, British Ambassador to the Republic of Ireland. He commented "*I wasn't even going to have a bit of a do ... I was just going to slip it in very very quietly, but when I saw Big Ian sitting down there with Gerry Adams I just thought, well, this is the end of an era but the beginning of a much better one.*"

The Board now faces a new and welcome phase in its history – full political representation. This is a new era for us all – not just those of us who have a particular interest in policing but all of us as members of the community; not only will developments in policing affect our daily work, it will also affect our daily lives.

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.

Northern Ireland has had a turbulent past and as I have said before, 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. It is an issue that must be given the priority it deserves.

But huge strides have been made. Since its inception in 2001, the Board and the Police Service of Northern Ireland have driven forward on a significant programme of change.

- change designed to encompass all in our society;
- change grounded in a culture where equality of treatment for all is the norm, and;
- change 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

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, 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 services 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 Board and

DPPs have been invited to address over 300 US police Chiefs at an upcoming conference on the sub-theme 'Policing in a Divided Society and Managing Public Order – Lessons Learnt from Northern Ireland'.

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.

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.

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 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. 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.

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, 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 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.

In this new era, having moved away from conflict and the threat of conflict, we may remind ourselves of the true nature of patriotism which was described by the poet John Hewitt as “...*to do with keeping the country in good heart, the community ordered with justice and mercy; these will enlist loyalty and courage often, and sacrifice...*”

In another poem, ‘A Happy Boy’, he says:

*“This is the story of a happy boy,*

*born in this place while yet the century  
scarce offered hint we'd not by now enjoy  
a tolerant and just society  
through wise congruence of our people's choices;  
the path seemed clear, and only for a time  
would some, deflected by ancestral voices,  
posture and mouth in bigot pantomime."*

We should all be 'happy boys and girls' this week. To paraphrase another line in this poem "we must never walk the ways of the past 38 years".

Thank you.