

Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Graduation speech by Brian Rea.

Friday 2nd January 2009

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.

May I begin by wishing everyone a happy, peaceful and prosperous New Year, and, speaking of the New Year it would be remiss of me not to mention and congratulate those who have been honoured by Her Majesty The Queen in her recent New Year Honours.

I refer of course to Chief Superintendent Ken Henning MBE who received this honour for his many years of distinguished service in the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross and the PSNI. It is to people like you, Chief Superintendent Henning, and all your colleagues in the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross and the Police Service of Northern Ireland who served us with courage, distinction and in many cases great suffering and loss over

those years that became known worldwide as “the troubles,” that we owe an enormous debt of gratitude.

I must also mention and congratulate my Policing Board colleagues, Mrs Rosaleen Moore and Trevor Ringland who received an OBE and MBE respectively for their work on the Board and in the community.

I would also like to take this opportunity to convey my deepest sympathy to the families and loved ones, and you the colleagues, of the four officers who died tragically in Warrenpoint just before Christmas. The loss of their lives was a great tragedy for their families and loved ones and also the entire Police family, and the only positive thing to come out of all of this was the outpouring of grief and support from the entire community for the work, to which the officers were committed, which showed the esteem and respect much of our community has for our police service.

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, and in paying tribute to them I also want 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 an exciting start for you and I don't need to tell you that you face a challenging and stimulating career which is somewhat different from that you would have faced had you joined ten years ago. To illustrate something of that difference, I availed of the opportunity to see current policing practices and have been out on patrol with Officers on Halloween night seeing the "Home Safe" operation, and also more recently with officers in one of the new groups which will in the near future be known as the "Armed Response Vehicle" teams, and was very impressed with their level of commitment and professionalism. Other Board members have been with Neighbourhood patrols and have likewise been impressed with the service provided by Officers.

Since its inception in 2001, the Policing Board and the Police Service of Northern Ireland have introduced and managed a significant package of changes:

- Changes that have brought policing and the community closer;
- Changes which have been recognised as having provided a blueprint for policing worldwide; and,
- Changes which, through the work of the Policing Board and others, ensures a greater degree of accountability through strong independent oversight.

With regard to Policing with the Community I was delighted to see just this week that new Neighbourhood Policing teams are being formed in South and East Belfast to engage with communities in clearly defined areas, increasing community confidence through more visible policing, thereby reducing crime.

The devolution of policing and justice powers remains firmly on the agenda and I am confident that this matter will be dealt with in the not too distant future. This tells us that policing is important to people and that it is in everyone's interests that our community is policed as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Everyone, and I emphasise everyone, is entitled to expect to live in a peaceful and safe society, with the delivery of a first class 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 and just recently Chief Inspector Donaldson, your Head of Foundation Programmes, informed me that you are the first group to undertake the new revised training programme which, amongst other changes, incorporates a significant increase in practical policing assessments and that you have been introduced to early and late shift patterns, welcome to the real world!

This new programme, completed successfully, should result in new recruits being better trained to engage more effectively with the public upon their arrival in their posting and has an accreditation value with the University of Ulster of 120 points, the equivalent to one third of a degree course. This should enhance Policing for us all.

The Board continues to host a range 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. 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. You may have thought you wouldn't make it to the end, but with the expert guidance and support of your trainers you have succeeded and, in doing so you have shown commitment, perseverance and dedication – well done.

Today's ceremony marks the completion of your initial training. Whilst you have learnt a lot over the past 21 weeks the learning process is far from over.

This is just the beginning and it is a timely start for you to begin your new career in a new year. Now you have the opportunity to put your knowledge, and skills to the test. In choosing to become police officers you have chosen to serve your community. A life dedicated to serving others is far from easy – you get to see the very best and the very worst society has to offer. But you are fortunate to have the opportunity to make a real difference to people’s lives through policing with the community.

It is important that our whole community has access to good policing and it is important that we continue to engage with the community to ensure their views are being heard. The Policing Board is currently developing its Community Engagement Strategy which gives all groups in our society the opportunity to give their views on how their areas should be policed.

To achieve this, the Policing Board has set up what we call ‘reference’ groups made up of people who may traditionally not have engaged with policing. The Board has been working closely with and building relationships with these key groups and individuals over the past year to ensure that, in line with our statutory duty, we encourage members of

our community to co-operate with the police to both prevent and report crime; and that the needs of the community are identified when setting targets and developing policing policy.

Today you have sworn 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. It is also worthy of note that Senior Officers will deal both firmly and fairly with any departure from good conduct by Officers.

Always remember that you are part of this community and the fact that you wear a uniform doesn't change the fact that you are citizens too.

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 and I congratulate you all again on your achievement, and on behalf of the Policing Board, wish you well for the future.

Thank you.