

Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Graduation speech by Brian Rea.

Friday 13th March 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. This is a day of immense joy and happiness for you because you have all achieved your ambition to become Police Officers, but it is also a day that is marred by the tragic events of recent days. It is a day that will never be forgotten by people here in Northern Ireland, indeed by society right across the British Isles and beyond because it is the day that a highly esteemed and experienced colleague of yours, Constable Stephen Carroll, is being buried having been murdered by ruthless terrorists whilst going about his duty in Craigavon.

This attack, along with the murder of the two young soldiers in Antrim last Saturday night, has shocked everyone bringing an unwelcome reminder of our troubled past. We offer our deepest sympathy to Constable Carroll's widow and family and to the families of the two soldiers.

The universal condemnations from right across the community and the political spectrum demonstrate a unity and resolve that those who carried out these murders be hunted down and brought to justice for their evil deeds.

The response from the vast majority of people has sent out a clear message that those responsible for this murder do not have the support of anyone with a grain of integrity who wish to see peace continue to grow and develop and political stability to be fully established.

Every day, police officers deal with the issues that concern us all. It is a challenging job and the threat from those who have nothing to offer our society will neither deter nor take away from the excellent work they are doing.

You have made the exceptional career choice to serve us. That is a brave and honourable choice and whilst the tragedies of the past week have been dreadful, they do serve to remind us of how far we have come from the days when violence and murder were daily occurrences.

Policing in a modern society needs to be what is sometimes called “fit for purpose” and the PSNI and the Policing Board, have introduced and managed a number of important developments in both training and policing practices that have brought policing and the community closer together and these have gained recognition as a blueprint for policing worldwide. To you Deputy Chief Constable and all your staff I offer my congratulations.

Presently the devolution of policing and justice powers remains an issue to be dealt with but I am confident that this is such an important matter that it will be resolved in the not too distant future. This tells us that policing is extremely important to people and that it is in everyone’s interests that our community is policed as effectively and efficiently as possible and that our local politicians, who can be held accountable by the electorate, shoulder their responsibilities accordingly.

Everyone, and I emphasise everyone, is entitled to live in a peaceful and safe society, be treated with dignity and respect and be assured 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. Your training thus far and that which you will receive on an ongoing basis will enable you to provide that first class policing service.

Over the past few months you will have faced new challenges and new experiences. Your training has not been easy, 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.

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 continues reaching out with its Community Engagement Strategy which gives all groups in our society the opportunity to present their views on how they should be policed and the issues which they believe need to be addressed.

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 by upholding it that the Police Service will continue to gain the trust, confidence and support of the people it serves.

As the PSNI's newest officers you are the future of policing here in Northern Ireland and no doubt you will find that exciting. You will, I am sure, take note of the example of the long and distinguished career of Chief Superintendent Ken Henning MBE, Head of the Training College, who has completed more than 30 years service in the Royal Ulster Constabulary George Cross and the PSNI and for whom this will be the final graduation before he retires at the end of this month.

It is to you, Chief Superintendent Henning, and 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 for the many years that became known worldwide as “the troubles,” that we owe an enormous debt of gratitude. We respect you, applaud you and wish you a long and happy retirement.

But back to you, the beginners. As you commence 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.