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## THE TASK OF THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON POLICING

**“... a new beginning to policing in Northern Ireland with a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole.”**

The Agreement of April 1998.

**1.1** The Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland was set up as part of the Agreement reached in Belfast on 10 April 1998. In a preamble to that Agreement, the participants set out its main purposes:

“1. We believe that the Agreement we have negotiated offers a truly historic opportunity for a new beginning.

2. The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.

3. We are committed to partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between these islands.

4. We reaffirm our total and absolute commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences on political issues, and our opposition to any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose, whether in regard to this Agreement or otherwise.

5. We acknowledge the substantial differences between our continuing, and equally legitimate, political aspirations. However, we will endeavour to strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement within the framework of democratic and agreed arrangements. We pledge that we will, in good faith, work to ensure the success of each and every one of the arrangements to be established under this Agreement.”

The Agreement was put to separate referendums in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on 21 May 1998. 71% of those who voted in Northern Ireland supported the Agreement, and 95% in the Republic of Ireland. The political life of Northern Ireland since then has been dominated by the attempt to implement the Agreement, re-establishing “democratic and peaceful means” as the sole way of resolving “differences on political issues”. After decades of violence within the community, its leaders have tried to settle their arguments in what Abraham Lincoln called “a spirit of mutual compromise”. Implementation of the Agreement would give the politics of Northern Ireland to the people of Northern Ireland; and in the same way it should also give the policing of Northern Ireland to the people of Northern Ireland.

**1.2** We did our work against the background of the efforts of the past 15 months to translate the words of the Agreement into a power-sharing executive, answerable to an elected Northern Ireland Assembly, representing a community at peace with itself and committed to the democratic process. Northern Ireland’s politicians have travelled part of the way to this objective, but as we were

writing our report, the talks aimed at completing the process stalled. Is our report, therefore, an irrelevant or even provocative distraction from the task of reassembling the political pieces scattered by the disagreements of July? We think not. First, the issue of policing is at the heart of many of the problems that politicians have been unable to resolve in Northern Ireland, hence the fact that we were asked to consider this question ourselves. As part of any final agreement to establish the customary institutions of democracy in Northern Ireland in a peaceful, civil society, the deeply controversial matters that we address will need to be confronted and settled. It may in some respects be better or more helpful that, with the publication of our proposals, they will now have to be debated openly by those who are looked to by the community to agree the way forward. Secondly, most of our recommendations make sense regardless of the broader political context. They touch on the efficiency, acceptability and accountability of the police service in Northern Ireland in any imaginable circumstances. Thirdly, we were appointed in the atmosphere of hope and generosity of spirit that attended the Referendum vote on the Agreement. It seems to us that, sooner or later, if peace and democracy in Northern Ireland are to be secured, something like the approach reflected in the Agreement will have to prevail. So one day – and we hope that day will come sooner rather than later – the issues raised in our report will be an integral part of the agenda for a Northern Ireland that runs most of its own affairs in a spirit of reconciliation and good faith. As a Commission that is both totally independent and mindful of the importance to its credibility of demonstrating this independence, we publish these proposals in the strong belief that they offer the people of Northern Ireland the chance of establishing an effective and widely accepted police service for which they are themselves responsible. We are not parties to the present political discussions, but we hope that those who are will see this report as a contribution to the restoration of peace and local democratic arrangements in Northern Ireland.

**1.3** As we have just argued, the role of Northern Ireland's police service, and general questions of policing policy and practice, are central to many of the issues mentioned in the preamble to the Agreement and to many of the more difficult problems affecting its implementation. The reasons for this are primarily political – failure in the past to find an acceptable democratic basis for the governance of Northern Ireland that accommodated the rights and aspirations of both the unionist and nationalist communities. Policing has been contentious, victim and participant in past tragedies, precisely because the polity itself has been contentious. The consent required right across the community in any liberal democracy for effective policing has been absent. In contested space, the role of those charged with keeping the peace has itself been contested. The roots of the problem go back to the very foundation of the state. Since 1922 and the establishment of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (in part drawn from the ranks of the old Royal Irish Constabulary), the composition of the police has been disproportionately Protestant and Unionist. This has become much more pronounced during the last 30 violent years for reasons that we shall examine later. Both in the past, when the police were subject to political control by the Unionist government at Stormont, and more recently in the period of direct rule from Westminster, they have been identified by one section of the population not primarily as upholders of the law but as defenders of the state, and the nature of the state itself has remained the central issue of political argument. This identification of police and state is contrary to policing practice in the rest of the United Kingdom. It has left the police in an unenviable position, lamented by many police officers. In one political language they are the custodians of nationhood. In its rhetorical opposite they are the symbols of oppression. Policing therefore goes right to the heart of the sense of security and identity of both communities and, because of the differences between them, this seriously hampers the effectiveness of the police service in Northern Ireland.

- 1.4** These problems have been exacerbated by three decades of conflict which have inevitably aggravated the divisions within Northern Ireland society. Violence has increased intolerance, mutual distrust between people of different traditions and disrespect for each other's convictions and human rights. It has distorted both the RUC's approach to policing and the community's attitude to the policing of its streets and neighbourhoods. Policing cannot be fully effective when the police have to operate from fortified stations in armoured vehicles, and when police officers dare not tell their children what they do for a living for fear of attack from extremists from both sides. At one of our public meetings, a local pastor reminded those gathered in his church hall, many of whom had criticised the police for not living within the neighbourhoods where they worked, that several police families had been burned out of their homes on local streets.
- 1.5** The problems faced by the police service in Northern Ireland are in a sense unique to a divided society, with its own particular history and culture. But many are similar to those confronting police services in democratic societies elsewhere. We have studied policing in other countries and, while we can discover no model that can simply be applied to Northern Ireland, we can find plenty of examples of police services wrestling with the same sort of challenges. How can the police be properly accountable to the community they serve if their composition in terms of ethnicity, religion and gender is vastly dissimilar to that of their society? How can professional police officers best adapt to a world in which their own efforts are only a part of the overall policing of a modern society? How can the police ensure that their practices recognise and uphold the human dignity and the rights of individual citizens while providing them with effective protection from wrongdoing? How should human rights standards and obligations be reflected in the delivery of policing on the streets? How can police services reorient their approach so that, in the words of the founder of first Irish and then British policing, Sir Robert Peel, their main object becomes once again the prevention of crime rather than the detection and punishment of offenders? How can professional policing become a genuine partnership for peace on the streets with those who live, work and walk on those streets? These questions affect recruitment, training, management, structures, accountability, funding, attitude and style. We see them reflected in recent legislative changes in Britain and in the debate there about the relationship between the police and the ethnic minorities. We have discussed them with police professionals in Europe, North America and elsewhere. There is no perfect model for us, no example of a country that, to quote one European police officer, "has yet finalised the total transformation from force to service". The commitment to a fresh start gives Northern Ireland the opportunity to take best practice from elsewhere and to lead the way in overcoming some of the toughest challenges of modern policing.
- 1.6** Our broad approach to the task given us reflects a number of factors. First, we were not set up as a committee of inquiry with all the legal powers to call for papers and to interrogate witnesses. We were not charged with a quasi-legal investigation of the past. If there is a case for such inquiries, it is up to government to appoint them, not for us to rewrite our terms of reference. But we have naturally had to inform ourselves about past practice in order to propose future conduct. Second, we have not seen our role as that of political arbiters. In both written and oral evidence to us, it was argued that we should separate policing from the usual partisan agenda where it became part of a zero sum game. Policing problems, we were told frequently, could not be resolved simply on the basis of either nationalist or unionist demands. We certainly do not believe that it is possible to assemble the best set of proposals for the police service that Northern Ireland deserves by searching out the middle point between opposing political views. We were urged by those who

made submissions to us to show imagination, common sense and generosity of spirit with the changes we proposed. We hope we will be judged to have done that.

**1.7** We did not approach our task bereft of values. No one who believes in an open society and the rule of law can be neutral as between democracy and violence, the protection of human rights and their abuse, the recognition of the dignity of every individual and its denial. But it was equally clear to us that we would never be able to fashion a fresh start out of a series of judgments about who was culpable for each of the tragedies and mistakes of the past. Northern Ireland voted overwhelmingly in 1998 to turn its back on the politics of revenge and retaliation. As the episcopal father of the poet Louis Macneice once advised his diocese, “It would be well to remember and to forget, to remember the good, the things that were chivalrous and considerate and merciful, and to forget the story of old feuds, old animosities, old triumphs, old humiliations ... ‘Forget the things that are behind that you may be the better able to put all your strength into the tasks of today and tomorrow’”<sup>1</sup>. So we have seen our approach as restorative, not retributive – restorative of the values of liberty, the rule of law and mutual respect, values that have sometimes been casualties of the years of violence. By means of a fresh start for policing, our aim is to help ensure that past tragedies are not repeated in the future. There is plainly a close relationship between the success of the overall agreement and changes in policing. If the fresh start for politics founders, it will be more difficult to make changes in policing; and if changes in policing are resisted (or mishandled) then there could be a serious impact on the attempt to rebuild democratic politics in Northern Ireland.

**1.8** The Agreement argues that it “provides the opportunity for a new beginning to policing in Northern Ireland with a police service capable of attracting and sustaining support from the community as a whole”. That has been our starting point but it does not provide a precise way for measuring the scope for, and the pace of change. “The opportunity for a new beginning” covers a multitude of possible outcomes, in terms of levels of violence and degrees of consensual, democratic politics. We cannot naively assume the best, and leave the community unprotected if the worst happens. Nor can we calibrate with the precision of watchmakers changes in policing and changes in the threat from terrorism or ordinary crime. Trying to double-track police change – for example, in force levels, composition and equipment – to Northern Ireland’s progress towards the policing environment of Strathclyde or the Thames Valley would be a fruitless exercise. What we have therefore sought to do is to suggest what we believe would be the best arrangements for policing in Northern Ireland in any likely environment, indicating where those changes should be accomplished rapidly over a given time span, regardless of other considerations, and where change will need to be judged by those in positions of responsibility according to circumstances on the ground. For example, in the first category, we argue for a measured but ambitious programme of change in the composition of the police regardless of other factors. On the other hand, there are changes – like the eventual disarming of the police for routine purposes and the devolution of responsibility for policing and justice issues – that will need to be considered in the light of other developments. Our commitment to goals in the second category is not diluted by the recognition that we cannot be judge and jury now of the precise timing of their implementation. The government and others responsible should not take our realism as an excuse for foot-dragging and we make proposals for monitoring change in a publicly credible way. However, the changes we propose cannot all be introduced at once – nor at some

<sup>1</sup> Sermon in St Thomas’ Church, Belfast, quoted in the *Belfast Telegraph*, 8 July 1935

unspecified hour in the future. That is not the real world, and it is not an ideal world. Ideal worlds are less disruptive. Several of the submissions we received have made a case for gradual change. “Proposed changes”, argued the Church of Ireland in their submission, “... need to be evolutionary rather than revolutionary”. In fact some of the changes we propose in the report can and should be introduced quickly. But others must be gradual. The Pat Finucane Centre argued that, “(the) creation of a new policing service will be an evolutionary process taking several years... It would be unrealistic and absurd to suggest that any new police service would come into being overnight...”. There is a general recognition that, whatever the arguments about its pace, change is necessary. “When we see, as we’re seeing, a significant change in the environment in which we operate”, argued the Chief Constable, Sir Ronnie Flanagan early in 1999, “then of course there should be a significant change in the way we go about our business”<sup>2</sup>. The “significant change in the environment” encompasses political development, improvements in security, and transitions in social habits and attitudes. These factors are all related. Adjustments in policing must also hang together. The “significant change” in policing should not be a cluster of unconnected adjustments in policy that can be bolted or soldered onto the organisation that already exists. The changes that we propose are extensive and they fit together like the pieces in a jigsaw puzzle. We believe that we have met the argument of the former Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights that “holistic change of a fundamental nature is required”.

**1.9** After calling for a new beginning to policing in Northern Ireland, the Agreement goes on to set out its ingredients:

“The participants [in the negotiations] believe it essential that policing structures and arrangements are such that the police service is professional, effective and efficient, fair and impartial, free from partisan political control; accountable, both under the law for its actions and to the community it serves; representative of the society it polices, and operates within a coherent and cooperative criminal justice system, which conforms with human rights norms. The participants also believe that these structures and arrangements must be capable of maintaining law and order including responding effectively to crime and to any terrorist threat and to public order problems. A police service which cannot do so will fail to win public confidence and acceptance. They believe that any such structures and arrangements should be capable of delivering a policing service, in constructive and inclusive partnerships with the community at all levels, and with the maximum delegation of authority and responsibility, consistent with the foregoing principles. These arrangements should be based on principles of protection of human rights and professional integrity and should be unambiguously accepted and actively supported by the entire community”.

The Agreement specifies our detailed terms of reference (recorded in Annex 1 of this report). These seek to direct our work towards implementing the principles set out in the paragraph above.

**1.10** These principles have provided the benchmark against which we have tested all our proposals. We have not tried to balance what may be politically acceptable to this group against what is reckoned to be acceptable to that. As one submission to us argued, any proposals “should not be calculated simply as a sop” to a particular interest group. The Methodist Church argued that “the sole criterion should be the improvement of the policing service for the benefit of the whole community”. Again and again, the tests we have applied have been these:

<sup>2</sup> Sir Ronnie Flanagan, interview with Sir David Frost on BBC “Breakfast with Frost”, 31 January 1999

1. Does this proposal promote effective and efficient policing?
2. Will it deliver fair and impartial policing, free from partisan control?
3. Does it provide for accountability, both to the law and to the community?
4. Will it make the police more representative of the society they serve?
5. Does it protect and vindicate the human rights and human dignity of all?

These tests are a matter of judgment; they do not constitute a precise science. Naturally, such judgments are conditioned by the politics of the Agreement. Someone who rejected the Agreement might well deny the validity of these tests, indeed of the whole of our work; he or she would certainly be likely to come to different conclusions from us in many, though probably not all instances. But the only way we can work, and would choose to work, is on the basis of trying to apply tests and reach judgments that would seem reasonable to anyone conscientiously committed to the establishment of peace and effective policing. Since over 70 per cent of those who voted in the Northern Ireland referendum – whatever the hazards they feared and the doubts they have subsequently expressed – supported the Agreement, this approach appears to be the most realistic as well as the most hopeful. It is not possible for us to argue that everything we advocate would make good policing sense without a political agreement. None of us can know what level of violence would exist in those circumstances and how much partisan distrust would inhibit change. Some of our recommendations are linked to the specific constitutional arrangements that should arise from the Agreement of 1998. Nevertheless, we believe that the main thrust of our proposals can be justified by looking at the challenge confronting policing in any modern society. What we propose is in the mainstream of the debate about future policing requirements in democratic and economically developed communities everywhere.

**1.11** Our proposals have to be paid for, by those who are actually policed in Northern Ireland and by their fellow taxpayers in other parts of the United Kingdom. They have a right to expect us to ensure that the changes we suggest are cost-effective and that their taxes are not wasted. But we did not believe it right to add to our other tests that of cheapness. Our primary aim is not to cut costs but to raise the quality and effectiveness of policing. There may well in time be a peace dividend in Northern Ireland; the costs of security will fall and the benefits of peace fructify. We should not put that desirable outcome at risk by claiming it prematurely. First, where there is a danger that spending reductions may threaten the return of peace and the building of partnership and trust, we believe it right to err on the side of caution. Second, this clearly affects decisions about the size of the policing establishment; these calculations need to take account not only of security considerations but also of the desired rate of change in the composition of the police service. Third, it is incumbent on the state to show generosity to those who have policed in very difficult conditions but whose service may no longer be required. Circumstance has given Northern Ireland the opportunity to create a new police service that can draw on best practice from policing elsewhere. It would be a tragedy to miss this chance for want of sufficient investment. We are wholly persuaded that sensible spending now for constructive purposes can help to avoid heavier spending later to deal with the costs of a return of violence. Better to defer the so-called peace dividend for taxpayers in return for a more assured peace dividend later.

**1.12** In oral and written submissions to us, and in our informal discussions in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, the word that has occurred over and over again is accountability – police accountability

to the law and to the community. The rule of law binds together a healthy, democratic society; under the rule of law we are all of us both governors and governed – we help to make the laws that govern us equally. In such a society, the police are in a uniquely privileged position. It is their task to uphold the rule of law, exercising their independent professional judgment in doing so. That independence is rightly prized as a defence against the politicisation of policing and the manipulation of the police for private ends. The police do not serve the state, or any interest group; they serve the people by upholding the law that protects the rights and liberties of every individual citizen. But the proper assertion of independence should not imply the denial of accountability. From the very beginnings of the organised policing of society, this issue of accountability has been debated: in the Roman writer Juvenal’s famous question, “Sed quis custodiet ipsos custodes?” – “but who will police the police?”. The debate about accountability has a particular resonance in Northern Ireland.

**1.13** Accountability places limitations on the power of the police, but it should also give that power legitimacy and ensure its effective use in the service of the community. The first limitation, as Lord Scarman pointed out in his report in 1981 on the Brixton disorders, is of course the law itself – “The police officer must act within the law: abuse of power by a police officer, if it is allowed to occur with impunity, is a staging post to the police state”<sup>3</sup>. Where the powers available to the police have been particularly extensive, because of terrorist violence, the opportunity for abuse has been extensive too. The establishment of a credible system for dealing with complaints against the police is one part of the response to this problem.

**1.14** Another limitation on police autonomy is also increasingly recognised as the key to more effective policing. Lord Scarman noted that the constitutional control of accountability meant that, while the police should exercise independent judgment, they were also the servants of the community and could not effectively enforce their judgment without the support of that community. We strongly agree with this, and we disagree with Lord Denning’s view that the police officer “is not a servant of anyone, save of the law itself”<sup>4</sup>; accountability to the law is vital but accountability is a much wider concept than that. It raises questions both of structure – the institutional relationship between the police and government both at central and local levels – and the style and purpose of policing. It involves partnerships – “constructive and inclusive partnerships with the community at all levels”, in the words of the Agreement. And it involves transparency – the police being open and informative about their work and amenable to scrutiny. In his 1995 book about the RUC, Ronald Weitzer spoke of the need for police to have a “receptive organizational culture, one that is infused with a spirit of accountability”<sup>5</sup>.

**1.15** The structural question has been particularly difficult in Northern Ireland because of the truncated nature of local democracy and because of the political imperative understandably accorded to security issues. In the absence of local government with real responsibility, an appointed Police Authority has operated as surrogate for an accountability mechanism. While it may be true, as the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee argued, that the Police Authority has taken “a very restricted view of what duties it does have”<sup>6</sup>, it is unfair to blame

<sup>3</sup> “The Brixton Disorders – Report of an Inquiry”, The Rt. Hon. The Lord Scarman, HMSO, London 1981

<sup>4</sup> R v Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis, ex parte Blackburn [1968] 2QB 118

<sup>5</sup> Weitzer, R., “Policing under Fire”, State University of New York Press, Albany 1995

<sup>6</sup> “Composition, Recruitment and Training of the RUC”, Report of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, House of Commons, The Stationery Office, London 8 July 1998

it for all that has gone wrong. The lack of any democratic basis for the Authority has reduced its credibility; this has been further weakened by the refusal of most nationalist politicians to identify themselves with it because of their broader criticisms of policing; and on top of this, neither the government nor some past chief constables have given much impression of taking it seriously. The Committee was right to argue that changing the governance of the police was crucial to creating greater public confidence in them. We make proposals for a new structure of accountability which should ensure effective and democratically based oversight of policing and the creation of a close partnership between the police and every local community. We believe these arrangements will work best when responsibility for policing is devolved to Northern Ireland, and it seems to us that the logic of the Agreement argues for this to happen sooner rather than later. If it is true in other areas of public life that people are more likely to act responsibly when they are given responsibility, then we see little or no justification for excluding policing from this approach. But first, of course, an executive needs to be established on the basis of the sort of understanding encapsulated in the Agreement.

**1.16** Accountability involves creating a real partnership between the police and the community – government agencies, non-governmental organisations, families, citizens; a partnership based on openness and understanding; a partnership in which policing reflects and responds to the community’s needs. This is the best way of securing what the very first Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police, Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne, defined in 1829 as “the primary object of an efficient police”, namely the prevention of crime. They went on to argue –

“Every member of the force must remember that his (sic) duty is to protect and help members of the public, no less than to apprehend guilty persons. Consequently, whilst prompt to prevent crime and arrest criminals, he must look upon himself as the servant and guardian of the general public and treat all law abiding citizens, irrespective of their social position, with unfailing patience, courtesy and good humour.”

In their report on “Policing Plural Communities” in 1996/97, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary said that the police could not hope to prevail against crime “without the support of the communities they serve”. In their submission to us the Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland made a similar point – “effective policing can only take place where the consent of the community has been secured”. All true, but one can and should go further: it is not so much that the police need support and consent, but rather that policing is a matter for the whole community, not something that the community leaves to the police to do. Policing should be a collective community responsibility: a partnership for community safety. This sort of policing is more difficult than policing the community. It requires an end to “us” and “them” concepts of policing. If it is to work, it has to become the core function of a police service, not the work of a specialised command or a separate cadre of police officers. It has implications for the structure of the police, which should become more decentralised; for the management style, which should become more open and delegated; and for the manner of policing down to beat level, which should become more orientated towards active problem-solving and crime prevention, rather than more traditional, reactive enforcement. In their submission, the Presbyterian Church in Ireland argued that “the ethos [of the police] should be one of service to the whole community... it should permeate the whole organisation and should be experienced as such by the whole community”.

**1.17** We are convinced that this is the best way to provide “a new beginning” for policing in Northern

<sup>7</sup> “Winning the Race: Policing Plural Communities”, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, October 1997

Ireland. The obvious challenges to adopting this approach provide the most persuasive reasons for choosing it. Organised terrorism and threats to public order have limited what the police have been able to do and have felt themselves able to do in partnership with the community. Even after the Agreement is – we hope – fully implemented, those factors will continue for some time to cast a shadow over policing. But it is our strong view that peace and decency on the streets and in the villages of Northern Ireland can only be achieved on those streets and in those villages. It will take time and it will not be easy. It is the right way, the only way, to make certain that the rule of law, not the rule of the gun and the baseball bat, prevails in every community. A sustained commitment to community policing, the creation of a police service not a police force, has implications for every aspect of the work of the police and we make appropriate recommendations on issues like training, public order and management later in this report.

**1.18** But real community policing is impossible if the composition of the police service bears little relationship to the composition of the community as a whole. Anita Hazenberg, a Dutch police officer directing the “Police and Human Rights” programme at the Council of Europe, has claimed that “in no country in this world is the composition of the police representative of its society”. While the problem is not unique to Northern Ireland, it is particularly acute here. The Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland spoke to us about “a deep legacy of distrust...” between the Nationalist community and the RUC, and they noted “the deep sense of possession of the police force by the Unionist community”. Others noted that the nationalist and unionist communities had different experiences of policing. The Pat Finucane Centre argued that “nationalist experience of the RUC is... a million miles from unionist experience of the same force”. But as Professor McGarry and Professor O’Leary have argued, “effective policing requires strong links between the police and the people they serve, ... and it is impossible to create them if the police are overwhelmingly from one community, so more Catholics, especially nationalist Catholics, are needed on efficiency grounds”<sup>8</sup>. The Presbyterians also argued to us that “every effort should be made to make a career in the police an opportunity as sought after and as obtainable amongst Catholic/Nationalists as among Protestant/Unionists”. This cannot be a matter of token gestures. The Equal Opportunities Commission made the point to us that it is not enough to have a few recruits from another gender (or religious background) entering the service; as long as they are less than 15 per cent they will never be able to have a substantial influence on the culture. The proposals that are made on composition of the police service are an essential part of meeting the five tests that we outlined in paragraph 1.10.

**1.19** During the course of our public meetings, the Commission heard many harrowing stories from individuals about their experiences of violence in the last 30 years. We were not established as a truth and reconciliation commission, yet we found ourselves inevitably hearing the sort of stories that such a commission would be told. This underlined for us the importance of the work we were asked to do: a new beginning for policing in Northern Ireland will both contribute to and result from the return of hope, healing and peace. There will doubtless be a period of debate and discussion on our proposals while broader political agreement on the way forward for Northern Ireland is also sought. We trust that the outcome will be extensive recognition in Northern Ireland that the conclusions of this report offer the best chance of creating an effective police service which, in the words of the Agreement “can enjoy widespread support from, and is seen as an integral part of, the community as a whole”.

<sup>8</sup> McGarry, J., and O’Leary, B., “Policing Northern Ireland: Proposals for a New Start”, Blackstaff Press, Belfast 1999