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EMBARGO: 3.30 PM

SPEECH BY SECRETARY OF STATE, RT HON DOUGLAS HURD, MP, AT
RUC PASSING OUT PARADE

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt Hon Douglas Hurd, MP, was the Inspecting Officer at a Passing Out parade today at the RUC Training Centre, Enniskillen. Mr Hurd also presented awards to the leading recruits.

In his address, the Secretary of State said:

"It is a particular pleasure to me that my first public speaking engagement in Northern Ireland should be at an RUC passing out parade. As Secretary of State, I intend to do all I can to show my support for the work of the RUC, and the other members of the security forces. Every citizen of the United Kingdom is deeply in their debt.

"I have been impressed by the sense of service and commitment shown by the young officers who took part in today's passing-out parade. I am sure it is a matter of great pride for all those relatives and friends who have shared with me the privilege of being here today. Many congratulations to you all.

"The officers who have passed out today represent part of the extra 500 officers whose recruitment was authorised earlier this year by my predecessor, Mr Prior. Those 500 will include 250 regular and 250 full-time reserve. Some of you, I know, have yourselves served in the RUC Reserve. Others of you were young recruits when you came to the training centre last July.

"In the course of your training, you will have been given much sound advice and many words of wisdom. So some of the points I am about to make will, I am sure, have been made already by others. But the basic truths about police work are well worth repeating, especially on an occasion such as this.

"Every police officer carries a great responsibility. Your job will be rewarding, but it will also make great demands of you. You will be expected to show many qualities - tact, patience, courage, understanding and many others - in circumstances which are often difficult and sometimes dangerous.

"The police service is continually faced with new demands, and with new challenges to its integrity and impartiality. Nowhere is the task of upholding the rule of law more challenging than in Northern Ireland. Respect for law and order is a cornerstone of a free society, and it will be your difficult task to act on behalf of all sections of the community in defence of the free society which exists in Northern Ireland. The key to your success will lie in striving at all times to earn the respect of the community which you have been appointed to serve.

"Even in the difficult circumstances of Northern Ireland today, and perhaps especially in such circumstances, the objective to be kept always in view must be policing by co-operation with the community. I can clearly understand how difficult this will sometimes be. But I suspect you will find that policing by co-operation is not just a platitude wished on you by politicians, but a necessary condition of your success as police officers.

"Certainly, the Government has a role to play in developing the framework within which you act as police officers. Not only are we responsible for the good government of Northern Ireland in all its many aspects. We have also a particular duty to provide the security forces with the manpower, money and equipment which they need to do their job.

"Since 1970, the strength of the RUC has more than trebled. That in turn has placed a great strain on the buildings which the force uses. At many police stations, temporary buildings have often been the only short-term means of providing the necessary accommodation. But with the

Government's full support, the Police Authority has given much time and effort to providing new permanent buildings. Much has been done and much also remains to be done. I know that the Police Authority and the Chief Constable will not be satisfied until overcrowding and other major shortcomings in police accommodation have been overcome. Already, in recent years, new or extended police stations have been provided at many places including Antrim, Dungannon, Limavady, Lurgan, Newtownabbey, Newtownards, North Belfast and Strandtown.

"Another duty of Government is to ensure that the law is framed in such a way as to enable the police to defend society effectively and to bring criminals to justice. But the law also has another function: to safeguard those rights and freedoms under the law which are the essence of our democratic society. It is not always easy to satisfy everyone that a proper balance is being struck in these two aspects of the law. My experience at the Home Office, working on the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill now before Parliament, gave me a clear illustration of how difficult it can be to strike the right balance.

"During the course of the next year or so, I will wish to consider whether and how changes might be made, either in the ordinary criminal law or in the emergency powers available to the security forces in Northern Ireland. I shall be doing this in the light of the proposed changes for England and Wales contained in the Police and Criminal Evidence Bill, and in the light of the late Sir George Baker's review of the Emergency Provisions Act.

"So the process of change to which I have already referred is by no means at an end. When we consider the place of the police force in a changing society, it is not surprising that the RUC itself has undergone many changes over the years. There have been changes in procedures, structure, training and communications. Throughout all the vicissitudes, the RUC has sought to fulfil its role of serving the whole community impartially under the law. The leadership given by the Commanding Officers has been a key factor in all of this, and it gives me particular pleasure to see the Chief Constable here today. I am happy to have this opportunity to pay tribute to the great qualities of leadership which he has shown, and continues to show. He has my full confidence, indeed the full confidence of all those who take part in the government of the Province.

"All law-abiding people in Northern Ireland owe a great debt of gratitude to the RUC - and to other members of the security forces - for the dedication which they have shown and the sacrifices which they have made. The reputation of the RUC stands very high, both in Northern Ireland and throughout the United Kingdom. With other members of the security forces, it has achieved an unmistakable improvement in the security situation. That improvement certainly owes much to the increasing effectiveness of the measures taken against terrorism. It is often the least obvious measures which are the most successful. But the improved results of recent years are also due, I think, in no small measure to the increasing support which the police enjoy among the public at large. It is that support which has enabled us to pursue our policy of police primacy. It is my intention that that policy should be maintained and, where possible, developed. We must do all we can to increase the public perception of the Royal Ulster Constabulary as the true servants of all sections of the community. I have every confidence that you who are now about to play your part in the maintenance of law and order will honourably uphold that tradition.

"I should like to wish each and every one of you all possible success in your new careers. It will not be plain sailing. But you are joining one of the most professional police forces in the world today. Your task, like mine, is to serve the community, and to enable all the people of Northern Ireland to live and work together in peace. My good wishes to you all."