

An Chartlann Náisiúnta
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Mr Cr. Phn Passed on to the Taoiseach (6)

14.4.2000

SIR RONNIE FLANAGAN SPEAKING AT HILLSBOROUGH - 12 APRIL 2000-04-12

Your Majesty Royal Highness, guests, ladies and Gentlemen, it is impossible for me to find words to adequately convey the deep sense of pride and honour that I feel that officers past and present feel, that civilian colleagues and families and friends feel today. Your most gracious decision Your Majesty, and that of his Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh to come to Northern Ireland to present the George Cross to the Royal Ulster Constabulary is so greatly appreciated. Each one of us recognises the single honour that has been bestowed upon our most prode organisation. This is truly a momentous day. On behalf therefore of the wider policing family in the Province, I express my and our deepest gratitude. The significance that this is only the second time in its illustrious history that the George Cross has been awarded for an act of collective bravery is not lost on the men and women of the RUC. Just as was the case with the people of Malta in the dark days of 1942, it is humbling for us to see acknowledged in this most meaningful and public way the sacrifice and dedication to duty of the RUC. This award is of course not only to officers and civilian colleagues currently serving but to all those who have gone before since our creation in 1922. We, down through those years, simply could not have provided the policing service we did, we could not today provide the policing service we do without the support of policing colleagues in the Republic of Ireland, throughout the United Kingdom and indeed across the world, I am delighted that those colleagues are represented today. I think it is most fitting that the citation also mentions families and friends who have shared difficulties and dangers down through the years. The significance is not lost on the wider public whose support we so dearly cherish. I salute all those individuals, organisations, agencies and community groups without whose partnership we simply could not function. I want too to pay a special tribute to our military colleagues. Their dedication to duty and selfless courage have been offered so freely on behalf of all of the people of Northern Ireland. I have said that this is a momentous day for the Royal Ulster Constabulary and all of those present and indeed those who cannot be present share tremendous pride in the award of the George Cross. But there is not one of us who is not reflecting today on the tremendous sacrifice of the past. And those officers whose lives were so cruelly taken, of those officers who have been so grievously injured in the course of their duty. They and their families are today and constantly in our thoughts. Our pride in our memories will be forever with each and every one of us. But as a policing service we now look forward to a new and exciting future. A future we seek to build on the traditions in the past and the wonderful foundations laid by officers in the past and being laid by officers currently serving. This most gracious award is not only therefore a recognition of outstanding past achievement but the most tremendous incentive to us all now and in the years to come to draw on that past experience. To work in partnership with all of the people of Northern Ireland, to build a better future for us all and for generations to come.

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QUEEN'S SPEECH

I am pleased to be here today on this historic occasion, to present the award of the George Cross to the Royal Ulster Constabulary. This award is an exceptional recognition of the outstanding contribution made by the RUC to peace in Northern Ireland. It is a singular acknowledgement of the gallantry and courage shown and in all too many cases, the ultimate sacrifice paid by the members of the Constabulary during the past 30 years of terrorism and civil unrest.

I want to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all members of the RUC – the regular officers of all ranks, the members of the full-time and part-time Reserve, and former members who have served so loyally over the years. I salute your courage and your sense of duty. I admire your determination to maintain the rule of law, and to provide a police service for all the people during some of the most difficult times in the history of this Province.

A terrible price has been paid for this brave and resolute stand.

We remember today the 302 officers who have lost their lives, and also the many thousands who have been injured, some very seriously, at the hands of terrorists. Their sacrifice must never be forgotten.

I also pay tribute to the part played by other, often unsung heroes. It has simply not been possible for officers' families to enjoy normal lives. Today's award recognises the very special contribution made by these families. They have been a constant source of support, and have had to endure fear, intimidation and, worst of all, the pain of bereavement.

The award also recognises the important part played by civilian colleagues of RUC officers and the Police Authority. And, of course, the RUC have for many years worked alongside the armed forces, who themselves have shown that same character of duty and courage we are recognising today.

Due in no small measure to the bravery and dedication over the years of the men and women of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, Northern Ireland is now a much more peaceful and stable place in which to live. I hope and trust that the enmities of the past can be laid to rest in a way that fully recognises the sacrifices made. I know it is clear to you, as it is to me, that there will be challenges to face in the period of change that lies ahead. As you face these challenges, I am confident that you will maintain that sense of duty and dedication which is being honoured today. I know also that you will have my support and prayers in the future as the dogged and relentless search for lasting peace continues.

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