

Address to the International Council of Police Representative Associations

*Minister Darren Hughes' address to the ICPRA conference,
Wellington 20th October, 2008*

Thank you very much for inviting me to open this special conference, which is being held for the first time in New Zealand.

I want to pass on the regrets of our Prime Minister Helen Clark, who would have enjoyed being with you today, but, in case our visitors from overseas are unaware, a general election is being held in New Zealand in less than three weeks, and Helen has other commitments she has to fulfil today. I also want to pass on the apologies of my close friend and colleague, Annette King, the Minister of Police.

I hope I am an adequate replacement, however, and the good news in relation to the Prime Minister is that she will be able to attend the 73rd annual conference of the New Zealand Police Association next week.

The Prime Minister is a strong supporter of New Zealand Police, and I am sure she will have plenty to say on current law and order issues when she speaks to association members at that conference.

On behalf of Annette, I want to acknowledge New Zealand Police Association President Greg O'Connor with whom my colleague has developed an excellent working relationship over the past two years.

Annette and Greg have been on two overseas fact-finding missions together - once to the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, and once to Denmark and the UK - and she has appreciated the wide range of contacts Greg has developed in other police jurisdictions.

New Zealand can be proud that it plays such a prominent role in the International Council of Police Representative Associations, with Greg currently serving his term as Chair on the rotational basis that ICPRA has adopted.

New Zealand can be proud also that its turn to host this bi-annual conference has come about so soon in the organisation's young history of just 12 years. Having read the conference agenda, I am sure visitors from overseas will find plenty of interest in the innovative and modern approaches New Zealand is taking toward policing.

Part of being a modern and innovative police organisation is, of course, being a full and participating member of the international policing fraternity.

I believe New Zealand is doing just that - in a number of ways, including contributing to international policing missions in countries like Afghanistan, the Solomons, Timor Leste

and Tonga; in taking a lively interest in international policing developments; and in playing its part in organisations like ICPRA.

Your organisation may be relatively young, but already it has developed the broadest geographical coverage of any police representative organisation of its kind ---- and I am told it may soon become larger still by affiliating with other organisations such as the International Labour Organisation.

I understand you have representatives at this conference from police associations and unions representing the interests of police officers from around the globe, including the United Kingdom and Ireland, Europe, North America and South Africa, as well as Australasia and the Pacific.

I want to welcome you all to New Zealand, particularly Peter Ibsen from Denmark. Peter was one of the several helpful Danish police staff who made Annette's visit to Denmark so useful earlier this year. I will speak more about Annette's visits to Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom in a few minutes.

Altogether, I am told, there are representatives from 11 organisations here today, including EURO COP, which in itself represents 26 countries. That means, in effect, that about 35 separate jurisdictions are represented - and those 35 jurisdictions share some 1.5 million police officers between them.

In some ways, I guess, that figure puts the New Zealand police organisation - with about 11,000 staff - in perspective, but the fact that we have 2,500 more staff than we did when our government entered office nine years ago shows the importance we place on building police capability in this country.

The theme of your conference is advancing the ICPRA - taking stock of the international environment in which you engage, and looking particularly at opportunities there may be to develop linkages with other jurisdictions.

I wish you well. The challenges for police in the modern world grow larger every day. No longer is policing just about catching crooks. Increased demands from governments and the international community, emerging crime types, and changes in technology are just a few of the challenges.

The impact of technological change and globalisation is across policing, particularly in the area of contemporary trans-national organised crime and terrorist groups.

New Zealand is keen to play its part alongside its policing friends in countering these growing international challenges.

Organised crime has no boundaries and exploits national and international points of weakness. Trans-national networks link gangs, business people, families, political and religious movements and terrorist activity.

That is one reason New Zealand now has nine police liaison officers in overseas postings --- in Sydney and Canberra, Jakarta (two staff), Bangkok, Beijing, London, Washington and Suva. Police organisations cannot afford to operate in isolation.

It is now a fact that countries face common threats from transnational criminals - especially those associated with drug trafficking, document fraud, extortion and kidnapping. Close international co-operation between law enforcement agencies is one fundamental element of effectively countering such threats.

NZ Police is seeking to understand better how such criminals operate, particularly their ability to form syndicates comprised of criminals from a number of countries in the region, and to apply sophisticated business principles to crime.

It is our hope that enhanced co-operation, such as that embraced by your organisation, will help us develop new and better strategies to counter these criminals effectively.

New Zealand also believes in playing its part in international policing missions, particularly those sponsored by the United Nations.

Annette has been privileged to watch New Zealand Police at work in the Solomons and Tonga as part of international policing missions.

The Government consistently receives excellent feedback from foreign governments, from other police jurisdictions and from people on the ground about the high regard with which New Zealand police staff working overseas are held. The comments are always genuinely positive about the commitment of New Zealand police staff, and emphasise the way in which they have the ability to work closely and openly with the local communities.

I have nothing but respect for the work New Zealand Police do on such missions, and I know from talking to staff who have served overseas how much they value the experience.

As I said earlier, Annette also learned a great deal from her visits to United Kingdom, Denmark and Netherlands policing jurisdictions. Our jurisdictions may face different problems, but there is nevertheless a common thread to policing in all our jurisdictions, whether in Copenhagen or Glasgow, Rotterdam or London, Surrey or South Auckland.

Much of that common thread has to do with community safety and neighbourhood reassurance. There is clearly now general recognition that community or neighbourhood policing offers not only a powerful sense of comfort to neighbourhoods, but also has a positive effect on public perceptions of police, and, also extremely importantly, offers a useful intelligence-gathering tool for police.

Everybody here no doubt knows that London's former Metropolitan Commissioner Sir Ian Blair believes the intelligence flow from communities was vital in thwarting a second wave of bomb attacks in London in 2005.

If community or neighbourhood policing can bring about that sort of outcome in terms of countering terrorism, then there is no end to its potential for bringing to light other crime. I am sure you will hear much more about New Zealand's approach to community policing later in your programme.

Other areas of common interest between New Zealand and these jurisdictions include the increased sophistication of organised crime and gang activity, commercial fraud, the need to recruit ethnic minorities into the police, and support for victims of crime.

I am sure Police Commissioner Howard Broad will talk about some of those issues later during your conference, particularly the establishment of the Organised and Financial Crime Agency of New Zealand, but I want to comment on New Zealand's approach to two other issues of mutual interest - workforce modernisation and non-lethal weaponry for police.

Annette was delighted to have ministerial responsibility for the successful passage, in the closing days of Parliament, for the Policing Act 2008, which replaced 50-year-old legislation in this country, and on her behalf, I want to publicly commend New Zealand Police for the thoroughness of their public consultative process and the thoughtful approach they have taken to modern policing issues and processes.

This Act better protects the independence of Police on operational matters; it recognises the need for international policing efforts in an age of transnational crime and regional instability; and, at a very practical level, it strengthens several frontline police powers and practices.

I want to commend the New Zealand Police Association for its input into the new Act. In fact, the association's input was considered so important that an association representative became a formal member of the project team. I believe that this arrangement may well prove to be a model for other jurisdictions in terms of how best to incorporate the views of employees in important decision-making.

I am confident that the Act places New Zealand policing at the forefront of workforce modernisation, and I am sure that you will enjoy Superintendent Hamish McCardle's presentation on the Act tomorrow.

The final issue I want to comment on is the decision by New Zealand Police, under Commissioner Howard Broad, to arm trained police staff with a new less-than-lethal weapon option in the form of Tasers. The decision will maintain the tradition of having a routinely unarmed police service, a value I believe is still closely held by New Zealanders.

We know that police jurisdictions take contrasting attitudes toward the routine arming of police, but I believe it is absolutely essential, in a New Zealand context anyway, that police do not get ahead of public sentiment in this respect.

There was some criticism of Commissioner Broad for seeking the views of political parties before making his decision on the Taser, but I consider his action to be totally appropriate.

There was never any question that the Commissioner would make up his own mind, but it is important that police listen to what people in their communities are saying. There is no guarantee, of course, that political parties always accurately reflect public opinion, but they are certainly a useful conduit for receiving and passing on the views of the people they represent.

I have no doubt about two things - the first is that policing would become more difficult if police did not have public support, if they did not police by consent; and the second, specifically relating to this issue, is that the public has accepted the decision Commissioner Broad has made.

Thank you again very much for inviting me to open your conference today, and I wish you the very best for the rest of your meeting.

Darren Hughes