

Police Federation of England and Wales' Centenary Conference - Home Secretary Priti Patel

John, thank you for your very warm welcome and thank you all for inviting me here today.

It is a real honour to be here with you.

And, in all honesty, it is nice to have a break from the wet and windy campaign trail and to spend time with you all.

As Home Secretary, it has been my pleasure to work with and to listen to John as the voice of the Federation.

And to hear at first-hand how you all, proudly, act as our country's Thin Blue Line.

Protecting our freedoms each and every day.

Ensuring we can live our lives as we choose.

Giving us the security we need to live free from fear.

Over the past few months, I have met with and listened to some of the most remarkable officers from across the country.

Some of whom I'm sure are in this hall today.

Spending time with you has been the most humbling aspect of my work as Home Secretary so far.

Your courage, dedication and public service has been truly moving.

I'm hugely honoured that my job is to help you do all of yours.

And that's why I am here today.

Because the Police Federation sits right at the heart of that, supporting you, as frontline officers, to keep our communities and country safe.

And I know that sense of duty is what drives you in everything that you do.

From physically taking on violent and ruthless criminals...to breaking heart wrenching and tragic news to bereaved families.

From handling some of the most devastating and atrocious tragedies to bringing safety and security to the communities in which we all live.

You are always there.

And for that, I salute you all.

Each and every one of us will have had our lives at some stage touched by the police.

When my parents first came to this country, they set up a shop.

Like all shopkeepers, they worked long hours... it was seven days a week.

Juggling a busy shop, both customers and staff...and unfortunately having to deal with crime from time to time.

Theft, abuse and burglary... these are not small matters.

And neither is the impact these crimes have upon the very people, the communities and the businesses who are subject to them.

I will never forget the support shown back then to my family by the police, as well as the local community.

Which is why, if we are to truly strengthen our communities, we must strengthen the support we give to our police as a nation.

And that is why this Centenary is a remarkable achievement.

Back in 1919, an inquiry under Lord Desborough led to the creation of the Police Federation by an Act of Parliament.

The same Act made the Home Secretary responsible for policing.

Over the past century, Home Secretaries have rightly joined your conference and listened to the challenges that you have posed to them directly.

In fact, John has been clear with me a number of times on the need to strengthen the relationship between us both.

I hope thus far, we have been able to demonstrate a joint commitment to doing just that.

That joint commitment is based upon a shared understanding that the Federation has represented the need of the rank and file over the past 100 years

Being absolutely instrumental in providing you with the protection and support you need to keep yourselves and the public safe.

And that shared understanding has given you a voice as you have selflessly put your lives on the line.

Each day, I ask myself, do people truly understand how unpredictable, dangerous and challenging the work of a police officer is?

Because, I worry, the people posing the threats you face are ever more callous.

The job we ask you to do is ever more complex and dangerous.

That is why I want to make it clear that I am on your side and I that I've got your back.

I recognise the bravery, commitment and sacrifices of both serving and former officers.

And I stand with you.

The brave men and women of our police.

And, together, we stand against the criminals.

The evil gang leaders, the drug barons, the thugs and the terrorists who seek to do all of us harm.

I say that proudly and without apology.

If there has been any doubt about that commitment to you as police men and women in the past – let me say now that will never be the case as long as I am Home Secretary and Boris Johnson is Prime Minister.

Earlier this year, along with many of you, I attended a funeral.

The funeral of a 28-year-old newlywed, senselessly and brutally killed in the line of duty.

A hero, whose life was cruelly snatched away, just weeks after his wedding, as he responded to a call for help.

Struck down for simply doing his job....

...Sacrificing himself to help others.

PC Andrew Harper put his life on the line to keep all of us safe.

And for that, he paid the ultimate price.

We will remember him.

In the days that followed that tragic event, your determination to come together.

To carry on and continue the relentless pursuit of justice was inspiring.

Your safety, your dedication and your loyalty are what I think of every single day.

Because nothing is more important to me than supporting you and ensuring that you have the protection you truly deserve.

And of course, the Federation plays a key role in this.

Whether it is engaging with Government...supporting families...or helping officers who have been assaulted, the organisation continues to work tirelessly to represent the interests of the rank and file.

Now, I know John will be saying to himself right now, “*Home Secretary – put these warm words into action!*”!

And John, you will be pleased to know that I agree with you!

He is persistent, and we all owe him thanks...

But, it is, of course, completely right that he is holding myself and the Government to account on our commitments.

That is exactly why I’ve worked so closely with John since being appointed.

And, I have to say, it’s been one of the highlights of my time as Home Secretary so far....

As the first National Chair who has been directly elected through a ballot of all members, he embodies how this organisation has adapted over the past 100 years to ensure it truly reflects the needs of those it represents.

I know he speaks for every single hard-working officer – and I hope that I have that honour too.

One of my first acts as Home Secretary was to begin the recruitment of 20,000 additional police officers.

And going forward, I will ensure that the leadership you give across our communities inspires and motivates the next generation to follow in your footsteps into a lifelong career in one of the finest public services.

The opportunities open to all officers in policing, including career development and training featured heavily, when along with the Prime Minister, I opened the first meeting of the National Policing Board.

This marked the start of a new partnership between the police and government.

Although, I was taken to task and rightly so, in my first meeting with John, when he insisted that the Police Federation should have a seat on the new National Policing Board.

I gave a clear commitment to making that change.

And, at the second meeting of the Board, the Police Federation, the largest police staff association, were rightly represented.

Promise kept.

Almost immediately after the recruitment campaign had launched, my attention turned to ensuring that all police officers have the tools they need to protect themselves and the public...

A message that I heard loud and clear from officers across the country....

Having shared in my first few weeks as Home Secretary, the dark moments felt across the policing family, witnessing attack after attack on police officers, I made a commitment to place policing security and welfare at the forefront of my policing priorities.

This also includes the training and equipping of officers with the kit they need to protect themselves, and importantly, give them the backing needed to use it.

That is why I announced a £10 million ringfenced Home Office fund to equip more of you with Tasers....

...It is the job of the Home Secretary to give you the protection you need as well as empower you to do your jobs.

Which is what I have done.

Another promise kept.

And as a testament to how humbled I have been by the officers I have met and the experiences they have been brave enough to share with me, I have been clear about the establishment of the Police Covenant.

A pledge to do more as a nation to help those who serve our country.

To recognise the bravery, the commitment and the sacrifices of serving and former officers.

I have accelerated that work and subsequently announced that I would introduce a Police Protection Bill to put it on a statutory footing.

And it is right that the Police Protection Bill will also give legal protection to all of you when driving to pursue a subject or responding to an emergency.

Sending a clear message to careless and dangerous criminals that they cannot escape arrest simply by driving recklessly.

It will also bring the essential change in legislation required to enable Special Constables to join the Police Federation - recognising that they put themselves in the same situations, with the same risks, as regular officers.

Promise kept.

But, there's no complacency here.

And I will not stop there.

In the last year alone, there were over 30,000 assaults on police officers in England and Wales – up 18 per cent.

As many as one in four serving officers were attacked.

And, as crime becomes more violent, the assaults are increasingly brutal.

Many of you will have been hurt.

Many of you will have seen friends and colleagues subject to abuse in the line of duty.

It takes extraordinary courage to keep running to the front line to face that threat, day in day out.

But, for you, your sense of duty comes first.

You refuse to be intimidated, and I refuse to leave you exposed.

I promised your National Chair, that I would ensure anyone who assaults a police officer receives a sentence that truly fits the crime.

That is why, today I have announced that one of the first acts of the next Conservative Government will be to consult on doubling the maximum sentence for assaulting police officers and other emergency service workers...

Taking the maximum sentence from 12 to 24 months in prison.

We are going to make the thugs who attack police officers think twice.

And, I will deliver on that promise...

...So, yes John, I may use warm words.

But I sincerely hope that my action speaks for itself.

Because that is what I mean when I say that I will back the police.

As long as I am Home Secretary, I will always give you the backing you need to keep yourselves and the public safe.

So that, together, we can stand for the forces of right, and against the forces of evil.

We can stand up for the law-abiding majority, not the criminal minority.

And we can stand for those who seek to do right by themselves, their families and their communities.

So, let me close by remarks by saying this.

Policing is a job like no other.

Every day, in every town or city, police officers perform thousands acts of bravery, humanity and compassion.

You are the ones society expects to run towards danger, to protect the vulnerable and to keep us safe.

I look forward to working with you all to put policing, and the safety and security of the public, at the heart of government, to ensure that you continue to be an inspirational force for good.

Thank you for your service, and thank you for your time.