

Minister, Commissioner, Members of the Oireachtas, ladies and gentlemen.

6 years ago another young guard and I attended the 3<sup>rd</sup> European Gay Police Association Symposium in Stockholm in Sweden.

We arrived in a beautiful city, to a conference that changed the way we thought about being a gay in the police.

In Stockholm we met police officers from all over Europe.

Police officers who worked in police forces

- with LGBT employee networks.
- where LGBT people were visible.
- where it was possible to be openly gay.
- where their management supported their visibility

A whole new world opened up to us.

Then we came home.

We returned to a police force, where once again LGBT employees did not exist,

where most LGBT people felt it best to hide who they really were.

With no policies in place to support any minority groups.

No apparent management support.

That was 2006.

One thing is clear from looking around this room today.

We have come a long way.

It is 2012 - Welcome to Dublin

At my first EGPA board meeting at that conference in Stockholm the board discussed the next conference and its location. I half seriously suggested that we'd host it in Dublin in 2012.

6 years seemed like a very long time.

I can assure you, it came around very quickly.

In planning for this conference, the committee of G-Force, the Garda LGBT Employee Network looked at the role of the EGPA and the function of the biennial conferences.

What was the EGPA's core reason to exist. What did we want to achieve.

Through this process, the committee and I developed a plan of workshops and speakers, which we felt would best address the learning needs of EGPA member states.

We needed to assist countries with developing and advanced LGBT policies. We also needed to assist countries that have no LGBT police network or policies in existence.

This process led us to the theme for this years conference. *Supporting Professional Policing.*

The concept of *Supporting Professional Policing* is key to how we run our business in G-Force, the Garda LGBT employee network, and key to how we run our business in European Gay Police Association.

We split the conference into two distinct days, reflecting the two roles the EGPA has.

Supporting LGBT Police Employees – The Human resources role  
and

Supporting LGBT communities – our community policing role.

We then selected very specific areas within the HR and Community Policing fields. We selected areas where the EGPA could work progressively after the conference, to make a real difference to the lives of LGBT police officers and LGBT police customers. We developed a practical agenda.

We hope that this conference, and the learning from the workshops we have planned, will lead to both national and European moves to improve the

situation for LGBT people.

Finally, I wish to thank just some of the many people who helped make this event possible.

The 4 Garda Staff Associations, the Garda Representative Association, the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors, the Association of Garda Superintendents and the Chief Superintendents Association.

They have provided financial, practical and moral support for this conference. We could not have better people representing the rights of LGBT staff in this organisation. In particular, I have to mention Mr. Joe Dirwan and Mr PJ Stone.

I would like to thank my Superintendent Joe O'Connor and Inspector Liam Dillon for being so understanding with my workload over the last few months. They facilitated me wherever they could and were most supportive of this conference.

Committee Lora Bolger, Ray Moloney, Paul Clancy, David Morris, Mark McNulty, Maria Keogh and Niall O'Connor.

Also donagh, joy, mark, Irma, Mairead and the others who came along recently and in the true Garda spirit of teamwork made this event possible.

All of the staff at GLEN, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network. Their assistance has been invaluable in making this conference a reality. Davin Roche for his HR expertise, and Mr Brian Sheehan, a gentleman, a professional, a diplomat and someone who has been a very good friend to me over the last two weeks, and a wonderful advisor.

The Equality Authority have provided fantastic support, with Brian Merriman and Cathal Kelly on hand to give valuable advice over the last few weeks.

I would like to thank Failte Ireland for their financial and practical help, especially their conference team.

I would like to thank the officials in the Department of Justice, Equality and Defence for providing us with this world class venue, and being so supportive of this conference.

I would also like to thank the Community foundation for Ireland and the Dutch GPA for their sponsorship.

The committee of G-Force would like to express our warmest appreciation to the Equality Officer for An Garda Síochána, Chief Superintendent John Grogan from Garda Human Resource Management. John and his staff have provided us with unwavering support since the commencement of this project.

We thank very much the Minister for Justice, Equality and Defence, Minister Alan Shatter for agreeing to launch this conference today. Your support means a huge amount to the LGBT Members of An Garda Síochána, and to the wider LGBT community in Ireland. Thank you.

Lastly, mum and dad. I'd better say hello or I'll be in trouble.

We have two busy days ahead of us, packed with opportunities to network and learn. The President of Ireland, the head of the Irish state, Mr. Michael D. Higgins welcomed the EGPA delegates to a reception in Aras an Uachtairain last night. He impressed upon us that this was a most important conference. And it is.

It was a wonderful start to the event. I hope the rest of the conference is just as wonderful.

Enjoy and learn. Thank you.