

**Text of Speech to Dublin Corporation “Drugs in Dublin” Conference, Dublin Castle  
- 07/08 February, 1997.**

**Assistant Garda Commissioner Thomas C. King**

**Mr. Chairman. Lord Mayor, Ladies & Gentlemen**

In December, 1996, all Heads of Government of the 15 E. U. Counties met in this very room and, as part of an Irish Government initiative, committed themselves to a continuing proactive international co-operative effort against drugs.

I say this, not only by way of acknowledging Government initiatives and its commitment to deal with this drugs issue, but to demonstrate that the issue is an international issue. Heroin finding its way to a Dublin street has its origin in Asia, a fact supported by the European Union Situation Report on Drug Production and Trafficking published in September, 1996.

Any effective action against drugs require An Garda Siochana to ensure that it has an effective network of co-operation with all law enforcement agencies who might be able to assist us in any material way.

The next stage of our interest arises at the point of entry of illegal drugs into the State. In an era of open boarders, free movement of goods and persons, it is a very difficult task to prevent illegal importation. This year, Dublin Port alone will have a movement of approximately 12,000,000 tonnes of goods through the Port. Dublin Airport will have a movement of more than 10,000,000 passengers and when one adds in Dun Laoghaire and the other Ports and Airports in the State, the difficulties for An Garda Siochana and the Customs Authorities become obvious.

It is important to say that in this context of preventing the illegal importation of illicit drugs, there is ongoing co-operation between An Garda Siochana, the Defence Forces (particularly the Naval Service) and the Customs Authorities. Delegates here can be assured that there will be no failure by these State Agencies to co-operate in the most effective way.

Against that backdrop, let me come to the subject matter of this Conference, namely, the drugs issue here in our Capital City. I think it is worthwhile to reflect on how we arrived at the current situation.

A review of Garda records and statistics suggest that so called ‘Hard Drugs’ did not materialise as a problem until the late 1970’s. Between 1970 and 1977 seizures were small in number and very few seizures were related to opiate possession or use. At that time, estimates indicated that as much as 90% of illicit supplies were obtained by larcenies from chemist shops.

Heroin appeared on the streets in a significant way between 1980 and 1986. However, only 25% of drugs charges between the period 1978 to 1988 were opium related. What we have observed, therefore, is a gradual process of movement from drugs like L.S.D. to Heroin. We have heard from an eminent speaker at this Conference that there is no such thing as a safe drug, but as communities here in Dublin will testify Heroin misuse has a proven track record of addiction leading, in some cases, to death.

## RESEARCH

One of the first requirements for any action programme is to establish first what exactly the problem is, and this can only be done by properly organised and methodical research. I have to say that there has been a failure to undertake such research and I, therefore, welcome recent initiatives where up to 25 separate research projects are being funded. Such research findings can provide a basis for appropriate action by all Agencies and we look forward to these research findings.

An Garda Síochána has initiated a Research Project involving primarily, the Force itself, but with external assistance and professional guidance and direction. I can share some of the preliminary findings with you this morning. This data is based entirely on Garda records and while valid in that perspective, we make no claim or statement that they represent the actuality of the drugs problem overall. They are, however, of sufficient importance as to give all of us food for thought and to require us to give careful consideration to their significance for potential action areas in social terms.

In 1996, 3579 persons who had contact with An Garda Síochána, and which contact resulted in a record being created, usually a custody record, were users of drugs. Of this total 89% were Heroin abusers, 5% Ecstasy abusers and the rest a variety of drugs including Methadone.

The majority of drug abusers are male - 85%. Only 2% of the total number are in employment. 80% of all abusers are in the 15 - 30 year age group. 83% of drug abusers are single with 58% of those residing still in the family home.

In pure statistical terms, the greater numbers of drug abusers are in the major suburbs to the South and West of the City. However, on the basis of percentage of drug abusers relative to the population aged between 15-55, the inner city area has the most severe problem in relative terms.

To put some of these figures in perspective, the research indicates that young unemployed males are at greatest risk of taking up drug taking leading, in many cases, to serious abuse of hard drugs like Heroin. It further indicates that this becomes a direct family problem, since most still reside in the family home. I think none of this will come as any surprise to many people in this room or to many living in the Community. Nor does it come as any surprise to professionals in the field and particularly to An Garda Síochána, who have a long history of direct involvement with the Community.

There is no formal research project which has established links between drug abuse and crime. The Garda research, as advised above, is proceeding on a proper research basis to come to some conclusions on the matter. It can be admitted that there is a link and certainly, in some areas, especially the Inner City areas, there is a proven drug it is unwise to jump to uninformed conclusions. For example, a recent analysis of persons charged with syringe attacks, showed that only 12% of such persons were drug abusers. Syringe attacks. Therefore, represent opportunist use by criminals of syringes as a weapon to effect their crime.

I will come to Operation 'Dochas' in a moment, but first let me remind all concerned that An Garda Síochána have been active in the fight against drugs since it first manifested itself a problem. There were times when we felt that we were almost alone in combating this problem and it is rewarding to see that that has changed completely.

Through our Community and Neighbourhood Policing strategies and the involvement of the Community in such schemes as Neighbourhood Watch, Pharmacy Watch, Coastal Watch etc. much has been achieved. We have been active in the schools via our schools programme and in many juvenile diversion programmes and have given drugs talks to interested parents and communities for many years.

On the more conventional operational policing side, special priority has been given to anti-drugs operations. The establishment of specialised anti-drug units in each area was a specific response. Paradoxically, this initiative was the basis of criticism, since some people seemed to believe, these units represented the totality of our efforts against drugs. Nothing could be further than the truth, and let it be perfectly understood, that the Garda effort against drugs in a matter of priority for all members and all units.

#### Operation 'Dochas'

In September of 1996, Senior Garda Management reviewed the then current Garda operations against drugs and their effectiveness. It was decided that any efforts by the Force alone, as a single Agency, could never eliminate the drug problem or, indeed, either drug related crime or crime in general. It was further recognised that whereas we always felt that we had the general passive support of the community, there was a need to revitalise our contact with the community and to create an opportunity for a more proactive community support for the Garda Operations against Drugs in particular.

On 7th October, 1996, the Garda Commissioner announced the start of a new major Garda Operation called 'Dochas. This is a word which, literally translated, means "Hope", but in a more traditional Gaelic sense represents a positive image that there will be a successful outcome to the task in hand.

The underlying philosophy underpinning Operation 'Dochas' was that close contact and co-operation with the Community was essential to a successful handling of this serious issue of drug abuse and related problems. In addition to that close community contact of uniform officers, task forces spearheaded by the local drugs units were created to ensure that the issue of drug dealing was directly confronted. And so on 7 October, 1996 An Garda Síochána committed 536 members to a policing practice of close community contact supported by operational drug task units.

Named and identified Garda members were nominated for identified "Community areas" with a mission statement to maintain close personal contact with all concerned in their areas. There were meetings with local organisations, local representatives, other Agencies and Community Groups. This was, in effect, an all out Garda offensive against drug dealing and related criminal activity.

I want to pay tribute here to the local Community, both at the individual and Community Group level. An Garda Síochána respect and acknowledge the part played by the community in the fight against drugs in their areas. We have observed the energy and commitment put into their efforts to get rid of the drug problem and to improve the quality of life for all living in their areas. In a Democracy, like this, policing is not something you do to people, but for them and with them and the success of Operation 'Dochas' over the past few months has, in large measure, represented the combined efforts of ordinary decent, hardworking, concerned people and An Garda Síochána.

To those who say that An Garda Síochána is opposed community efforts against drugs I say, quite clearly, that we support and commend community efforts against drugs and other forms of crime. What is not acceptable, is any form of criminal action by anyone in the community, and however worthy the motive may seem, the law is there for the general protection of society and must be observed. Every genuine effort by the community to improve the quality of life in their area will receive only support and encouragement from An Garda Síochána.

### What has Operation 'Dochas' achieved?

There has been considerable bonding of community and Garda efforts. The additional uniformed presence has brought about a genuine local improvement in terms of peace and order and quality of life in local community areas, and a recognition that the Police Service is a truly genuine Community service.

In terms of statistics, the following may be of most significance. Since October 7th last

A. Total No. of Drug Searches carried out:	4013
B. Total No. of Vehicular Checkpoints operated:	6393
C. Total No. of Arrests:	2881
D. Total No. of People charged in relation to Operation Dochas:	2325
E. Total No. of Summons applied for:	4272
F. Street Value of Seizures	almost £2m

Two days ago, a significant find of Heroin was made in the North Inner City and charges have been preferred. The street cost of that find is estimated at between £0.5m and £0.75m.

These significant results could not be achieved without public help and assistance and I say thanks to the public for their co-operation.

### THE FUTURE

Significant as these figures may be in result terms, I am conscious that they confirm that drug abuse is still a major issue for the community. I can confirm from our point of view that An Garda Síochána remains committed to two policing practices

1. To maintaining a very personalised and community based Policing presence
2. To full engagement in the many inter-agency efforts now underway.

It has long been evident that no Agency, however professional and effective it may be, can resolve this problem on its own. The recent Governmental and local authority initiatives and the additional funding and support for Eastern Health Board operations in respect of treatment will bring results. We intend to play a full proactive part in each of the Drug Strategy Teams, and to the many other schemes which require an inter-agency approach.

An Garda Síochána welcomes the initiatives of the Dublin Corporation in respect of environmental improvement schemes.

The single most important element in a successful anti-drugs effort is the community itself. Without the participation of the community at individual, family and community group levels the work of all the other Agencies is likely to fail, and will certainly not achieve it's full effect and advantage.

Urban renewal schemes, while worthy and good in economic terms, tend to be pitched at the level of the infrastructure and buildings. It is time for urban renewal of the social fabric of these areas on the basis of our experience over 75 years now, in these communities, it is evident that community problems have an economic, environmental and social basis. Efforts to resolve, for once and for all, the problems of these areas, will require an inter-agency approach on the State side, business and commercial interest and, above all, help and assistance directed at the social fabric of those societies.

I have personally travelled into these communities and I sense new spirit and a new energy. I believe that there is present in the community now a sense of purpose and a confident expectation that their quality of life can be improved. There is, therefore, in my view, a potent mix of community spirit and genuine efforts by relevant Agencies to focus their efforts on this drugs problem. In the West of Ireland where I grew up, the concept of "Meitheal" was established. This was where the community came together to achieve some specific purpose, which not only got the work done very effectively, but also created a community bonding and renewed everyone's commitment to that community. On the basis of that experience, I welcome the current community efforts and look forward in confidence to joining in those efforts to achieve a level of harmony with the Community to the advantage of all.

In this, the 75th years of Garda service to the community, I wish to place on record that this Force will continue to fully engage in a true sense of partnership with both the Community itself and all other Agencies, included voluntary organisation, in the interest of achieving a drug free, crime free safe city environmental for all citizens and visitors to this wonderful city.