

Minister's Policing Priorities for 2020 - 2021

In the Northwest Territories, we entrust the RCMP with the responsibility to support every citizen's rights to safety and security; and, we also entrust them with the right to take away a citizen's liberty in response to unlawful activity. That is a tremendous power and responsibility. We are fortunate to have the service of a professional and experienced national police force, and an RCMP division dedicated to community policing, but it remains critically important that we ensure our policing services reflect the unique context of our territory and the diversity of our people, and respect the trust that we are all placing in them every day. The ultimate goal we are all working towards together should be safe communities where our citizens can thrive.

The Minister's Policing Priorities for 2020-2021 have been under development since April and were already in their final form when the ongoing challenges of systemic racism within law enforcement took center stage around the globe.

As we are all acutely aware, the world has changed drastically over the past few months. While it may initially have been a global pandemic that illustrated the need for out-of-the-box thinking as it pertains to our justice and policing systems, it has been society's recent awakening to the reality of racial injustice that has driven this home. It has become apparent that innovation and reform are necessary in these systems, and that the status quo is no longer acceptable.

We considered not presenting these priorities today through this statement, but decided we cannot shy away from the painful reality of racism and a potentially

difficult conversation about policing. So I will proceed to present the policing priorities today, and I look forward to engaging in more conversations with the RCMP and with the members.

For 2020-2021, the four themes of policing priorities are: first, promote confidence in policing services; second, adapt to changing enforcement and community policing landscapes; third, continue to improve the RCMP's response to vulnerable population; and lastly, operational and fiscal innovation.

Regarding the first priority, the need to build confidence and trust in those who we have trusted with our safety is foundational. Confidence will come from trust; trust requires a relationship and mutual respect. It is also something that must be constantly and consistently nurtured and protected.

To serve communities effectively, it is critical to acknowledge, reflect and learn from a past that has not always been characterized by mutual respect and use those lessons to improve understanding, empathy and cultural safety in how policing is done today. Some progress in establishing trust has been the creation of the Commanding Officer's Aboriginal Advisory. In addition, the NWT has an Aboriginal Policing Services unit within G Division, and the division's commanding officer has directed that all new members to a community must complete a personal biography to be presented to the community. As well, they are required to attend a cultural orientation specific to the community where they have been placed, that includes meeting with local Indigenous organizations and Elders. Such steps should be recognized, but that does not mean the work is done; and so promoting confidence in policing remains a priority.

Northwest Territories communities have made it very clear how much harm they witness in their communities from alcohol misuse, drug trafficking and bootlegging. Bootlegging and substance abuse have been identified on almost every community's Community Policing Action Plan. In addition to further cracking down on illegal alcohol and drug trafficking, we've also identified the need for more effective enforcement of impaired driving legislation as a means to keep our communities and streets safe.

The RCMP must continue to foster trust within communities to help residents feel more comfortable reporting illegal alcohol and drug trafficking and impaired driving which will allow the RCMP to implement more effective crime prevention and enforcement strategies. Although we know that root causes underlying the misuse of alcohol lie in areas beyond the influence of police, their enforcement efforts are integral to the disruption of the illegal networks taking advantage of people living with addictions and mental illness.

The Department of Justice on the RCMP as a first point of contact for the diversion of suitable matters to local restorative justice options such as the Community Justice Committees. Restorative justice practices and principles have long been linked to more positive outcomes for both offenders and victims. By increasing the use of more restorative practices, the RCMP will play a vital role in identifying matters for youth and adult diversion early in the justice system process.

The second priority, adapting to a changing community landscape, is linked to the third priority, which is: improve the RCMP's response to vulnerable populations.

The RCMP play a critical role acting as the first point of contact for many people experiencing family violence by informing victims of their rights and connecting those victims to community supports. Recognizing that family violence rates remain

consistently high in the Northwest Territories; it is essential that RCMP members and Victim Service workers continue to collaborate so that victims' rights are recognized and respected. With that said, we also recognize the challenges victims face in reporting sexual assault. We look to the RCMP to continue working with stakeholders and partners including the Department of Justice to implement solutions that would ensure a thorough investigation of a complaint in each and every case. Implementing trauma-informed investigative tools remains a best practice of our police officers and in turn, is an area of focus we've identified for the coming year. This lessens the impact of crime and trauma on victims and their families, while also aiding in healing and recovery. Proper training, and accurate use of investigative tools, go a long way to improving the quality of the response provided to survivors of violence.

Our last remaining priority, with connection to the third, is operational and fiscal innovation.

Mr. Speaker, the world is experiencing an unprecedented challenge with the COVID-19 pandemic. Policing is a critical piece of our emergency planning. The RCMP should continue careful planning to support safe communities, and the safety of their members, throughout this evolving situation. They should continue to participate in emergency planning within their scope at the territorial and federal level and collaborate wherever possible with territorial departments and agencies to help keep Northwest Territories residents safe.

As we continue to work through the added challenges we face as a result of this pandemic, as well as addressing racism within law enforcement, it is more incumbent than ever on the Government of the Northwest Territories and the RCMP to work collaboratively to leverage our efforts for the benefit of our communities. While this might require some ingenuity, I am confident that we have appropriate

and rigorous checks and balances in place to hold our organizations accountable to operate innovatively within the financial limits of our contract.

In closing, I reiterate that annual Ministerial police priorities are part of a much wider conversation that includes acknowledging both a past and present that still needs much healing, about building trust and finding a way forward so that police services are partners in upholding and protecting the safety of all people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.