

Organization of South Asian Police Officers of Ontario
8th Annual Gala Night
Saturday, November 13, 2004
Woodbine Banquet & Convention Hall

Keynote Address
Chief Vince Bevan
Ottawa Police Service

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am honoured to be here tonight and thankful that Jay Parashar invited me to be tonight's keynote speaker.

It is a pleasure to have with me here tonight several members of the Ottawa Police Service. Joining me are:

- Sergeant Uday Jaswal
- Detective Kulvir Guram
- Constable David Bal
- Constable Barb Sjaarda
- Constable Paramjit Singh
- Staff Sergeant Samir Bhatnagar
- Detective Wayne Niemi

Now, it does not seem like that long ago that we witnessed a national debate when Constable Dhillon joined the RCMP and needed to go to federal court to confirm that he could wear his turban.

Recently, I was honoured to present our most recent recruit from the Sikh community, Constable Jasdeep Singh Bawja with his official Ottawa Police Service turban before he headed off to the Ontario Police College. It was a proud day for me, for my organization and for the Ottawa Sikh community.

Times are changing and this evening I want to talk to you about the future of policing and some key challenges we must confront. What I have to say involves a transformation, succession planning and the opportunity we all have to shape the future of policing in Ontario and across Canada.

Right now we are faced with a shortage of qualified recruits who have the skills and knowledge we need. This Canada-wide shortage has been identified by both the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Professional Police Association.

Employers across Canada, including police services, are facing a demographic bubble made of granite that will roll right over us if we do not do something now. The exit of baby boomers from police services cannot be made up by the entry of the current generation of young people, there are just not enough of them. And, in a people intensive activity like policing they cannot be replaced by technology.

In a recent article published in the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police magazine, David Baxter of the Urban Futures Institute comments that declining birth rates since the 1970s are far below what is required to replace the existing workforce. The exit of baby boomers from the labour force cannot be made up by the entry of today's under 20 population simply because there are fewer people under the age of 20 in Canada than

there people aged between 45 and 64. He further comments that that by 2011, with current participation rates, any increase in the labour force in Ontario will come, directly or indirectly, from immigration to Canada since new Canadians are concentrated in the under 35 age group.

The bottom line is that all police services need to make sure that we have enough front line officers who have the skills and knowledge we need to get the job done.

Let me give some tangible examples of what I am talking about. The Ottawa Police Service is facing a changing of the guard. In the next five years there will be a complete turnover of senior ranking officers and a renewal of our organization:

- Through retirement and promotions, virtually 100% of our senior officers will change over the next 5 years;
- 20% of all constables and sergeants will retire during the same period; and
- Against that reality we must remember that roughly 60% of officers now on the front lines have approx 5 years experience.

The next few years are critical for the Ottawa Police Service and the stakes are enormous.

As an organization, we risk losing hundreds of years of experience and knowledge that are locked inside the heads of the officers who will be retiring soon. We must take the steps necessary to preserve corporate knowledge and ensure sure that we have the people with the skills and knowledge to police our increasingly complex community.

Given the extent of change in the demographic and cultural make-up of our cities, we need to double our efforts to grow trust and confidence in all the communities we serve.

We are serving a larger population that is becoming increasingly diverse.

It is a fact that the total immigrant population in Ottawa is increasing at twice the pace of the City's overall population. Between 1996-2001, Ottawa's immigrant community grew fourteen percent. This compares to overall population growth of about seven percent. This trend is expected to continue and is similar in cities across the province.

As of the last Census, twenty-two percent of Ottawa's population were foreign born. Eighteen percent of our population are visible minorities.

Statistically, the size of the visible minority population is growing at almost four times the pace of the overall population.

Our community has become a reflection of the world. People in our community speak more than 70 languages. Chinese has become the most spoken non-official language in Ottawa, followed by Arabic, Italian and Spanish.

This change in the population of Ottawa is seriously testing our ability to police the diverse community that the City has become. Operational requirements have become much more complex.

I remember vividly the days after 9-11 when we had to identify which of our members spoke Arabic to assist with national security investigations.

More recently, I recall the pressures brought on by a large-scale drug investigation where we needed officers who could speak Vietnamese and understand the cultural issues we faced. And there are other examples.

Combined with the retirement of baby-boomers, our diverse communities present us with both a challenge and an opportunity

We can't postpone action. This is a long-term problem that requires a long-term solution, starting now. If we fail to invest in solutions today, we will pay a significant price tomorrow.

We must recruit from our immigrant communities not just because we want to better reflect the makeup of the community at large, but for purely operational reasons. We will not be a legitimate public policing organization unless we have the capacity to communicate with and understand the diverse people who now call Canada home.

If we cannot communicate with victims, who will investigate crimes committed against them? If we cannot penetrate organized crime because we cannot speak the language and do not understand the culture, who will halt its spread? Criminal acts of a few can affect us all, no matter what language we speak or the colour of our skin. We have an obligation to position ourselves to be effective. These are the operational reasons for doing what we are doing.

This new approach to recruiting will help to bring into the Ottawa Police Service officers who can communicate in the languages that are spoken in our neighbourhoods, understand and appreciate the cultures that are alive on our streets, and thereby strengthen our links with those we serve and protect.

I want to introduce you to a different vision of policing and how we will be doing things in Ottawa. We plan to meet the impending staffing crisis by preparing to recruit the best and the brightest with the skills, knowledge and awareness needed to meet our operational requirements, hire them based on merit, ensure that the organizational culture is welcoming and supportive, and provide opportunities to prepare them assume leadership positions in the next few years.

Before we developed a strategy to address our staffing crisis it was important that we take a cold hard look at the culture within the Ottawa Police Service. It is pointless to recruit individuals from diverse communities if they feel unwelcome. If they do not feel

supported within the Service, they will leave and, even worse, they will spread the word that Ottawa Police Service is not a desirable place to work..

We began by looking at ourselves and asking some tough questions about incidents and complaints of harassment involving women inside the organization. We then asked the Sprott School of Business at Carleton University to study what impediments existed to implementing a new recruitment strategy. The study identified an unofficial culture within the Police Service resistant to the presence of members from diverse communities in the organization as well as a lingering resistance to the presence of women. I read this report very carefully and was stung by some of the comments I found. Clearly there was evidence that we were not quite the organization we thought we were. We have some work to do.

The Sprott study crystallized for the management team of the Service the need to articulate our vision in a clear and powerful manner so that all members can rally behind it and be inspired to support the needed changes for the future. The study also identified six areas that we need to focus on to move our vision forward. They are:

- Changing behaviours;
- Providing leadership;
- Developing a critical mass of support;
- Improving communications;
- Training and education; and
- Providing a framework for consistent change.

With the Sprott School study as a backdrop, the Ottawa Police Service has created the Outreach Recruitment Project. The Project aims to find ways to recruit and retain qualified applicants for the Service while addressing the organization's need for diversity. This means diversity not only as it relates to what is visible such as skin colour, language or gender but also to what is not visible such as sexual orientation, knowledge of other cultures or religious beliefs. The Outreach Recruitment Project is meant to open doors for people who may not have considered a career in policing and make the Ottawa Police Service an employer of choice for all.

In short, it's about broadening our horizons so we can understand and work effectively with all the different parts of our increasingly complex community. The Outreach Recruitment Project will not only grow our numbers, but it will grow our skills and awareness. For the Ottawa Police Service, diversification makes good business sense.

One of the pivotal elements of the Project is the Outreach Recruitment Champions. The Champions include sworn and civilian members of the Ottawa Police Service, some of whom are here this evening, and community members and leaders. The objective of the Champions is to identify individuals who are suitable for and interested in a policing career, encourage them to apply and support them through out the recruitment process and once they are hired. The joint community-police partnership in recruitment is a groundbreaking initiative by our Police Service.

I believe that this is such an important initiative that I am taking personal charge of the Outreach Recruitment Project. In spite of the budget pressures faced by the Ottawa Police Service, I intend to make sure we address staffing needs through a carefully planned set of initiatives that will:

- Promote those who are ready to take leadership positions;
- Capture current experience and expertise so that when we lose our current leadership the next generation will be ready; and
- Recruit qualified candidates who have the skills and knowledge we need from outside the service. Only those with merit will advance in the Ottawa Police Service.

The Ottawa Police Service needs to protect the investment we have made in our people and the human capital we have developed. The same is true when it comes to our new recruits. They will bring new skills and knowledge to the Service. It is my intention that we retain those new recruits by making sure that they feel welcomed and supported in our organization.

As I've stated before, our goal is to become employer of choice for all qualified individuals, including visible minorities, women, aboriginal and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered people and white males. The Outreach Recruitment Program is not a system that espouses equity for select groups. That in itself creates inequity for others. We need a system that is equitable for all.

I recognize that it is not possible to create an equity program for only one group. Any such program will only serve to disadvantage others. Therefore, we have been careful to construct a program based on merit. Anyone who can meet our standards and is interested in a career in policing will want to come to Ottawa because it is the best employer in the sector. We will be seen differently and we will do what we need to internally to ensure that Ottawa Police Service is the kind of workplace where everyone can flourish and advance based on merit.

Meeting our staffing and operational requirements won't be easy, but the Ottawa Police Service is always striving to improve. If we get it right, the work that comes out of the Outreach Recruitment Project will make us a better, more effective police service. We will have constables who have the skills to do the job now and in the future while building on the experiences and knowledge of those who came before them. They will be able to:

- Communicate in other languages and understand other cultures and lifestyles leading to better crime prevention because we will have the trust and confidence of all our communities;
- Detect crime by being able to get people to come forward as sources or witnesses who might otherwise not want to help; and

- Understand other cultures and lifestyles in order to deliver even better service and satisfaction to victims.

Our ability to fight crime and serve victims depends on the success of this renewal program. Increasing the diversity of the workforce will help the Ottawa Police Service to:

- Increase the trust and confidence of all communities;
- Harness the energy and support of a wider section of the community;
- Be more effective at investigating crimes against vulnerable people;
- Identify important gaps in service so it can ensure everyone has access to the Ottawa Police Service; and
- Recruit from the widest possible pool of people those who can speak other languages, understand other cultures, understand other life styles, and are willing to use those skills to the benefit of the organization and community at large

In closing, this is a time of great challenge and opportunity for all police services. This is about renewal and positioning of policing for a secure future. The number one test of leadership is to ensure the next generation has the tools and skills they need to do the job. If we fail to renew our police services today, we risk crippling them tomorrow. This will mean hard work, patience and unwavering dedication. All of us in policing must take up this challenge for the well being of the profession we love and the citizens we serve.

Policing in Canada is noble profession that embodies the best virtues of humanity, those of serving and protecting others. For those of you here tonight who are not members of a police service but are interested in policing, or those who have children or know others who might be interested, I encourage to give serious consideration to a career in the profession that I cherish.

Thank you.