

**Address by Mr. Brian Lenihan T.D.,  
Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform,  
at the celebration to mark the centenary of  
the Probation of Offenders Act, 1907  
City West Hotel  
23 November, 2007**

Chief Justice, President of the District Court, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am very pleased to be here this evening to join the Director of the Probation Service, Michael Donnellan and his staff in commemorating the centenary of the Probation of Offenders Act, 1907. This is an important milestone in the history of the Probation Service.

In joining you this evening I want to welcome, in particular, former members of staff who are with us tonight. It is the combination of the contributions made by former and current serving staff which makes the Service the organisation it is today.

A special welcome to those of you who are actively contributing to the wide range of projects, programmes and initiatives in the community which support the work of the Probation Service. I want to thank you most sincerely for this work. I know from my work as Minister for Children and my interaction with groups that you are contributing your knowledge, expertise and energy entirely on a voluntary basis to this important and vital work in partnership with the Probation Service.

The Act we are commemorating tonight - Probation of Offenders Act, 1907 – sets out the system for the supervision of offenders. This Act effected great reform and provided a new formal mechanism for supervising, on behalf of the court, the conduct of the offenders placed on probation. The 1907 Act has stood the test of time and today whilst it is fair to say many other pieces of legislation impact on the work of the Service this Act remains the primary legislation applicable to the core work of the Probation Service.

In contrast to the legislative base for the work of the Service dating back to 1907, the structure of the Probation Service, as an organisation, has changed dramatically over the past 100 years. The video presentation gave you an overview of the changes that have taken place and we will hear a little more on the history from David O'Donovan later. The Service, initially Dublin based, grew from humble beginnings to the point in 1973 when the Service had a staff of 47. Over the next three decades the Probation Service grew significantly to the organisational structure we have today with

over 500 staff in 38 locations around the country.

The Probation Service has international recognition with a representative on the Board of CEP (Conference Permanente Europeenne de la Probation) which some of you will know, is a body representing Probation agencies across Europe. The Service works closely with colleagues in Northern Ireland exchanging information to strengthen cross jurisdiction supervision of offenders. The Service has also continued to develop inter agency, inter Departmental and Community links in order to develop a coherent, co-ordinated and results orientated strategy in the supervision of offenders with a view to making our communities safer. I am a firm advocate of greater effective co-operation between groups with the clear aim of dealing with an issue in an 'holistic' way.

Whilst the Probation of Offenders Act is the primary legislation which guides the work of the Service, you do not need me to remind you of the many legislative changes in the management of offenders over the past century. Tonight is not a night for listing a long list of Acts of the Oireachtas but it is important that we acknowledge the many new responsibilities that have been placed on the Probation Service in respect of the supervision of offenders.

To mention very briefly some examples: the Criminal Justice (Community Service) Act; post-release supervision of sex offenders; and implementation of a wide range of innovative measures provided for under the Children Act, 2001.

I want to particularly acknowledge the pivotal role the Probation Service plays within the criminal justice system here tonight. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank you for the contribution which all of you are making to the fight against crime. You do make a difference and the high esteem in which the Service is held by the Judiciary, the community and the other arms of the 'justice system' is testament to the dedication and commitment of the staff of the Service. As with any organisation, the tasks and role of the Probation Service have evolved and developed beyond the role "to advise, assist and befriend". There is now much more emphasis on public protection and public safety; on reducing re-offending and offering offenders the opportunity to change through addressing their behaviour and the factors contributing to their criminality. Victim issues are –quite rightly - to the forefront of all your work with offenders be they in custody or under supervision in the community.

The Probation Service as we know it today has evolved and developed through the hard work of many. It would be remiss of me to let the evening pass without paying tribute to deceased staff, including Martin Tansey, who headed the Service for close to 30

years, all of whom helped to grow and develop the Service over the years.

Tonight is a night for celebrating the many achievements and developments of the Service. It is a time to look back with pride at what has been achieved and to look forward with confidence to the part the Service can play in the future as a key component of the criminal justice system.

In concluding I want to wish our host, Michael Donnellan, his senior management team and all the staff continued success in your work. You will continue to have my support and that of my Department as you work to meet the challenges of the decades ahead.

Enjoy the remainder of the evening. Thank you.