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Blog article by Chief Commissioner Dr Michael Wardlow

Leadership requires courage and vision

It is disappointing that the political talks have broken down this week and it is of concern that the vacuum created has the potential to be filled by civil unrest unless those charged with leadership offer a constructive alternative. While welcoming the general call for calm heads and a non violent response to the events of the recent past, I think our civil and political leaders should reflect upon their words and more importantly their actions in the coming days.

Leadership requires courage and vision, but it also requires leaders to model what civic responsibility should look like in what they say and what they do. Leadership should deliver for all members of society and it is of the utmost importance that whatever happens in the coming days, the impact should not be experienced disproportionately in the communities already most under pressure.

Over the past year, many young people, particularly those from the most marginalized communities, have found themselves in the criminal justice system by coming out onto the streets and ending up being caught up in anti social and, in some cases, criminal activities. Many of our older citizens have lived their lives in fear and effectively have felt as if they have been under house arrest during these times.

Race hate incidents have been on the rise, sectarian abuse continues to be experienced in many communities and many of our older and most vulnerable citizens already live in fear of the threat of violence in the coming weeks. The added pressure which the potential for street protest will inevitably present may be a step too far for many individuals to be asked to accept.

Ernest Hemingway said that “Courage is grace under pressure”. Our political and civic leaders have to be courageous and continue to reflect on the needs of all sections of our community in what they say and do in the next few days. To resume talks would be the desired outcome but, in their absence, it is essential that they reflect on the



responsibilities of courageous leadership and how this should be delivered for the best interests of all our citizens.

To this end, there is a challenge for our leaders to consider whether calling for, or offering support for, street protest, however well intended or legally acceptable those protests might be, will deliver equality or good relations outcomes for those most at risk in our society. In my view, this is an unlikely outcome.

Maybe the time has come for grace under pressure to be expressed through courage in action. The outworking of this could be seen in changed circumstances and just perhaps renewed talks.



Read the Chief Commissioner's blog "*Here's the thing...*"

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