

Jo Farrell
Chief Constable
Police Scotland

08 October 2023

Dear Chief Constable,

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment and wish you well as you embark on the significant endeavor of leading Scotland's police service.

Amnesty International campaigns globally on human rights and policing, including from our Scotland office. As an organisation we advocate for police forces to fulfil their legal human rights obligations, resist the global trend towards striving for ever-increased powers, and focus on upholding and facilitating the rights of the public with maximum transparency.

Our Scotland office works on a range of policing issues and engages with the force where appropriate, to share evidenced calls and ask necessary questions.

For some time, Police Scotland has emphasised an explicit commitment to operating as a 'rights based' force. Some areas of good practice have emerged from this, as well as clear gaps between rhetoric and implementation. It is however a commitment I would urge you to restate as a foundation on which to build.

As you take up post, I believe it's important to highlight the comments made by your predecessor earlier this year about institutional discrimination within the force. In May, Sir Iain Livingstone QPM issued a statement describing Police Scotland as 'institutionally racist and discriminatory', adding that institutional sexism and misogyny also exist. Interim findings from the Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights Independent Review Group (EDIHR IRG) also reported testimony from staff describing instances of ongoing discrimination, including first-hand accounts of racism, sexism, and homophobia.

Globally, the police system is blighted by racial and discriminatory practices. The grave injustices we have seen carried out at the hands of police forces across the UK are overwhelming. This includes, the racism evident in the treatment of Child Q, the use of stop and search, Tasers and gang profiling databases and evidence that Black men are more likely to die as a result of restraint in police custody, as well as the unlawful response to the vigil for Sarah Everard and disturbing accounts of serious sexual assaults by police officers that have been covered up. The task of reforming forces across the UK and earning the trust of all communities as well as creating accountability mechanisms that are fit for purpose in policing is a mammoth one.



Sir Iain's honest comments are a stark reminder that Police Scotland is not exceptional in this regard but that urgent action is required. Inaction risks serious harm and rights violations to both the public and serving officers. Police Scotland cannot assume it has the consent of all communities in Scotland to police them. Particularly people of colour, people within minoritised ethnic or religious groups, women and LGBTI people deserve assurances that one of your first acts as Chief Constable will be to set out a plan of action to address institutional sexism, racism and discrimination that is detailed and measurable, with clear transparency and accountability mechanisms.

Any plan to tackle these institutional crises must involve robust external oversight, and Amnesty will recommend that the Scottish Parliament provides additional scrutiny of the force in its role as a human rights guarantor. I would also welcome your assurances that Police Scotland will be prepared to respond to the findings of the Sheku Bayoh Inquiry and implement recommendations swiftly when Lord Bracadale presents his report. While it would of course be inappropriate to prejudge the inquiry's findings, testimony from the hearings to date indicates there will be crucial learning for the force regardless.

Colleagues in our Scotland office will provide further relevant information on ongoing and planned areas of work in Scotland as they progress.

I look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Patrick Corrigan

Head of Nations and Regions, Amnesty International UK