

Speech: PM's speech at emergency services reception

Good evening everybody and it is a great pleasure to welcome you all to Downing Street today.

I host a number of these receptions, and when I host events here it is normally to celebrate an anniversary or to recognise the success of a good cause.

And of course today is different. Because the events that have brought us together are some of the most tragic our country has had to face in recent times.

Four dreadful acts of terrorism and a catastrophic fire, which all occurred over a 3 month period this year; they united, I think, the whole country in both shock and in grief.

Just to recap, on 22 March, the Westminster Bridge attack killed 5 innocent people, including PC Keith Palmer, and injured 49.

On that day, Metropolitan Police officers responded immediately to neutralise the terrorist and the London Fire Brigade rescued a person from the River Thames.

On 22 May, in the attack at the Manchester Arena, 22 people were killed and at least 250 were injured.

Officers from the British Transport Police and Greater Manchester Police and the North West Ambulance Service were on the scene within minutes, entering the arena without hesitation to help survivors.

On 3 June, on London Bridge and at Borough Market, eight people were killed and nearly 50 were injured. Armed police arrived and shot the attackers dead within just 8 minutes of being called.

Officers from the British Transport Police, the Metropolitan Police and the City of London Police worked together at the scene administering first aid and comforting the injured, evacuating the area, and gathering evidence.

On 14 June, at the Lancaster West Estate in Kensington, the devastating Grenfell Tower fire killed whole families – adults and children – and made hundreds of people homeless.

The first fire crews were on site in less than 6 minutes. Over 200 firefighters and officers attended, working in extremely difficult conditions to bring the fire under control and rescue scores of people.

Officers from the Metropolitan Police secured the scene, while the London Ambulance Service treated the victims.

And then in the early hours of 19 June, a man was killed and ten people were injured in a cowardly attack outside Finsbury Park mosque.

The alleged attacker was detained by members of the public until police officers, including an armed officer, arrived at the scene, again within just a few minutes.

Firefighters and the Ambulance Service supported the police and treated casualties.

What linked all these terrible events was not simply the loss of life and the suffering inflicted, but also the inspiring responses of the people in this room today – our emergency services.

You see the worst of us, but represent the best of us.

You are the ones who run towards devastation, while others run as fast as they can the other way.

And every day you go to work knowing you could be called on to face things which most of us would never want to confront.

On each of those five days this year, and again at times like the Parson's Green bombing, that's exactly what you had to do.

To bear witness to horrific and heart-breaking scenes.

To do your jobs, in the most difficult of circumstances, with professionalism and courage.

And to risk your own lives to protect others and to serve your country.

And then, when your shift was over, to go back home to your families, to try to put what you've experienced into perspective, and to get on with your lives.

I have to say I know from my experience, and also as Home Secretary, one of the most inspiring things when I meet members of the emergency services, both in general, but particularly those who have been responding to incidents like this, is the way everybody says they 'were just doing their job'. But as I say that is a job that most people wouldn't want to do and it is a job that matters and is so important to all of us.

And I know that doing that and then returning to, if you like, normality, with your families and life generally can be enormously difficult.

And you will of course be supported and sustained by the camaraderie and mutual support of your colleagues. By the love and affection of your families and friends.

And by your own sense of duty and public service.

But the country you have served has a responsibility to support you and your

families too and the government takes that responsibility seriously.

We have a responsibility to ensure that you have access to the right occupational health services, with proper mental health support.

And we announced over the summer that we are making available a further £1.5 million to support the delivery of Mind's Blue Light Programme, which provides mental health support for all emergency service staff and volunteers.

And we are also supporting Chris Bryant's private members' Bill, which will double the maximum sentence for common assault from six months to a year if committed against an emergency worker while they are on duty. Now it is my privilege to host you here today; to be able to invite you here to Downing Street. And I want to thank you, on behalf of the whole county, for your bravery, for your professionalism and for your dedication.

At all times, you command the respect and admiration of the British people.

And you represent the values and qualities which we all look up to.

You are truly an example to us all.

Thank you for being here today, thank you for everything that you did in relation to these incidents, and for some of you are continuing to do in relation to these incidents.

Thank you for what you do every day when you go to work.

Thank you for being here and enjoy the rest of the evening.