

Keeping a Peace Process on Track

A Comparative Study Visit Report

Dublin, Dundalk and Belfast

19th - 23rd April 2015

The logo for the Democratic Progress Institute features the words "Democratic", "Progress", and "Institute" stacked vertically. Each word is written in a dark blue, serif font. The letters "D", "P", and "I" are significantly larger than the other letters and are positioned at the start of their respective lines, creating a strong vertical rhythm. The words are centered horizontally relative to each other.

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Sunday 19th April 2015

Session 1: Introduction & Agenda



Eleanor Johnson, DPI Head of Programmes, giving participants an outline of the comparative study visit.

Venue: The Westbury Hotel, Dublin, Ireland

Eleanor Johnson:

Welcome and good evening. It is a pleasure to see you all. Welcome to Dublin on behalf of the Democratic Progress Institute. Tonight, we will have dinner at the Turkish Ambassador's residence, which will not take too long. I would like to give you an overview of the programme and the days ahead of us. First of all, I'd like to apologise for Kerim Yildiz, who was called away for work this evening. He is unable to join us. He will be with you later this evening, or tomorrow. I am delighted to see Mr Participant 8, member of our Council of Experts, with us. It is a pleasure to see new faces as well.

Let us discuss our agenda. In front of you, you will find documents with summaries of the Good Friday Agreement, the Sunningdale Agreement, and the St Andrews Agreement. They may be useful texts to keep with you.

Most of you will be familiar with the background of DPI. I will give you a short summary. It was established in 2010 by a number of conflict resolution experts from around the world, including Turkey, and other countries ranging from Peru, South Africa, to Ireland. By now we have formed a number of programmes focusing on conflict resolution. This includes the Turkey programme, of which this visit is part. We are also working in Syria, Afghanistan; we do several things related to Colombia, the Basque Country, and other regions.

The aims and objectives of DPI are to broaden the base for dialogue and conflict resolution. This is done through activities, mainly study visit like this, as well as roundtable meetings. A larger one was held in Turkey; a number of you have participated.

We also have research programmes. You can find our research reports on our website, most of them are translated into Turkish, some into Kurdish, and all are available in English. Our roundtables take place in various areas of Turkey, most recently in Istanbul, in Urfa, Van, or Mardin. We hope to have more roundtables of this kind in different regions. Topics include the role of the media, of women in conflict resolution, how civil society can play a role. Civil society visits have been taking place in a number of countries looking at post-conflict society. For example in South Africa, where we looked at the democratic transition process. In Germany we looked at governance issues and constitutional affairs. In Wales and Scotland, it was about the role of language, devolution, and education. We also paid a number of visits to Ireland and Northern Ireland, which many find useful. Over the next year we are planning a comparative visit to the Philippines, and some other roundtable meetings in Turkey on topics like transitional justice, the role of civil society, dealing with the past, the choreography of peace process, and others.

I will be here as well as Esra; Kerim will join us. We are happy to answer your questions.

Let's turn to the agenda. We have a full programme, we will meet as many of actors in the peace process as possible. Some of them are difficult to get hold of, some are not based in Ireland. We arranged roundtables with them for you, for example with Bertie Ahern, the former prime minister of Ireland. We try to meet most key figures of the Good Friday Agreement, like US Senator George Mitchell. It is a name you hear mentioned a lot because of his chairing role in the Good Friday Agreement talks. The visits will take place here in Dublin today and tomorrow, and then in Dundalk, which is a border town between Ireland and Northern Ireland, to meet with

a member of parliaments there. The end will be in Belfast with two nights there. We want you to get as much out of it as possible, so please ask questions.

As a short recap on our plans for the next few days: the agenda and biographies of speakers you will be meeting are in your packs. Dinner this evening is with the Turkish ambassador, joined by Sir David Reddaway, former UK ambassador to Ireland and Turkey. Tomorrow we will have a full day in the centre of Dublin, in the morning we will meet with the CEO of the Glencree Peace and Reconciliation Centre. He will be talking about the role they played as a civil society organisation during the Troubles and the peace process. He will also give an overview of the conflict before we go into more technical detail. He is a good person to ask for factual questions.

We will then be leaving to Iveagh House, to the Department of Foreign Affairs. We will have a meeting with the Conflict Resolution Unit of the department, followed by a private tour through parliament with the Department of Foreign Affairs. We will be meeting with members of the joint parliamentary committee in charge of the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. Dinner will be in city centre with the former British ambassador to Ireland, Sir David Reddaway, and the Turkish ambassador.

On Tuesday, we will be travelling to Drumcondra, a suburb of Dublin. It is the constituency of former Irish Prime Minister Bertie Ahern, from 1997-2008. He is known for having a strong partnership with the prime minister of Great Britain, Tony Blair at the time, during the Good Friday Agreement process. This meeting is followed by meeting Liz O'Donnell, the Irish government's main negotiator at the Good Friday Agreement. We will then leave to Dundalk, the border town, to meet with Dermot Ahern, the former minister of foreign affairs. This will be an introduction into travelling to Northern Ireland.

We will spend Wednesday in Belfast. We will meet with British government officials in Northern Ireland, from the Northern Ireland Office. We will hear about the British perspective. After that, we are going into the Assembly, the Northern Irish parliament, to meet with members of Sinn Féin party, followed by a meeting with Senator George Mitchell. In the afternoon we will be meeting the other side, a member of parliament of the DUP, the biggest loyalist party. At the end of that day, we will go on a tour of the interface areas of Belfast. There, we will meet with former prisoners of IRA and have a chance to talk to them. That will be the end of the programme; we are departing to Dublin airport on Thursday.

We have a packed programme ahead of us, hopefully it will prove valuable and useful to you. I am looking forward to spending the next few days with you.

End of session

Sunday 19th April 2015

Dinner at the Residence of the Turkish Ambassador to Ireland

With:

His Excellency Necip Egüz, Turkish Ambassador to Ireland

Şenay Egüz, Ambassador's wife

Işil Gürler Ileri, Counsellor and Deputy Head of Mission, Turkish Embassy to Ireland

Cemal Sangu, First Secretary, Turkish Embassy to Ireland

Susan Conlon, Deputy Director Enlargement and West Balkans, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland

Sir David Reddaway, former British Ambassador to Ireland, member of DPI Council of Experts

Venue: Killiney Bay





Monday 20th April 2015

Session 2: Roundtable Discussion: Conflict Resolution in Ireland: an overview of the Irish peace process



With:

William Devas, Chief Executive Director of the Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation

Venue: The Westbury Hotel, Dublin, Ireland

Eleanor Johnson:

We are here to meet Will Devas. He is the chief executive of the Glenree Reconciliation Centre. He is an experienced development and peace-building professional since August 2013. His work is related to transforming violent conflict between divided communities, in Ireland, north and south, in the UK, and the world. His work is part of civil society activities. He will give a background of the Northern Ireland conflict and the peace process. The overview will prove useful for the meetings we go into, to clarify about geographies, groups involved etc. It is a good opportunity to ask factual questions.

Will Devas:¹

Thank you, and good morning everybody. Welcome to Dublin. I work for Glenree, a

¹ *William Devas is the Chief Executive Officer at Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation which is dedicated to providing leadership and support in practical peace building, and works to transform violent conflict between and within divided communities in Ireland, North and South, and elsewhere.*

peacebuilding centre. It started its work in 1974 as a result of the Troubles. There was violence primarily in Northern Ireland, which lasted for 35 years. The main thing is dialogue. It is important to bring people together, often enemies, to talk, build relationships, to find solution for the reasons of conflict. I will talk about two things today: about the history, why was there conflict on the island, and a little bit about the history of the peace process.

There is one lesson you need to take away. Even the basic history that I will give is contested. Some would listen to what I say and argue that it is wrong, that was not what happened. We cannot agree on one history of this island. Everyone has different interpretation of what happened, of why it happened. I cannot win, but try to give as objectively as possible a few facts and dates on the conflict. I start with the map. Here is Dublin, tomorrow you will go to Belfast, the capital of Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is part of the UK, with Scotland, England and Wales. The rest of the island is the Republic of Ireland, sometimes called 'the South'. And 'the North' is referring to Northern Ireland. There is a border in between, but no checkpoints.

100 years ago, this island was all one country, governed by Westminster in the UK. We had 800 years of English rule in Ireland. In 1921, the island was partitioned after a war of independence seeking independence for the whole island. A majority of the people in Northern Ireland were Protestant, very loyal to Britain; they were British. Most in the South, in the Republic, were Catholic and Irish. They wanted an independent Irish country. Negotiations between London and the people fighting the war of independence took many weeks. The agreement said that six counties remain part of the UK, the rest was to be independent. In 1921 Ireland was partitioned, with two countries on one island.

Two important minorities were created. In the South, people were mainly Catholic, with a reasonable Protestant minority, mostly near the border. Northern Ireland was Protestant mainly, with quite a large Catholic minority. Protestant were mainly in the east, the west was more Catholic in Northern Ireland. Londonderry, the second city, or Derry, is right on the border and is very Catholic. Belfast is the biggest city, also with quite a lot of Catholics. The Bloody Sunday occurred in Derry, when British troops killed 13 demonstrators.

Northern Ireland was a one party state from 1920 to 1970s, with one party ruling, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP). There were other parties, but it was always the UUP that controlled the North. But they only had devolved government; it was still London controlling foreign policy and taxation. There was a lot of inequality. Protestants were favoured with jobs, housing, better voting rights. Community relations were OK, but there was inequality. If one group gets pushed down for long time, it gets upset and discontent, and feels to deserve better.

In the 1960s in the US, with Martin Luther King and the civil rights movement, there was an example for Northern Ireland. People started campaigning for 'one man, one vote'. If you owned a business, you had two votes: Protestants owned more businesses, so there were more votes for Protestants. They were also campaigning about access to housing and jobs. That was largely a peaceful movement but some violence erupted, and in 1969 we say the Troubles started, the start of the conflict. In 1972, because the Northern Irish government were unable to keep control, with rioting, marching, violence, and bombs, the British took over. They removed the government and installed direct rule, they took complete control again.



Speaker William Devas from the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation

It was effectively 30 years of conflict. One part of it was the British army. In 1972, the army came on into Northern Ireland as a military police force to try and keep control. At this time, other military groups had started to emerge. Most famous, known as Republicans, the IRA, sometimes called PIRA, sometimes Provos. On the Unionist side, the loyalist, Protestant side, other military organisations emerged like the Ulster Defence Association (UDA) or the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). There was violence from late 1969 until 1990s, the main people involved were the British army, the IRA, and loyalist paramilitary organisations. If I use the term loyalist, it is based on working class and usually associated with sympathy to military organisation. They did not necessarily support, but were sympathetic to the paramilitaries during the Troubles. They felt they were defending their communities from bombings of the IRA. The IRA in turn felt it was defending their communities from the British army and the paramilitaries.

Most violence was from 1969 until 1994. In 1994 we had ceasefires. The IRA first declared a ceasefire, ceasing violence, but not forever. It wished to stop violence to see for other solutions.

Loyalist groups a couple of months later also declared a ceasefire. It was from then on that political negotiations made progress. After four years in 1998, we had the Good Friday Agreement, which was very important. They agreed on a number of things, mainly power-sharing between those who wished to be Irish, Republican or nationalist, and those who wanted to be British, often loyalist or Unionist. After the elections, the strongest party would be senior partner, the second strongest their junior partner, all in a power-sharing government after the D'Hont system.

FACTION	Republican		Unionists
ALSO CALLED	Nationalists		Loyalists
POLITICAL WING	Sinn Féin (SF) + Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP)	Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (Non-aligned)	Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) + Ulster Unionist Party (UUP)
VIOLENT DIVISION	Irish Republican Army (IRA) / Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) + Irish National Liberation Army (INLA)		Ulster Defence Association (UDA) + Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)
RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION (In General)	Catholic		Protestant

Negotiations were primarily between the British government under Tony Blair as Prime Minister, the Irish government under Bertie Ahern, and then the main political parties in Northern Ireland negotiating Good Friday Agreement. The main parties were Sinn Féin, directly linked to the IRA as its political arm. Another important party was the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), described as nationalist, anti-violence, which has always been still wishing for united Ireland. Sinn Féin was pro violence, or they saw violence as the only option to achieve a united Ireland. On the Unionist side you had UUP, ruling from 1920 to the 1970s, and a new party, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), founded by Ian Paisley. Some may have heard of him, he was a divisive and important figure in Northern Irish history. In 1998, the two big parties SDLP and UUP formed a government. In the early 2000s, this happened between Sinn Féin and the Alliance in the middle, which was neither Unionist nor Republican. They want to do whatever majority wishes. The DUP in 1998 said no, never. It refused to engage in negotiations, and to accept the

agreement. 'How can you have a government with terrorists in power? How can you agree to the Republic having some say in affairs of Northern Ireland?'

Today, in 2015, Sinn Féin and the DUP lead the government. People on the extremes are now in charge. They run the government, being by far the biggest parties in Northern Ireland. One lesson is that until you include everyone, however much you dislike their behaviour in the past, sustainable peace is very hard to achieve. Paramilitaries on the Unionist side would by and large support DUP; Sinn Féin and the IRA were closely linked. Until the extremes could agree, there had never been a lasting agreement.

It took ten years from 1998 to implement the Good Friday Agreement. There were two big problems. One was decommissioning. The DUP said we will never negotiate until the IRA has destroyed their weapons. They said they would not get rid of weapons until there was an agreement that meant acceptance and equality. To resolve that took a long time. And secondly, there was the matter of policing and justice. It was agreed in the Good Friday Agreement that policing would come back from London to Northern Ireland. But the police in Northern Ireland had a history of being very unfair: the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). From 1920 to 1990s, they were almost entirely Protestant, and had a reputation of being unfair to Catholics. They reacted strongly against Catholic violence, against Protestant violence not so much, as was the perception, and perhaps the reality. Those who had suffered from the RUC were nervous to have policing back in Northern Ireland. The new police force, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), is a great success. There was a big commission by external people about how to do that best, and it turned out to be a great success.

There are two other things: important in all of this were other outsiders. We talked about the British and the Irish government, but other important people were involved. The Americans were very helpful. Bill Clinton made a lot of phone calls and met many people during the Good Friday Agreement, late at night he may be ringing Gerry Adams. Probably more important was George Mitchell, the American who negotiated the Good Friday Agreement. I have not heard anyone saying that he was not a very good facilitator of discussions. Without them, it would have been hard to achieve the agreement and its implementation, like decommissioning. If it wasn't for the international monitoring commission lead by a Canadian, this would have probably never been sorted out. Externals were very important. Ultimately we had to sort out our own problems, the UK, Northern Ireland and Ireland. But it was not just all us, help was useful.

What is the situation today in 2015? The government is made up of Sinn Féin and DUP as the main parties in Northern Ireland. The Republicans are wishing a united Ireland, and the Unionists wish to remain part of the UK. The DUP is bigger than Sinn Féin. There are elections on May 7 in

the UK, and we will see, the DUP will probably remain the biggest party. We also still have the UUP, and still have the SDLP. However, they are much smaller now, and the Alliance in the middle.

We have three main problems today. The first is the past, or let us call it dealing with the past. There had been 30-35 years of violence, among not much more than 1 million people in Northern Ireland. It is hard to find someone who was not affected by violence, who didn't know someone or had been affected themselves. The level of trauma and suffering, which is passed down to children, is widespread. We have not yet found solutions of how to deal with the past. People feel that they want justice. 'I don't know how and why my son was killed, I need to know'. They may want them [the perpetrators] in prison. On the other side, some say maybe we should just draw a line in the sand and move forward. We have not found a solution as a society as to how to help people with suffering, who seek information, to promote peace, to continue peace and reconciliation.

Another issue is culture and identity. In Northern Ireland, you have 55% saying they are British, 45% Irish, so almost 50-50. Yet many are still upset that their culture is not accepted, not valid. There are problems about flag protests. In Belfast, the council voted that the Union Jack, which flew on the City Hall in Belfast every day, would only fly 18 days of the year, for example on the Queen's birthday, Prince Charles's birthday, and on other significant days. People who were Unionist, loyalist, particularly, were very upset by this. It hit their heart. 'My culture is being taken away by them. Those others, Irish, want to take my culture away'. There was rioting and protests. The flag wasn't the problem but the idea of whether your culture is accepted by other people. It is the same for the Irish; their flag is not allowed to fly. 'I want to speak Irish, play Irish music'. This is still reason for tension today. Do we have to accept that there are British and Irish people living in same place? We have to, but we are struggling.

A third issue is parades. A tradition for the Unionists is to parade, particularly in summer, celebrating battles won 200 years ago, and other things. Five or six parades cause huge problems. They go past areas where Catholics live, who say 'we don't want their parades and music and songs telling about victory over us'. There are hundreds of parades, for most there is an agreement on how they are to happen; five or six are problematic, mainly in Belfast. This poses a great source of division. Unionist politicians say we have to sort out this parade issue.

Last year there was the Stormont House Agreement. It was negotiated with the Irish government, the British government, and mainly by the parties in Northern Ireland, to solve those three issues. There is some progress, but the implementation of the agreement is the tricky bit.



Eleanor Johnson opens the floor for questions.

Participant: There was no truth and reconciliation commission in Northern Ireland. Why is that?

Will Devas: This is a fair question. There is no political will for reconciliation commission. Why? If I was Sinn Féin, the British army or the British intelligence, I would need to give out all the files and everything we did. There was collaboration with the paramilitaries, British intelligence officers telling these organisations that this person is in that bar. They then put a bomb there and killed that person. You would say there was collusion. We need to see what happened. They say they will never agree to show everything, so a commission is useless because you would only get half the truth.

On the other side, the British army would say, because you [the IRA] were a terrorist organisation you just killed without any paperwork, you couldn't even produce evidence. You won't reveal atrocities, sexual abuse, and abuse of your own people. My suspicion is, in reality no one wants it, because they are scared of what they have to reveal.

There is a victim-centred approach instead. There is not a commission for all issues, but a system of 'I lost my brother, the people who killed him are unlikely to be prosecuted' - so a commission for information retrieval. 'Can you find out information about my brother?' The commission is sealed in theory, and legally, people working there can go to the IRA or the British army, 'can you give us information about what happened to this person?' They may then give out

the information which is not allowed to be used in court. So this is safe in theory. I have learned in my work as a peace builder, relatives just want to know why and how, then things are better. They want to be able to have closure, to get on with their lives. This commission's work is not happening yet, but it was agreed on. They have two years to set it up after the Stormont House Agreement. Some people talk about: what about South Africa? Many study visits look at their reconciliation.

Participant 9: What steps were made to include the media and academia in reaching the agreement? And concerning information, there often seems to be a lack of cultural information. It requires other social actors.

Will Devas: This was very important, during the violence and leading up to the Good Friday Agreement. Civil society was very important, sometimes individuals, sometimes organisations. There were famous church people, Alec Reid for example, a Catholic priest who acted as facilitator between John Hume and Gerry Adams, because they didn't like each other. With his help they were able to have discussions in the 1980s. This very much helped the peace process to start.

Organisations like Glencree had political dialogue workshops in the 1990s. People were coming down to Dublin, this helped the high-level negotiations. Civil society in Northern Ireland, and with us in the South, were very important to help the political discussion. The media was probably less helpful, they like violence. They are quicker to report on problems and less quick to report on better things. They are important though for cultural and identity issues, crucial I would say. One problem at the moment are the people in power in Northern Ireland, the DUP and Sinn Féin. People are angry they feel these parties don't do anything to help their daily lives. They carve up power, and then do little for the people, which makes them frustrated with politics.

Participant 12: I would like to know about the American involvement? At which points were the Americans invited?

Will Devas: I don't know about the first time they got involved. There were a number of agreements in 1975, in the 1980s, none of them worked. In the run-up for 1998, the Americans became very important. There was this one key moment when Bill Clinton's administration granted Gerry Adams a visa to come to the US for three days, in 1994 I think. The British government under John Major was furious. 'How dare you let terrorists in, give him the credibility to go to the US'. Actually with the benefit of hindsight, that was important. It gave Adams some more legitimacy, and helped negotiations. It was a risky initiative. Clinton knew

that. He was on the phone in the run-up of the negotiations. Clinton would be on the phone for hours to various people, to encourage and push. Even now Clinton came two or three years ago offering his support. He is truly committed to the Irish peace.

Participant 1: Did the Americans involved have Irish roots?

Will Devas: Some do, some don't. The Irish vote in America is important but not that important, unlike the Jewish vote. Israelis have real influence in foreign policy, not so Ireland. They do have a connection though, which is helpful. America was relevant for our peace process, maybe not for others. In other contexts their involvement may even be bad and someone else may be more suitable.

Participant 6: In terms of policing, what was the approach of the commission?

Will Devas: That was dealt with by the Patton commission, led by Lord Patton, a British politician and former governor of Hong Kong, where he was sent to oversee the handover. It was someone with international standing. He undertook a thorough review of attitudes towards policing among the population on what steps in policing could be done to create trust. This was done after the Good Friday Agreement. They determined things like having at least 30% Catholics in the police force as minimum standard. There was a change of logo, to make it look less royal; it had looked like it had links to the monarchy. The fact that it is called a police service now, meaning to serve you as the people, not as a government controlling you. I know some police officers who want to do more community policing, want to react quickly when a robbery occurs, but the political situations seems to drag them back. They try to serve, but when there are riots you have to put on riot gear etc., it gets difficult. By and large, with few exceptions, the police force is accepted. There is no real problem with policing anymore, except for a few extremists. That is remarkable.

Participant 2: There was an ongoing peace process but on the other hand there were constant provocations, which can bring about traps. What were the source of provocations, and how were they dealt with?

Will Devas: There was a lot of problems during the process, for example during the Good Friday Agreement, or Belfast Agreement. Ian Paisley and his DUP were very much against the agreement. Paisley was brilliant at speaking, at gathering crowds, at rallying support for his cause. He died last year. As a person, he was very charming. His party kept saying no, never, never will terrorists run our country. Many supported him, he had a clear, simple message. Important in 1998 were the two referendums, in Northern Ireland on the Good Friday

Agreement, and the people of Ireland voted because their constitution had to be changed: it laid claim to Northern Ireland, so it had to be changed such that a majority decision in Northern Ireland could be accepted. In Northern Ireland it passed hugely, almost everyone said yes. The biggest 'no' section was linked to the DUP and to Unionists. The majority of Unionists in favour of the Good Friday Agreement was not as strong.

There were other problems too. The IRA did a big bank robbery in the early 2000s, an action which set things back by two years. Some said they could not be trusted, and everything started again after 6 months. You would keep hearing Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern talking about it, they would just keep stuck at it, saying 'let us talk again'. We were lucky to have Ahern and Blair, and have each of them in office for ten years. With their continued leadership they were determined to solve the problem. Dialogue won over provocations, and persistence.

End of session

Monday 20th April 2015

Session 3: Roundtable Discussion: Perspectives from the Irish Government on the role of international actors in the Good Friday Agreement - past and present





With:

Kevin Kelly, Director of the Conflict Resolution Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland

Émer Deane, Director of the Anglo-Irish Division, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland

Helena Keleher, Deputy Director of the Conflict Resolution Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland

Ralph Victory, Director of the Communications Unit, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland

Rory Beatty, Conflict Resolution Officer, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland

Venue: Iveagh House, Irish Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland

Kerim Yildiz: Thanks for having us. The Department of Foreign Affairs is an important partner for us and on these visits.

Kevin Kelly:²

We are proud to have such a high level delegation from Turkey here with us. We are curious to learn more about it. Welcome to Iveagh House, to one of the offices of the Department of Foreign Affairs. Please ask questions, everything is held under Chatham House rules without formal records. You are curious to learn from the Irish peace process. We are also interested to know about the Turkish peace process, and the challenges you face. You are influential people, with different roles in the Turkish society. Let me introduce my colleagues: on my right there is Helena Keleher, Deputy Director of the Conflict Resolution Unit, she is leading a number of portfolios, today she will share our work on women in peace and security. This is one of the priorities of our department.

At the end of the table there is Rory Beatty, he leads our work on conflict resolution. We are a small team. There is also a colleague of the Anglo-Irish Division here, and from the Communication Unit. They have first-hand knowledge and expertise of Northern Ireland, and of the work of this government and the Department to support it.

I would like to propose the following format: we will be saying a few words about our work, the approach our work. Helena will talk on women, then there will be an introduction by the colleagues of the Anglo-Irish Division. We have tried to listen close to DPI and their approach. You hopefully had a useful presentation by Will Kevass. We understand that most of this is new, please ask any questions, you will get a different perspective from this department.

² *Kevin Kelly is the Director of the Conflict Resolution Unit, at the Political Division of the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs.*

I would like to spend a few minutes explaining our work at the Conflict Resolution Unit. This is an interesting time for us. We are about to conclude a new foreign policy called 'Global Island'. Ireland is a small country, but we consider ourselves globally aware and international. There are four million people living here, but the size of our diaspora is considerably larger with 40m people of Irish heritage in America. There is a huge footprint in many parts of the world. Our policy is based on the awareness of that, we are trying to harness the potential of that diaspora in pursuit of our foreign policy objectives. We are launching this at the start of 2015, as a framework for our foreign policy.

My name is Kevin Kelly, I am director of the Conflict Resolution Unit. We are a small team within the political division of the Department of Foreign Affairs, and based on values as part of our foreign policy. We try to promote Irish values through our foreign policy. This document I have been referring to is very much trying to describe the overall values that drive our international engagement. Some don't come as a great surprise to you. We are a neutral but internationally engaged country. We are actively involved in terms of multilateral engagements, as a strong partner in the UN, next year we launch our bid to get on the Security Council. Ireland is a strong supporters of the UN system of multilateralism. Priorities are disarmament, human rights, and peacekeeping. We have a strong tradition of Irish engagement, engagement by the Irish army: people often say that the only reason for our army is in the engagement in peacekeeping work. We are proud to do that as a small country.

Another important theme of our foreign policy is international development cooperation. Ireland has been through difficult period in terms of economic development in recent years. It has been in the headlines internationally not for the right reasons, for bad reasons, but even in difficult times we maintained our commitment to development cooperation. We have a sizeable programme focused on bilateral cooperation with Africa, through our embassies in ten places in Africa. Many of those are in post-conflict countries which are emerging from generations of war. We developed good relationships with them, to help them developing from aid into trade.

Speaking of the conflict resolution side: back in 2008, the decision was made to establish a conflict resolution unit. It focusses on peacemaking to support mediation, facilitation, on agreement in different parts of the world, on peacebuilding. There is effort for conflict prevention, and for democracy building, through development programme. An important pillar of our work is also lesson learning. You can see a map here, these are some of the countries we have worked in, where we have either hosted delegations coming into Dublin like you, which were also coming to Belfast and Dublin to meet key figures in the process. An example is Colombia today, we supported an international NGO supporting the mediation in Havana, we share relevant documents from Northern Ireland, and we translated them for key actors.

We are not missionaries going out saying that we have reached the final state of peace. We are not selling a blueprint for a peace process. We know from our own conflict that every situation is very different, conflicts change all the time. We try to respond to requests, and try to engage where it is relevant and suitable. Colombia is an example, if there is a feeling from protagonists, from key actors, that there could be something useful to learn from Northern Ireland. Some of our engagement is very much under the radar, not publicised, there are no big media events. It is just discreet support. There is increasing interest in learning from Northern Ireland peace process.

Helena Keleher:

I would like to talk about the work we do on women in the peace and security agenda. There is UN Security Council resolution 2025, adopted in 2000, as a response to trafficking in the Balkans and Rwanda. It was adopted according to demand by civil society women groups to make it stop. It has two main goals, firstly to ameliorate effect of conflict on women and girls. Secondly, to increase the participation of women in peace negotiations, in peacekeeping, in development work etc. It was adopted in 2000, and there were six subsequent supporting resolutions, the most recent one 2122 in 2014, with the focus on women participation in decision-making. The plan was launched by the minister in January, endorsed by the government's highest level. This is important for Ireland: we have had a large tradition of participating in peacekeeping operations for decades, a tradition of overseas development aid, and we have recent experience of conflict unlike many who are participating in peacekeeping and sending troops. An independent committee produced a midterm report, similarly the civil society was important for our second national action plan.

As a quick highlight: there are four main pillars, prevention, participation, protection, and promotion. In terms of prevention for example, we can take action like training. Irish troops or civilians deployed can do training on human rights, on gender, or on tackling impunity. Another action is the strategic promotion of peace. The chair from Bangladesh said it is not just about making it safer for women but about preventing war via women participation. This is also related to our bid for the Security Council seat in 2020. We encourage participation: in our own department, in the defence forces, in peace service, in our action related to Northern Ireland, we undertake actions to increase women's roles in fragile states, and to work with men to improve role of women in decision making. Women are often a minority, but actually they are half the population. Our fourth pillar is protection, on gender based values, it is also about trafficking, about women's roles in humanitarian crises, in relief and rehabilitation. It is not just for people affected by conflict, but also aimed at migrants, the health service, and the

department of justice. Our fourth pillar is promoting resolution 2025, to promote the Human Rights Council for example, where we will engage in lesson sharing, public awareness. There are media campaigns funded by the department in relation to that.

There are tensions between protection and participation elements. We need to include both. It is not just about protecting them but giving them a role and a voice. Also, gender does not just mean women. In many ethno-national conflicts one group is dominating other, involving masculinity, the protecting brother.

Kevin Kelly: I think this work is relevant, for Ireland as well as Turkey. I would like to introduce my colleagues, Émer Deane, political director of the Anglo-Irish, who overall leads the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement with a team working on reconciliation every day. Also, there is Ralph Victory, currently director of our communications unit. He formerly worked in the Anglo-Irish Division, where he was active at the time when looking at the international dimension to the peace process and devolution. We have a sense of DPI and its ideas. We understand themes you are interested in, like the roles of third parties, monitoring commission to oversee it, and decommissioning. We have shared the themes you suggested with our speakers. Please, Kerim, explain the group and its role.

Kerim Yildiz: This study is part of our ongoing comparative studies visits in Ireland. This particular group has contributed hugely to the ongoing resolution on the peace process in Turkey, by particularly looking at how to broaden the basis overall. Most are appointed formally as Wisemen, as professional members of the media. It is one of the first commissions ever in Turkey to explain the peace process. In the past, the Kurdish issues were taboo, just like the conflict in the Philippines. In the last 12 years, the government has opened space, and this group of friends has contributed enormously to the issue. An important issue is disarmament, monitoring, third party involvement, and the withdrawal of rebels from Turkish soil. We would like to look at differences between third parties and a monitoring commission, between mediators and facilitators. What makes a successful peace process, how can a successful peace process go further in Turkey.

All countries are different, we have learned that so far from Northern Ireland. However, we don't want to make the same mistakes. We aim to ask a number of questions, to learn about the mechanisms. We have so far learned with two other groups from Northern Ireland. Members of all Turkish parliamentary parties, appointed by party leaders, have taken part in our past visit. This is what we hope to get out after this trip. Turkey is facing an interesting period, the election period. Hopefully we can take advantage of that with broadened basis in Turkey.

Émer Deane:

It might be helpful to summarise in five words why international support was important during our peace process. This will be a simplification, and may provoke questions from you. Every situation is different, these are very general impacts. Status, first: international involvement gives status to peace process. The world is watching, the world is determined that these actors want peace more than winning. In Ireland that was when international actors became interested. The US wanted to be part of the success. We had to get to that point. The quality of international actors is important: it cannot be just any American, or Canadian etc. One has to assure that people of quality and international standing come to assist. They need to have status that the world attaches to the peace process, people need to see who was sent by the US, by the EU, are they taking it seriously. It is not just about power, it is whether the person is independent, has values. It does not matter much if they have understanding of the situation, they first of all need values and experience when coming in.

Secondly, in a negotiations context, local politicians need to be given distance from difficult decisions. Any politician is subject to elections, to the media, to their criticism for decisions taken. In a conflict particularly difficult decisions have to be taken. Politicians cannot be expected to suddenly change things, they were not elected for that. As a terrorist organisation, you cannot tomorrow become a totally different entity. So if you have an international actor saying that this is a good idea, then you can take a step. The issue is to ensure that the step demanded is not too big nor too small, it also has to ensure that both parties are asked to take a step.

Many difficult decisions are to be taken, we need to call on international actors to make a stand and permit locals to take a step. Third thing is monitoring. There are two ways for that: formal mechanism to monitor peace process, like an international commission, but we also need an informal monitoring process. Those who have been involved need to make sure to stay involved. In Ireland for example, there is an annual visit to Washington DC in March of the Irish and the Northern Irish governments. Is everyone doing what they should be doing etc.? So there is informal monitoring in addition to formal steps.

We have a new political agreement in Northern Ireland since December 2014, the Stormont House Agreement, which returned to a very formal monitoring model because it was previously found that monitoring and implementation was too weak. We lost a few years, we didn't have the power we needed for proper implementation. Fourth, we had investment and economical support, by the EU; the US was also very generous and encouraged the private sector to invest in Northern Ireland. Business needs stability, and once stability is there, they become a powerful

civil society voice. If there is backtrack and unrest, business will hate that and leave. The international private sector became supporting.

I would like to make one last point regarding the continuity of the process. There is peace, and there is process. We need to measure both. We need to measure the people dying, sectarian attacks; the mere numbers. We also have to measure the process. We need to look at political organisations: do we have a process, and when we need international actors can we call them back in? I will finish on this note, with the Stormont House Agreement, and how to deal with the legacy of the past. The process started in 1994, in 1998 we had the Good Friday Agreement, only now are we dealing with the legacy of the past. It is a long process.

Ralph Victory:

Welcome to Dublin, I hope this visit will be useful. I previously worked from 1995-1997 in the Anglo-Irish Division. I then went off on an EU track, from Brussels to Dublin, then serving in the Embassy in Poland, then back to Anglo-Irish from 2008-2011. It is an interesting compare and contrast exercise. A lot of progress has been made, some not. Decommissioning is still delicate, but there has been large progress made, we are grateful for that. In 1990s there was no sense of inevitability for that, everybody had hopes and plans. Over 70% of voters in Northern Ireland opted for the Good Friday Agreement, it reflects the mind of people. When there is popular support, negotiators and all stakeholders can draw on it and point to it. It grants legitimacy.

I will speak quickly about the timeline of decommissioning. As a general point, it attracted a lot of attention for a long time, which was not necessarily helpful. This should not be seen in isolation. It was influenced by events in the real world, on the ground, and how they were perceived. We also need to consider technicalities for various initiatives. In 1994, there was ceasefire of the IRA and some preliminary discussion of giving up weapons. Only towards the end of 1995 did the issue come to the front ranks. How could the Unionist side have confidence with the nationalist side, they wanted reassurance, that even if the negotiations wouldn't go as planned, that there was no danger? The British and Irish governments considered this issues, with a team led by Senator Mitchell. The Mitchell Principles ultimately evolve around the issue decommissioning, that it would be handled in parallel to the promises made on the political track. Do we need a body for that?

A key step in our peace process was to find a process by which to deliver on these issues. In early 1996, the real world has affected in a negative way, in February the IRA's ceasefire collapsed. There was context to it, when people can talk about not using weapons or explosives: there is no practical approach unless it is accompanied by willingness and spirit and

determination that the recourse to violence is removed from everybody's thinking. Thankfully, throughout 1996 and 1997, we worked towards restoring the IRA ceasefires. There were also elections in Britain and Ireland, and as a result it was agreed by the two new governments to establish two independent commissions by General de Chastelain of Canada, with colleagues from Finland and the US. This created space that allowed the negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement. It called on parties to achieve decommissioning of all arms within two years after the referendum in context of the overall settlement.

A majority of Unionist parties implied that the decommissioning process would have to start straight away. Decommissioning proved to be a process, there was a lack of progress at the time, and it prevented further progress in the political spectrum. By early 2000, it was possible again, with the assistance of international colleagues and inspector Martti Ahtisaari from Finland and Cyril Ramaphosa from South Africa, the IRA agreed in 2000 to put their arms beyond use. Decommissioning was a vital part of overall process. It was the symbolic context of weapons as a means to achieve political goals, it has occurred in various places of Irish history. There was the implication that IRA would have been defeated by giving up arms, which was unacceptable to the Irish side. If progress should be made, any connotation of defeat had to be avoided.

In 2001, decommissioning started again. Through the independent international commission by General de Chastelain, over many years in the 21st century there were several acts of IRA decommissioning in 2001, 2002, further acts in 2004. In 2005, there were two key events in hindsight. One was a large bank robbery in Belfast, with many million pounds stolen by some of the IRA side. In early 2005, there was an incident when someone was killed, and IRA involvement was alleged. These real world events impacted on other things, shocked a lot of people, and clarified the view for many. It showed that the progress of decommissioning was very welcomed. This issue had to be completed, there was certainty at this stage. It resulted in a statement by the IRA in July 2005 to end the armed struggle. In the following September, decommissioning was completed, with independent figures, including members of the clergy. It was a historic breakthrough moment.

There are tentative lessons: they are not universally applicable, but interesting. It is important to have a process to address difficult issues, even making tiny progress matters, to broaden the agenda around the problem. Decommissioning delayed the whole progress, it delayed the political, human rights, identity, cultural and economic issues, which all ensured that no one aspect could dominate in a negative way. There was the role of independent verification by international figures of repute, like General de Chastelain.

There is a distinction between symbolic-historical aspects of decommissioning, and practical aspects. It reminded me of an instance when the head of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) said in an interview that there were no illusions, in the late 1990s, that anybody who had weapons and decommissioned could just get new ones through channels available. The issue was not just about weapons but about the mindsets of people. It was decommissioning of mindsets! To be honest, it is hard to argue with reality. The symbolism of history attached to weapons made it very difficult. It was needed to create space, for further progress on the political track. Those are the five or six key lessons we drew.

Kevin Kelly: This described the long and twisted role in the peace process, and the various dimensions involved.

Participant 6: In 1998, you said, the peace was almost completed, but only now do you deal with the past. What can be done to deal with past, is it possible to achieve success in dealing with past?

Émer Deane: The first challenge is to make the past the past. We need peace first, to create a past that is different from the present. That took a number of years. Then you have to build politics. While these things happening, to a certain extent you cannot deal with all parts of the past. Releasing prisoners was an immediate part of the agreement, it brought a party related to terrorists into politics: Sinn Féin.

Not dealt with were the deaths. There were ongoing police investigations in a normal way, however because of the volume of deaths during the conflict, in many cases there were no full investigations. There were many controversial deaths, with the British state involved, which was not willing to release information. There are cases coming back to the public domain now, every week there is an anniversary etc. The elections campaigns on the different sides remember all conflict deaths.

In the last four to five years, they had to be taken out of politics. We needed to find a framework. That was achieved with the Stormont House Agreement: there was no amnesty, that was not possible in Northern Ireland and it was not what people and parties wanted. Investigations will continue. The percentage of cases with prosecution is small, just four people in the past few years were put to prison. We also established an independent commission for information retrieval. For information, not for evidence, so separate from the judicial process. Anyone with information on dead, whether Ex-IRA, Ex-British soldier or anything, can come and privately give information to the commission: 'I killed x, I want to give this information to the family'. It works on a case to case basis, very differently to a truth commission, only the family

can ask for information. The family can then put it to the media; that would be their choice. This works on a twin track approach with police investigations. So this process is new, the legislation is still being written.

Going back to the international element, there are three layers: the Northern Irish/local parties, the British and the Irish government, and lastly the international community. Such difficult decisions cannot just be taken by the local government, so the British and the Irish government will do legislation in London and Dublin, not in Belfast. This big responsibility is bigger than local parties, and there is need for international management.

Participant 2: Was amnesty ever thought about?

Émer Deane: It was considered a number of times. The Attorney general of Northern Ireland recommended that in 2013, but nobody accepted it. It was an important moment that somebody said it, it shifted the public debate. Everyone accepted that there will be no prosecutions. This was an important point, as part of original agreement saying that anyone convicted of a crime related to the conflict would only serve two years in jail. Some say this is enough of an amnesty. Most had served more than two years at the time, so they were released. This was the single most difficult decision to release them. It goes against normal justice and democracy, but it was essential.

Participant 5: Would the family get to know the name of the perpetrator?

Émer Deane: No. In many cases the family already knows, even the name, they just want verification. The reason for not naming them is that governments have international human rights obligations: the government needs to protect the individual.

Esra Elmas: There was no formal amnesty - did former IRA fighters go back to the country?

Émer Deane: Some are still on the run, still out of the country. Just a small number. In some cases they received a letter by the government that they would not be pursued. Often there is a lack of evidence. It was after an agreement with the IRA that those confirmation letters were handed out.

Esra Elmas: Was there an indirect way of amnesty?

Émer Deane: There was the 2-years-release, which was a limited amnesty. People can still be prosecuted, which in small numbers happened. No British soldier ever served time in jail. For

the Irish government this was most difficult because a number of our citizen were killed by the IRA or the British army, and it has to be accepted. For Britain it was most difficult to accept international assistance and find a way to talk to the IRA. To Ireland it was challenging to change the constitution, and to release prisoners. For the IRA it was difficult to realise decommissioning that was not surrender. For Unionists, the challenge was to share power! All of that was quite big, easy for no one. There is only peace when everyone accepts that peace is better than winning.

Participant 7: We have the 8th ceasefire period in Turkey, we have not been able to start negotiating yet. The first ceasefire by the PKK was in 1993, the 8th in 2013. Now our government does not accept a third party or international involvement. There are no official decrees of forming a committee of Wisemen. Under such conditions, no international third party is allowed inside Turkey, there is no monitoring. What do you think about a monitoring group that is formed of Turkish citizens? There were ceasefires of the IRA, we are still backwards; we do not have time to wait that long. Do you have suggestions how we can use our time more effectively, how we need to make negotiations and agreements? The Kurdish problem interests four countries in the Middle East, and the UK and the US. The PKK is organised in four countries, Syria, Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. It has military troops and a strong diaspora in Europe. The problem is time. What mistakes can we avoid? For example, a public survey shows 60-70% support for the peace process in Turkey.

Émer Deane: Broadening of the problem is needed. It cannot just be about the PKK and the ceasefire. You need a vision in Turkey. If there is public support, the conversation must be wider, not necessarily international. In terms of the status question: you need to have an independent voice. In Northern Ireland for example, there were leaders of the faiths overseeing decommissioning, it worked because they were trusted. Because of Syria, public perception is changing, the US and the UK are looking at things differently. There are opportunities and risks. There is a need to try and find new discourse in public. Use international interest, people are already interested, this doesn't mean that it must be led by international actors. Use the interest, capture it, and create a process. Even if it is separate, to not upset those who do not want international involvement.

Kevin Kelly: This came up many times. Perhaps for Ireland, it was less of a challenge to find a neutral credible international voice. In many other conflicts we advised, it was a real struggle to identify such a neutral voice because of geopolitics.

Kerim Yildiz: Status is a difficulty. Who wants status? Who wants to have a third party, and why is it always the rebels or the armed group - because they are weak, or because they are looking for balance?

Émer Deane: I will keep my answer short. IRA members are human too, they have guns and power, what are you offering me [to bring me to the negotiation table]? If you have to offer something, this offer can be status, access to the US. For the British government it was the realisation that the IRA will not listen to them but they want US friendship.

Ralph Victory: It need not be so focused on practicalities. It has to be about shared principles and visions of ultimate goals. In case of the IRA ceasefire, it only broke down once, some within the IRA couldn't accept it. It often did not break but some decided not to be bound by its terms in other organisations. That was a dangerous element at the time, like the 1998 attack in Omagh. Incidents like that could be enough to destroy the process. It had the opposite effect however. It made them realise how much they were interested and invested in the process, they did not pulled off. This violence cannot be determining. It needs a vision to be added to the role of international facilitators. Absolutely, internationals are not always the right way. It worked well but it did not happen easily.

Participant 7: Turkey does not accept any international monitoring at all. Some of us foresee that a monitoring group will be formed among ourselves. What could be the benefit of an internal monitoring group?

Participant 1: That Turkey is not accepting an international monitoring group should be evaluated. Sometimes people are speaking of Masoud Barzani, the head of Iraqi Kurdistan, as speaking on behalf of the Turkish Kurds for international support. The role played by Canada in Northern Ireland could be similar to a role that could be played by Barzani.

Participant 2: The dominant power of the US and Barzani's impact cannot be compared. The US was very willing to solve the Irish problem, it was very active. Neither Europe nor the US nor any country could get involved in the Turkish-Kurdish process. Turkey needs to find its own solution with its own actors.

Participant 8: The government does not want to see such a committee. It would want to improve its public image though.

Émer Deane: Sometimes interesting conversations take place on the margin. There has to be room for wider conversation, for economic or political stream or whatever. If 60% of the public

are behind it, there is a need to find language to what public needs. Even to having a paragraph saying what the public wants could be useful, in a language the Turkish people understand.

Ralph Victory: We have to distinguish between the international dimension of government, but also individuals. Mitchell was acting on his own authority. He had an independent capacity with his colleagues, he was not giving the US perspective on behalf of the US government. Rather he was a facilitator, bringing people together. After the Good Friday Agreement, at the end of 1999 there were still issues outstanding like decommissioning. He took initiative of inviting people to talks on these issues. He invited parties to dinner. He wanted people to get to know each other as people. There was no talk about decommissioning. The role of an international party does not always need to be dramatic, or grabbing all headlines. Sometimes it can be very quiet, behind the scenes, just to create the space. It took the British a bit longer to come to that conclusion to have an international dimension. It helped the overall agenda. Finally, it was important to have someone from the US. Also Finland and Canada, we didn't just choose or limit ourselves to obvious countries for international support. We had to find someone to be a credible interlocutor, from wherever.

Kevin Kelly: This is an interesting discussion. You [Participant 7] said very clearly that no involvement is wanted. Realities change though. There is the element of timing. Soon there is a new government in Turkey. Maybe their mindsets shift over time, we experienced that too. The role of internationals wasn't always agreed, but it changed over time. The role of internationals was always around reinforcing the role of main actors, never to take leadership and interfere with the prerogatives, with the main attitudes. It is up to Turkey to decide on the scale of involvement, it doesn't need to be high level, it can be small localised technical support.

Participant 2: It is very important to learn about Irish experience. We had a historic hero, Nasreddin Hoca, and there is a joke about him. He was walking on a roof, slipped and fell down. Everybody gave recommendations, why did you go up on the roof etc., and he said: 'Stop talking! Find me a man who has just fallen from the roof and I talk with him.' Like Ireland. Your experience is more important to us than any other country's. Thank you!

Kevin Kelly: I would not know better words to conclude this session. Thank you!

End of session



Participants with Rory Beatty at Iveagh House, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland

Monday 20th April 2015

Tour of the Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament) at the Houses of the Oireachtas







Participants in front of the Leinster House building, where the Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament) convenes

With:

Padraig McGovern, tour official at Leinster House

Rory Beatty, Conflict Resolution Officer, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

Venue: Leinster House, Dublin

Participants were shown around the Houses of the Oireachtas in Leinster House by tour guide Padraig McGovern, hosted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. They visited both the Dáil Éireann, the house of representatives, and the Seanad Éireann, the Senate, the latter holding sessions in what was previously a ballroom. There were no sessions held at the time of visit.

Participants were particularly amazed by the story of Countess Constance Markievicz, They were further shown, and Irish nationalist and the first woman to be elected to the British House of Commons (without accepting the seat), one of the first women in the world to hold a cabinet position, and a freedom fighter for Irish independence.

Monday 20th April 2015

Session 4: Roundtable with members of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement



With:

Frank Feighan TD, member of Dáil, Fine Gael

Ruairí Quinn TD, member of Dáil, Labour

Seán Crowe TD, member of Dáil, Sinn Féin

Venue: Leinster House, Dublin

Frank Feighan: This committee was established as part of looking into the Good Friday Agreement implementation. We look at the Good Friday Agreement in understanding matters. Elements of the agreement are still outstanding. We are also a listening post of communities who feel let down and excluded, to give advice. We are still playing an important role. Unionist parties have taken the decision to not take part in the committee. Some say they don't have objections, we have however still not been successful in getting them in.

Ruairí Quinn: Thanks for having us here.

Participant: Who chooses the members of the committee, who gets involved?

Frank Feighan: Everyone is involved in the Republic. Most parties are on board in Northern Ireland, except for the DUP.

Participant 5: How many members does it have?

Frank Feighan: 50, plus the ones in Northern Ireland. On a good day there are only two to three in from the nationalist Northern Irish side.

Participant 10: How does the committee operate?

Frank Feighan: We meet every two weeks. Sometimes we reach out and invite people like former residents or prisoners. We are working on cross-border operations. In May, ministers of the North and the South are invited to address health services across the borders.

Participant 5: Is it a joint committee with Northern Ireland?

Frank Feighan: No.

Participant 5: What legal authority does it have? Does it only prepare a report with recommendations, or does it have legal authority?

Seán Crowe: It just gives recommendations to the ministry of foreign affairs. It serves as a listening post for many groups.

Participant 5: Which topics are you mostly focusing?

Ruairí Quinn: Our work is part of the rapprochement between Ireland and Northern Ireland. In 1937, with the new constitution in Ireland, we had a territorial claim on the whole island, which was hotly disputed. Then to get the ratification of the Good Friday Agreement, a plebiscite took the form of a yes for the new agreement meant to change the constitution too, to remove this territorial claim. Three to four years after the final agreement in Northern Ireland, it led to bilateral links between the North and the South. Every six months a ministerial meeting between the two cabinets is held. It is succeeded by a joint ministerial meetings, and there is a permanent secretariat in Omagh which is the religious capital of the whole island, with a lot of religious symbolism. The work of the committee is part of that overall architecture. We can make recommendations to the minister of foreign affairs in Ireland arising from our deliberations.

Seán Crowe: Many of us are also part of the bilateral Anglo-Irish consultation, we have space there to place ideas. There are mechanisms where we can raise issues that are coming up.

Frank Feighan: The agreement sometimes calls it 'Irish solution to Irish problems'. There is some ambiguity to that. Some of the real issues were kicked down the road, and these are some of the issues we deal with now.

Oral Çalışlar: What is the most difficult subject?

Frank Feighan: The most difficult is the legacy, the flag, the marching, the on-the-runs - the ones who committed atrocities, and how to deal with them.

Ruairí Quinn: I work for the ministry of education: we have bilateral meetings with our counterparts. The boundaries between the political entities North and South is irregular, it follows river and so on, like any border. So we wanted to facilitate people who felt like being on

the wrong side of the border. For children of the age of five to thirteen, if they lived five kilometers from the border, also for senior pupils of 18 years, they could be sent to any school across the border. We took a survey of parent choice through the school system, what was the interest in having that possibility. There is a very small percentage, 5-15%, interested in sending their children to schools across the border. The Northern Irish side had a bias, they did not want to lose numbers and lose more people.

Seán Crowe: For almost 50-60 years, Northern Ireland was a one-party state, with people coming out of conflict. Now there is a lack of trust. It is about simple things, some refuse to talk to each other when they are in the same room. We moved to a forced arrangement with parties sharing power.

Participant 6: The Good Friday Agreement established committees. So far if you are reviewing your work, what kind of developments, concrete steps, could be taken in what field, do you have examples?

Frank Feighan: There is a lack of opportunity in health, education, and infrastructure. It is amazing to see how things have moved apart in the political system, sometimes slower than in society. Sometimes mothers of opposing sides can meet where they had different lives just 200m from each other. The political system has not moved as fast in Northern Ireland. It is slower than it should be. I lived in the west of Ireland forty miles from the border. We didn't think it [the conflict] was our problem. There was no bloodshed, no violence, we knew what was going on. It was always an issue, but it felt like it was the problem of the UK or outside influencers like Europe. Without their involvement there would have been no agreement.

Seán Crowe: Before the Good Friday Agreement, there was per population the largest amount of British troops in Northern Ireland, higher than Iraq.

Ruairí Quinn: The part of the British army's occupation was deliberately provocative. In Croomagh, the British army commandeered the local football stadium as a helicopter base for twenty years. It was a constant reminder of the occupation to the local population. There were such daily provocations from one side and the other. The relations between London and Dublin have never been better, there is no more violence. Outside of the workplace and of parliament, they are like two people living in the same house but apart from each other. There is no interaction. That is going to take time.

In Dublin, we have a tourism authority promoting tourism for Ireland. And one in Belfast is doing the same. Both sides agreed to bring them together. Tourism is a big industry for this island, and

we try to cooperate in such areas. But it is slower than we would like. The Northern Irish minister of education couldn't meet me on his own without a monitor from the Unionist who wanted to know what was going on. This is a diplomatic reality.

Frank Feighan: The RUC was 95% Protestant. Catholics didn't trust them. They changed it to the PSNI now. I met with their chief, change is incredible. They are much more nationalists now. The British army is off the streets.

Participant 10: How do you see social class problems?

Frank Feighan: They are big. On the loyalist working class, the Unionist side, the level of education attainment is very poor. On the nationalist side, through the church or football associations, the strife for education is much better. Upper class has left those communities [Unionist], like teachers.

Ruairí Quinn: It was a middle class conflict fought by workers on both sides. The Protestant working class was guaranteed employment in Belfast, their shipyard was one of the biggest in the world. After 1922 and even before, jobs were for members of the loyalists. There was never the same cultural commitment to education. In prisons where they were kept, nationalist Catholic fighters did open-university studying, long term study etc., whereas loyalist internees went to the gym. The prospects of creating employment in Loyalist areas are very weak. This is a constant source of isolation which political leaders exploit.

Frank Feighan: The Northern Irish are very involved in the British army, especially the Loyalists. They are less than 2 million out of 60 million Brits, but 20% of the British army from Northern Ireland. Shows culture. It is the one place to get jobs, there is huge affinity with the British army.

Seán Crowe: Both sides used sectarian issues to appeal to workers. In the hungry 1930s, there were attempts to unite workers with employment issues. The sectarian card was used against that. It is a difficulty that the Northern state was built on sectarianism. On discrimination, supposedly because of religion, but rather about affiliation. In housing, jobs, in every element of society. This fed into the conflict itself.

Ruairí Quinn: A new dimension of insecurity are now the British general elections. The Conservatives want a referendum on EU membership. They had one in the 1970s before. The percentage to stay was 67%. Now there is a fear that a majority may leave, if Cameron won't get changes to the European constitution. The result could be very close. If the UK was to leave, there would be a referendum in Scotland for joining the EU. It would immediately isolate the

Unionist population in Northern Ireland, which is mostly coming from Scotland in 1600s. It could create a whole new instability, in terms of identity. When they use 'British' as a word in the UK, they think it's the same as 'English'. The Scots, the Welsh, and the Northern Irish are very clear about being Welsh and British. In reality it has always been the English empire, they just changed the name.

Participant 2: How close or far are you to a final solution?

Ruairí Quinn: This is final solution. The alternative is violence and war.

Frank Feighan: I was talking to hardline Unionists. They feel let down by their politicians. There are a lot of friendships now, of people who were once shooting, and discriminating. But there are still huge legacy issues.

Seán Crowe: Small groups would want to go back. But they have no support. The biggest danger is the slowness of change. The agreement has huge support and expectations, we have to live up to them. Otherwise people will be angry. The biggest issue to deal with is the past. People have to look forward. We have shared government, we are beginning to address outstanding issues of the Good Friday Agreement. Demilitarisation has happened, there is inclusive policing now.

Participant 12: Are there social divisions inside the Catholic society? Both in the North and the South, are they more secularist, or more religious.

Frank Feighan: Very much so. There is a lot of Catholics, but not too many practising Catholics. It doesn't play a big role now, religion. In the city maybe 10% are attending church, in rural areas maybe 20, 15%. It is not a huge issue now.

Ruairí Quinn: The Catholic Church plays a similar role as the Orthodox played for Greece. They have Istanbul etc., this would play until the 1960s. The fastest growing category in the census are now atheists and agnostics. It is the second largest denomination now. Even though 83% are nominally Catholic. One third of marriages take place in a secular context. The momentum is going away. There are three kinds of Catholics: Catholics by conviction, Catholics by culture, and Catholics by compulsion. Compulsion, because the Church controls most means of education, and 20% of our schools are overcrowded. Parents will have their children baptised for practical reasons, not for faith.

Participant 1: Are there mixed marriages? Are they treated as a different category?

Ruairí Quinn: This used to be difficult. For the main reason, if they would leave their towns: where would you live? On the Catholic or Protestant side? Some would emigrate to England maybe.

Frank Feighan: England was the destination for liberals. We didn't have divorce. The Irish solution to divorce was working in London.

Seán Crowe: It differs in terms of background, whether it is middle class or working class. For the middle class it was easier to form relationships across borders. During the conflict it was particularly difficult for the working class, depending on the areas they lived in. There was a chance of one's home being attacked on basis of intermarriage.

Ruairí Quinn: There is one tragic incident I remember. A Catholic woman had a second relationship with a Protestant. She had three or four children, and they threw a firebomb into the house, which killed all children. This act was condemned, but all it takes is on crazy person like that to get such a reaction.

Seán Crowe: It was a wakeup call for many to what we could slip back into. Something positive came out of the tragedy.

Kerim Yildiz: How did you find assistance from the international community during the course of the negotiations, and also after the Good Friday Agreement?

Ruairí Quinn: The Irish nationalists since 1850 were mobilising the Irish diaspora in the US, parts of England and Australia. Most significant was the American president. The Irish had strong ties with politics, particularly the Democrats. Churchill wanted to invade the South of Ireland because of German U-boats. But Roosevelt had elections in 1940, and Churchill understood that there was no way even for good reasons. Also Bill Clinton and Ted Kennedy played a big role.

Frank Feighan: There is supposed to be a diaspora of 75 million? It is similar to Turkey who has a diaspora, they keep commitment and love to their country. Sometimes this is even strengthened in the diaspora. There was funding in the diaspora, this economic dimension helped.

Seán Crowe: The UK wanted to keep it an internal problem. Bringing outsiders in, internationalising, was important for those who didn't trust the British. Clinton related it to the civil rights movement in the US. Involving international elements was a key factor.

Kerim Yildiz: How could the UK be persuaded? It was prohibited for Sinn Féin to travel.

Frank Feighan: Civil society in positions of influence pushed the political system to see both sides.

Ruairí Quinn: Gerry Adams was prevented from going to the US because of the IRA, even after the ceasefire. The White House appointed Kennedy's sister as ambassador in Dublin. She as ambassador recommended to give Adams a visa. The State Department was completely opposed, they valued the relationship with Great Britain more. But politics overruled diplomacy. The Irish lobby, the Democrats in congress, the Democratic president, they had more votes than the State Department.

Seán Crowe: This is still a problem in the State Department today. It is not a positive actor for change in Ireland.

End of session

Monday 20th April 2015

Dinner with international guests at the Shelbourne Hotel



With:

His Excellency Necip Egüz, Turkish Ambassador to Ireland

Sir David Reddaway, former British Ambassador to Ireland, member of DPI Council of Experts

Venue: The Shelbourne Hotel, Dublin

Kerim Yildiz: We are happy to support the work of DPI and its advisory board. DPI, rather than solely talking about issues, brings people together, get them to know each other. By inviting journalists and Wisemen, DPI aims at preparing society for peace. We try to have you meet as many people involved in the Irish question as possible, particularly in light of the role of international actors: meeting with Senator Mitchell will be a great opportunity, as his principles have gained acceptance around the world. Hopefully on this trip, we can come together ourselves.

His Excellency Necip Egüz: We would like to thank DPI to invite those guests from Turkey, guests from the thinking and media world. Previous guests have said that they were happy at the end of their visits to Ireland. Turkey is going through an important process, it is up to now whether Turkey can have a breakthrough. We have to prepare for a better future, for more democracy, to go forward. I myself would like to support that as an individual as well as a civil servant.

Sir David Reddaway: I spent three happy years in Ireland after three happy years in Turkey. Just as DPI recognises, every situation is different. Thus, this visit is also taking place under the recognition that Ireland is different from Turkey. I welcome the efforts that have been made, they are difficult and they take time. But I see progress in Turkey, and hopefully the political will is sufficient.

Kerim Yildiz: I would specifically like to welcome Ali Bayramoğlu at the table. Thank you for your huge contribution to DPI, both practical and theoretical.

Ali Bayramoğlu: When DPI started its activities in Turkey, it was under different conditions. Today we are discussing an international monitoring board, we can easily discuss such issues.

This is a major improvement. We started when the Turkish intelligentsia was accused of being agents or spies when suggesting things like that, now the discussion is recognised as important.

End of session

Tuesday 21st April 2015

Session 5: Roundtable with Bertie Ahern: Good Friday Agreement Negotiations



Participants with Former Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister) Bertie Ahern at the Skylon Hotel, Drumcondra

With:

Bertie Ahern, Former Taoiseach (Prime Minister of Ireland)

Venue: The Skylon Hotel, Drumcondra, Dublin, Ireland

Kerim Yildiz:

Bertie Ahern was Taoiseach from June 1997 to May 2008. Before that he served as MP, and from 1987 to 1991 he was minister of labour, from 1991 to 1994 minister of finance. During the course of all his time he has been involved in the peace process, he worked to bring peace to Ireland together with other international actors. He stresses that it is important to have international assistance, to have them involved. And to have an inclusive process. His experience goes beyond Ireland. He worked closely with George Mitchell. We will be trying to concentrate on one area, particularly the role of international assistance, of international actors. There are standard phrases: that all situations are different. But one thing is common, for the thirty conflicts of the last twenty years, there are common things they can learn from each other

Bertie Ahern:

Welcome to my part of Dublin, this is where I am from, where I went to school, and represented parliament for 34 years, I am still involved in community here. I have met delegations from Turkey previously, I know a little bit of your issues. I also know that you have elections in June. They always create their own tensions and problems. I stood in ten national elections, the great thing about them is that they come and go.

I will talk a bit about Northern Ireland today, but I am involved in other conflicts now. With people like Jonathan Powell and others. It is always worth repeating that no two conflict situations are the same. Each has its own character and features. There are some elements of our situation in Ireland, and supposedly every conflict. Nobody in the world can be an expert in conflict resolutions, even George Mitchell, he was so helpful, but then he got invited to get involved in the Middle East, and I think he was glad to finish that job. It proved to be a different conflict. I spent a lot of time in Ukraine last year. We spent time with Jonathan Powell in the Basque country. The only thing that's always similar is that all conflicts are about people. If you are to try to do something about conflicts, rather than waste your time, I believe that there has to be broad acceptance by people, parties, groups involved, that the status quo is untenable and some sort of agreement better. Otherwise you would better go home.

In our case in Ireland we had to convince people that killing is not a good idea. That takes time and trust. The key lesson is the need to be inclusive and as comprehensive as possible in terms of people involved in the conflict. There are sensitive issues, with governments in particular, who a sovereign government can they deal with and who can they sit down with. There cannot be a sense that you can bomb your way to the negotiation table. An elected government can't just negotiate with anyone. We in Ireland insisted that no party currently involved in violence, directly or indirectly, could be part of the peace process. Include everyone you can, but not unconditionally. This is not just a basic moral principle, it is also practical politics. People wouldn't participate if there may be a bomb under the table or you get shot at the door. You can take risks. If political leaders, like Blair and I, had taken the view that only people who are absolutely pure, who never used violence, should be involved, we would have never made any progress. Most of the people we dealt with were involved in violence. They had a track record in violence. Our job was to get them to say that this is over. There were many attempts in this country to try to make peace agreements with people who were only involved in peaceful means and excluded violent people. All failed. The hard work about a peace process is bringing those involved in violence in. It is not that difficult to bring anti-violence people in. But otherwise people violent outside will say that you waste our time. I could quote tons of examples.

I want to emphasise a key lesson that I learned, something I didn't know before. Dialogue is the only way forward if profound differences, like in Northern Ireland, were to be managed and resolved. I want to stress my belief in ongoing dialogue as a best way to build peace. You cannot persuade people to stop violence if you don't communicate with them. I cannot understand a government believing that you can stop people without talking to them. Maybe the Prime Minister cannot talk to them, but somebody else may. It doesn't work very well otherwise. It is like people getting married and never talk, that won't last long. This is hard sometimes, because you don't like them or they did terrible things, like murders, they have blood on their hands, but if you want to stop them you have to communicate. It is hard, it sometimes comes from the heart. You must say it's a terrible thing to do but maybe for the common good. I always tell this story: one day when I was in the North for talks, I was dealing with people called hard people, tough ones, all their 12 leaders were in the room. One notorious one, a tough individual, said to me, 'to the best of our knowledge you are the only one in this room who hasn't murdered somebody'. It was reassuring that I was the odd one out. I wonder if it's a good idea to be in this room. But that's what you have to do to find a solution.



Guest speaker Bertie Ahern

After a long conflict it is important that paramilitaries involved in violence are given an exit strategy. Because if they stop what they have been doing for years, some of these are bright and intelligent, others not, some don't know how to stop and get out. Leaders have to find a way out. You have to work with them to move from violence to peace, to a democratic process. Get them to call a ceasefire, then move to the next process to say 'never again'. A further lesson is comprehensiveness in terms of issues that should be incorporated. A small number of issue, particularly in long and protracted negotiations, is always easier to handle if you are chairing and mediating. Dealing with as many as possible is better though. You can't say it is 10 or 15 issues, but it is better to deal with them at an early stage. We finished the Good Friday Agreement negotiations, on April 10, 1998, but it took us until 2007 to implement issues. Sometimes the easy part are the negotiations, rather than implementation, as Mitchell said. I spent nine years of my life involved in negotiations, seven days a week, trying to implement. The more you put up from day one, the easier it is. I spent most of my time early as minister of labour with employers, farmers, trade union, I spent all my time negotiating. We were trying to get agreements for economic problems, in labour law, for national strike and things like that.

When you are an advocate of peace and try to convince people to move on the peace road, put yourself in the shoes of the other persons in the negotiation. A good negotiator is not someone who goes in, saying this is my view, this is what I said, get out if you don't like us. Like Margaret Thatcher, she was useless in my view anyway. God bless her. If you try to dominate, it is OK if you only take your own side. If you try to make progress then you have to understand their position. We all have biases and feelings about what we think of people. But you have to try to understand their argument if you want to understand them. Why do they go out and risk their lives? Why would people pack a car with explosive, with a timer in their hand, driving through a city, with the risk of blowing up themselves? Why would they go out at night with a machine

guns to take on the might of the British army, and risk themselves? Some say those are suicide cases. No. They are mad? - No. Something motivates them. You have to get inside of them to find out how you can change that.

It has also been fun. Sometimes negotiations can be boring.

I did that with parties in the North. I didn't like some of the people and their politics and the fact that they were so British, they didn't share my culture, anything. And still I ended up friends with a lot of them, very good friends with some of them.

The chairman asked me to say something about external players. I believe that external is a key question. There is no doubt that the contribution of the EU and the US was crucial. Clinton's help at critical times, the fact that Clinton gave us Mitchell, a good man. His wisdom, humour, patience, tact, decisiveness was indispensable. This commitment came from the involvement of a huge number of Irish people who lived in the US. It is our diaspora. The EU helped with resources, John de Chatelaine was in charge of decommissioning for several years. A reality of today is that every issue is connected globally. I had a chance of travelling and speaking in lots of places in my career, I spoke to the US Congress' joint houses, and in Westminster. Those honours were not for me, despite it being a good opportunity for me personally, but it had more implications beyond our shores. It is not just the question of whether the external dimension valuable, the wider world also has something to gain from access to that process. In my honest opinion, the conflict in Ireland would have never been solved without external players. ETA in the Basque country neither, in Syria it will never be solved without externals, or Iraq. Mitchell said about Ireland, that they were fighting the British always, there were many attempts for processes, it worked for a while, was crushed by the British, then back again in the next generations.

We always have to keep working, the day you stop working on the peace process is a dangerous day. If you believe that fighting won't reoccur is dangerous. I always think it is strange with the government, including my own. If there is a big war out in the streets and people shoot each other, the government will have no problem getting the army and police and aeroplanes and tanks, they don't worry about costs, and they will supply thousands of people. But when there is peace and you want the government to invest to keep that peace, into education, into motivating people, trying to make people live together, share cultural differences, there government say there is no money for those things. It is a pity. Prevention is better than cure. It is better to have a medical before doctors say you can't do anything about it.

Mitchell used to say we had experience with violence in Northern Ireland because we spent

hundreds of years fighting. But there is no common history of the same historical event. There are different views by people about how events started.

Civil society, employers, trade unions worked with us, worked hard to communicate with people. It was helpful to us because sometimes politicians can't do this. They were very useful to try to engage people. The more people talk about issues the better. Nothing is more important than working for peace. We all only have one life. I wish you well, you have a great country. I hope you can find ways of moving forward with your issues.

Kerim Yildiz opens the floor for questions.

Participant 12: About the Good Friday Agreement, some authors say there was 53% public support. What is the current situation?

Bertie Ahern: We put it to a vote in the North and the South, in the North approval was about 60%, in the South it was 94% for, 6% against. That is a big difference. The reasons for the 'no' votes in the North were that one of the parties, the DUP, didn't support it. They came on our side in 2006. After that all parties were on side. Support is now 95% in the whole of Ireland.

Participant 7: Related to the Kurdish question in Turkey, the solution of Ireland is teaching many things to us. On the one hand you were carrying out negotiations, were you calling people terrorists you negotiated with? Were you using discriminatory language? That's what we face in Turkey. Dialogue is going on, but authorities say we liquidate, we kill the terrorists. Instead of saying that we reach peace, they say they want to eliminate the problem of terror. Because of this approach of the Justice and Development Party, they and the HDP are attacking each other with very violent words, which creates tensions. What recommendations for style and language used do you have? And did you have a list of terrorist organisations, and did you exclude IRA from this terror list?

Bertie Ahern: This is a crucial issue. You must be as inclusive as possible. If you don't include people you are not going to stop them from engaging in violence. First we set principles, the Mitchell Principles. Basically you cannot come in until you say you stopped violence. You have to disengage from this day from activities that we know you did in past. You have to sign yourself to peaceful means. We used to say you cannot have the Armalite in one hand and the ballot box in the other, you need to leave violence behind. For me to ask you to sign, but still call you terrorist and go after you, wouldn't work. You have to say if you want to be in the process, sign up, then you are part of the talks. Or your political party can be. The IRA was never at the talks, Sinn Féin was; sometimes those were the same people. I say the opposite side of a coin. I said to

Gerry Adams, 'you have a meeting with the IRA, go there's a mirror!' For those who did not sign the Mitchell principles, then it is fair to say for the government 'we go after you'.

We still have a small number of people in Northern Ireland who are involved in violence. The government has to go after them. If you were involved in violence in 30 years, it was hard for leaders in talks to control their members outside. There were breaches of the Mitchell principles. Like in football, we had the red card principles, you were suspended if your friends engaged in violence, and there would be a period before you could go back in. Sometimes we were criticised. Some said 'we told you so, they are not committed, we gave them chances'. The same happened when we left out prisoners, Tony and I, people said to us you are mad. You left out all the murderers. But the fact is that practically all prisoners never reoffended, now 18 years later. Only a small number of them did. It is not true that it is impossible to convince people. Some are mad, are maniacs.

My advice would be to follow the system, the principles, if you stick to the rules you are allowed in, if you breach them you are thrown out, then engage in talks and work for them. It was the same with ETA, the Spanish government won't deal with you until you stop. This is the experience in the whole world, if you go out and kill all the terrorist, their sons and daughters are the next generation. You don't solve the problem. The British made that mistake from the year 1100. In only one case, Sri Lanka, were they all killed. But their sons and daughters will come back. The IRA was on terrorist list, on the Irish and the European and the US list, on every list. Also during negotiations until the end. I went to the Americans and convinced them to allow Sinn Féin to travel, Gerry Adams and others. The State Department said they were terrorists, they will never change, they are mad.

Participant 4: During the process, were there moments when you had real difficulty when you were making decisions? What is the most difficult point as a decision-maker? We don't have negotiations yet. How did you make the first definitions, how did you see the first demands, how did you establish a first kind of trust?

Bertie Ahern: Most of our early contacts with paramilitary organisation were private. Most was done by small group of people who were assigned to meet with them privately. Some of the early meeting were organised by religious people on both sides. No media. Secret. Locations were secret. There would not be reports out of it. If paramilitary groups are disciplined, which they usually are, there are no leaks from them. Only when you meet political parties, then there is leaking. Those first talks lasted for many years. Then, the hard bit was to convince them that they have to sign up to peaceful means. That they must be ready to go the road of peace. That's difficult. People you are talking to may be OK, the ones they represent may be not. That is a risk

for the government, a political risk. It is easy for me to sit now and say we have to take that risk, but it was a big worry at the time. One Christmas, before the negotiations, IRA/Sinn Féin had asked me if I release some of their prisoners for Christmas for 72 hours. The official advice was no. The minister of justice would not sign the orders, he was afraid, so I signed them the day before Christmas Eve. But I had to wait until they came back. If they didn't, I would have been gone. When they did come back, we could trust them.

When we released prisoners. That was difficult. We didn't release them within a year after the Good Friday Agreement. I was releasing prisoners down here who had 40 years in prison for shooting a policeman. If you release one who has shot police officers, you had to go and meet the relatives to explain. That is difficult. They are never going to agree, get them to listen is only thing you can do. If you didn't do those things, we would have ended on the daily news. The news was all: item number 1, who was shot, item number 2, which bombs and where, and so on. Would I listen to that for the rest of my life, or take some risks? The easiest thing to say was to get up in the morning, read a speech 'I hate terrorists, we should kill them all, hang them'. That is easier. Would that stop anything? Those are the tough choices.

Participant 5: Some parties avoided participating in the process. In such circumstances, what should we do? And secondly, will involvement of the opposition not make the process dependent on the opposition?

Bertie Ahern: We kept on trying, we have to challenge those people who don't participate. My phrase was 'why are you afraid of peace?' What is wrong with peace, with people staying alive? It will get them if you keep at it.

One of the biggest parties in the North, the biggest problem, was Paisley. He didn't sign up to 1998, he was outside the gate when we were signing, shouting abuse at us, 'traitors'. He didn't join the talks for eight years. We had to keep encouraging him to commit to the talks. He wasn't directly involved in violence, but he had big influence over the paramilitaries. The paramilitaries supporting him were in the talks before him. He had the biggest vote for European Parliament for fifteen years. He was a political leader, of religious influence. Things he had encouraged violence. There is always a small percentage that no matter what you say, violence becomes their life, their business. They are in trafficking, drugs, bank robberies. The police can normally deal with them if political motivations are gone.

Participant 9: Which communication strategies have you developed to encourage participation of civic society? Did you pick certain organisations?

Bertie Ahern: We did two or three things. There were many organisations over the period of the Troubles. Civil rights people, concerned about housing problems; we involved them because they have been there. There was a group called Women's Coalition. Their work was one of the best, it spread out into families, schools, communities. We involved trade union leaders, employers, farmer leaders, sports people, from music, journalists, writers; anyone who would help the cause. Most of these people were never involved in politics. All the public could hear was the Troubles. People did not talk about education, about economy, many turned off listening to that. It was good to have people talking about other issues. We went as broad as we could. We were encouraging them without making it seem like we did that. Trade unions, religious people, community leaders were our main focus. It was helpful to get another audience.

Participant 2: What was the impact of the press?

Bertie Ahern: Press correspondents from the whole world were talking about the horrors. When it came to the Good Friday Agreement, we spoke directly to editorial teams of all media. We went to them. 'Whatever your differences with us normally is about politics, please report on the Good Friday Agreement, on opportunities'. The press was wonderful, very supportive. They wrote many articles in support of it, they supported publicity of events we were involved in. I always said that in Northern Ireland the most read document was the Good Friday Agreement, people read it everywhere, people who would never read a political article, and they still read it. The media helped to do that. I had plenty of differences with the media, the Good Friday Agreement wasn't one of them.

Participant 7: In Turkey today, an international monitoring or third party intervention is not allowed by our government in the process between Öcalan and the government. HDP is ensuring his connection with the PKK by visiting him. The government did accept to form a national monitoring delegation. But the government is not allowing an international one. Do you think a national committee is enough, or do we need a third party?

Bertie Ahern: I never like to recommend other government what to do. However, an international body is almost essential from my experience. If it had been left to us in Ireland, with the British, we would not have solved it. No doubt. In the Basque country, where I was part of an international group, again that would not have happened.

Participant 1: I want to support your approach about international involvement. I just want to remind that Turkey was involved in the Philippines, Turkey gets involved in other countries, so it should also allow other parties in their own domestic affairs.

Bertie Ahern: It is not rocket science. Like the news about the talks with Iran, there is a multinational group with the Chinese etc. Or in North Korea there is an international group involved, anywhere in the world. You could argue that where people stay out, or only go in a little bit, like with Syria. If people went in early in Syria, when it was just protest, they could have made some progress in the first six months, and look at it now, it is unsolvable. Aung San Su Kyi being free is what international actors have made possible. You rarely hear about the country in the media now. The reason is simple enough that governments have fixed positions about situations, they have said so much for so long, it is hard for them to reverse those positions. Whereas internationals can deal with things differently.

Participant 6: Did you mention the issue of amnesty during the negotiations? What kind of reactions did you get?

Bertie Ahern: The only amnesty was releasing prisoners. We released them on license, so not unconditionally. If you were guilty of reoffending, you went back to jail to serve your sentence. That was the amnesty. If you were on a ten year sentence, and some were, and if you reoffended for anything, you were back for fifteen. Maybe that's why few reoffended. Prisoners became crucial in selling peace on the ground. It was hugely important that they involved themselves in their own communities on the peaceful side of things. It was a risk, if they agitated and created difficulties, we would have been hammered. But they became advocates of peace in their communities.

One issue about arms: we did not handle decommissioning very well in the Good Friday Agreement. We said we would set up an international commission, with John de Chastelain and others, but we were not precise about how this should be done. This turned into a difficult, messy position. It took us a long time to hand in the paramilitaries' weapons. If I could do it over again, we would have been far clearer on how to deal with arms. The IRA had huge stockpiles of arms given to them by Gadhafi because he hated the British, so he gave huge shipments to the IRA, large amounts of everything. They still had them when the Good Friday Agreement passed. This took a long time. We left it loose and grey, because it was a torturous issue. We got the IRA and other groups to agree that we allowed arms inspectors who were secretly brought to the arms and marked them. Inspectors went back every now and then to see whether they have been used.

Some of the IRA leaders who were responsible for the arms came to the conclusion themselves to get rid of the arms rather than having to take responsibility to protect those big arms. I am not suggesting to give them all in on day one, but it better be clear how it is done.

Participant 3: Did you have the agreement maybe because such items were vague?

Bertie Ahern: It wasn't that. It was rather having so many other issues. Everyone said if we get peace and nobody is using arms, these issue will die away. They did not. When the information came out about how many arms the IRA actually had, that they had received five shipments from Gadhafi, and we only caught one of them. The other four were buried somewhere.

Kerim Yildiz: Some have laid down their arms as a condition before moving to negotiations.

Bertie Ahern: You know my opinion. That means telling the groups to surrender. I got to know them. Leaders of the IRA, who had fought for 30 years, many of their friends were killed, or are in jail, they are separated from their families, run off to the US or Australia, and you want to tell them to give up their arms first? I wouldn't do that. 'What guerrilla leader will surrender? I fought for 30 years!' That's his answer, and I agree with him.

Participant 12: Two months ago, our Prime Minister made a gesture to the guerrillas to go down the mountain. It was a gesture to disarm their minds. Two months ago a university student had participated in PKK fighting in Syria, he then came back to Urfa. He got kidnapped by his father who wanted to save him from the PKK. He sent an invitation to the Prime Minister to go to his wedding, I participated at that wedding. We gave a call to the wife and kids and parents, congratulated them and gave them a present. Did you experience similar incidents? What kind of impact could it have? It is important to purify their minds, to make them say I don't want that, how influential are gestures?

Bertie Ahern: Any symbolic act can work. Ultimately, you purify their minds by dealing with the causes of the trouble. Paramilitaries don't go out to get killed for fun, they believe in their cause and motivations. We thus need to deal with inequalities and causes and injustice. That was discrimination in Northern Ireland. Houses and grants were given to Protestants. Catholics were discriminated, this was the underlying reason causing all the trouble. Those are the kind of things you have to challenge in negotiations. I was involved in many secret meetings and gestures, in the end we negotiated about the main elements. We totally changed the police force, we set up equality on the agenda, a new criminal and justice system, and the police force would no longer be 99% Protestant. Symbolism is a help, the solution is dealing with causes.

Participant 4: In Turkey there is a widely discussed issue that there is no solution without press freedom. Some say we have an authoritarian leadership. Do you consider this an obstacle to the peace process?

Bertie Ahern: I know some of your leaders. With thatcher we would not have solved the

problem. You need someone to be prepared to enter into dialogue. Any leader anywhere, even if it's Putin, will want to see progress. I have friends involved in North Korea, which is really authoritarian, but they are slowly working towards finding a solution. It may take a long time.

I wish you well in your efforts. Elections always raise tensions, but they will be over in a few months. Hopefully the PKK don't cause any trouble on the way.

End of Session

Tuesday 21st April 2015

Session 6: Roundtable Discussion with Liz O'Donnell: The Mitchell Principles in Practice





Participants with guest speaker Liz O'Donnell

With:

Liz O'Donnell,³ Former Minister of State

Venue: The Skylon Hotel, Drumcondra

Kerim Yildiz: Liz O'Donnell worked closely with Bertie Ahern, with Tony Blair, George Mitchell. We try to concentrate again on the role of international actors, in terms of her perspective as a member of the Irish government, and the lessons they learned from the Irish experience.

Liz O'Donnell: About my background: when I became minister in 1997, there was no peace process, it was blown off course by the Canary Wharf bomb in London. The previous government had worked hard to keep the peace process going, discussions have been ongoing in Northern Ireland, but here was no ceasefire. We came into government, it was actually two new government, under Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern, my party was the smaller coalition partner. When I was appointed minister of foreign affairs, we would normally deal with Anglo-Irish relations. Immediately it was not apparent that I would be involved because the negotiations ceased.

On 20 July, the second IRA ceasefire was announced and we were back in business. I received a message from my party leader to get involved. It was a challenge, I had not previously been involved in any detailed way in the Anglo-Irish peace negotiations. We had it on good authority

³ *Liz O'Donnell was appointed Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs, Ireland in 1997, with responsibility for Overseas Development Assistance and Human Rights. She was among the representatives of the Irish Government at the multi-party talks at Stormont, which culminated in the Good Friday Agreement in 1998.*

that the IRA and Sinn Féin were happy to try it again. After about twelve weeks from the start of the ceasefire, during a period of decontamination, the ceasefire seemed to be steady and not just cosmetic. The two governments went to Northern Ireland, George Mitchell came back, and we started negotiating. We were not starting with a blank page. Lots of work had been done by the previous two governments; Reynolds' government since the first ceasefire, and the previous one. A lot of working papers were really finalised, broadly outlining a possible settlement. These working documents are probably the most important thing. The solution we eventually reached was a masterpiece of drafting. When you think of the diversity of people to be satisfied, the long disputed areas, the drafting was an exercise which was the business not of parties but of governments. That's when they came in because they were experts of drafting, the best people in Blair's office, of the British and Irish foreign services. They were notoriously talented at drafting. The Prime Ministers were totally focused on this exercise, there was nothing more important from the time of the formation of the two governments. We had two new governments, two young and fresh Prime Ministers with fresh mandates, who were totally committed with all of their staff.

There were two aspects, first to frame a replacement for the Anglo-Irish agreement, a new constitutional agreement between the UK and Ireland in relation to Northern Ireland. It was big drafting exercise. It dealt with constitutional change, changes in legislation to reflect the totality of the two countries' relationship. Then, as a second aspect, there was the conflict resolution process as well, which was not just a political exercise, people were killed. The fractured paramilitary war was going on. Progress on the first was slowed down by the fact that we couldn't make progress on conflict resolution. It was cross-cutting, to balance the new agreement between the governments, and the need to end the violence. It was a fallible process, some were less sure than others about the bona fides of Sinn Féin. They were not very involved in politics at the time. They are successful now, 16 years later. At the time, as far as the Irish government was concerned, they were terrorists. They planted bombs in our cities and in the UK. There was distrust. The government in Ireland had to be careful not to compromise democratic values, which was risky. The peace process was never easy, it was never plain sailing. It could all have blown up into our faces, we could have made fools of ourselves as a sovereign government. People could place a bomb at any time and thus killing any progress we would have made.

What happened and was useful, was the help of outside actors. We had the US, which was hugely supportive. The Irish diaspora is big in the United States. Irish Americans were fully supportive to process, right into the Oval Office. The State Department did what they could, Madeleine Albright used her influence and put pressure on Sinn Féin through their contacts. A lot of funding to Sinn Féin came from the US. That friendship between governments was crucial. It

was most manifested by them giving us George Mitchell. He, more than any other actor, was able to bring the parties around a table, representing the different stances of Northern Ireland. He was able to bring people to a mental state through his skills, to a space where they could find accommodation.

It was not as if it was an El Dorado or an ideal ending. It was tough, people had to abandon long-held positions. Nationalism, which was broadly the SDLP, Irish government and Sinn Féin's position, was not compatible with British Unionists. We were hoping to achieve a settlement of those differences with the view to look forward, to a fair settlement. There should be parity of paying, and of gain for the outcome of work, according to Mitchell. Everybody should feel to get something out of the negotiations. Most difficult was that the parties were not in a good space of trust. They all had their constituencies which made them very nervous. The Unionists were extremely nervous, terrified to be seen as conceding with terrorists. They were negotiating down, risking democratic values, electoral support, by negotiating. For that reason, a huge cohort of the Unionist community, the DUP, was outside of the negotiations, under 'Mr. No' Ian Paisley. It was a difficult position for that party. We looked at the negotiations as an opportunity for Sinn Féin to come out of the margins to come into the democratic room. But Sinn Féin still had a massive arsenal, sufficient to blow up the centre of London. 'How come we are negotiating with those people, they must be committed to decommissioning'. It was a huge issue.

We finished negotiating the settlement without actually getting decommissioning. We dealt with it by having agreement in principle form, between Sinn Féin and other paramilitaries; that they would deal with a decommissioning body under de Chastelain. He would oversee decommissioning. There would be verifiable decommissioning of their arsenal by an independent body. It was important to have independent oversight to build confidence in the participants. The issue had always been giving up guns. First, they had to maintain the ceasefire, then forego their arsenal, which proved more difficult than anticipated. Sinn Féin was reluctant, because they saw it as an outcome, not a condition of negotiations. This was their militaristic position. We constantly were in a state to persuade the Unionists to stay in the negotiations; that it was worth the risk if the outcome was peace. It was a high risk politically. At the end, the DUP had overtaken the Unionists who were in the negotiations. It was the people who took the risks for peace who did not well politically. They lost all their Westminster seats. When institutions were established, the DUP actually achieved power, when everything was done. This is a big irony. It wasn't good for the participants who took risks, were courageous, moderate. In the end the extremes did better politically. We have to live with that. It is not fair, history will be kinder to those parties who took such risk and gave up so much.

Decommissioning was ultimately to de Chastelain and his colleagues, who always said about that issue: it was about decommissioning of mindsets. More weapons could be bought. If the mind was not wholly committed to peace, decommissioning would be a charade. George Mitchell tried to bring the paramilitaries into a space where they were so embedded, where they could see that politics was working rather than guns. It required a huge degree of leadership in the Sinn Féin party. They were willing to actually make a settlement but they were demanding. They wanted the best possible outcome for all their agenda, their inequality agenda. There was unfairness in terms of jobs, discrimination against Catholics. There had been reasons for unhappiness and political fractioning. Civil rights of Catholics had not been recognised by the British. When they campaigned peacefully led by John Hume in the 1960s, the British government's response was not good. The army reacted in a militaristic way, with the Bloody Sunday, civilians were shot in the streets. There were faults on all sides. It resulted in a long and dirty war between paramilitaries and the British government. We also had fatalities down here in the Republic. It was a subversive group undermining the Irish government, which it did not recognise. They were shooting army and police members, and often civilians. For such a long period, even though Ireland was economically thriving, this was a monkey on our back. It was a long-term problem preventing investment, it meant lost lives. The war on our island was unnecessary, because it was capable of being resolved in negotiations.

At the beginning of the negotiations, there was a lot of fear about the fundamental dilemma of negotiating with terrorists. Once we overcame that, Sinn Féin was willing to make a settlement. There was fatigue on both sides, the UK was fed up with their cities being blown up, their soldiers killed. They finally realised realpolitik, that they could not win this war by security measures. This took a long time. John Major to a certain extent authorised the beginning of the ceasefire negotiations. This took a long time, 10 years of secret approaches to the IRA with the view to ceasefire, settlement. It happened through trusted intermediaries, which was important for all peace processes, who can operate on good authority from the two governments, to tease out ways if there is goodwill. There was a lot of support once it started to make progress, the will to throw a lot of civil service and diplomats to work on a settlement.

Negotiations started in September, it probably took two months before we agreed on an agenda. An agenda will have headings, and people will object to even seeing cross-border bodies or decommissioning there. It was difficult to agree on the agenda. Nothing was agreed until everything was agreed. We could talk of power-sharing, decommissioning etc., it could be discussed without prejudice. There was a benefit to get people talking without fear. The disadvantage means that you are not really making process, you can't tick off points. It is a recipe for procrastination. It would have been great if Mitchell could have ticked one off after the other. But nothing was agreed before everything was agreed, we couldn't buy in before they

saw everything. It was all interdependent.

What we talked about was massive. We talked about the whole of Northern Ireland's government, of mandatory power-sharing, a participatory government of forced power-sharing based on a specific formula of the D'Hont system. The negotiations had three strands: firstly new internal arrangements in Northern Ireland, as a second strand the North-South arrangement, and thirdly East-West between the UK and Ireland. When it all came together, the Irish government was not involved in the internal Northern Irish setting, this was a matter for the UK and Northern Ireland. I was involved in the North-South strand. We would have cross-border bodies. We would allow greater cooperation and representation. And I was involved in the East-West strand. When it all came together, the scale of everything envisaged was shockingly big. There was a difficulty in implementing. It meant total reformation of relations. It involved everything from changing the legislative system, government arrangements, the judicial system, the equality platform, housing, and the employment of previously unfair governance.

1998 when we signed it was only the beginning. The outside world thought that it was all over. History showed that it would be many years until the totality of matters agreed were implemented. It took ages before we had total decommissioning. It took almost the same amount of time before there was the governance that we had envisaged. It was work in progress for a long time, not for the faint-hearted. There were highlights and lowlights, days when we thought it would never work. What made it strong was the mandate by the referendum in Ireland and the North, who voted for the agreement. It gave the agreement a certain degree of popular authority. It gave the security of knowing no matter how difficult it was, it was mandated and nobody had been forced.

Kerim Yildiz opens the floor for questions.

Participant 11: From start to end, can you provide information about the power of women in the process?

Liz O'Donnell: The negotiations were loaded in favour of women and small parties. The Northern Irish women's coalition had two negotiators, the same as big parties. It was a liberating thing in Northern Ireland. Parties were very tribal, fixed for so many years, they had no imagination, no professional or academic experience. Women came from across the sides, from wider civil society. Some were nurses, social workers, academics. Women were poorly represented in the big parties in Northern Ireland. They would not have been at the table. Not one of the Unionist negotiators was a woman. What they brought was not just gender to the table, but also professional expertise coming from their jobs, in law or academia. They were

very good at helping governments to overcome obstacles in the process. That's something political parties are not very good at, they were too fixed in tribal resolutions and fixed positions. They had no experience in negotiating. The elected people in Northern Ireland were excellent at articulating their own position, but had little capability of putting themselves in the place of the other side, of understanding the other perspective. Women brought to the table flexibility, an open perspective, which was not based on tribalism and history; common sense women with an open mind. It made a difference, it was liberating.

There was also space for smaller parties, for labour, smaller loyalist parties, for two small ones on Unionist side who were paramilitary groups, which also allowed them in the discussion. It was about widening the discussion, bringing in people from the margins, which was just as important as bringing in Sinn Féin. It was important to get in small paramilitary groups who had no party. Women in particular made a deliberate and comprehensive contribution. That Mo Mowlam and I were female ministers was a coincidence. She was the first to have an understanding of the nationalist grievances. She was not from the conservative establishment in England. The British government was ultimately fair, open to reach accommodation. She was like that personally, too. The two Prime Ministers had a good relationship as well. They were both young and ambitious.

To go back to women, they were useful. My only regret was that when the normal elections started after the peace process, the Women's Coalition failed electorally. When it came to the tough real world of electoral politics in Northern Ireland, the Women's Coalition didn't survive. People voted for traditional parties. It would have been good to have them help implementing.

Participant 9: Were there plans to integrate the idea of peace into the educational system?

Liz O'Donnell: This is one of my big regrets. It had little political support. It would make sense to sustain peace by introducing education about peace, about power-sharing, respect for diversity etc. Normally this happens in integrated education. But in Northern Ireland education is so fundamental to what makes Northern Ireland diverse, there is little political enthusiasm for integrated education on either side. The big parties from both sides wanted to keep their children in Protestant or Catholic schools. There is no political support. Only a small sector has integrated education now.

Participant 5: Can you elaborate on the election system? How many parties go into the elections, what is the threshold, is it mandatory for all parties to be in the government?

Liz O'Donnell: Today's system is based on shared government. There are not very many parties.

The main parties contest the elections. The agreement is that the executive will comprise 50-50 of Nationalists and Unionists. People have to declare what they are, Nationalists or Unionists. At the moment the DUP is the biggest party, having the first minister, Sinn Féin is the second biggest, with the deputy first minister. There are four Unionists and four Sinn Féin ministers, the SDLP in the other nationalist party. This is not ideal, but it is working all right. They are still political enemies yet they are forced into shared government.

In many ways, it makes progress on wider issues apart from peace difficult. They are very different when it comes to economic policies yet they share a government. There recently was a budget stand-off between the two parties because the UK government brought in a welfare proposal for the whole UK. But the Nationalist parties would not accept the welfare cuts, the Unionist were willing to accept them. It led to crisis in government because of ideological differences. Sinn Féin, the second biggest parties, are electorally strong in the Republic camp, they are opposing all austerity. It is complex.

We had very many crises in Northern Ireland, it seems to limp from crisis to crisis. It is getting better though. It still is not a perfect system, but at least we have peace. Politics in Northern Ireland are always going to be difficult. It is a divided society. It is different to the Republic, their politics, it is much more based on tribal grievance. People still feel Nationalist or Unionist, that's the way they are and think. There is little room for new ideas or parties. You would imagine opportunities for new parties with the economic recession, but there seems no space for fresh thinking. People are still stuck in the trenches.

Participant 1: Was the Women's Coalition elected by London? Were both Protestants and Catholics represented, how was that managed?

Liz O'Donnell: They were elected as members of a brand new party called the Northern Irish Women's Coalition. They came from civil society, it was not dictated. It included women from both communities who saw that they would be excluded from important negotiations, but who had a lot to contribute. They were committed to have a say in the new resolution of the war. Yet, if we allowed just traditional parties they would have been excluded, so they formed a party, which entitled them to contest in elections. They drew support across all sectors of society. They did not contribute as Unionists or Nationalists, just as women. They didn't play the sectarian card at all. They tried to speak as women, as members of civil society.

Kerim Yildiz: When do you think the Northern Irish peace process actually came inclusive?

Liz O'Donnell: A big concern of mine was that we made a settlement with only half of the

Protestant community. The DUP remained outside, they did not sign. It was a big concern that although a majority of people was voting, there was a big cohort of political Unionist objections to everything we had agreed. Eventually politics worked that out, they won the elections because of their opposition. Because it took Sinn Féin so long to give up arms, there was a gradual loss of confidence on the Unionist side, that's why they gained support. 'This is not a fair deal for Protestants, the IRA still has its arsenal!' They won votes all the time. The DUP came out as the top dogs when the IRA finally gave up arms. That's when it became inclusive. The people opposed to peace won seats!

I also regret that, not just about the women not surviving the tumble after negotiations, the same happened to small loyalist parties, to the paramilitaries on the Protestant side without a political party, they couldn't sustain. They were not expert at being a political party. So there are no women, and no representatives of loyalists who were previously paramilitaries. That's why we had unrest in the loyalist poor working class paramilitaries, who pay allegiance to the Queen. They are poor, uneducated working class who feel excluded. They feel to have no political representation at the moment. It was a mistake, we had that choice at the negotiations, on the last day to continue the weighting, to have loaded voting to ensure that women and loyalist small groups continued to be involved. The big parties were so selfish and greedy for power that they would not agree.

Participant 1: The women, rather than being part of one of the sects, how did they manage to invent a new identity for themselves as women, what kind of psychology was behind that?

Liz O'Donnell: Monica McWilliams was the woman who start the Coalition. She was Nationalist. She didn't abandon her views, her allegiance, she was still nationalist. They came to the negotiations with open mind. They could do that because they were mandated to go with an open mind; that was on their election material, that they bring common sense and non-sectarianism to the negotiations. They would talk about equality issues, about how to deal with victims of violence. They said they would deal with prisoner issues. They brought a different perspective, on education, equality, employment rights, and human rights. Monica McWilliams became the first woman in the human rights commission. She held lectures in human rights and equality studies at university. They came from a place which would not have been represented. They did not have to abandon allegiance, but they were not there to represent a tribe.

Kerim Yildiz: Monica McWilliams is advisor to DPI. Unfortunately she is not in Belfast when we are there.

Participant 7: Since you were minister, you participated in the negotiations. I wonder about statistics. How many meetings were carried out, were they regular meetings? What was the total volume of work?

Liz O'Donnell: From the point when negotiations started, I was in Belfast three days a week. It was not always a roundtable. There were far more bilateral talks because the level of trust was not sufficient to have them in one room. The two governments were often acting as proxies. The British government would help the Unionists with the drafting, we helped the Nationalists to prepare papers. Everything was trafficked through Mitchell's secretariat which was sitting full-time. It allowed the process to go on and have permanency.

We had killings during the negotiations, sectarian ones, some threats to the ceasefire. We had to give us security that the process would sustain instability outside of the room. It was difficult. It was a leaky process. People were well behaved in terms of confidentiality. The media wanted to know everything. We became experts at saying little despite being at press conferences. Nothing much was achieved, but we pretended so, people were looking for confidence. The media was very supportive. There was little mischief making from the Irish or British media. They knew what was at stake, they were supporters, but critical. They reported on atrocities. We kept them up to date on what was happening. They were part of the process as well. Mitchell was the main chairman of the talks, he would chair the plenary, at the big table. Little was achieved at those meetings, most progress was done bilaterally with the parties. Sinn Féin and the Ulster Unionists did not sit down once in a discussion, you wouldn't believe it. Still we reached agreement. The level of trust is still very bad. We negotiated for nine months, reached an agreement, yet the main protagonists never sat down face-to-face.

Kerim Yildiz: When did you realise that the peace process would become irreversible? Still there were divisions, within Unionists or the IRA. This is still causing instability in their areas.

Liz O'Donnell: My own belief was that it could not be relied upon to be permanent as long as guns were not decommissioned. When we had an objectively viable independent body for monitoring, that was when we knew that it was irreversible. That's when the arms are taken out of conflict.

End of session

Wednesday 21st April 2015

Session 7: Roundtable Discussion with Dermot Ahern: Setting the Scene for the Good Friday Agreement



With:

Dermot Ahern,⁴ Former Irish Member of Parliament

Venue: Ballymascanlon Hotel, Dundalk

Esra Elmas: Welcome to the third meeting of the day. We are in the Dundalk region. Dermot Ahern is our guest, he is former minister of foreign affairs. He undertook important roles during the agreements before the Good Friday Agreement. Before working as a minister of foreign affairs, he also worked in different ministries. This is a special region. It is between the North and the South. Dermot Ahern is one of the experts of DPI. He worked together with us in former studies, he also closely collaborated with Bertie Ahern.

Dermot Ahern:

Welcome to my home region. I was born in a village on the south side of Dundalk. We are here virtually next door to the border. 20 to 30 years ago you would have been in the middle of a difficult area. Most of you are not politicians, maybe you have been. People I meet are usually politicians. The peace process took over 20 years. Most of you had meetings and have more of them, they are important.



Participants with guest speaker Dermot Ahern

⁴ *Dermot Ahern is a member of the DPI Council of Experts as well as a Former Irish Member of Parliament and Government Minister and was a key figure for more than 20 years in the Irish peace process, including in negotiations for the Good Friday Agreement and the St Andrews Agreement. He also has extensive experience at EU Council level including being a key negotiator and signatory to the Constitutional and Lisbon Treaties.*

By profession I am lawyer, I came into politics a little by chance. I was fighting with my local community for sports facilities, and I was sucked up there. The reasons for getting into national politics were because this area suffered economically and physically. This town of Dundalk was infamously called 'El Paso' by Thatcher, it was regarded as abandoned. 'Abandoned Country' was a book written. Some say it was important, more objectively it was written by someone who had an agenda. This area suffered. I got involved as a local businessman. I am aware that we are halfway between Dublin and Belfast, and in every normal society this place would be prospering. When Thatcher heard that a British company would set up a factory here, they had business to do with the British navy, she stopped it. You could not have a factory in a location sympathetic to the IRA. I became a national politician in 1987, I was re-elected until 2011, and I was always heavily involved under different Prime Ministers, appointed by different governments, I was mostly aware because I was a person from the border area.

For years, this conflict was regarded by the rest of the world as a British problem. The Irish were troublesome neighbours of the British, in the colonial past, but we got no international attraction from Europe or the wider world. It was regarded as a problem on the British doorstep, they would deal with it. Only because of our accession to the European Union did we become equal partner to the British on the European table. Subsequently there was US involvement, then it became an international dispute resolution process rather than a British problem. As a sovereign government we were given credence, unlike previous governments in the 1970s and the 1980s at the UN. The UK had the influence to counter us at the UN table.

Membership in the EU helped in a lot of ways, particularly as a young MP with the Single European Act. Every time I wanted to go to Northern Ireland, there was an artificial border created in the 1920s. There were substantial British army checkpoints we had to go through. It was hard to do business. Close to here, because the British army was afraid of going around on the ground, they built monstrosities like scaffolding towers to look around the area, and brought people in and out by helicopter. They did not police the locality in any way. That's why it was an abandoned country, on the northern side the IRA could do whatever under the cover of darkness. The Irish on this side also had trouble policing because the border was used to evade law and order.

There are two points I want to make. It was really only until the third party intervention that people began to realise that this was bigger than a British problem. I listened to a number of Turkish delegations, I always emphasised that it is important, thanks to organisations like DPI, because they have this emphasis, to look and learn from similar conflict. I was often struck as foreign minister in different disputes that it was the same issues by and large that caused

problems, despite different cultures. It boiled down to respecting people's differences in culture, respect equality, respect everyone. It is one of the reasons why our peace process was successful, only when the international community listened to the Nationalist side in the North and by extension the Irish government. Without Tony Blair, and also Clinton, we would not have a peace process and peace.

The proudest moment of my political life was when Clinton in 2006 came to Dundalk. Bill Clinton called us boomtown because of the peace process, Thatcher called it abandoned. Shortly after the Good Friday Agreement, when peace descended, investment came in and this area became quite prosperous. It recently suffered because of the recession.

Esra Elmas opens the floor for questions.

Participant 4: In the border area, was it mostly Catholic, and on the other side is it mostly Catholic or Protestant?

Dermot Ahern: Internationally it was perceived as a religious war. It was not. I grew up next door to a Protestant family which was strongly nationalist. It did not necessarily mean that whoever was Protestant was against a united Ireland, and vice versa. The vast majority of the Irish Republic at that stage was a mono-cultural, mono-religious society, 90% Catholic. In fact we discriminated positively other religious minorities in our constitution. Some Catholics complained about the overemphasis on assisting minority religions and cultures.

With the accession to the European Union, and migration in the mid-2000s, also because of the economic situation, there was an increase in population. Over 300'000 came mainly from Poland. I remember when I was foreign minister - I finished in 2008 - I was commenting that every nation represented in the UN was represented in Ireland, 170 out of 190, of a small population of 4.5 million. It was not a religious dispute but more about national identity and people living on the same space. It is a small island, when you add the South and North it is just over 6 million. A majority of people in Northern Ireland would be of Unionist persuasion, mainly non-Catholics, because they were planted. They are successors of those planted mainly from Scotland 300-400 years ago. There is an equally small minority, mostly of Catholics, in Northern Ireland who would be in favour of a united Ireland, and a majority in the Republic in favour of a united Ireland. It is not black or white.

Participant 2: When you reached an understanding with the Good Friday Agreement, Thatcher was already outside politics. After drafting the agreement, we know that Blair visited Thatcher in her house and gave the information to her as a former Prime Minister

outside of politics. And Thatcher then made a press statement in favour of the Good Friday Agreement, is that correct?

Dermot Ahern: She would have been in favour I think. I don't think she could have done otherwise. She was out of politics, people didn't really listen to what she had to say. There was so much overwhelming support for the Good Friday Agreement, we had referendums; no-one responsible would be against it. She was conservative. They are still called the Conservative and Unionist Party. The Unionist bit is in favour of keeping the Union of Great Britain and Northern Ireland in official term. The Good Friday Agreement was the first referendum where they voted in favour of the conditions. We amended constitution which laid claim to the whole island. My party was one of the parties, we had a civil war in the 1920s because of this partition. Subsequently parties formed out of that issue, and my party [Fianna Fáil] was the main party against partition. The other one is in government now. They would have been pro partition. This is a difference to this day, but not relevant anymore.

Participant 2: The reason for my question is that Tony Blair was the main architect, and at the time even the people with the most extremist thoughts were convinced. They even tried to convince people outside of Ireland, in the UK, to involve them. In Turkey we have some parties pro agreement, but also some who are strongly against it. That's why those in favour of an agreement should work together with the ones against it.

Dermot Ahern: From Blair's point of view, there was no point in convincing the people of the UK. They did not care about Northern Ireland. It was about the ones in Northern Ireland, to get the extremists to put down their guns and stop shooting at innocent and not-innocent people. To a certain extent things got so bad that even the extremists were convinced, and in a perverse way things had to get bad before getting better.

Prince Charles and his wife are coming to Ireland in May, and one of the places they see will be where Lord Mountbatten was blown up fishing on a lake. 18 British soldiers were also killed that day, ten miles from here, 30 years ago blown up by the IRA. The surviving soldiers were shot, and civilians were killed at this Loch. Things got so bad, most of us who lived through that remember. It was a bit like people recall where they were when 9/11 happened. We can remember what we have been doing at these occasions. Instead of atrocities that happened, instead of governments moving apart and not talking to people, we redoubled our efforts. We did that in secret to some degree, away from the public, to try and retain some light at the tunnel. It is always important to investigate and see that murderers lay down their guns.

Participant 5: Is there a possibility for a united Ireland?

Dermot Ahern: Not in my lifetime, I would like to see it though. John Hume as key architect in our peace, as leader of the SDLP, famously said that it is not so much about uniting the territory but about the people living on it. I have always been of that view. I vehemently disagree with the IRA, with Sinn Féin, even though they have the same ideal, I disagree with the methods with which they try to achieve it. It is counterproductive to try and bomb and shoot people into a united Ireland against our will. I always believed a better way of achieving unity was by negotiation, by reconciliation. The campaign of the IRA was counterproductive. It put it back further. Again, with a small population on the island, and small with 1.5 million in the North, there was no family who hasn't been touched by the violence. Human beings will recall what happened to their loved ones, I can understand people in the Unionist communities unwilling to sit down with Nationalists. I can understand though why the IRA started in first place. There was distinct discrimination aided by the British in Northern Ireland for decades prior to 1969.

Participant 8: With hindsight, was the political solution able to eliminate the entire problem - cultural, social, class differences? To what extent were they satisfied with a political solution?

Dermot Ahern: Ultimately if civil society is not brought in on the process, you won't heal wounds that are there. It will take long time for a united Ireland, maybe not in the form that we like to see it. While we have peace on the island, it is an uneasy peace. There are deep wounds. If you scratch the surface, it will erupt. For instance two years ago, one of the issues left behind by the Good Friday Agreement, and by the St Andrews Agreement, was the issue of flags and emblems. The flying of the Union Jack. Agreement has been reached. You have a government of sort in Northern Ireland, a partnership government, not a democratic government as in Ireland where whoever wins the election has the complete say. They were not given all the powers in the North, that's why there is still a long way to go in the political and cultural sphere. The US did pump a lot of money into the north of Ireland, also the EU, into community projects to try to bring people together. Recipients of funds like the International Fund for Ireland, mainly financed by the US, would be children and students who are brought together. Huge work still has to be done. It is an uneasy peace as I said, but still it is peace. We are thankful for that.

Participant 7: There was an involvement of the EU and the US in Ireland. In this process, did you discuss the sovereignty problem of Ireland? You were minister of foreign affairs. Were there discussions about the perception that such kind of international intervention means to the sovereignty of a country? Turkey is negotiating about EU accession. There is the ongoing Kurdish problem, how can the EU help Turkey more effectively?

Dermot Ahern: I mentioned border checkpoints and military infrastructure. We also had physical borders which literally disappeared over night after the Single European Act with the free movement of goods and services. This had a huge effect in border area. A lot of customs checkpoints disappeared. Everything was done virtually after that. The EU had a big impact. I am aware of Turkey's accession, I was minister when the talks started, with Gül as foreign minister at the time. The EU has influence in all sorts of ways. It allowed us to be an equal member at the European table instead of being an irritant.

We did not have a sovereignty problem, we put a referendum there to change our constitution in order to ratify the Good Friday Agreement. For the first time, we deleted the claim on the right over Northern Ireland. Instead, we put a clause in from Good Friday Agreement: a united Ireland only happens if 50% or more of the people in Northern Ireland decide that they want unification. One of my first speeches in parliament, I am proud of it, used to be about a perception in the 1970s and 80s that eventually Nationalists would outbreed Protestants. The figure showed that Catholics parents had more children than Protestants.

It was simplistic, Catholics and Nationalist are not always the same, but the idea that they would outbreed and then decide on a united Ireland ... I always said about this idea of '50% plus 1' that I wouldn't want to be around if the existing majority of Unionists are forced into a united Ireland because of '50% plus 1'. We need to come to an accommodation with people with different ideas of Ireland. It is about uniting the people, about agreeing to par differences like with the Good Friday Agreement, have a pared constitution with political issues. For instance, I was minister of communication and energy, I said it did not make sense that on a small island there are two electricity grids. They should be connected. When there is a problem on one side, the other side can help. In fairness to the politicians in the North, they agree with that. Equally, when you came to this hotel or my own house, when you started the mobile phone, in the sitting room of my house I would be welcomed to the UK. I became minister for telecommunication and forced them to make sure that if that was to happen I wouldn't have excessive roaming charges. I led charge on the EU level of doing away with roaming across Europe. How to replicate that in Turkey? I don't claim any expertise. I do think that perhaps some outside influence would be of great help. The EU has so much on the play that they may want somebody else to settle it. The EU would say to a country like Turkey that it would be encouraging internal efforts to bring peace in Turkey. Only then would a majority favour Turkey to join the EU.

Participant 10: What kind of relations were there between the Republican government in Ireland and the IRA?

Dermot Ahern: Torturous ones. In 1988 I was asked by the then Prime Minister of the Republic

to meet them in secret. I did that in Dundalk. With Gerry Adams, Mitchell McLaughlin, Pat Sheehan; now leading Sinn Féin members. There were efforts mainly by religious people to see if there was any possibility that the IRA would stop their campaign of violence. Over time, it was torturous, that has worked out. It was one of the things my party did. The more we were successful to convince Sinn Féin to put down the gun and go into politics, they would ease into our space. The recession also helped, but it happened. Sinn Féin is now a reasonably legitimate political party. One of their leaders said we fight with the Armalite in one and the ballot box in the other hand. Unfortunately, they continued for a long time.

The biggest bank raid in history of the British Isles took place towards the end of the peace talks, £26 million were stolen in Belfast. Without a shadow of doubt, I was minister of Foreign Affairs and subsequently of justice, it was carried out by Sinn Féin/IRA. One reason was that it was a way of paying off a lot of combatants. It was sanctioned by leaders of Sinn Féin/IRA as a way of allowing their members to come away from violence and go into 'legitimate' business. There is nasty laundry, literally every week on this side of the border. Toxic sludge from fuel laundering is dumped from across border. The local authority spent millions trying to deal with this. Without a shadow of doubt, the people who are diesel laundering were formally shooting and killing people.

Participant 5: How was Sinn Féin performing in the South after the Good Friday Agreement? Did they increase their votes?

Dermot Ahern: Yes, there has been an incremental increase in votes. It is accepted now that they are representatives in parliament and local authorities. They are not involved in violence anymore, which is a good thing. For people like our generation, we still remember the murder mayhem they caused, we can't forgive them. Gerry Adams succeeded me here in my constituency. I have no idea why my people would vote for him, having been a leader of an organisation which carried out atrocities. A farmer who I knew was taken and murdered by the IRA because he found guns and explosives on his land and told the police about it. Most people know who did it, but there was no proof. In the Omagh bombing, with 26 dead, most who did it came from this county. They were Northerners who settled in this area, hence 'El Paso' by Thatcher.

Kerim Yildiz: You had a lot of money for conflict resolution. This money is spent around ending violence. Why did the government initially decide against international assistance but later accepted it like the UK? In the case of Turkey, the government is quite opposed to a third party or assistance, at least publically. We have learned from the media that apparently there were secret talks between the government and armed groups. On the one

hand there are secret talks through a third party, but then officially there is no third party.

Dermot Ahern: John Major said in parliament the he would get sick of the thought of any suggestion that his government would be in talks with the IRA. It is now proved that they were, and he knew about it. I don't want to say that we are better than Turkey, but we do have a free press. From what I read, which is all I know, I don't know if you have it or not. To focus on outside influence, and international eyes could not be as pivotal if it had not be for the focus of the media. We have an active media here in Ireland despite many talks held in secret. My 1988 talks didn't get out until 1998. My career as a young MP could have been ruined if people knew I was engaged in talks. It is sometimes necessary to do things under the table and the cover of darkness

In terms of the influence of the international community, the influence the international and national press was huge here. Perhaps that is not possible in Turkey. You can cure that. If you were Prime Minister in 1988, with a minority government, you would not have lasted for five seconds to openly negotiate because of the perception that he was a Nationalist leader, he would have pulled out. He took that risk to delegate me and two others to meet with the IRA. In fairness to the media, they were very conscious of their reporting. In the history of our parliament, whoever was in the opposition would not take political advantage of the government in any blow-up in the problem of the peace process. The role of the civil society is critical in any process.

End of session



Wednesday 22nd April 2015

Session 8: Roundtable Discussion with the Northern Ireland Office: Setting the Scene for the Good Friday Agreement





With:

Michael McAvoy, Deputy Director of the Engagement Group, Northern Ireland Office

Venue: Stormont House, Belfast

Michael McAvoy:

Welcome to Stormont House, the British government's representation. I am the Deputy Director of the Engagement Group of the Northern Ireland office. I will give a presentation to give a British commentary on the peace process. The Engagement Group deals with our outreach. Joe, my colleague, also deals with commemorations. We are in a decade of centenaries, of the First World War, and in Ireland a hundred years ago a number of events occurred from 1912 to 1922 which in many ways represent key changes on this island. They play right through the Troubles we had here, and the peace process.

Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom. It lies in a small corner of the island of Ireland, and it was created in 1921 with partition. 1.8 million people live here, which is 2% of the British population. Six counties form Northern Ireland, six out of 32 on island. The Troubles are firstly explained as a religious dispute between Catholics and Protestants. It was much more nuanced,

it was about identity, affiliation, allegiance, and history. There is a slight majority of Protestants in the North. Typically, Protestants are characterised as Unionist, they want to remain British, and Catholics as nationalists or Republicans. This is simplistic though.

History is something we are very fond of. We can start in the 13th century, with the first formal link between the UK and Ireland. There was Protestant majority rule. The creation of Northern Ireland and Ireland was a political deal, and a number of Catholics in the North perhaps didn't feel entirely reconciled with the political entity they lived in. There was a civil rights movement in the 1960s which sought equal citizenship, the removal of discrimination and inequality. It created a platform for discontent to manifest itself in violent extremism. It tried to force the British to leave Northern Ireland, they were an external entity. For those who felt Unionist and British, and lots of them have been here since the mid of the 17th century, Scots and English, to call the UK external was a bit odd. Throughout the 1960s, at the start of the Troubles, there was a campaign of civil unrest against the British state. In 1972, the British government stepped in and superseded Northern Ireland's government by direct rule from London. A British minister came to administer Northern Ireland. This continued from 1972.

A blue gradient slide titled "Historical Background" with a list of key events in Northern Irish history. The text is white and yellow. The events listed are: 1801: Act of Union, Irish Parliament suppressed and Irish MPs sit in Westminster in the United Kingdom. 1921 - 1968: Partition of Ireland. Unionist Majority rule in Northern Ireland. 1968: Growing Catholic protest against discrimination leads to Civil Rights movement. 1968: Unionist fear of Civil Rights as a route to a United Ireland. 1968: Outbreak of 'the Troubles'. 1969: Introduction of British Army. 1972: UK Government suspends the Devolved Administration - Direct Rule begins.

Year	Event
1801	Act of Union. Irish Parliament suppressed and Irish MPs sit in Westminster in the United Kingdom.
1921 - 1968	Partition of Ireland. Unionist Majority rule in Northern Ireland.
1968	Growing Catholic protest against discrimination leads to Civil Rights movement.
1968	Unionist fear of Civil Rights as a route to a United Ireland
1968	Outbreak of 'the Troubles'
1969	Introduction of British Army
1972	UK Government suspends the Devolved Administration - Direct Rule begins



Speaker Michael McAvoy, Northern Ireland Office

Some statistics: 3600 people have been killed since 1969, 57% of them by Republicans, 28% by Loyalists, as a response to Republican violence against their communities. The conflict became sectarian. It is often called 'dirty war'. It creates serious schisms, fear, and resentment. Sometimes it is hard to date the start of the peace process. From 1972 through I can point at political initiatives to stop the violence, I opted for the 1993 Downing Street Declaration here. Then Irish and British Prime Ministers Reynolds and Major made a political agreement. They established a number of principles: about the Irish dimension, and the importance of consent of the people of Northern Ireland. Traditional Irish republicanism always thought that a majority of the people of the whole island matters, not just in Northern Ireland, because they didn't accept this entity. The Irish and British government acknowledged that a majority in the North was required. There should further be a peaceful constitutional settlement to find a solution for future generations. The label 'loyalist' or 'Republican' sometimes makes it seem like it is the only issue, but people's lives are about more issues, like education. But parties enter the stage with the status question.

Sinn Féin, the political wing of the IRA, was largely accepted during the 1980s. There was a hunger strike with ten dead in a Northern Irish prison to protest against the prison regime. They wanted recognition as political prisoners, despite having committed violence. The movement Sinn Féin started there in the 1980s, as a small party during the time of the IRA campaign. It had limited support at the polls. It has grown and changed. At the time it was the political representation of an armed group, which people struggled with.

The IRA ceasefire in 1994 was a critical turning point, an event that made the difference. Then people agreed to talk to Sinn Féin. The ceasefire broke down with the 1996 Canary Wharf bombing, and was later re-established. It created the circumstances for dialogue. It was one key milestone, and people quickly started to ask whether it meant a complete cessation of violence, or if it was a strategic decision. There were lots of discussions about decommissioning.

Remaining Challenges – Divided Society



- ◆ Ongoing community segregation – 92% of public housing and 93% of education is divided.
- ◆ Orange Order Parades and interface violence.
- ◆ Loyalist flag protests starting in 2012 symptomatic of wider disaffection
- ◆ Ongoing threat from 'dissident republicans' – 22 national security attacks in 2014, police, armed forces and prison officers remain targets

The key personalities involved, John Major etc., but also Tony Blair, Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, Bertie Ahern, who came forward for their constituencies; John Hume from the SDLP, who became the Nobel Prize winner with David Trimble. Sinn Féin joined talks in 1997, some parties boycotted it, which was a reoccurring thing. A key part was establishing the Mitchell principles, the terms to participate. It required rejecting political violence. Mitchell chaired the talks as an independent, honest broker with key skills. At the time, the Northern Ireland problem seemed one of the most intractable disputes. Some say it was a civil war.

Kerim Yildiz: How was Mitchell chosen?

Michael McAvoy: The Americans had a political interest in Northern Ireland, and they also had a special relationship with the UK. 50 million Americans claim Irish heritage. Clinton was interested in trying to move the peace process in Northern Ireland forward. It was the obvious way to go.

A key moment was the Good Friday Agreement at the end of year-long talks. From 1993 Sinn Féin and John Hume talked, and there were many setbacks on the way. The Good Friday Agreement went to all households in Northern Ireland. It talks about the relations with Ireland

and Northern Ireland, about East-West relationship. Two things were critical for the Good Friday Agreement: there was a constitutional claim by Ireland to the whole territory. The other thing was the consent principle, a majority needs to vote for change. This created space for normal politics and business of governments free from violence. It was not free from the debate whether to be British or Irish, but it was put into the political space. There was a way to do that through political means.

Participant 7: Would the UK accept a referendum?

Michael McAvoy: The government would accept it, that's what the agreement says. Absolutely. We have a recent example, the Scottish voted in a referendum.

The Good Friday Agreement set up good governance, also human rights, equality, and reform of the police and justice. Lots of people were in jail, thousands, for their part in terrorist acts. They were part of the process, keen to participate in the discussions. It didn't mean to leave those in jail for 10 years despite the deal. So part of the deal endorsed by a majority in Northern Ireland majority was that people in jail would go out after a maximum of 2 years. 3600 were killed, 10'000s injured: it was difficult to sell in Northern Ireland. It was endorsed through the referendum. Some say it was part of the price to pay for peace.

An international body was set up to monitor decommissioning, to find way to gather up all weapons and explosives and have them verifiably put out of use. That became a political issue, it was destabilising. There were often problems about the timing and whether the IRA would ever decommission. Others didn't find IRA weapons acceptable even if they were buried somewhere. It was done in 2007. Policing was another issue: it remained with the British government, it seemed too much for the devolved government, and they only got the competence back in 2010. It was rolling devolution, road transport etc. was devolved in 1998. Not so police and justice.

There were milestones along the road, it is a long story of the peace process in Northern Ireland. Later issues like flags, symbols, and policing took a long way. There never was a one-off agreement, it is always work in progress. Three months before Christmas we spoke on a range of issues. In this room we had the Irish Prime Minister and David Cameron hosting talks with political parties to get a deal. In 2005 decommissioning happened, it took some more years until all armed groups put their guns beyond use.

The largest party at the Good Friday Agreement were the Unionist UUP and the SDLP, over that time to 2007 there was a change in the support base: Sinn Féin became the largest Nationalist,

and the DUP the largest party in Northern Ireland. They found a way to other agreements, namely the St Andrews Agreement, as a political way to meet their requirements.

I mentioned the Stormont House Agreement. The Good Friday Agreement was no once-for-all deal. The Stormont House Agreement was around finances, welfare reform, flags and parades. It was about the legacy of past, many victims found it politically unacceptable to talk to representatives of the IRA who used arms against civilians. Many families did not see anyone convicted for the death of their loved ones. We wanted to put new ways of dealing with the past, people should go to an interlocutor to get information about the circumstances of a death.

There were international bodies for decommissioning, another one about victim remains - many were buried by the IRA, their bodies never found. There was an international monitoring commission again to provide commentary on the quality of the ceasefire. Trust was still in short supply at the Good Friday Agreement. We have a general election coming up in the UK, to the Westminster parliament in May. Next year there will be Assembly elections. It is always work in progress, issues are always coming up. A lot of it can be dealt with by the parties in Northern Ireland, sometimes the British and Irish governments get involved. Their foreign ministers co-chair talks to discuss those issues.

We have a stable political system, the economy of Northern Ireland was badly affected and now there is a common interest of the UK and Ireland that the economy in Northern Ireland prospers. Reconciliation is a key strand, because of the separation and segregation there are lots of institutional impediments to Protestants and Catholics working and educating together. These structures prevent peace and normalisation. If you drive around parts of Belfast, you see walls separating communities, 'peace walls'. This is not normal! The new generation should see change, but this will take time. It is a negative note to finish, but also a positive one. We have space to deal with those circumstances.

Participant 3: How does the UK feel - do they feel defeat?

Michael McAvoy: I grew up in Northern Ireland, I have an Irish and Northern Irish passport. The British government established the position a number of years ago saying that they don't have selfish or strategic interest in Northern Ireland. As democrats, they are happy if a majority decides to leave the UK. It is a benign relationship, the Conservatives have the policy of supporting unity. They want to keep the joint union. But as democrats they respect the wishes of the people in Northern Ireland. Ireland also gave up their territorial claim as part of the agreement, and it was a price worth paying. It was backed by a referendum with 72% approval.

Participant 7: What is the role of Northern Ireland in the British economy?

Michael McAvoy: It makes up about 2% of the British economy. It suffered during the Troubles. It was hard to encourage people to visit it, or to attract investment. Northern Ireland has the highest level for foreign direct investment, it is work in progress. Unemployment is at 6%, so below the British average. During the Troubles, it consistently had the highest in the UK, in some areas more than 20%.

Participant 1: The Protestants in Northern Ireland are mostly coming from Scotland. Whenever there is tension between Scotland and the UK, what would be their attitude?

Michael McAvoy: The honest answer is: when you are Unionist, Protestant, and in Northern Ireland, it stands to reason that you want to be united with the entirety of the UK. Most of the parties in Northern Ireland didn't express views on the Scottish referendum, some did. On the issue of Scotland, there are lots of ties, cultural, linguistic links. The referendum was seen as a matter of Scottish, who preferred to be part of the union.

Participant 5: What's the percentage of Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland?

Michael McAvoy: 48% are Protestant, 45% are Catholic.

Participant 5: International people mostly know the situation as a sectarian conflict. But you said that there are other problems beyond sectarianism. What are they?

Michael McAvoy: It is not religious between Catholics and Protestants. It would mean that all Catholics are Republicans, which is too simplistic. Lots of people have different reasons, economic, cultural; some are happy with the link to Britain, and see their relationship as normal. All are members of the EU.

Esra Elmas: What was the contribution of the Stormont Hosiery Agreement for the resolution process?

Michael McAvoy: It dealt with some controversial issues like flags and public unrest around parades, and with the finances of the government. Key was the attempt to deal with the legacy of the past. Academics are appointed to prepare an oral history archive of the Troubles, as a body by the British and Irish government for people with lost family members to go. A new historical investigation unit was set up to reinvestigate Trouble-related deaths. 1500 of the 3600 had previously been reviewed, a lot of work needs to be done still. It resulted in four

prosecutions, some dating back to the 1970s and 80s. They only serve a maximum of two years. This generates tensions, some have the viewpoints that we should draw a line, to have no more inquiries or prosecutions. Politically, most parties believe that people should have access to justice if there is enough evidence. It means we go constantly back to events during the Troubles, this can be destabilising.

Esra Elmas: Is there a debate about issues like the peace walls and those paintings? It is ironic for a third person to see those peace walls.

Michael McAvoy: There is a debate. It is often about territory, the areas are usually Protestant or Catholic. At the start of the Troubles there was movement of people, Catholics left Protestant areas. They resettled along sectarian lines. Peace walls prevent attacks of one to the other community. We have other institutionalised separation, most children go to predominantly Catholic or Protestant schools. Most Protestants go to state schools, now there is a movement driven by locals and parents to have them educated together. Less than 10% go to integrated schools with roughly equal numbers. This is not normal. It is hard to force integration in some areas. It is not universally supported. The UK commits 50 million pounds every years during ten years to invest in schooling.

Participant 7: You have established a new police service. How is it operated? What relationship does it have with the British police, their intelligence, and the British army? It is different to the old relationship before the Good Friday Agreement?

Michael McAvoy: The army was brought in to help the police service with civil unrest. It left and ended that operation. There are still barracks in Northern Ireland, as in other places of the UK, with a very small number of people. They don't perform any role to support the police. There is a new police now, the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The old RUC had a Protestant workforce, for different reasons. Often police officers were attacked by the IRA, so Catholics joining the police would be more vulnerable to Catholic attacks. It moved to a more representative police through positive discrimination, from 8 to 30% Catholics.

The UK still plays a role for intelligence. The MI5 still operates. Although some things were devolved to the Northern Ireland executive, national security is still on national level. Cooperation with the Irish police and agencies in Northern Ireland is exceptionally good. Sharing of information takes place. Not everyone was reconciled of ending the armed struggle, still in 2015 there are groupings actively pursuing an armed campaign. They killed two policemen, one prison officer, and two soldiers at an army barracks. The bomb in Omagh after the Good Friday Agreement was one of the biggest atrocities. It was committed by a group which was not happy

with the IRA going to ceasefire. The police now deals with that, and it is working with the UK and Ireland, which is a success. There is no popular public support for those groupings.

Participant 10: How does power-sharing work?

Michael McAvoy: It is a forced coalition government. It relies on creating an executive body to run affairs, representing both groups. There are 180 members in the Assembly, and five parties in the coalition government. Most parties sitting in the Assembly have representation in the government. Parties in the executive are represented according to the D'Hont system, to prevent majority rule.

Participant 5: There was a ceasefire in 1996, in 1998 the Good Friday Agreement was signed. There have been 20 years without conflict now. Has a process been created for the transition from sectarian to political identity? Are there Protestants who vote for Sinn Féin, or the other way around?

Michael McAvoy: Traditionally, there have been Catholics who signaled the intention to remain in the UK. The test of the settlement would be when people vote for parties on their policies. Largely Protestants still vote for Unionists, but also for parties like the Alliance which is shared by Catholics and Protestants, and is about policies. Parties still identify themselves as pro Union or Republic. This hasn't moved that much. The younger generation growing up in the last 20 years knows nothing of the Troubles. In a recent census about their identity, 20% said they were Northern Irish. The younger are happy with being Northern Irish.

End of session

Wednesday 22nd April 2015

Session 9: Roundtable Discussion with Sinn Féin Members of Parliament: The role of international actors in moving from armed struggle to a political solution



With:

Pat Sheehan MLA, member of the Northern Ireland Assembly for Sinn Féin

Rosie McCorley MLA, member of the Northern Ireland Assembly for Sinn Féin

Venue: Stormont Assembly

Pat Sheehan:

I would like to set the conflict in Northern Ireland in context by explaining how the peace process developed and where we are today. Both Rosie and I are former prisoners, I spent 18 years in prison, Rosie 10 years, for IRA activities.

The conflict is easily understood through the prism of colonialism. England invaded Ireland 800 years ago, and there has been constant resistance to that occupation. It manifested itself on a number of occasions, in armed uprisings, the most significant one at the start of the 20th century. The Easter uprising in 1916 was a failure in military terms. The British took out all leaders and executed them, which created support for the war of independence. This is wrongly named because Ireland only gained limited independence. Instead there was partition! Ireland was partitioned on the basis of gerrymandered sectarian headcount. Those loyal to the British resided mainly in the northeast where we are today. These Unionists were offered nine counties, they refused because their majority would have been too narrow, and they accepted six thinking that their majority will last forever. The first Prime Minister described the new institutions, this new statelet as Protestant parliament for Protestant people.

It was not about religion but about national identity. So if you weren't Unionist or Protestant, you were a second class citizen. Catholics were discriminated in every walk of life, in employment, housing, education, culturally, politically, economically. It was institutionalised sectarianism, a denial of civil rights. Protests in the 1960s were met with violence from the state. There were abuses of human rights as well. We had a colonial situation, on top there was the injustice of partition, on top of discriminating sectarianism and the abuse of human rights the denial of civil rights. An explosion was inevitable, and it did explode in the 1960s and early 1970s. It was another armed uprising, which lasted for 30 years. Irish republicans, like myself and Rosie and Sinn Féin believed in an independent united Irish republic without interference from Britain. We didn't believe we had a peaceful avenue for our objectives. That was the reason for armed resistance.

Our leadership acknowledged in 1970s, and even the British military generals wrote that, that there was military stalemate. We acknowledged that we couldn't defeat the British. Why did the conflict continue? The political leadership continued to believe that a combination of military aggression and attempts to politically isolate republicans would lead to their defeat. They launched political initiatives which excluded Irish republicans. That was doomed to fail. If the process wasn't all inclusive it wouldn't succeed. It was only in the early 1990s that we entered

the peace process. A number of issues we had to resolve ourselves. We had to internationalise the conflict because the British government consistently said that the conflict was their internal problem. They claimed it was an issue of criminality, of illegality, a law and order issue. There are 40 million people in the US claiming Irish descent, this lobby is strong, next strongest after the Jewish lobby. This secured commitment from Clinton when he was rolling for presidency. When he got elected he put Northern Ireland on top of his agenda. American involvement was probably crucial. We are a critic of US foreign policy in the rest of the world, particularly in the Middle East. Their instinct here however was good.

We also had to create unity among other political parties of similar persuasion. Among others who didn't support armed struggle, like the SDLP, and we also had to bring in the Dublin government into that coalition. Our organisation has a history of splits and divisions, of former comrades killing each other. It became a strategic imperative within our organisation that there had to be unity. Otherwise there could be no peace process. Our leadership made it their business to inform the rank-and-file and separate parts of the organisation about what was happening at every step. No one was ever surprised when major decisions were made. This doesn't mean that rank-and-file could force decisions onto the leadership, because it was a leadership-driven initiative. But the rank-and-file needed to be informed and have trust in the leadership. On occasions, the leadership presented rank-and-file with *fait accompli* without a major discussion around it. But because of the trust built between the base and the leadership, the movement wasn't necessarily happy, but certainly had trust and when many had not agreed they were still happy with the overall strategy.

This brought us to the IRA ceasefire of 1994. The British government and the Unionists began putting obstacles in the way of the process: they demanded that the IRA used particular words, that they say that the ceasefire is permanent, that we have to surrender weapons, and so on. It broke down and was only reestablished when a new government came to power led by Blair. The process was then revived, which led to the Good Friday Agreement. The Good Friday Agreement was a game-changer. It was ultimately a conflict about national identity. What the Good Friday Agreement did was creating an architecture for that to happen in a peaceful and democratic way. There is the possibility of a referendum at some stage in the future. If 50% plus 1 vote for a united Ireland, it will happen. Another cornerstone is the concept of equality, the equal recognition of other aspirations of our identities and cultures. There is also an all-Ireland architecture within it, for greater cooperation between the North and South.

At the Good Friday Agreement, the main parties were the SDLP and UUP. Now it is the DUP and Sinn Féin. We came to a brink at many times during the process, but we could resolve problematic issues. Since the Good Friday Agreement, a number of further agreements have

been made, named after the places where the agreement was held, like St Andrews, the Stormont House Agreement. It is easy to get an agreement but difficult to implement. There is the example of David Trimble, the leader of the UUP. While his party has suffered losses since then, initially when they signed up, instead of coming out and sealing it, they resailed from aspects of the agreement. Their own people became confused whether it was a good or bad agreement. The DUP who had not signed up then overtook them politically.

About the institutions, we have a power-sharing government. Five parties get seats dependent on the number of seats they win in elections. You will find a different language being used in this set-up. We call it partnership government, the Unionist refer to it as a mandatory coalition. Sometimes they argue that it is a bad system, difficult to work, frustrating, and they talk about the Westminster model with a government and an opposition. But that's of course if you compare it the other model, compare it with what was before. We had 30 years of conflict, 50 years before it was a one-party state when the minority was discriminated against. The process is not the final deal. The Good Friday Agreement was never the final solution to the issues that created the conflict. It removed the arms and violence from the equation.



Speakers Pat Sheehan and Rosie McCorley, Sinn Féin members of the Northern Ireland Assembly

Participant 3: How did you the strongest parties change?

Pat Sheehan: If the UUP had gone out strongly and sold it, if it informed their people about details, they would today be in a much stronger position. But they allowed their flank to be exposed by accepting that there are weaknesses. It is always a compromise, you have to prepare your people for that. It is a must.

Rosie McCorley: Also, the DUP were able to accept it once they were the biggest party, now they were the leaders of Unionism. In some sense it is about being the top dog. Prior, the DUP

had always been the biggest critic, but they changed positions overnight after becoming number 1. Paisley came across as anti-Catholic, and overnight he was happy to share power with Martin McGuinness which he would have called devil earlier. Some within DUP can't accept compromise. The DUP said we will never go into government with terrorists, and they changed their position.

Participant 7: In 2017 there will be the referendum about being an EU member or not. One of Sinn Féin's political aims was the unity of Ireland. Are you pursuing that with non-violent means, definitively? If UK's EU membership ends, what is the projection of the unity of Ireland for the future?

Pat Sheehan: This referendum is not definite. We have a lot of agriculture here. If the UK leaves the European Union, there will be a lot of consequences for agriculture and industry in the North. There would be an imbalance in agriculture between the South and the North, which a weakened Northern Ireland, which would help our argument for a united Ireland. We want to reach our objectives: we are the only party organised all over Ireland, in both Irelands. At the last elections, the European elections which were simultaneous in the North and South, Sinn Féin was the biggest party on the island, and we continue to build our political strength.

We want to convince the Unionist to be in a united independent Ireland. As part of the population of the UK, the Unionists make up a small minority, less than 1 million within 60 million. The North here is at the periphery in every way, politically, economically, culturally, and the Unionists have little influence over the British government. In Ireland they would make a sizeable minority. We have to continue convincing the Unionists of that benefit. If the UK withdraws from the EU, it would help us. It is ironic that we favour negotiating terms with the EU, about not ceding too much sovereignty to Brussels. But the benefits are for Ireland to remain in the EU.

Participant 1: You have served 10 years in prison - were you released after the Good Friday Agreement? Did you have the psychology and the understanding that now everything is finished? When you first entered parliament, you faced the Unionists. They see you as murderers. Did you feel that they were invaders? How is the collaboration environment between you and the Unionists?

Rosie McCorley: We were both released under the Good Friday Agreement. It was Pat's second term. We understood that the conflict was political but we were involved in the military aspect because we saw no alternative, so the process to realise that the armed conflict was over took some longer than others. By and large, the vast majority of Republicans think that this peaceful

political way forward is the best to achieve our objectives. A small number of groups has gone different ways. They can be dealt with as a law and order issue.

I came to the Assembly three years ago, I worked with Unionists on committees, and outside committees as well. Some of them are friendly, some are happy to have a working arrangement. Some are opposed to working and engaging with us in meaningful ways. There is a smallish number of Unionists in the DUP who still resists having full engagement with us. Whenever issues around conflict and the legacy arise, like police, or the victims, there will be divisions among us on those issues. There are efforts, with the Stormont House Agreement as the most recent, to have outstanding issues brought into the process. That's still an ongoing process, which it will continue to be. Those interests must be resolved to bring lasting stability.

Pat Sheehan: Legacy is constantly a dark cloud over the political process here. We cannot agree on what the conflict was, the Republicans say it was an anti-colonial struggle against oppression in our own country. The Unionists say it was a terrorist campaign. There are two narratives, but the Unionists won't agree to that. There are constant clashes. It can be depressing to work at times, because the issues related to the conflict still impinge on the current process. We were involved in armed conflict, so were many Unionists, in the police or the British army. Very few were not involved on one side or the other.

Some of the difficult points are not dealt with in the Good Friday Agreement. One would be the IRA weapons, another was policing; it said that an international commission would be established. The Unionists and the UK had demands that the IRA surrenders its weapons, we had the view that we were not defeated on the battlefield, so why would we surrender. So there was a commission under de Chastelain, helped by Ahtisaari and Ramaphosa and local clergyman. The formula was that the IRA put their weapons beyond use. This would be verified by an international commission. A similar arrangement dealt with policing, which was seen as the armed wing of Unionism. There should be a police service representing the whole community by a new police service with oversight and accountability. I sat on the policing board, with 10 independents and 10 political members. I was formally part of an organisation to kill the police, now I decide on hiring and firing of policemen. They have operational independence, we don't force them to carry out particular operations, but once they do they are answerable to the policing board.

Participant 5: There are members of the working class on both sides. How did they act, in line with class interest, or identity?

Pat Sheehan: It was by and large the working class which was affected by the conflict. The

conflict was worst in the working class areas. We are a left wing party, so we were supported mainly by working class. The Republican working class probably identifies with us. The Unionists are different, the DUP and all Unionist parties would be right-wing to various degrees. Yet the working class of the Unionists would still vote for them. Divide and conquer comes in, whenever there are tensions in the Unionist camp, they would say that the Republicans want to take your job and houses. Prior to the 1960s, the main industries in the North were heavy industry, engineering, rope making, ship making. The shipyard once employed over 30.000 workers, but only a tiny percentage from our community worked in big engineering plants. There is a legacy issue related to that. Among Unionist working class boys, there is a high degree of education underachievement. They previously had not had a culture for education. Jobs were available for them in the industry, this has all changed. We have a modern economy now, you need qualifications for jobs. The Catholic population had always pushed their children towards education, it has been the escape route from poverty and discrimination.

Participant 11: There are freedom fighters around the world, many of them suffer in prisons. Can you talk about your experience in prison?

Pat Sheehan: I was in prison on two occasions, each over nine years. I spent three years on the H-blocks, famous for the blanket protests, I was also part of the hunger strike in 1991 when ten others died. When the hunger strike ended, I was 55 days on it and critically ill. I am lucky to be here today. Prisons were a very brutal place. The prison administration had a carte blanche to break protests, and they did whatever they could to do that. Prisons played a big part in the struggle. One of the most significant events apart from the hunger strike was Bobby Sands' election as member of the British parliament when he was on hunger strike. Prior to that Republicans did not take part in elections. One reason was because it would not achieve anything, the other was that we felt to enter into politics would mean compromising our principles. In 1981, in the constituency of Bobby Sands, there was a massive debate in our organisation to put Bobby Sands forward. If he lost, it would have been a major setback for the protest. He was elected however, which was a major blow against Thatcher's argument that prisoners were criminals. The election was the single biggest news issue on that planet on that day. It had a number of impacts: in our own organisation, it convinced many sceptics that electoral politics could be an arena for struggle. It also convinces others in the UK that they were not close to defeating us. After that election, we contested in elections, from strength to strength, which opened up a new sphere of our struggle, and it opened eyes in the British establishment. They had argued that we have no support, now our support could be measured electorally. What was the happiest day of my life? The day Bobby Sands got elected was massive.

Rosie McCorley: What are your issues, what are you trying to achieve? What is your framework

to do that?

Participant 7: The Kurdish people in Turkey want to solve this problem inside through democratic methods. It is clear that no solution can be achieved through military conflict. That's why we've had the 8th PKK ceasefire now for two years. The PKK and the Turkish army have not had conflicts apart from small incidents. In terms of a political solution, dialogue has been started. We are starting the negotiation phase, or we hopefully expect it to start. Mostly in Turkey, the Kurdish people want to solve this by achieving democratic rights. Instead of PKK's target of an independent free Kurdistan, they want to live in a united Turkey with others. Demands are the strengthening of local administrations in Turkey; that every group should be able to teach their children in their mother tongues, that there is equal citizenship. This process will also be a democratic constitutional process. Today, compared to 10 years ago, we are in a very improved position. As people in this room we want to make best contribution.

Participant 1: The Kurdish people are not living in Turkey alone, but also in Syria, Iraq and Iran. The upheavals there brought a new status to the Kurdish people in those countries. The Kurds in Turkey are also influenced by that. The Kurdish problem started as a problem of Kurdistan. Now it is evolving into a problem which interests four different countries. This issue is not up to the Kurdish people living in Turkey alone, it will also be up to international forces. How are they going to intervene in the Kurdish problem, which is getting more complicated day by day?

Pat Sheehan: Thank you for coming. I wish you success. He had help from many parts of the world, from South Africa by Mandela himself, for that reason and reasons of solidarity, we also want to share our experience. We want to help always.

End of session



Participants with Pat Sheehan and Rosie McCorley, outside of the Northern Ireland Assembly, Stormont Estate

Wednesday 22nd April 2015

Session 10: Roundtable Discussion with George Mitchell



With:

George Mitchell,

Venue: Residence of the Vice-Chancellor of Queen's University, Belfast

George Mitchell:

In 2000 and 2001, I was appointed as chairman of the international commission to look into the violence in the Middle East between Israel and Palestine. There were five members of our commission, one was the former president of Turkey. He was a constructive member of our commission. I visited Ankara later as a US special envoy to the Middle East. I am glad to assist you.

Kerim Yildiz: It is a pleasure to meet you. Our group consists of Wisemen, of journalists. The group is a part of DPI's effort to share the Irish experience. We have learned a lot from you. The Mitchell principles are used worldwide, they are the standard principles to follow in this area. The peace process in Turkey is very new, we are concentrating how important international assistance is.

George Mitchell: As a first point, it is useful and helpful to study other processes as you are doing, but you should always keep in mind that each conflict is unique. It is specific to the area and the people, there is no formula which once discovered can be applied everywhere. Every conflict that you meet, any solution is local and specific to that area. There are some conflicts including Northern Ireland which have benefitted from the presence of a third party or external presence. Those parties recognised that it is not their proper role to impose a solution on those involved but rather to help them discover a path to resolution which is their agreement. On the first day of negotiations in Northern Ireland, in June 1996, I told delegates that I did not come with an American peace plan. There was no Mitchell peace plan. If ever there was an agreement, it would be their agreement. Two years later, after difficult negotiations, when I and my colleagues drafted an agreement, I made certain that every single word had been spoken or written by one of the delegates in Northern Ireland. So if you include a third party, they need to know their limits; that they don't want to impose. Other solutions in other examples have been imposed, but there were different circumstances here in Northern Ireland.

The second thing is the importance of listening to all sides. You can't get people to agree on a solution involving their lives and future if they don't feel they had the full opportunity to

present an agitative use. On my first day here I mad an unwise statement, I said that I am a product of the US Senate. There was a rule of unlimited debate, any Senator can stand up and speak for as long as they want, even if there is no relationship to the legislation. I listened for two years, but at the end nobody could say that they had not been able to make their case. They had the full opportunity orally and in writing. They made their points over and over again. I can't say that I am here and I want peace next Tuesday. I am here to listen, to help, to encourage, but I don't make people feel like they don't have chance to express and argue fully their opinion. Then they are much more likely to accept the outcome even if it is not 100% their way.

As a third point, in Northern Ireland, there are political divisions within each of the main parties. Divisions on whether to go forward or agree to this or that. That had to be recognised at the outset, we were not dealing with monolithic groups on the two sides. Everyone in our talks was an elected official. I as a former politician knew that the only way to agree would be if they can go before their constituencies saying that they succeeded. Unless you have a total war with total defeat there is always compromise. I picture myself as a Northern Irish politician standing for his or her constituencies. I try to figure out what could be in an agreement that he can stand up and say this is good for us. Even recognising other parts of the agreement would be good. In Northern Ireland on both sides there were some unreconciled to any process, they wanted 100% of their way. That is not possible. In good faith negotiations, without total military victory, you cannot reconcile those 100%, which is a problem until today in Northern Ireland. After we got the agreement in April 1998, after it had been approved in a referendum, where 71% voted yes, and 95% voted yes in the Republic, even after that horrific acts of violence. There were murders and bombings on both sides that could not become reconciled during the process. One of the principles I apply is to try to keep it going no matter what happens. It would be a mistake in this type of negotiations to stop in cases of violence. That gives men of violence a veto power.

Also at least in Northern Ireland, while we were in the process, events would occur that would not permit leaders to be seen together. If a bomb went up in a Nationalist restaurant, their representative couldn't go to a meeting the next day as if nothing happened. I approached to keep the process going but not in a meeting together, each side would be separate. 'Let's keep talking, I come to you because you can't be seen with the other group'. I was mostly listening and understanding what they were going through. In five days, or two weeks, emotions would subside. I feel that's very important. You should not say at the outset that the process would be over when violence occurs, otherwise you yield the agenda to those who don't want progress.

As a final point, it is very difficult to get an agreement in a conflict with a long history as in Northern Ireland or the Kurdish issue. When you get an agreement, you find that the work is just

beginning. It is much harder to implement. As hard as it is to get people to say I agree, it is much harder to make them do it. We have to keep in mind that getting an agreement is the first step and not the most difficult. Critically important is that whoever is involved in the drafting presents it in a way that includes mechanism for continuing review, efforts to comply, and understanding that saying that I will do something is not the same as doing it.

Kerim Yildiz: If one side, for example the government, is refusing to have international assistance, even if the rebels insist ... what would be the best approach? How ethical would it be for a mediator or facilitator to support just one side of the conflict?

George Mitchell: The second question is easier, it is hard to see how you can ask a group to accept an external participant who is already in favour of one side. This was a big issue when I came here. I am American, I am a Democrat, and I am Catholic. For many Unionists, those were three strikes against me before I started. They thought I had a bias because of my background. In a peculiar way that discussion went on for many years and helped me, I made decisions in a fair and objective way. I gradually gained the confidence of both sides. I had never expressed a previous view that I was for one side and against the other. I am not a perfect person, but I do feel I am impartial and listen in good faith.

Participant 3: Was being American a handicap at first?

George Mitchell: It was at first. When the negotiations started, I also asked that I don't have any formal relationships with the US government. I had a small staff, three people, who had previously been paid by the US government. The British and Irish government insisted to pay their expenses, they wanted us to be independent. There is no doubt that the fact that I was American, a former official as leader of the US Senate, and close friend of the president was an important factor. I was not bound by anything. I kept the president informed and met him, but never received instructions, I took it seriously that the British and Irish governments wanted me to be neutral.

Participant 5: Did you take responsibility after the Good Friday Agreement for the implementation?

George Mitchell: I did not personally, but one of my colleagues. I was chairman of a three member panel, one was the former Prime Minister of Finland chosen by the Irish, one was the Canadian de Chastelain chosen by the UK, I was neutral and chairman. The Canadian general told me that he wanted me to know that he would be willing to stay on afterwards, particularly in the critical issue of decommissioning. He knew that I was under pressure not to stay, I was

away from home for many years. I had been here for five years. He stayed on the subject of decommissioning. Unexpectedly, one year after the agreement had been reached and approved, the process collapsed. The Prime Ministers of Britain and Ireland, and Clinton called me if I would go back and try to put it back together. I came back in July 1999, and until December we patched it up.

Participant 1: What was the most difficult subject of the negotiations?

George Mitchell: All were. The first issue because of which we got involved was the issue of arms. The British government had taken the decision that Sinn Féin and the Unionist parties that had paramilitary organisations could not enter into the talks until they gave up their arms. This would have meant prior decommissioning. I chaired a commission in December 1995 and January 1996 on that question. We concluded that there was no possibility, it was an unrealistic demand. It would not and could not be met. What we proposed was a mechanism to get into talks without prior decommissioning. We did decommissioning during and after the process. Historically many negotiation errors have been committed, all attempts failed, the reason is that those who are actually fighting were not included in the talks. It seems simple in retrospect, but it was politically impossible at the time. Nobody at the negotiating table was involved in fighting the war they wanted to end. We tried to figure out a way to bring the parties in who were affiliated with paramilitaries, but still make sure that the constitutional parties would stay. These are the origins of the Mitchell principles: how can I get them in without the others walking out. We sought to establish this balance.

Participant 10: What do you think about the issue of trust?

George Mitchell: There is a saying that money is the root of all evil. In peace processes, the lack of trust is the root of all evil. It is by far the most important factor. After Northern Ireland, I did two tours in the Middle East, hundreds of hours with Abbas and Netanyahu, and the fundamental problem was that they don't trust each other. Netanyahu does not believe that Abbas has the strength to implement and reach an agreement, and Abbas thinks that Netanyahu doesn't want an agreement and just wants to placate us. If you are a leader and the process you are in cannot succeed, you will not be willing to take risks and make concessions necessary for peace.

It is also clear that trusting someone and acting on basis of that person's assertions are two different things. They develop incrementally both ways. You cannot begin negotiating and say 'let's have trust' by turning on the lights. You have to begin with small steps to establish trust in modest ways. Then you can take a little step which helps to build a little more trust; back and forth. Trust is 17 years later, 22 years after my involvement, still not fully there. It takes a

generation. You need a minimum level to get to the first steps, it is an incremental process which takes years. When I first went to Northern Ireland, they didn't talk to each other. In all five years, never, not once, did I have everyone in the same room at the same time. There was always someone who walked out or was kicked out or didn't want to come. That is the most important task and great skill is required of an external actor, first gain their trust and then encourage them to develop trust among themselves.

I said earlier, when the process collapsed in 1999, Clinton and the Prime Ministers asked me to go back. When we settled that in November 1999, I wrote in my own handwriting 'step one, Gerry Adams will make a statement at 9 in the morning', we wrote down the statement, 'step 2, Trimble will make a statement the next day at 1pm', we wrote down that statement. There were 18 steps, and before the first step was taken, everybody knew exactly what had happened. It took six months to negotiate every word. People were so mistrustful, if you change one word, one comma, they would decline. There was no trust. But they were reassured by the fact that they knew in advance each step to be taken. I wouldn't have them have a copy of it before it was done, otherwise it would have leaked to the press. It was always in my handwriting. People need confidence that they are not taken for a fool. That they would not have to make a difficult concession and then get embarrassed. The biggest fear for a politician is being seen as weak or foolish.

I said in a speech last week in the US, we just observed the 100th anniversary of the First World War. In World War I, 10 million people died because four weak men, England, the Czar, the Kaiser, and the King of Austria-Hungary, couldn't stand to be seen as weak. So they overcompensated by acting tough and by calling for people to fight. It is amazing to look at those old videos, how in every country the crowds were cheering and troops were marching, like a wedding. The enthusiasm went down when the killing started. Political leaders are afraid of being taken for a fool or of looking weak. We have to figure out a way to give them assurance that they are not taken for a fool and won't look weak. If a process works, you will look very strong.

Participant 7: You had a huge power behind you despite being neutral yourself. Did you feel the gravity of being backed by a huge power although you were independent? In Turkey, with Abdullah Öcalan, our government does not want a third party in the negotiations. We want to form a domestic committee. To what extent could it be useful to have a domestic monitoring committee? While the PKK said the US should be the third party, our government has said there should be a national solution.

George Mitchell: Yes, it clearly helped that I am American, that I was an official, and close to

the President. In addition, the two principle parties were the British and Irish government. We call the British government the mother country despite the revolution. Secondly, although we didn't have the same political relationship with Ireland, we had personal relationships. 30 million Americans have Irish heritage. Under these circumstances, the presence of the US was important.

Concerning the second question, in this case the British government was opposed to outside involvement. When I met top MPs here at the beginning, they were opposed. 'If Texas tries to secede from the US, would you invite a Brit to settle it?' To the credit Prime Minister Major, he deserves a lot of credit yet received little, he defied the segment of his party that didn't want us involved. He agreed because I had already been here for a year, I got to know him, and he felt comfortable. He told people that he knew me, that I was reasonable, 'he does not do crazy stuff'. It worked out. Ultimately it will be the decision of your government, I wouldn't presume advice on that, I don't know enough. Governments permitting third parties is usually seen by government leaders as failing, and encroachment on sovereignty. They are always reluctant. It has to be done that it is in their self-interest.

Participant 5: You said that parties should be given as much time as possible during talks. As it is prolonged, it will be open to provocation, fatigue will develop.

George Mitchell: It is probably the greatest challenge of judgment by anyone chairing. When to start them, when to end them. Trust in this case started high, and went downhill for nearly two years. After 18 months, violence was rising. So it was out of desperation that I concluded that we had to bring it to an end, and force a decision. It was spiraling downward, we feared a full scale resumption of conflict. The plan had a firm deadline. Two weeks before that, we had intense round-the-clock negotiations to bring it to an end. I had an objective for each day, and we failed every day. We kept at it. We were one day late by the deadline. Right until five minutes before the agreements, it could have gone either way. Next day hundreds of reporters were waiting. I was often asked, you set a deadline and you got an agreement, why didn't you do that two years ago? My answer is if that had happened it would not have worked. It is about timing, judgment, when and how to do it, there is no way to say that in advance. You have to hope that the people involved know the right time.

It was a painful decision for delegates in the talks, several careers ended, two were murdered. One of the reasons they did it was that they knew if they didn't do it, the alternative would be worse. It would have been a return to full-scale conflict, with much more death and destruction. Each time the conflict renewed, it was worse than before. Weapons developed. One or two people can kill hundreds with little resources. They did not want to do it, but the alternative was worse.

I bought an air ticket back to the US on that Saturday, ‘look at that, I will be leaving on Saturday. There are 500 TV-crews outside. If we don’t reach an agreement, I will walk out of the door to the press and tell them that you have to explain why there is no agreement. If we do reach an agreement, you go out first.’ We got the agreement.

End of session

Wednesday 22nd April 2015

Session 11: Roundtable Discussion with Jeffrey Donaldson MP: Perspective on international actors and the decommissioning body



With:

Rt Honourable Jeffrey Donaldson MP,

Venue: The Old Town Hall, Lisburn

Jeffrey Donaldson:

My party is the DUP, the largest political party in Northern Ireland. I am the party's chief negotiator on peace issues. I work closely with the First Minister, and I have been a member of the British parliament in the House of Commons for 18 years. I served in the Northern Irish government as a minister, I was also involved in the negotiation process for peace. I served in the military during the conflict, specialised in counterterrorism.

The conflict wouldn't be solved by military means I recognised, that's why I got involved in politics. Northern Ireland changed a lot from these dark days to where we are today. The DUP is part of the government. We are always trying to reform those institutions, to enhance democracy, to move to a more stable democratic situation. Not everything runs smoothly, there are always problems to be addressed. We are still dealing with issues 16 years after the Good Friday Agreement.

I took part in the negotiations for the Stormont House Agreement, before there was St Andrews, Hellsbury Castle, and now the Stormont House Agreement. There were three other agreements since then leading to agreement about elements of the peace process. The first fundamental thing the peace process is that it is not a one-off single agreement. A 30-year conflict can take many years to solve. We have to rebuild a society damaged by conflict. With the Stormont House Agreement, we finally have ways to move forward. It establishes new institutions to investigate unsolved killings, to offer victims the opportunity to find out more about the deaths.

Setting up a reconciliation group is the next step. Communities are still divided, now we need reconciliation. We have moved a long way. The wound is still there, unhealed. There may be new bandages, but the wound is still there. The divisions are. The next stage is to start healing, removing the peace walls. We set the target to remove them all by 2021, for the 100th anniversary of Northern Ireland coming into existence. It needs a lot of work. We are not just dealing with physical issues, to stop violence, we have to change the way people think. The mindset has to change. If attitudes don't change, then the risk of violence reoccurring is still there. The next generation may repeat our mistakes. We are not blind to the need to complete the journey.

Please don't have the impression that the peace process has not been successful, it has. Last year no one was killed. That is a big thing, coming from the very dark days when hundreds were killed every year. We have been dealing with symptoms of the problem, now we are dealing with the root causes of divisions. It has driven people apart, they are segregated in some areas. People need to feel comfortable. We need to remove things leading to fear and suspicion, to

dismantle feelings that can stir up tensions ending in violence. Society is being transformed. Our political institutions work reasonably well, but it could be better. We need reform to make them more normal. We need to get more of a parliamentary style with a government based on elections, whereas here we have mandatory coalitions. We want a voluntary coalition, where after elections parties coalesce and negotiate with each other, and with an official opposition. It is important to resolve issues that gave rise to conflict.

I would like to make two final points. The construction of the peace process is very important. Prior to the Good Friday Agreement, many initiatives were attempted, but we didn't achieve success until we moved away from concentrating on the constitutional issues. We built peace about relationships, around human relationships. In Ireland, there are three sets of relationships: the most important is between the people living here, the second is between North and South, and the third between East and West. We constructed our process around those three sets of relationships. We divided it into three strands to reflect that. We had to step back from it all: how do we live together, how do we relate to each other? We built institutions for those three dimensions. We don't pretend that it has been perfect here, but it worked. Lessons can be learned from our situation. I am invited to many countries to talk about that. I hope you will find those lessons.



Speaker Rt Honourable Jeffrey Donaldson MP

Participant 8: It is not correct to compare Turkey and Northern Ireland, I was listening. When I read something about you, I had a question in my mind - there was a huge change towards the peace process in your attitude. We have parties in Turkey close to your position, they are in the first stage. Some are strictly against a peace process, the proper

answer should be violence. What were your breaking points, transitions, what was the 'flow'? How was your transition from counterterrorism to be a politician?

Jeffrey Donaldson: That goes to the heart of the peace process. For me, one of the difficult decisions I had to take was to enter negotiations in 1997 with Sinn Féin. They had murdered members of my family, and some comrades in the army. Here I was being asked to negotiate my future with the people responsible for that. I recognised that we can either go on killing, or see and sit together to resolve differences. Dialogue should have a chance. I wasn't happy with 1998, it didn't go far enough in terms of holding armed groups to account, and ensure that they deliver disarmament. This proved to be the case, the agreement said they should disarm in two years, they didn't. Yet the compromise in return was the prisoner release. After two years all prisoners had been released, and not a single weapon handed in. My problems wasn't with the agreement, not the peace, but that it was flawed. The next one solved disarming.

We need to persuade people that dialogue is better than violence. Even if you are skeptical about political progress. I have worked in Colombia, talked to Guerrilla groups, in the Middle East, and in Burma, the Philippines. I have gone out to people. I sought to persuade them that violence is not going to give them their objective. Therefore they should at least try dialogue. There is no magic solution. It is an individual thing, for me it was realising that neither side was going to win. We had to try politics, dialogue. Human emotion is powerful in any peace process the longer the conflict goes on, the older the combatants get. They get children, grandchildren, and they start thinking about their children's future. Is that what future looks like for my children? This was an important dynamic. My generation began asking, 'do we have to do this for the next generation?'

The government at the time had an advertising campaign. It was very successful in changing what people thought: many didn't believe violence would ever end. Because they were immune, acclimatised, accepted it reluctantly. The government ran a campaign, which was very graphic, it shows terrorists coming into a public place killing people. It asked: 'does it have to be like this all the time?' One showed a member of an armed group talking to his son. The son wanted to play football, the father said he did not have time, he had to fight. One day the son joined armed groups. This advert was publicised over a two to three year period, at peak viewing time in TV. It changed the attitudes. 'Why are we accepting this?' If we can't influence individuals, we have to try to influence the ones influencing them. Advertising was not sending a political message, it was challenging attitude and mindset. The change in public mood helped to change the leaders of armed groups.

Participant 2: You were in the army in a counterterrorism regiment. To what extent did the attitude of the army keep pace with the transition?

Jeffrey Donaldson: The army fully supported the peace from day 1. In the UK, there is no question of the army being superior in any way to politics. The army always took direction from political leadership. When the government decided to engage, the army fully supported it. You will see that from reports. They recognised that they could not defeat terrorists, the insurgency would continue for many years. They said to politics: we can contain it, at a low level, but we will never be able to eradicate it. We can't defeat them militarily. Out of five attempts, the army prevented probably four, but it only takes one successful one. Terrorists operated on the base that the army has to be successful every time, they only once. The army was very supportive.

Participant 6: You need to deal with past. What do you mean, what elements does it have?

Jeffrey Donaldson: There is a number of elements. Firstly, there are over 3000 unsolved killings. No one has been brought to justice. Those families still want justice. We have established a new investigative body to investigate those unsolved killings. We know which organisations were responsible, not which individuals. This is the first thing. Then there are many allegations on both sides about what happened. We set up an independent commission to investigate and make available the results of incidents. They will go to the armed groups and state authorities. It is about justice, and truth or information recovery. Then because we had 30 years of conflict in Northern Ireland, there is a high level of people suffering from trauma, mental health problems. We will establish a unit within the health service to increase support for those people. We consider the payment of pension to victims who have severe psychological injuries.

Participant 5: The Good Friday Agreement means self-determination to the Irish in the North. If there was a referendum in Northern Ireland, and if a majority wants to unite with Ireland, what would your attitude be?

Jeffrey Donaldson: This goes to the heart of our differences here. We support the principle of self-determination for the people of Northern Ireland. I think, it is important as a Unionist, that if the result of a referendum was a majority for a united Ireland, I would accept it. You cannot on the one hand argue for self-determination, and oppose the outcome if you don't like the result. Particularly not with violent means. However, others may oppose by violence.

I would want to say that in a referendum today, an overwhelming majority would favour the

status quo. That includes Protestants and Catholics, because the people accept that what we have is better than what we had before. Often, conflicts arise because people fear their position is threatened. Unionists in Northern Ireland felt if they make any concessions to the minority, they would weaken their own position, that sharing power would weaken the Unionist position. The irony and real benefit of the peace process is that the opposite has occurred. The Unionists are now sharing power, and the result is that in all opinion polls the support for the union with Britain is increasing. This tells me that holding on to all power and exclude others because you feel threatened is not a solution at all. It doesn't give you the security you seek. The decision to share power has resulted in our position being more secure now. Catholics now say they are treated fairly, some say equal. 'Why would we want to change that? We feel a strong affinity with the South, but we are happy to have our own government here, to have strong links to Ireland and to Britain.' I don't think that will change soon.

To illustrate that, I live next door to a Catholic family, and I carry a UK passport. My next door neighbours, when they travel, they have an Irish passport. Part of the agreement is that any citizen in Northern Ireland, as self-determination on the most basic level, can choose in matter of identity. It lies with the individual. Everyone can choose whether they are Irish or British or both, if I want I can have both. Most people here accept that that's a good way of dealing with this issue. To change that would be a mess. I support self-determination both for Northern Irish people as a whole, and for each individual. No identity can be imposed! This is the most important lesson that can be drawn. You cannot impose an identity on someone. In the modern world, we accommodate difference, this even involves different identities inside our own entity.

Participant 8: There is equality of rights, the issue of political representation is solved. Why is the political solution not enough? Why the depth of difference?

Jeffrey Donaldson: One of the legacy of the conflict is that, although armed groups cease to operate, they continue to operate on a local level, sometimes as criminal gangs. They are still trying to control local areas. In order to maintain their areas of control, like in New York City, gangs create fear. This is also part of the legacy, mainly in Belfast. In this city here, there are no peace walls. In Belfast, criminal gangs formed out of paramilitaries still create fear in their communities, they intimidate the local population. That's why there is reluctance to bring the peace walls down, out of fear that gangs would go back to violence. We need to address this. We established a new programme called 'Together Building a United Community'. We spend a lot of resources in divided communities dealing with residual problems, that by 2021 all peace walls are gone. The political process hasn't failed to reach people, but armed groups are still operating as criminal gangs. There is still a level of fear. The Mafia uses fear too, they are not terrorists, but they use the same tactics.

End of session

Wednesday 22nd April 2015

Session 12: Roundtable Discussion with former prisoners: The role of international actors in civil society engagement with the Good Friday Agreement



With:

Michael Culbert, former IRA member

Eibhlin Glenholmes, former IRA member

Venue: Coiste, West Belfast

Eleanor Johnson: Coiste is an important civil society organisation in Belfast today. Michael Culbert, Director of Coiste, was a social worker until 1978 when he was sentenced to 16 years. Afterwards, he completed a Master's and worked with Coiste first as counsellor, then as director. Evelyne also works with them, previously she was one of Scotland Yard's most wanted suspect. She was on the run for a few years.

Michael Culbert: Thank you for coming. I will tell you about our motivations and backgrounds, why we participated in armed conflict against the British government, and why we now don't find it appropriate to do so. About me and my life, I used to be social worker. At the age of 28, I went into prison charged with shooting dead a policeman, I served a life sentence. I was released in 1993, which coincided with the IRA ceasefire. We political prisoners had been discussing that as an option for two to three years. The Republican leadership was engaged talking on the outside. The cessation of violence ended 10 months later, with the escalation of violence with the England bombing. Subsequently there was another cessation, which has held since. The Good Friday Agreement was the outwork of that. Integral to that agreement was an agreement about the political prisoner community at the time. 400 IRA members were in jails in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The governments agreed that prisoners had to be dealt with satisfactory for a political settlement to take place. Within two years all were released, this happened. This gave way to the emergence of a political process. Sinn Féin, engaged with most of the former Republican fighters, participated. It exists until today.

My organisation was set up and funded by the EU mostly, to work at reconciling communities and build better relationships with political parties, former army personnel, former pro-state illegal fighters. To build post-conflict peace, I am not engaged in peacekeeping, peacebuilding.

Eibhlin Glenholmes: I am the granddaughter of an IRA fighter, who was interned by the British in the 1940s. I am the daughter of an IRA fighter, who was interned by the British in the 1970s. My father was condemned for a long sentence in prison. When I was 16, I was victim of an assassination attempt by pro-British forces, not because I was threat, but because my father was

the officer commanding in the Long Kesh concentration camp. The tactic was to attack the family of Republican leaders. They were not afraid for their own life but for their families. I was injured but OK. I became an active member of the Republican forces.

At that time, we were not conscious, we didn't understand colonialist occupation, we were too young, but we knew oppression. We saw that when our people marched for human rights and equality, for one man one vote. Unemployment among Nationalists was at 85%. From the day you were born to the day you die you would never have a job, never have the same access to education. We were second class citizen, hostages. With the global civil rights movement, our people started to march peacefully. They were met with the full fury of the Orange state which protected the loyalists. The green people were living in an orange state. I became committed to the ideals of justice and equality for all. When the minority held no power, no political representation, no international defence, everyone suffers, also the oppressors. We resisted peacefully, we tried to do the right thing. The usual response from the British government was the same as in the past 800 years: oppression. They opened internment camps in the 1970s in Western Europe! Internment without trial. The British would have been criticised if they did it anywhere else. Oppression does not crush rebellion, it breeds resistance. People felt disengaged from the British government. They had no part in their future and the creation of their society, we were foreigners in our own land.



Guest speakers Eibhlin Glenholmes and Michael Culbert

In the 1980s, I was named 'Scotland Yard's most wanted' for questioning on the Brighton bombing, for an attempt to kill Thatcher, I was wanted for the killing of the commander of the

regiment that killed 13 in Bloody Sunday, and also for the murder of the top anti-bombing expert of Scotland Yard. And for the attack against the then British Attorney General, Lord Havers, and other actions. In 1985, I was captured by the Irish government for extradition. I won the short trial, but I was rearrested one year later for the same offenses. I again faced extradition, and I defeated that case. I left court and disappeared from the public view. The British media reports say that in the years following my release I was IRA representative in Latin America, and that I forged relationships between forces of the IRA and other revolutionary movements of the indigenous.

With the Good Friday Agreement, as others on the run, I was a first beneficiary of the Good Friday Agreement, and returned to the North in 2001. Following the cessation of the IRA, I became a full-time member of Sinn Féin. I was selected to the national leadership of Sinn Féin, I retained in the next election. I then worked with the ex-prisoners network because there is still massive discrimination against political prisoners. They are in some cases unemployable, cannot adopt children, and cannot travel freely. In counterbalance to ordinary prisoners, they are still victims of the conflict. Our commitment is to equality for all, we represent them as oppressed ones.

Participant 7: Did you experience disappearances of people under custody? In Turkey we are facing many such disappearances.

Michael Culbert: Basically no. The British had the direct policy not of restoring peace but to defeat the IRA. In their campaign, the standard procedure in colonies is the coloniser brings the army in, they control it, after a while they bring in civil servants to administer, and then remove some of their troops, then use locally recruited troops, then the same with civil servants. If locals are colonised, they always need a type of force. It happened in the Middle East, in Yemen, Aden, Africa; it is a common thing, and it happened here as well. The British army introduced shoot-to-kill for IRA personnel, and it is now proven they then introduced illegally locally recruited personnel to kill IRA personnel. The British government didn't have to disappear people, they just killed them through illegally recruited people armed by the British army. This is proven!

Eibhlin Glenholmes: Given the size of Northern Ireland, unlike Chile or Guatemala, it is impossible to effectively disappear. Arrests were noted, and people were seen at some point. We lived in barricaded areas to defend ourselves. When British forces came in, women would take tin tans or bin lids and alert everyone that they were coming. The British did not need to disappear us, they just killed us with impunity.

Michael Culbert: As a major legacy today, up to fifty known cases have been waiting a coroner's court report for 30 years. It is still not officially declared under what circumstances death occurred. We know what happened, but we want to get acknowledged what happened. The coroners still have to deal with them.

Eibhlin Glenholmes: It was heartbreaking for families of IRA victims to find the bodies. They had been executed at night. Often people who did the killings are no longer alive. The IRA has worked with relevant organisations to find the bodies.

Participant 4: Bobby Sands went to hunger strike when they tried to force him to wear prison uniform. We had something similar in Turkey. How did that continue? Was there continued imposition to wear uniforms?

Eibhlin Glenholmes: We are well informed about Turkey. Hunger strikes strike fear to our heart. It is a last resort of desperation. We quickly understand that when we say political status we are political prisoners. On the 30th of April you were a political prisoner, and on the 1st of May you would be criminal. People did not understand, nor did international actors, 'what do you mean by political status?' We had to explain what that meant. The British government claimed that it was an impossible demand. We put forward five demands: the right to wear our own clothes, the right to education within prison, the right to associate with our comrades, the right to one parcel and letter a week, and the right to one visit a week. Those were considered impossible demands.

When the hunger strike began, we knew our people, the prisoners; we would shortly be carrying coffins. It was the worst period of my life, the worst for my people. We still live with the legacy of the hunger strike. We watched ten young men carried out of that prison. They died to defend us, to proclaim to the world that we were not criminals, that we were political rebels. It reinforces to me how easily that could have been avoided, simply by talking and negotiating. We are all scared by 1981, we will never forget those months. Is it always that power makes you right? If you can shoot, should you do it? Thatcher was showing that she was stronger and tougher than any man, but what kind of man was that? Those were not actions of true men or women. Every child lost is everybody's son. We all bleed the same colour. Every mother's tears are the same, if Irish or British. All those tears could have been saved if people would talk and listen. Our hunger strike cost us dear. We are more sensitive to those situations in other places.

Michael Culbert: Bobby Sands was a normal man, a symbol for the world, a recognised symbol of resistance. I knew him well. And I knew the reasons for the hunger strike. From our situation, the hunger strike was not at the beginning of things but at the end. The British government had

a policy of criminalising our armed struggle. One way to achieve that was by getting captured fighters to indicate that it wasn't political struggle they fought. We did not give way when the British government wanted us to say that we are not political. The prison uniform was the main indicator of accepting criminalisation. The issue was about wearing the uniform, but the core reason was to accept or not that you were criminalised.

Eibhlin Glenholmes: A little story helps to remember who the people were who did this. One person was sentenced without political status. Kieran was 18, the first IRA prisoner to be taken to the H-Blocks of Long Kesh prison, a new prison especially built for criminals, which they called us. He was surrounded by big prison officers, all of whom were anti-nationalist - that's how they got the job. They screamed at him, threatened him, to him to put the uniform on. They thought if they can break a first one, the second one will be easier. Kieran Nugent was quaking with fear, shivering, and said 'if you want me to wear that, you will have to nail it to my back.'

Michael Culbert: Once the hunger strike ended, the British government gave us what we wanted. For a short period of time we had status. Why did they allow him to die? They were testing IRA personnel. Following that, we had political status.

Participant 3: You were caught in Dublin, Evelyne, what was the Irish government's attitude?

Eibhlin Glenholmes: The collaborated with the British government all along in oppression of the Republicans and Nationalists. Under the constitution, they were obligated to proactively recover the North. That was in the Irish constitution, but it was never done. Probably before the IRA did, they were looking in the future and saw a spillover of the popular revolution. What if the same attitude of challenging the system would have translated to other parts of the country? 26 counties ignored the North, they would have made it disappear if they could. They feared spillover in support of Sinn Féin, which terrified the establishment in Dublin. This support was non-existent.

Michael Culbert: Today, half of Sinn Féin's representatives in parliament are former prisoners. To former political prisoners are in the European Parliament. Throughout Ireland in local city councils, there are hundreds of former political prisoners. This is an indicator of not only who we are, but of the people voting for us knowing what we were. We had public support back then as well as today.

Participant 8: Did you have integration programmes for IRA militants after their release from

prison? And did you manage to achieve what you wanted?

Eibhlin Glenholmes: We always rejected the word 'reintegration'. We were never not integrated. It implies that you come from somewhere away into society. Our society was the IRA, our fathers and our brothers and sisters, our family. Getting out of prison was coming home. They were greeted and welcomed by each small area they lived in. Immediately locals would start knocking on the doors looking for their advice, their wisdom and leadership. They became community leaders. They were then elected counsellors, as a measure of respect that our community holds for our ex-prisoners. They had fought for them, risked their lives, lost families, they had no money for anything. The most expensive accessory to have in life is a political prisoner in your family. It cost a lot of money. You have to feed and clothe them while they were in prison. Some families had five or six, when they came out we had invested in them. We looked at them for leadership, elected them to the new Assembly, to Europe: Martina Anderson, former IRA prisoner during 13 years, our junior minister Jennifer McCann spent 12 years in prison. The minister for culture, Carál Ní Chuilín, spent eight years in prison. Gerry Adams had also been interned.

We look to political prisoners to lead. They were not gunmen for nationalism, or looking for a fight, but forced when there was no other option to defend our people. You cannot continually defend without proactively going on the attack. The IRA was small and poor. We had no outside support. Our objective was to force the British government, with its massive army and resources, to the negotiation table. Everything else came after that.

Participant asks a question about DDR.

Michael Culbert: In our situation that never happened, for multiple reasons. The main reason was that the British government couldn't engage in that, it would have to acknowledge that the IRA somehow defended us. We were seen as criminals. Technically, when the guerrilla war was coming to an end, the EU got engaged instead of the British government for assisting re-engagement of former activists. That's why my organisation is funded by the EU. We set up the structure, funded from Europe. We are now in a position we could not have been 20 years ago. Our party is in a powerful position, and the military campaign was essential to build on politically. Normally it doesn't work that way, in this case we are very convinced that the military campaign is what gave rise to the political. I do not see equalness in Turkey, our situation is unique. Our story is unique to Ireland. We had the advantage of having a British Prime Minister who wanted peace. The American president wanted to end suffering in Ireland. It was a coalescence of factors leading to negotiations between the government and the guerrilla.

Participant 6: After the normalisation process, violence has come to an end. We still see serious isolation and the separation of communities. What kind of measures can be taken to ensure communication between the two communities? Your party, Sinn Féin, now has political power.

Michael Culbert: The major problem is the narrative of why and what happened. If we go back 500 years, politics was religious. Today we have an interpretation in religious terms of the conflict instead of political. Do we ever talk about Buddhist-Christian wars of in Southeast Asia? No, we call it the Vietnam War, in political terms. We could put it in religious terms. So what is the narrative about here? In Liverpool and Birmingham people oppose each other politically, in Turkey too. Why don't people in Liverpool all get along? There were political differences, what's wrong with that? At one stage, the differences were so strong that violence was used, now the enemy is the opposition. People oppose each other, as long as nobody gets killed.

Eibhlin Glenholmes: There is not even an agreed line or story about who was fighting whom and why. If you go across the road where the Loyalist live, some live in conditions as bad as our people did, in the same houses, without bathrooms. It is the same life. They would tell you that their enemy was the IRA. If you talk to state militias, they were fighting the IRA. If you talked to the RUC, they were fighting the IRA. The IRA was only fighting the British government. Other agents brought themselves onto the stage to fight the IRA. We had enough to do fighting the state, we did not need another battle. I understand their loyalty to the British crown. They are British. That's all right. I am Irish. The British government have no right in my country. When we had to fight them, we fought them. Now we don't have to fight them, but we will negotiate them out of our country. I identified with the people across the wall, they are the same socio-economic group, the poor; the only difference is how we see our future. Their loyalty to the crown has left them heartbroken, they feel betrayed, by the British government negotiating with the IRA. Our responsibility is to build their community as much as ours.

Participant 7: Are you struggling with the effect of torture in society? Do you have organisations dealing with social trauma?

Michael Culbert: Yes, this is one. We have two in Belfast, and two full-time people going out to different areas. We operate a 24h telephone line. We have acknowledged that trauma will come through eventually. We engaged psychiatrists. We further talked about research in Holland, which showed an upsurge in erratic behaviour by elderly people in the 1970s. They had been members of the guerrilla resistance against the Germans. When the war ended, they went back to civilian life without assistance.

End of session

Wednesday 22nd April 2015

Private Tour of Belfast's 'Peace Wall'

With:

Jack Duffin, tour guide on the Nationalist side

Tour guide on the Loyalist side







To conclude the visit, participants were taken on two separate tours through the interface area of West Belfast, where predominantly Nationalist and Unionist communities are separated by 'peace walls'. They serve to prevent violent attacks from extremists of one community on the other. Murals praising paramilitaries are still seen in the working-class neighbourhoods, now complemented by 'international murals' to give attention to prisoners and oppressed in the whole world.

On the Nationalist side, a memorial for 'martyrs' in Bombay Street right next to the 'peace wall' was visited. On the Unionist side, the tour ended at a memorial on the infamous Shankhill Road, right next to the site of a tragic alleged IRA retaliation bombing which killed four civilians instead of targeted Loyalist paramilitaries in 1971.