



GALVANISING THE PEACE

**The Future for
Conflict Transformation
in Northern Ireland**

Executive Summary

The Northern Ireland peace process has made a real contribution to bringing us closer to becoming a truly peaceful, prosperous society. It has significantly reduced violent political and sectarian conflict, created the basis for a sustained and inclusive political settlement and supported reconciliation between people from different communities and backgrounds. It has provided an opportunity for Government and wider society to work together and create the conditions for long-lasting prosperous peace.

While acknowledging a lot of progress has been achieved to date in building peace both politically and on the ground, it is important to note that not all areas have fared the same. Some community groups report that a hardening of attitudes and behaviours has left some communities isolated and segregated. Others report that levels of confidence and collaboration within and between communities are growing at a level in advance of the political process. It is important that progress to date is not eroded, either through political divisions, complacency, a lack of focus on ongoing issues, or a lack of investment in peace.

Concerns have been expressed by the community relations sector that much of the goodwill displayed at the signing of the 1998 Agreement has evaporated and this has been exploited by those committed to ensuring that sectarian, racist and political tensions continue. This is particularly important given the collapse of the Executive in January 2017, the apparent tensions between the leading political parties and the uncertainties caused by the Brexit referendum.

The community relations sector is determined to play its part in reigniting and recalibrating the peace process and urges that those in positions of influence or power begin the next phase of the peace process by building upon the commitment, courage and skills that people here have demonstrated for decades. The momentum behind peace building must be prioritised and consistently supported if we wish to build a sustainable and peaceful society based on the principles of equality, human rights and good relations. The peace process in Northern Ireland needs to be reinvigorated through partnership between political institutions and communities on the ground.

This paper reflects the views of groups and individuals working to support conflict transformation and good relations at a time of reducing resources and, in some quarters, a hardening of attitudes and behaviours. The paper highlights some key issues raised by the sector for the consideration of the Executive and MLAs, for the political parties and for civil society more generally.

It recommends that a future strategy and programme of action needs to build on existing commitments in *Together: Building a United Community* and *A Fresh Start* and should include the following:

1. Building Trust, Respect and Reconciliation

The principle of reconciliation, based on the five elements identified by Hamber and Kelly (2004):

- 1) Developing a shared vision of an interdependent society.
- 2) Acknowledging and dealing with the past.
- 3) Building positive relationships.
- 4) Significant cultural and attitudinal change.
- 5) Substantial social, economic and political change.

should remain as the basis in planning and building a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland. These elements should be reaffirmed by the Executive as the foundations of a future peace building framework and strategy for Northern Ireland.

"We cannot build a united community without significant long-term investment in attitudinal change. Until Joe Bloggs values the idea of a united community we won't get one. We're the ones who can change Joe Bloggs mind. Give us the chance to prove it"

Community relations worker, GTP workshop November 2015.

"Opportunities need to be provided for us to learn about and engage with those from other cultures and traditions. This is the only way we will learn to respect and understand." Community relations worker, GTP workshop December 2015

2. Leadership

The period of sustained political devolution and the expansion of the powers of the assembly to include policing and justice, were positive examples of political leadership. However, recurrent political crises highlight the fragility of the wider transformation process. Our politicians need to show more effective leadership and offer a vision, not simply for a sustainable and just peace in Northern Ireland, but also for Northern Ireland's place in the wider world.

"We need our leaders to lead. Leaders articulate a vision for the future, not just for their constituents but for all of the people. We have no unifying political vision that all our peoples can buy into. This above all else is what we need, a unifying cross party vision of the future and a process to buy our people into it"
Community relations worker, GTP workshop November 2015.

3. The Institutions

Any future Stormont Executive should prioritise the development and implementation of a long term vision and cross-sectoral, cross-departmental peace-building plan for Northern Ireland. This would provide a clear strategic direction, not only for the Executive and the departments, but also for the statutory agencies and organisations of civil society in the next phase of peace building.

4. Future peace building framework and strategy

Any future peace building framework and strategy should outline the key elements of an Executive strategy for a future phase of peace building and reconciliation in Northern Ireland including:

- A clear timetable needs to be set out to ensure that a comprehensive framework, implementation plan and budget is agreed to address all the issues outlined in the Stormont House Agreement and subsequent *Fresh Start* implementation plan (2015) relating to the legacy of the past.

"The peace process failed me, my family and my community because we got no justice for the killings of our parents. Justice is not on the agenda, but some truth would be helpful. We need a process for dealing with the past. We got nothing." Survivor, GTP workshop November 2015.

- Significant and sustainable investment into organisations which can make a positive impact on the lives of children and young people and their role in the peace process.

- An ambitious, timetabled and resourced action plan to support the critical, equal and full participation of women as active agents in peace building.

“Are women good peace builders? Women have more common sense but they aren’t given the opportunity to participate in community relations work. Women don’t put themselves forward for this kind of thing because it is kind of ‘out of the box’ thinking. Women are still seen as first and foremost the homemakers. Politicians don’t tend to listen to women.” Woman’s sector representative, GTP workshop August 2015

- Clear and public commitment from the Executive to end segregation in education and teacher training.
- Housing policy and practice designed and implemented primarily to meet housing need and the ambition to promote and build, and support and sustain a larger number of shared housing initiatives.

“This isn’t rocket science. Segregated housing and education lead to segregated minds. Segregation breeds sectarianism so end segregated education and housing now. Make it happen, my kids deserve better.” Teacher, GTP workshop August 2015

- A policy and practice of zero tolerance on all behaviour and displays that intimidate threaten and thus undermine shared housing environments.
- A co-ordinated and joined up strategy to regenerate interface communities and reintegrate such communities into mainstream civic life. This should explore approaches that have been applied to other urban environments and adapted to the local context.
- Planning and resourcing is also required for barriers that exist in many rural communities which may not be physical or visible, but are barriers nonetheless and have real effects in constraining and shaping the behaviour and attitudes of both individuals and communities.

“There are no walls and no interfaces in rural areas but there are roads that help shape the landscape, there are divisions, you just have to look at a map to determine this.” Rural resident, GTP workshop December 2015

5. Peace building infrastructure

The building of peace, the benefits it brings and the impact of not having peace, means that protecting the peace process belongs to everyone in this society. It is not a special preserve or possession of politicians. Civil society organisations work with diverse groups and individuals to support and progress ongoing work towards

peace and reconciliation. The Executive needs to commit to greater prioritisation of reconciliation by better resourcing delivery through long-term support for community relations organisations and projects and with an outcome based focus.

"We have been peace-building for decades but our work is now being undermined. Imagine wasting all that investment in building the expertise and network to deliver peace then pulling the plug on it." Community relations worker, GTP workshop September 2015

6. Diversity

The Racial Equality Strategy requires ambitious timetables, action plans and should evidence a real commitment to reform, including changes to the Race Relations Order. The Executive must recognise, and demonstrate with resources and public comment, the enrichment of Northern Ireland by BME communities and the need to facilitate genuine integration.

"It was felt that BME communities were not welcomed and they don't get help to settle in. Lots of people were not even aware that BME communities had any problems living in the village" Rural resident, GTP workshop December 2015

The TBUC strategy provided for the development of a Sexual Orientation Strategy, but there has been little evidence of any progress in this area, and is another example where limited progress is made on policy initiatives. This feeds a sense of disenchantment with the body politic.

7. Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration

A broad process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration is needed that includes a clear strategic framework and time frame, proper resourcing, and a genuine commitment to participate from the groups themselves. Any strategy to tackle paramilitarism must acknowledge the social and cultural, as well as the military and criminal aspects of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland.

"One of the problems facing local communities are the gatekeepers in those communities, many of whom are ex paramilitaries who stifle open discussion and community initiatives." Community development worker, GTP workshop November 2015.

8. The Economy

A strong local economy that meets the needs of the local population is critical in consolidating and extending the work that has been done to build the peace. Economic development is an integral part of peace building, and any such development has to be based on principles of equality, human rights and social justice.

Our future economic status in a global economy will be gravely compromised if sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance are not tackled robustly. Racism and sectarianism destroy economies and target the most vulnerable. A commitment to a shared future within a reconciliation framework is integral to constructing a vibrant and sustainable economy and the creation of good quality jobs. Innovative approaches for providing training and apprenticeships that lead to jobs are required in areas with high levels of low educational attainment.

“Stormont executive needs to see themselves for what/who they are in much larger international picture terms and stop being so inward looking. They need to learn to lead on the world stage.” Community relations worker, GTP workshop
October 2015

In Conclusion

The 1998 Agreement provided all of us in Northern Ireland with an opportunity to re-imagine our future, to do things differently, and to be a beacon of hope for other societies coming out of conflict. The Agreement needs to serve as the catalyst for the delivery of good governance based on equality, human rights, good relations and social justice. These principles must inform policy and practice and replace relationships based on enmity with relationships based on trust. A shared and united community should not be a hope but a reality built by civil society and politicians together.

Background

The Galvanising the Peace Working Group was established in early 2015 to explore current and future initiatives and outstanding issues affecting community relations and peace building work in Northern Ireland which were raised by people working in the good relations sector. This paper was initially developed through a series of discussions involving key decision makers and influencers followed by over 45 facilitated workshop discussions with over 642 participants across Northern Ireland between July and December 2015. The conversations in the workshops and between those involved in peacebuilding work have served as the basis for drafting this paper.

Introduction

1. The Northern Ireland peace process can be considered as an ongoing series of actions and initiatives that have been designed and implemented to bring about an end to the armed conflict, to create the basis for a sustained and inclusive political settlement, and to support reconciliation between people from different communities and backgrounds.
2. The peace process marks a sea change in the debate about the constitutional status of Northern Ireland, rather than drawing a line under it. Many people, quite legitimately, advocate a single united Irish state, while others, equally legitimately, support the continued status of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom. The 1998 Agreement, supported by the majority of people in Ireland, north and south, provides for an institutional and political framework that will enable peaceful debate and dialogue to continue.
3. The formal or public aspect of the peace process began with the declarations of ceasefire by the IRA and the Combined Loyalist Military Command in August and October 1994 and includes the negotiation and implementation of the 1998 Agreement, as well as the subsequent St Andrew's Agreement (2006), Hillsborough Castle Agreement (2010) and Stormont House Agreement (2014) and the Fresh Start implementation plan (2015). The 1998 Agreement, the Northern Ireland Act (1998) and the Human Rights Act (1998) were designed as the institutional architecture and underpinning structure to enable a society based on equality, human rights and good relations to be built.
4. However, the elite level political negotiations that led to the various agreements were but one part of a much wider process that involved (and continues to involve) a diverse range of civil society organisations, including community groups, voluntary organisations, trade unions, business community, arts and sports bodies, faith-based groups and others who sought to ensure that peace and justice was built from the ground up and horizontally between groups and communities as well as vertically.
5. Much of this work has been enabled by financial support from bodies such as the European Union, the International Fund for Ireland, the Ireland Fund, Atlantic Philanthropies, as well as by a range of smaller trusts and funders, and the Northern Ireland, British and Irish Governments.
6. At times the political and grass roots aspects of the peace process provided mutual support for each other and peace building work flourished. But at other times progress has been slowed by political disputes, underlying mistrust or by tensions on the ground. Nevertheless the general dynamic over the past twenty years has been towards a consolidation of the peace, albeit at a slower rate than many would have liked.

7. Broadly the peace process has involved four main phases to date:

Phase 1, 1994 - 1998: The initial phase was focused on political negotiations involving the local political parties and the two governments which culminated in the securing of the Agreement in 1998. But this period was also counterbalanced by sustained tensions on the ground, largely associated with disputes over parades, and in particular the Drumcree protests.

Phase 2, 1998 - 2007: The second phase was marked by the challenges involved in implementing the key aspects of the Agreement and establishing a power sharing assembly at Stormont, but was balanced by an extensive and sustained period of work on the ground, which helped to reduce tensions, improve relations between communities and institutions and so provide the foundations for a sustained peace.

Phase 3, 2007 – 2016: The third phase was marked by a period of devolved government, but one marked by recurrent political crises, which led to a decline in optimism on the ground, renewed inter-communal tensions (particularly associated with the disputes over flags), and a lack of clear vision or direction. These in turn created a sense of drift in consolidating the peace. This third phase also coincided with the global financial crisis, economic recession and austerity politics, which have led to major protests across the world and a profound dissatisfaction with the political and economic elites in many countries. Austerity is continuing to have a negative impact on local society, which is compounded by a perception among people working in the peace building sector that for some within the political parties the main work has been done: peace has effectively been achieved, or at least has been achieved as far as is possible. There is a perception that Northern Ireland has achieved as much 'normality' as can be expected and that on-going tensions and occasional outbreaks of violence will continue to need to be managed.

Phase 4, 2016 - : The fourth phase of the peace process arguably began with the Stormont elections in May 2016 and which led to changes in the political structures with a reduction in government departments; the formalisation of a political opposition and a two party coalition government; and growth in support for some of the left-wing and non-sectarian political parties. At the time this could be seen as an indication of a growing maturity in the political system and also an opportunity for the new executive to take forward a more coherent programme of activities to consolidate and extend the peace. However, the collapse of the Executive in January 2017 is an illustration that ongoing tensions between the parties persist and also of the need for a long term perspective on peace building.

8. Considerable progress has undoubtedly been made in the years since the Agreement was signed in 1998. This includes a reduction in acts of violence; the

creation of new institutions of governance, policing and justice; an increasingly visible demographic diversity; the regeneration of many urban and rural areas; a growing tourism industry; an improvement in all-Ireland relations and the demilitarisation and normalisation of the border region. Northern Ireland is clearly a very different place from twenty years ago.

9. But not all of the issues that led to the conflict in the first place, or which were generated by the conflict, have been addressed. Furthermore, much of the goodwill and enthusiasm that was displayed at the signing of the Agreement and in subsequent years has largely evaporated and been replaced by apathy and a sense of frustration. So while much progress has been made there is much work still needed to be done. This includes:
 - Challenging the attitudes that gave rise to the conflict and continue to sustain sectarianism and racism.
 - Building a sustainable and peaceful society based on the principles of equality, human rights and good relations among all communities.
 - Sustaining, rather than dismantling, the reconciliation infrastructure, and building a stronger partnership between the political institutions and communities on the ground. Bodies such as the TBUC Engagement Forum must draw on the commitment, courage and skills that people have demonstrated for decades to work together to develop and implement the next phase of the peace process.
 - Expanding the *Together: Building a United Community* strategy as a clear road map for a future peaceful, prosperous and shared society with long term targets and a strong strategic framework which is integrated with such matters as economic development, social justice and race equality. This should include actions necessary to fully implement the steps identified in the *Fresh Start* agreement (2015) to address paramilitarism; parades; flags, symbols and other cultural practices.
 - Addressing the major issue of how to deal with the past and the legacy of the conflict (including fully addressing the needs of victims and survivors) in a comprehensive manner.
10. We also need to be aware that the wider context in which our peace is being built has changed and continues to change. The financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent recession and austerity politics were significant factors that are still being worked through, while the repercussions of the vote for UK exit from the European Union in June 2016 for Northern Ireland, Ireland and the UK are still being assessed. The uncertainties over the shape and form of Brexit mean that it is all the more important to have a coherent strategy for consolidating and taking forward the peace over the next decade.

Critical Themes for the Next Phase

11. The following sections outline some of the main issues that we believe need to be addressed if we are to ensure that the next phase of the peace process is used to consolidate the progress made to date but also to extend the scope, range and inter-connectedness of the different elements of peace building work.
12. A key element of our thinking is that all these issues need to be addressed simultaneously and in a sustained manner; rather than cherry-pick some issues and ignore others, they all interconnect and influence one another. Failure to address any of these critical themes may serve to undermine work being done in other areas. We have seen only too recently how an increase in inter-communal tensions can motivate acts of violence, lead to mutual recriminations between political parties, undermine confidence in political institutions and instigate a downward spiral. This in turn can have a negative impact on economic development and investment, reduce trust in shared activities and willingness to work together for the common good.

Building Trust, Respect and Reconciliation

13. Complacency and indifference are enemies of any peace process. Although there has been considerable progress in consolidating the peace over the past twenty years, the permanence of the change is by no means guaranteed. It is important to remember that a large proportion of the Protestant unionist community did not vote for the 1998 Agreement and many remained sceptical of the value of the political reforms even after the DUP gave its support to the process through the St Andrew's Agreement of 2006.
14. Many people still feel excluded from any benefits of peace. Many remain marginalised and disenfranchised from the political system and see little to look forward to in the future. For some this has been expressed through such events as the protests over the flying of the Union Flag over Belfast City Hall, which surprised and disappointed many in their scale and persistence. The protests had a sustained negative impact on relations within communities, between communities and between communities and institutions. Growing numbers have expressed their dissatisfaction in other ways, such as by refraining from voting. Others have taken more radical steps and have emigrated or moved elsewhere to study or train, a process noted anecdotally by many in both rural and urban areas, and which may only increase in scale as austerity measures hit harder.
15. There is still a diverse array of civil society organisations that continue to work to build peace, both on their own and in partnership with other organisations, as well as with political parties, the institutions of governance and with statutory bodies. What they have in common is a belief that sustainable peace can only

be based on relationships built on trust and respect and, through this, it will be possible to foster reconciliation, while at the same time tackling the hard issues within a framework of ethnic, social, political and cultural diversity.

16. Previous funding programmes, provided by the European Union and others, have highlighted the importance of building trust and mutual respect as the foundation for any programme of work designed to lead to reconciliation in Northern Ireland, and more widely across Ireland. The principles underpinning the concept of reconciliation were elaborated more than a decade ago by Brandon Hamber and Grainne Kelly (2004) who identified five interwoven and related strands to this work:
 1. Developing a shared vision of an interdependent society.
 2. Acknowledging and dealing with the past.
 3. Building positive relationships.
 4. Significant cultural and attitudinal change.
 5. Substantial social, economic and political change.
17. **The principle of reconciliation, based on these five elements, should remain as the basis in planning and building a sustainable peace in Northern Ireland. These elements should be reaffirmed by the Executive as the foundations of a future peace building framework and strategy for Northern Ireland.**

Political and Civic Leadership

18. In any process of social and political change there is a need for clear political leadership, but through statesmanship rather than as factional leaders. Historic and symbolic initiatives taken at high political level have been welcomed by the vast majority of people. However, there have also been repeated calls for politicians to move away from bi-partisan positions driven by 'parish politics'. We need politicians at all levels to demonstrate statesmanlike qualities and clearer political leadership in the interests of all, particularly at times of actual or potential political tensions. Politicians need to deliver on their responsibilities and support and promote their policies and strategies through words and deeds.
19. Our politicians need to be bolder in engaging society in a way that helps to embed the peace and create a shared vision that appeals to, and engages with, people from all ethnic, national and religious backgrounds. Surveys and research have indicated that there are a growing number of people who define themselves differently from the polarised opposites of British or Irish, and who do not see their aspirations reflected in the political options on offer. In fact, 27% of people described themselves as Northern Irish in the 2015 Life and

Times Survey. Some have disengaged, while for too many, especially young people, emigration is seen as the best option for their future.

20. It is important that building a peaceful and shared future in a reconciled society is not something that can, or should, be left to politicians and political parties alone, although they can and should provide the legislative, policy and strategic framework that will help shape future actions.
21. There should also be a role for wider civil society to contribute more effectively to a sustainable peace. A range of civil society organisations work closely with the Executive and the departments to inform policy and deliver services, but more could be done to build a stronger, as well as more open, transparent and accountable partnership between elected representatives and civil society.
22. The 1998 Agreement provided for the establishment of a Civic Forum to act as a 'consultative mechanism on social, economic and cultural issues', and, while a sixty member body was set up in 2000, it was suspended in 2002 and has not met since. The Civic Forum remains one of key elements of the Agreement that has not yet been fully implemented (a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland being another). Some moves have been made to formalise engagement through structures such as the *Community Engagement Forum*, and the *Compact Civic Advisory Panel* (whose membership formally announced in December 2016), but these actions are much more limited than those envisaged for the Civic Forum as set out in the Agreement.
23. **There is a broad acceptance among civil society organisations and some political parties of the value that a wider and more effective and sustained engagement with the wider civil society will be an important to building a sustainable peace. While some steps have been made in this direction they are a long way short of the ideas for a Civic Forum and there is a need to explore new and imaginative ways to work to break the logjam of issues that are currently clogging the political system.**
24. There is however a cautionary caveat in any calls for closer working relationships between government and civil society. One of the roles for civil society organisations is to have a challenge function to government and to hold it to account. The capacity within civil society to hold government to account has been reduced over recent years by many factors. While there will always be limitations on the role of civil society, a weakened and subservient civil society will not have the capacity to engage effectively or to challenge the Executive.

25. **The building of peace, the benefits it brings and the impact of not having peace, means that protecting the peace process is the responsibility of everyone in this society. It is not a special preserve or possession of politicians. Civil society organisations should work with diverse groups and individuals to support and progress ongoing work towards peace and reconciliation. However, the reconciliation infrastructure is being eroded. Organisations that have contributed so much to building the peace are being closed at a time when there needs to be a step change in how reconciliation is delivered on the ground. The Executive needs to commit to greater prioritisation of reconciliation by better resourcing delivery through long-term support.**

The Institutions

26. The establishment of diverse institutions under the terms of the 1998 Agreement, including the Assembly; the North-South Ministerial Council and the East-West bodies; the Human Rights and Equality Commissions, as well as the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the other bodies associated with criminal justice and accountability has been seen as a positive achievement. Credit must be given to the political leadership that has led to a sustained period of devolution and the expansion of the powers of the devolved assembly to include policing and justice.
27. However, the recurrence of political crises serves to undermine much of the progress that has been made and increase cynicism of the depth of change. The collapse of the Executive in January 2017 was a set-back for the devolved institutions and for any sense of a sea-change in political relationships among the larger parties.
28. **The political parties and the devolved institutions need to work more effectively, and be seen to do so. Public confidence in the institutions of governance has been undermined by sectarian politics, incompetency and accusations of cronyism and corruption. Trust in the political institutions needs to be rebuilt and ways need to be found to make them work better, more collaboratively and to be able to deliver more effectively for the wider public.**

A New Participative Framework to Build the Peace

29. In recent years the Executive produced two policy documents; *Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration* (2010) and *Together: Building a United Community* (2013), which aimed to address the fundamental issues of sectarianism, segregation and division that remain within Northern Ireland. More recently the *Fresh Start* document acknowledged some of the other issues that remain to be fully addressed, including parades, paramilitarism, and cultural matters including flags and symbols.

30. These have all been positive developments. But often key policies remain relatively narrowly focused, too readily siloed, and too slowly implemented. We believe that there is a need for a broader overarching policy framework designed to underpin the Agreement, which is agreed by the Executive, and which serves as a road map to take the strategy forward and build on the progress made to date. This inclusive future 'peace strategy' should address and include all the critical issues that are highlighted below within a single framework.
31. Issues designed to reduce sectarianism, segregation and division, should not be distinct from policies to challenge racism or to promote economic development. Other important matters, such as the need for a sexual orientation strategy or an overarching framework for dealing with the legacy of the past need to be addressed and not remain unrealised, in part at least because they are too difficult or too contentious.
32. **There is a need for a single over-arching peace building plan that sets out the key elements of an Executive plan for the fourth phase of peace building in Northern Ireland. It should outline the main aims and objectives, with targets, indicative timeframes and indicators of progress. Such a peace building plan could serve as a guide to progress and a framework for planning for councils, statutory bodies and civil society organisations, and could also serve as a means of holding government to account.**

Legacy Issues

33. The legacy of the violence that dominated the politics of Northern Ireland from the late 1960s to the late 1990s continues to take its toll on the local population. It continues to have a profound impact on the mental and physical health of many people, contributes to cultures of suspicion and mistrust, and to continued patterns of segregation within and between communities in both urban and rural areas. The residue of the violence is not confined to the generations that lived through the conflict but is intergenerational in impact. Old enmities continue to be passed down to younger people and to those who were born after the conflict nominally came to an end and therefore continue to be sustained.
34. It has long been acknowledged that a meaningful political commitment to the needs of victims and survivors is essential to any process of reconciliation and a comprehensive process of addressing the legacy of the past and which includes processes of documentation, narrative telling and recording; remembrance and commemoration; and appropriate criminal justice responses is vital to enable this society to move on.
35. However, despite these issues being highlighted in the Haass Talks in 2013 and an outline framework being set out in the 2014 Stormont House Agreement, they were still put to one side in November 2015's *Fresh Start* document due to

an inability 'to agree a way forward on some of the key issues'. Agreement on a comprehensive framework of actions to address the issue of the legacy of the past remains blocked. No timetable or framework has been set out to address the issue. The continued failure to make any effective progress is viewed by a wide range of victims groups to be but the latest insult in attempts to deal with their needs and concerns in an effective and inclusive manner.

- 36. A clear timetable needs to be set out to ensure that a comprehensive framework, implementation plan and budget is agreed to address all the issues that were outlined in the Stormont House Agreement and subsequent *Fresh Start* implementation plan relating to the legacy of the past.**

Communities Reclaiming Community

37. Support for the rule of law and a commitment to a purely peaceful means of advancing political objectives have been major advances over the past twenty years, and an increasing array of groups and organisations are now contesting elections and seeking a democratic mandate for their political demands. However, the legacy of the conflict is also reflected in the continued presence of loyalist and republican armed groups. While some paramilitary organisations are continuing to pursue the 'armed struggle' to advance their political cause, others, which are supposedly on 'ceasefire', continue to engage in acts of violence, intimidation and criminality.
38. Until recently the presence of paramilitary organisations was rarely challenged. Paramilitary activity and the persistence of paramilitary organisations seemed to have been accepted as part of the 'new normal' and the groups were tolerated as long as their activities did not cross the sectarian divide or threaten the state. As a result, paramilitarism has continued to thrive in many working class communities and has exerted a negative influence on adults, young people, residents, businesses and social networks. This has happened through both explicit and implicit intimidation and threat, involvement in criminal activities, as well as acts of violence.
39. While some former members have moved away from use of force and have sought to transform into peaceful actors, others have maintained a role in both peace building and paramilitary camps or sought to rationalise the continued presence of paramilitarism. But for local communities to be able to truly flourish and for divisions within and between communities to be addressed people must have confidence that paramilitarism does not have unreasonable and unlawful influence within those communities.
40. One of the limitations of the 1998 Agreement was the limited consideration given to how to bring paramilitarism to an end. There was no comprehensive

disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) strategy. Instead the Agreement only addressed issues of the release of prisoners and the decommissioning of weapons. The *Fresh Start* agreement sought to address this void and the May 2016 report on the Disbandment of Paramilitary Groups outlined a number of steps that the Executive should take to ensure the demise of paramilitarism. But while the Executive accepted most of the recommendations in the report, limited work has been done to implement them.

41. **A broad process of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration, of the kind that has been built into many peace agreements around the world, is needed in Northern Ireland. Any DDR process must include a clear strategic framework and time frame, proper resourcing, and a genuine commitment to participate from the groups themselves. It is important that the proposed strategy to tackle paramilitarism is wide ranging enough to acknowledge the social and cultural, as well as the military and criminal, aspects of paramilitarism in Northern Ireland and is designed and implemented in such a way as to work with those groups and individuals who have been seeking to transform the armed groups from within.**
42. Other factors have also have a negative impact on community cohesion in some areas. These include growing concerns about the availability of illegal drugs and the presence of drug dealers; problems of anti-social behaviour, particularly involving young people; the challenges faced in integrating new migrants in communities that are already struggling to provide services due to austerity cuts, and which has resulted in a rise in racism and other forms of hate crime; and the absence of hope or prospects of worthwhile employment opportunities for young people, and which in time may feedback into criminality, anti-social behaviour and acts of prejudice.
43. **The peace agreement was signed nearly twenty years ago. Any future strategic planning needs to reflect the realities of the current situation and not just focus on the wider legacy of sectarianism and the conflict but also the wider socio-economic and demographic changes that have taken place since the Agreement was signed.**
44. It is also important that any actions that are designed to address issues of paramilitarism, community tensions and social problems in residential communities acknowledge the distinctive and insidious nature of such issues in smaller settlements and rural area. All policy initiatives should therefore be effectively rural proofed.

Cultural Diversity

45. There is a rich and varied popular culture in Northern Ireland which has been built up and developed over many years. While some people choose to highlight

the long-standing and 'traditional' nature of many the cultural practices, one of the strengths of various aspects of the local culture has been its ability to adapt and change in response to different contexts and situations.

46. One of the legacies of the conflict has been the impact of the violence and of paramilitarism on aspects of popular culture. This has included influencing aspects of parades and commemorations, flags and symbols, music and murals, memorials and bonfires. All of these activities were already established features of Northern Irish culture in the 1960s, but all have been influenced in scale, tone and content over the course of the conflict and the subsequent peace process. If we are to move beyond the recent past and develop a vision for a peaceful future then we must also consider what aspects of popular culture may need to be further adapted and changed, or which might have to be abandoned, to reflect the changing times.
47. **Our diverse cultures should not be at odds with each other nor organised in pursuit of narrow agendas. Any debate about culture and identity must find ways to reflect and celebrate our growing ethnic, religious, linguistic and cultural diversity peacefully and respectfully. While the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition provides a positive opportunity to address a number of the issues that have become prominent over the course of the peace process, nevertheless the long standing commitment to an Irish Language Act should be progressed with urgency.**
48. It is also important to remember that contemporary popular culture in Northern Ireland is not just the preserve of the two majority communities. Rather, local society is increasingly reflected through, and represented by, an ever growing diversity of ethnic, national, faith, LGB and Trans communities. Belfast Pride is now one of the largest festivals in Northern Ireland, the Chinese New Year and the Mela festivals are also established parts of the annual cycle of public events and all attract a wide and cross community participation, while the annual May Day march has been a cross community, and now multi-cultural, event for decades.
49. **The new Racial Equality Strategy 2015-2025 requires ambitious timetables, action plans and should evidence a real commitment to reform, including changes to the Race Relations Order. The Executive must recognise, and demonstrate with resources and public comment, the enrichment of Northern Ireland by BME communities and the need to facilitate genuine integration.**
50. **The TBUC strategy provided for the development of a Sexual Orientation Strategy, but beyond an initial consultation document there has been little evidence of any progress in this area. This is another example whereby policy initiatives are announced but limited progress is then made to act on the commitment, which in turn feeds into a sense of disenchantment with the body politic.**

Children and Young People

51. Children and young people represent the future of Northern Ireland. One in four of the total population were not born when the conflict ended. However, children and young people continue to experience the legacy of the conflict as a result of the persistence of segregation and division, a failure to effectively deal with the past, the intergenerational transmission of trauma and high levels of prejudice and bigotry.
52. Many young lives are also blighted by high levels of poverty and disadvantage and by low levels of educational aspiration and attainment. Crime and drugs have become the norm in many estates where young people live and, for too many, paramilitary figures are the main role models. Middle class children and young people may experience different perspectives and opportunities but too many choose to emigrate either for work or for a university education.
53. We need to prepare our children and young people to contribute positively to society and the peace process and give them a belief that there is something to contribute to. Some young people continue to be on the frontline of community violence, while others opt out of (or are effectively excluded from) democratic society altogether. We need to ensure that the education system adequately meets the needs of young people – all young people, not just high achievers - and provide opportunities for high quality training and employment that will offer them a future to believe in, and a physical environment to grow in, not marked by segregation, division and fear of the other.
54. **Contact theory has shown that cross-community interaction is an important factor in bridging the divides created by segregation and division. Too many young people are still brought up within a series of segregated environments. We should aspire to ensure that does not remain the norm. There needs to be significant and sustainable investment into organisations which can make a positive impact on the lives of children and young people and their role in the peace process.**

Women

55. From United Nations resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security to the experiences of practical work on the ground, the critical, equal and full participation of women as active agents in peace building has been widely recognised. This work needs to be better supported and further developed in Northern Ireland.

56. In the 2016 Assembly elections 30 women were elected, compared to 20 in the 2011 elections and five out of the twelve Ministerial posts were held by women. This progress is to be welcomed but Northern Ireland still remains extremely under-represented in the political structures and has a long way to go to match the 51% female population.
57. It has also been argued that over the course of the transition women have become less prominent in community development and conflict transformation work, rather than more so. In part this is claimed to be due to men increasingly dominating these areas of work, occupying paid posts and positions of community spokespersons, but in part it has also been linked with the continued presence of paramilitary structures in working class communities and in the levels of intimidation and threat they can and do exert.
58. This has been noted in the *Fresh Start* document, which includes a commitment to the 'development of a programme to increase the participation and influence of women in community development' (page 17) in the section on dealing with paramilitarism. But beyond a single line there has been limited elaboration of how or when this will be undertaken and whether this might be subject to specific funding or simply remain as an aspiration.
59. **The UK government's National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security 2014-17 makes no reference to Northern Ireland, unlike Ireland's second National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, 2015-18. One way to take forward the commitments both to UN 1325 and the aspirations of *A Fresh Start* would be to build on the work of the Assembly All Party Group on UNSCR1325 and the strategic guide and toolkit on *Developing and Applying Women, Peace and Security Practice in Northern Ireland / Ireland*, which was commissioned by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.**
60. **The Executive should develop an ambitious, timetabled and resourced Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for Northern Ireland as part of a broader programme of peacebuilding activities.**

Segregation in Education and Housing

61. If there is a real commitment to build a united community the Executive must address the long term issues of segregation and division within Northern Ireland, and in particular within the education system and in residential areas. These are undoubtedly difficult problems as the patterns of division within Northern Ireland long predate the recent conflict. But the segregation of such fundamental areas of life only helps to sustain and deepen divisions, and in particular among children and young people living or schooled within this system.

62. There has never been a strong commitment to end segregation in schooling and teacher training systems in Northern Ireland. A divided education system will only ever serve to reproduce a divided society. Although there have been moves to increase the amount of sharing between schools within the Controlled and Maintained sectors, this does not address the problems of the fragmented and segregated nature of education here, nor does it address the problems of a surfeit of places for pupils or the excess number of teachers that are being trained through the divided teacher training system.
63. The problems with the education system go beyond the sectarian divisions, since there is increasing recognition that the current system is failing too many young people and especially boys from working class backgrounds. Too many young people are leaving schools without sufficient literacy or numeracy skills and without qualifications, and who then struggle to find work.
64. The local education system also needs to be better able to contribute to the needs of the future economy by ensuring that young people have the opportunities to develop appropriate intellectual, vocational, manual and linguistic skills that will enable them to build careers or take up new work opportunities.
- 65. If the Executive is truly committed to building a united community and a sustainable peace then it must develop a comprehensive strategy for an education system that can contribute to a future vision of a united community rather than tinkering at the edges of the current system. There should be clear and public commitment from Government to end segregation in education and teacher training.**
- 66. An education strategy must also raise the aspirations and meet the needs of the children and young people who move through the system, so they have the skills and abilities to participate and contribute confidently to the wider society.**
67. Housing is an even more difficult issue to address. Good quality social housing remains a real need for many people and there is a need for more social housing than is being constructed at present. There is a need for comprehensive conversation about how residential areas can be made more open to people's needs rather than prioritising access by community background.
68. There is also a need to ensure there is an adequate supply of housing in shared or mixed areas and that housing estates and residential areas become less segregated and less clearly identified as 'belonging' to one community or another.
69. There have been some attempts to construct new developments as shared housing environments and, despite some challenges, this is a step, albeit a small one, in the right direction. But building new shared estates will not

address the large number of heavily segregated estates that exist in many urban areas. And many of these estates are becoming more segregated rather than less so.

70. Addressing issues of threat and harassment, safety and fear that serve to exclude members of the various minority communities in many public housing areas must be a priority. It means acknowledging that some forms of cultural displays can be perceived as threatening or intimidating, challenging the power that paramilitary organisations have in many estates, and developing strategies to address forms of anti-social, sectarian and racist attitudes and behaviours in a systematic and sustained manner.
71. **Housing policy and practice should be designed and implemented primarily to meet housing need and there needs to be more ambition to promote and build, and support and sustain a larger number of shared housing initiatives.**
72. **The Executive should work closely with the Northern Ireland Housing Executive and other housing providers to agree and implement a policy of zero tolerance to all forms of behaviour and displays that intimidate and threaten, and thus undermine attempts to create a shared environment.**

Contested Spaces

73. During the course of the conflict a variety of forms of barriers were built to reduce the opportunities for violent attacks and to increase community safety. Many have also been built or extended since the ceasefires were declared in 1994. In 2012 it was estimated there were almost 100 physical barriers providing some form of protection in residential areas across Belfast, with a number of others in Derry/ Londonderry, Portadown and Lurgan.
74. Although *Together: Building a United Community* set out an expectation that all the barriers should be removed by 2023 little progress has been made so far in transforming interface areas through regeneration projects and initiatives. The potential for paramilitary and / or inter-communal violence has meant that, while many of those living in interface areas would like the barriers to be removed at some stage, they do not feel comfortable with any change in the immediate future.
75. It should not be acceptable in a western democracy for people to have to rely on ten metre high barriers to protect them. Nor is it acceptable that people who are perceived as different are intimidated from their homes. Violence and the fear of violence has left communities isolated from one another, from services and from jobs. While *Together: Building a United Community* clearly sets out the aspiration to remove barriers and transform interface areas, the work to date has not delivered sufficient progress. It has been too fragmented, with too many agencies involved.

76. While the purpose-built physical barriers are only to be found in a small number of urban centres, many smaller towns and rural settlements contain different forms of ‘contested spaces’, which impact on the daily lives of local people and which affects movement, access to services and resources, opportunities for work and leisure, the nature of their social networks and a sense of safety and security. Many communities across Northern Ireland remain highly segregated. Future planning and programme work needs to acknowledge that many of the barriers that serve to segregate communities in rural areas are effectively invisible, but no less real for that. It also requires promoting all area as shared space and creating the conditions to achieve this.
- 77. There is a need for a co-ordinated and joined up strategy to regenerate interface communities and rural contested spaces and reintegrate such communities into mainstream civic life. This is not a simple question of ‘taking down walls’ but a concerted effort to reinforce safety through partnership and trust, and create assets which serve everyone in urban and rural communities. The current approach is clearly not working. The Executive should look to approaches to regeneration that have been applied to other urban environments in Northern Ireland and elsewhere as potential models to be drawn on and adapted.**
- 78. The Executive target to remove interface barriers by 2023 may have contributed to a sense of anxiety in some interface communities. The removal of interface barriers by this date requires intense, well resourced, long-term and outcome based resourcing.**

The Economy

79. Northern Ireland was fortunate insofar as the peace process was reasonably well established by the time of the financial crash of 2008 and was able to draw upon substantial funds from Europe and America to begin the process of building the peace. Nevertheless there are many people who feel they have not benefited substantially from the transformation of the past twenty years. The same working class areas of Belfast remain the most deprived parts of Northern Ireland as they did twenty five years ago, while levels of poverty have increased, as have the number of children living in poverty.
80. Economic and poverty data supports the argument that for many there has been a two-tier peace process. A substantial minority of the population have benefited little from recent developments. Moreover, the maintenance of sectarian divisions and social marginalisation has a financial cost in the duplication of resources, and limits people’s access to jobs and services and thus has a negative impact on opportunities for development.

81. It is widely acknowledged that the Northern Irish economy is overly reliant on the public sector and has an underdeveloped private sector, although some attempts are being made to try to change the balance and restructure the economy and make Northern Ireland more attractive to international investment.
82. It is also important to consider how to build an economy responsive to the needs of the local population rather than to the expectations of global capital; an economy that responds to environmental opportunities and challenges; that encourages the growth of a social economy and the principles of social justice; and which recognises the need to plan and develop within the changing contexts that are linked to and resulting from climate change.
83. Future economic planning and development must also aim to ensure that opportunities are available across Northern Ireland and not just concentrated in the Greater Belfast area. Planning must recognise that, beyond Belfast, Northern Ireland remains a largely rural society and must strive to ensure there is adequate investment in transport, rural development and infrastructure and training and employment opportunities that acknowledge and help support regional diversity.
84. The future economy needs to be able to function within the United Kingdom and across the island of Ireland, within Europe and also globally. The UK negotiations for Brexit need to ensure that these diverse and varied opportunities for economic development are sustained as options into the future. But the Northern Irish economy also needs to be developed within, and response to a local context of a changing and ageing demography and of increasing ethnic and national diversity and which aims to provide opportunities for all.
85. **A strong local economy that meets the needs of the local population will be a critical factor in consolidating and extending the work that has been done to build the peace. Economic development is an integral part of peace building, and any such development has to be based on principles of equality, human rights and social justice.**
86. **Our future economic status in a global economy will however be gravely compromised if sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance are not tackled robustly. Racism and sectarianism destroy economies and target the most vulnerable. A commitment to a shared future within a reconciliation framework is integral to constructing a vibrant and sustainable economy and the creation of good quality jobs.**

Northern Ireland in a Wider Context

87. The conflict in Northern Ireland made us very focused on ourselves and very inward looking. The peace process and ongoing transition has largely been possible because we have been able to draw on international support from the two national governments, international figures and multi-national institutions, such as the European Union and the USA.
88. The 1998 Agreement confirmed that Northern Ireland will remain a part of the United Kingdom while a majority so wish, but that north-south relations on the island of Ireland are also vitally important for future development and a sustainable peace. However, the majority support for leaving the European Union in the Brexit referendum has challenged the previously established framework that had been established by the Agreement and has created a void that is currently being filled by various 'what if' scenarios. A clear overarching and comprehensive peacebuilding strategy will be an important element in elaborating Northern Ireland's needs in the Brexit debate.
89. One of the successes of the peace process has been to reduce the impact of the border on daily routines, better integrate communities, services and the economies on either side and begin the process of (re)establishing relationships and infrastructure. The Brexit process risks undermining much of this work and instead may reinforce the border as a barrier and a divide. This further highlights the need for a broader and more inclusive strategy for future peacebuilding.
90. Beyond the Brexit debate all of us in Northern Ireland live in a dynamic and globalised world involving trade, communication, travel, education, employment and development, and which moves in many directions. Northern Ireland can benefit from such global networks but participation in such networks will continue to drive change and development locally. Such change needs to be embraced, while at the same time fears and uncertainties that may result must be addressed rather than pandered to.
91. **The uncertain future that is largely beyond immediate local control places a further burden on local politicians to show true and effective leadership to offer a vision, not simply for a sustainable and just peace in Northern Ireland but also for a vision of Northern Ireland and its place in the wider world.**

In Conclusion

92. The 1998 Agreement provided all of us in Northern Ireland with an opportunity to re-imagine our future, to do things differently, and to be a beacon of hope for other societies coming out of conflict. The Agreement needs to serve as a catalyst for the delivery of good governance based on equality, human rights, good relations and social justice. These principles must inform policy and practice and replace relationships based on enmity with relationships based on trust. A shared and united community should not be a hope but a reality built by civil society and politicians together.

Background to the Paper

93. The Galvanising the Peace Working Group was established in early 2015 to explore current and future initiatives and outstanding issues affecting community relations and peace building work in Northern Ireland which were raised by people working in the good relations sector. This paper was initially developed through a series of discussions involving key decision makers and influencers followed by over 45 facilitated workshop discussions with over 642 participants across Northern Ireland between July and December 2015. Consultations were conducted with community and community relations groups, churches, students, teachers, academics, the LGBT community, political parties, council good relations officers, band forums, women's groups and others. Consultations were conducted by 25 community relations groups including Belfast Interface Project, Community Relations Forum, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, Community Dialogue, Churches Community Work Alliance, Foyle Interface Forum, Groundwork, Harmony Community Trust, Holywell Trust, Institute for Conflict Research, Intercomm, LINC, North Belfast Interface Network, Rural Community Network, REACT, St. Columb's Park House, Suffolk Lenadon Interface Group, Shankill Women's Centre, Shankill Parish Caring Association, The Junction and TIDES Training. The conversations in the workshops and between those involved in peacebuilding work have served as the basis for drafting this paper. Ongoing engagement with consultees to the point of publication confirmed the continuing relevance of these issues.



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