Reconciliation:
rhetoric or relevant?

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democratic
dialogue

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Preface

This is the 17th report from the think tank Democratic Dialogue. DD gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance for this project from the European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, via the Community Relations Council. DD also acknowledges the generosity of its core funders, which currently include the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, as well as the CRC.

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Introduction

Gráinne Kelly

This report is based on a round-table discussion hosted by Democratic Dialogue in Belfast in June 2004. The round table formed part of an 18-month research project aimed at exploring the concepts and practices of reconciliation in Northern Ireland, funded by the Community Relations Council, as part of the European Union Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. The research was motivated by an observation that the term 'reconciliation' is not well developed in Northern Ireland and that no agreed definition exists, despite increasingly common usage in a range of contexts.

The purpose of the research was, therefore, threefold:

• to look at the ways reconciliation is *conceptualised* at the political and community level in different areas in Northern Ireland;

• to explore the ways reconciliation is *implemented* or realised at the political and community level in those areas, and

• to examine the ways local government structures have created or constrained opportunities for local reconciliation initiatives.

This is one of two DD reports emanating from the research, and focuses on the papers presented and discussion which took place at the round table. DD invited a range of community and interest groups, statutory and voluntary agencies, funding organisations, academics,

Squaring a circle?—the round table tackles reconciliation

practitioners, clergy and interested individuals to participate. The input from our invited speakers and the rich discussion throughout the day was thought-provoking, yet grounded in the realities of day-to-day life in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. A selection of comments is presented thematically between the papers; these are not attributed, in acknowledgment of the Chatham House Rule which operated on the day.

DD greatly appreciates the contributions of all the authors and participants. We are particularly grateful to our two international speakers, Prof Luc Huyse from the University of Leuven and Prof Ed Garcia of International Alert, for finding the time to come to Northern Ireland and share their wealth of experience in international contexts. The views represented here are of course the responsibility of the authors alone. ❧

Theory and practice

Luc Huyse

This chapter presents some of the main points made in the handbook *Reconciliation after Violent Conflict,*[1] published by the Sweden-based International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA, 2003).[2] The concept of the handbook emerged from the observation that reconciliation is clearly recognised as a critical dimension in the consolidation of young democracies, as a crucial ingredient in conflict prevention and the implantation of a human rights culture. In addition, however, there was a feeling that the concept of reconciliation was very ambiguous. For example, in post-genocide Rwanda the word was taboo for many years. In Kosovo the very term 'reconciliation' is so charged within the Albanian community that it is simply not used publicly. In some Latin American and Asian countries reconciliation is often considered a codeword for those who wanted nothing to change or is equated with a 'forgive-and-forget' policy.

A poem of Cabazares, a Filipino author, very strongly expresses such feeling:

> Talk us about reconciliation
> Only if you first experience
> The anger of our dying.
>
> Talk us about reconciliation
> If your living is not the cause
> Of our dying.
>
> Talk us about reconciliation
> Only if your words are not product of your
>   devious scheme
> To silence our struggle for freedom.
>
> Talk us about reconciliation
> Only if you cease to appropriate all the symbols
> And meanings of our struggle.

Reconciliation is a relatively new addition to the study and practice of post-conflict situations, and thus there are still large gaps in our knowledge and serious imperfections in our practice. The need for more clarity about reconciliation as a concept and a tool motivated us to write the handbook.
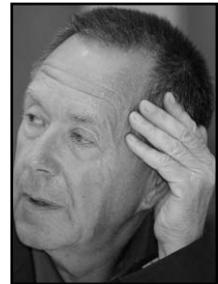
Reconciliation is both a goal (something to achieve) and a process (the various steps and means to achieve that goal). The handbook focuses very firmly on the process. Five straightforward, but profound, observations about this process underpin most of what is written in the ten chapters of the handbook.

1. Reconciliation is a long-term process

Ideally, reconciliation prevents, once and for all, the use of the past as the seed of a new conflict. It consolidates peace, breaks the cycle of violence and strengthens newly established or reintroduced democratic institutions. In practice, such all-encompassing reconciliation is not easy to realise. The experience of a brutal past makes the search for peaceful coexistence a delicate and intricate operation. Reconciliation is not an isolated act, but a constant readiness to leave the tyranny of violence and fear behind. It is not an event but a process, and usually a difficult, long and unpredictable one, involving various steps and stages. Each move demands changes in attitudes (for example, tolerance instead of revenge), in conduct (for example, joint commemoration of all the dead instead of separate, partisan memorials) and in the institutional environment.

There is a danger in talking about reconciliation in terms of strict sequences. The process is not linear. At each stage a relapse into the more violent means of dealing with conflicts is always a possibility. The stages do not always follow logically in any set order. Nonetheless, they remain essential ingredients of lasting reconciliation.

The first step away from hostility and hatred is the achievement of non-violent coexistence. This implies no more than a willingness to look for alternatives to revenge. For some, this step can be taken on the basis of the simple but realistic conclusion that killing does not bring the dead back to life. Or it may be based on the belief that, as Martin Luther King said, those who do not learn to live together as brothers are all going to perish together as fools.

The second stage in the process, when fear no longer rules, is the building of confidence and trust. This requires that each person, both victim and offender, gains renewed confidence in himself or herself and in each other. It also entails believing that humanity is present in every man and woman: an acknowledgment of the humanity of others is the basis of mutual trust and opens the door towards a sustainable culture of non-violence. In the context of Kosovo, Howard Clark (2002) writes:

> One can counsel distinguishing between a person and his actions, hating the sin while trying not to hate the sinner; one can also attempt to understand the human weakness of those who were swept away by the tide. However, even when one cannot forgive, there are some minimum standards below which one should not sink: social reconstruction demands respecting the rights of those one detests. This respect is in itself an assertion of one's own humanity.

Another product of this stage is the victim's capacity to distinguish degrees of guilt among the perpetrators, disaggregating the community into the individual. This is an important move in destroying myths, which keep alive the idea

that all members of a rival group are actual or potential perpetrators.

The process of building trust and confidence will eventually lead to some degree of empathy, maybe forgiveness. Empathy comes with the victims' willingness to listen to the reasons for the hatred of those who caused their pain and with the offenders' understanding of the anger and bitterness of those who suffered.

None of these steps excludes the continuation of feelings of anger, nor do they require that the victims be ready to forgive and forget. Above all, the approach must be that every step counts, that every effort has value. Progress is an accumulation of small steps.

Given the volatility of a post-conflict context, time management in processing reconciliation is an extremely important, but difficult, dimension in the search for a shared future. Policies must not come too soon or too late and questions and challenges abound.

When to develop reconciliation activities? Difficult decisions have to be taken. Policymakers must 'understand the times', reading the forces that exert an influence on the transition agenda. They must be conscious of the importance of measures long term, and be aware that mere passage of time will not ultimately engender reconciliation. What is the proper sequencing? Any reconciliation policy needs a 'flight plan' to sequence the steps in the various dimensions of the process. And what is the appropriate pace? Experience suggests that a rushed approach, as regularly advocated by national and international peacemakers and facilitators, will almost certainly be counterproductive.

Coming to terms with human injustice is a deeply personal process. It touches the cognitive and the emotional, the rational and the non-rational in human beings. It is culturally determined and gender-based. How people view the tempo of a reconciliation process is also intimately linked with their position and experiences during the conflict. All this results in individuals and groups finding themselves at different levels and stages on the continuum that leads from open hostility to trustful relations.

2. Reconciliation is broad and extensive

Reconciliation is a broad and extensive process and it involves individuals and communities. Coexistence, trust and empathy develop between individuals who are connected as victims, beneficiaries and perpetrators. This is reconciliation at the interpersonal level. For example, what happens when the victim is willing to shake hands with the torturer who inflicted the pain? Many initiatives in the area of healing (such as counselling victims and offenders together) and restorative justice (for instance, mediation) pursue this route towards reconciliation. But all the steps in the process also entail the reconciling of groups and communities as a whole. Each perspective, the interpersonal and the collective, has its own chemistry but they are equally important. In addition, in most conflicts, no single community has a monopoly of guilt or innocence.

The approach must be top-down and bottom-up. It is an illusion to believe that reconciliation imposed from the top will automatically engender individual steps towards trust and

empathy. No political or religious authorities can reconcile/forgive in the name of the victims. For example, the rhetoric of the former president, Nelson Mandela, about forgiveness is still a source of considerable frustration in large parts of South Africa's black community.

Then there is the delicate question of the definition of victim and offender. The terminology used is vital. The process of reconciliation is indeed also a search for common ground on key terms. The definition must be broad enough to include those who are perhaps not at the heart of the process, but must nevertheless be involved in reconciliation programmes: the second-generation victims, the bystanders and onlookers of severe human rights violations and the silent beneficiaries of past injustice. In addition, reintegration of offenders is an important, if often neglected, tool of reconciliation policies. The prolonged physical and social exclusion of offenders may drive them into social and political isolation, ultimately creating subcultures and networks hostile to peace, democracy and human rights.

Programmes must not only deal with the effects of distress but also with its causes. Reconciliation is not sustainable if structural injustices remain in the political, legal and economic domains. If the patterns from the past that produced and sustained violence remain unchanged, they will eventually produce the same outcome. Reconciliation must therefore be supported by a gradual sharing of power, an honouring of each other's political commitments, the creation of a climate conducive to economic justice and a willingness among the population at large to accept responsibility for the past and for the future. Political, social and economic justice is a foundation of durable reconciliation.

3. Lasting reconciliation home-grown
Lasting reconciliation cannot be imported. Each post-conflict situation has its particular context. Each transition from violence to peace is unavoidably unique. The nature and scale of violence, the intensity of division in society and the previous and post-transition balance of power have an impact on all policy choices. That is why the handbook insists not on adopting but rather on adapting the ideas, policies and tools it presents from different contexts. Local policy-makers and civil society groups should be encouraged to identify, examine and build upon their own political and cultural resources, such as coping and healing mechanisms.

4. There is no one road to reconciliation
There is, against a background of accumulated feelings of hostility, no one road to reconciliation. The handbook discusses healing programmes, truth-telling, punitive and restorative justice, and reparation. It tells the reader that no single tool will solve the whole problem. We believe in a locally designed combination of these different instruments.

5. It is only one of many challenges
The end of a violent conflict creates a complex agenda: stabilising a delicate peace accord, rebuilding the political machinery and the civil service, holding free elections, drafting a national constitution, guaranteeing a minimum

of physical security, establishing a non-partisan judiciary, prosecuting human rights abusers, stabilising the currency and so on. More often than not it will be impossible to tackle all tasks simultaneously. As reconciliation is only one of the challenges, short-term political or economic interests may lead to reconciliation measures being postponed. International financial institutions, consciously or otherwise, tend to reinforce that approach. We are aware of the many opposing pressures on the successor élites.

International peacemakers and facilitators also tend to advocate a minimal or rushed approach to reconciliation. This is often a reflection of their own short-term interests and/or is based on the unfounded conviction that the success of a transition depends on a rapid, even imposed, move towards national unity. At several points in the handbook it is argued that such a perspective is, more often than not, counterproductive. Care must be taken not to damage the prospects of long-term reconciliation by establishing inappropriate political and economic structures. If the context prevents an early start, interim reconciliation measures should be adopted. Reconciliation is a need that does not ease simply with time. Quite the reverse. The collective and individual hurt, pain and frustration that is the legacy of violence will only grow, not diminish, if left unaddressed.

Reconciliation is an immensely difficult, time-and-energy consuming process, a process of fits and starts, of going forward and going back. The good news is that it can be done—never perfectly, perhaps, but often effectively. This is the message from many examples examined in the handbook. Others show how it can go wrong, go backwards, even fail. But the most outstanding examples are those where reconciliation was ignored or treated superficially. In every case, it has come back to haunt the society. Only by incorporating reconciliation as a vital and equally important piece of the jigsaw—along with economics, politics, justice and the other parts of the peace-building puzzle—can a society truly move with confidence from a divided past to a shared future. ❧

References

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COMMENTS ON DEALING WITH THE PAST

• We are in a situation were, for the first time, the UK government is acknowledging that one ought to begin a process, and I suspect it will be a very long process of dealing with the aftermath of the conflict. That immediately does raise questions of timeliness and acceptability. Are we, for example, in a post-conflict situation in Northern Ireland? I don't think, in the fullest sense, that we are. We are not in a situation where one faction or another has triumphed politically and we are at the definitive end of that period … People are saying 'Will there be a truth and reconciliation commission for Northern Ireland?' I think what they have in mind is the South African model. As we have heard, a model deemed appropriate in a certain situation, and arrived at for particular reasons and after particular negotiations, is not necessarily transplantable. A huge number of people out there don't know that there have been various efforts at truth commissions all over the place, some more successful than others … This is such a sensitive area that I think people need to be better informed before they even get into a process of widespread consultation.

• One of the things which is often put forward as a prerequisite for reconciliation is that we have a shared view of the past, and of the future. This seems to me to be particularly difficult, because even if this was studied by historians, you still have two different views of the past. People are starting from very different premises.

• I think human rights are an essential element of any process of reconciliation. The reality is that human rights abuses and inequality did feed the conflict here in Northern Ireland. I am not just talking about the civil and political abuses and structural injustices in the legal and political institutions, but the social and economic injustices and inequalities. I think these abuses need to be acknowledged in any process of reconciliation. I cannot stress enough the need for truth and justice for victims. However, there is also another role for human rights in terms of developing a vision for the future, be it through a Bill of Rights or something else, where you try to instil values in a society.

• We have been involved in some work with some Chilean colleagues, and they have also been involved in organising similar round table discussions on reconciliation … What had been thought to be useful was to come to an agreed past—to agree a past story … but our Chilean colleagues found that this was impossible. Different groups were not able to agree on their stories. They had different perceptions of their past.

• With regard to this difficult search for common ground, there will also be a need now and in the future for a basic common view on the past. And every aspect of this search refers to the question of having some sort of truth-seeking activities.

• I wonder about the mechanisms and the processes that we are talking about here, in the context of a comprehensively segregated society in which we live separately, go to school separately, often have occupational segregation. It does strike me that even if we were able to deal with the business of the past in some magic-wand kind of way, we would still need to put in place comprehensive mechanisms to deal with the fact that we have two large communities who live in separate contexts and separate realities and who, inevitably, see things in very different ways.

Pathway to reconciliation

Colin Craig

This chapter is 'work in progress'. The models offered here are, in part, a synthesis of the wisdom of all those who have taught me over the years, not only in TIDES Training and the Corrymeela Community but also across the breadth of Northern Ireland and beyond. I started off on this journey believing that our 'trouble' would last maybe a few months or, at worst, a few years. That was just one of the many mistakes I was to make when I became involved in seeking a path to a place called reconciliation.

I first came into contact with the Corrymeela Community in 1970 and found myself quickly drawn to its work and vision. Since its founding in 1965 Corrymeela has been dedicated to the search for reconciliation in Northern Ireland. This work has developed in many phases over the last 40 years, as it responded to the descent into violent community division and political stalemate that resulted in the profound physical and social segregation of working-class communities.

From 1990 to 2001, I had the honour of being the centre and programme director of Corrymeela. This brought me on a journey of learning around reconciliation and peace-building. This journey has continued through my work as the director of TIDES Training which I co-founded in 2000. In 1997 I had the opportunity to step away from the busy schedule of Corrymeela for a three-month sabbatical. I began to unpack what we were beginning to understand about the concept of reconciliation.

I started with a simple question: if we had it, what would it look like? I began to work on the range of elements that made up reconciliation. At their core these confirmed the principles of equity, diversity and interdependence that the Future Ways project based at the University of Ulster had developed (Eyben *et al*, 1997). However there were other elements that I felt needed to be included and out of this came the TIDES model of reconciliation. The elements of the model are: transformation, interdependence, diversity, equity and sustainability.

Transformation

Through years of designing and delivering reconciliation and peace-building programmes, it became clear to me that reconciliation is not just about transitional change but about transformative change. The change—however it is characterised—is a fundamental shift in understanding, commitment, activity or behaviour, which is not open to modification or easy reversal. It becomes the foundation on which new possibilities can be built.

It was clear from our work through the mid-80s and early 90s that the heart of this was not structural. As important as this was, in a social and political sense, the true heart was relational and experiential. This, for me, is the core of understanding interdependence. The 'either/or' form of thinking was contrary to reconciliation; what we needed was an understanding of a 'both/and' reality. The old paradigms of being British or Irish, Catholic or Protestant, loyal or traitorous, good or bad served to reconfirm our history of hurt, mistrust and victimhood. What was needed was a new lens through which to view our differences.

In looking at the story of people who found their path to reconciliation it became apparent that this came about through the recognition that my hurt is like your hurt, my safety is based on your safety and the legitimacy of my aspirations is underpinned by the legitimacy of your aspirations. This shift is transformative and it is difficult and often painful. It means recognising the enemy within, as well as the enemy without.

Interdependence

Interdependence is the relational bond that determines our capacity to deal with our differences. It is this which offsets the tension that diversity brings.

Diversity

Diversity is about recognising and understanding our differences, not with the naïveté of simplistic celebration, but through working with the tension that the multitude of human difference brings into each situation. If our safety is built only on the likeminded, on the same colour of skin, on the same understanding of God or the same political beliefs, then our world can only be sustained through the driving out of those with whom we differ.

Equity

The equity of a system is built up of all those mechanisms and structures that each culture designs to translate and transmit how it wishes to order itself. If the system is based on the other elements of transformation, interdependence, diversity and sustainability then it has to commit to structures that are based on fairness, justice, order, rights and responsibilities, civic leadership, tolerance and equality of opportunity, among others. The historical ingredients of our current phase of inter-community conflict can be argued about. But, few, I suspect, would argue that they include an agreed experience of interdependence, diversity and equity.

Sustainability

For a system or organism to be sustainable it not only has to function within a given niche,

seeking and finding the resources it needs. It also has to adapt to evolving environmental and structural pressures. To sustain literally means to give life. These processes of reconciliation not only create survivability but, when combined, also become 'life-giving'. Finally, the model hopes to show that while all seek in their own way to reach sustainability, none can do so without relating to each other. Each is therefore dependent on the other.

It was intended that the model would be used as a mapping point for our work. We could look at our organisation and have a sense of what specific changes we were seeking to encourage, what relationships we were seeking to build, what differences we were seeking to bring together and what systems we were hoping to help put in place. However, as useful as this proved to be, we quickly realised that there was another problem on the journey towards reconciliation. If, in a deep sense, TIDES could map the destinations we were heading for, what was holding us back? We found that the world that the TIDES model called forward was something that most people could easily agree on. So what was the problem? Quickly we realised there were roadblocks along the way.

For some years we had been looking at the role of the scapegoat in conflict situations. This work brought forward the model that we have characterised as FEARS. This model had five components, all of which are part of most people's lives.

Freedom

Most of us live with hopes, goals and aspirations which can be described as our freedom to

have, be, go, believe and so on.

Economics

We all live within economic realities at local, state and global levels. Often the first question we ask of a stranger is 'What do you do?' This is in part a way of locating the economic power of the individual. We ask our children 'What do you want to be when you grow up?' This reinforces the cultural underpinning of our collective economic reality.

Alienation

The human capacity to hold a sense of personality and individuality is often recognised as the main characteristic that separates us from the animal world. But it is also that sense of individuality, at both a personal and group level, that reinforces a deep sense of you and me, us and them. The lens through which our understanding of the world emerges is this public sense of self.

Rivalry

In a world of limited resources we have to compete to survive. We co-operate often on the basis of competitive advantage. Winning is rewarded; losing is punished and is not encouraged.

Scapegoats

Someone has to be at the bottom. Someone has to lose in this world-view. The scapegoats are those who find themselves there. They can be anybody depending on the circumstances, but mostly they are the poor, the powerless, the dispossessed, the undeserving victim. The

dominating myth of this modern era is that everyone carries the possibility of achieving their freedom, power and desires, with the hidden message that if you do not make it it is mostly, if not all, your own fault. This is a myth created by those who have won or who are winning. As is well documented, over 80 per cent of the world's resources are controlled by 4 per cent of the world's population. We live in a world that is becoming increasing divided between rich and poor.

This brought my work to an uncomfortable realisation: we have a serious lack of understanding of what a sustainable peace may look like, and it requires us to evolve creative approaches to managing conflict as a normal part of our human reality. By late 2000 I had decided to begin to focus on this challenge more directly and with the support of Corrymeela colleague Mary Montague—who had developed new approaches to community reconciliation—TIDES Training was founded.
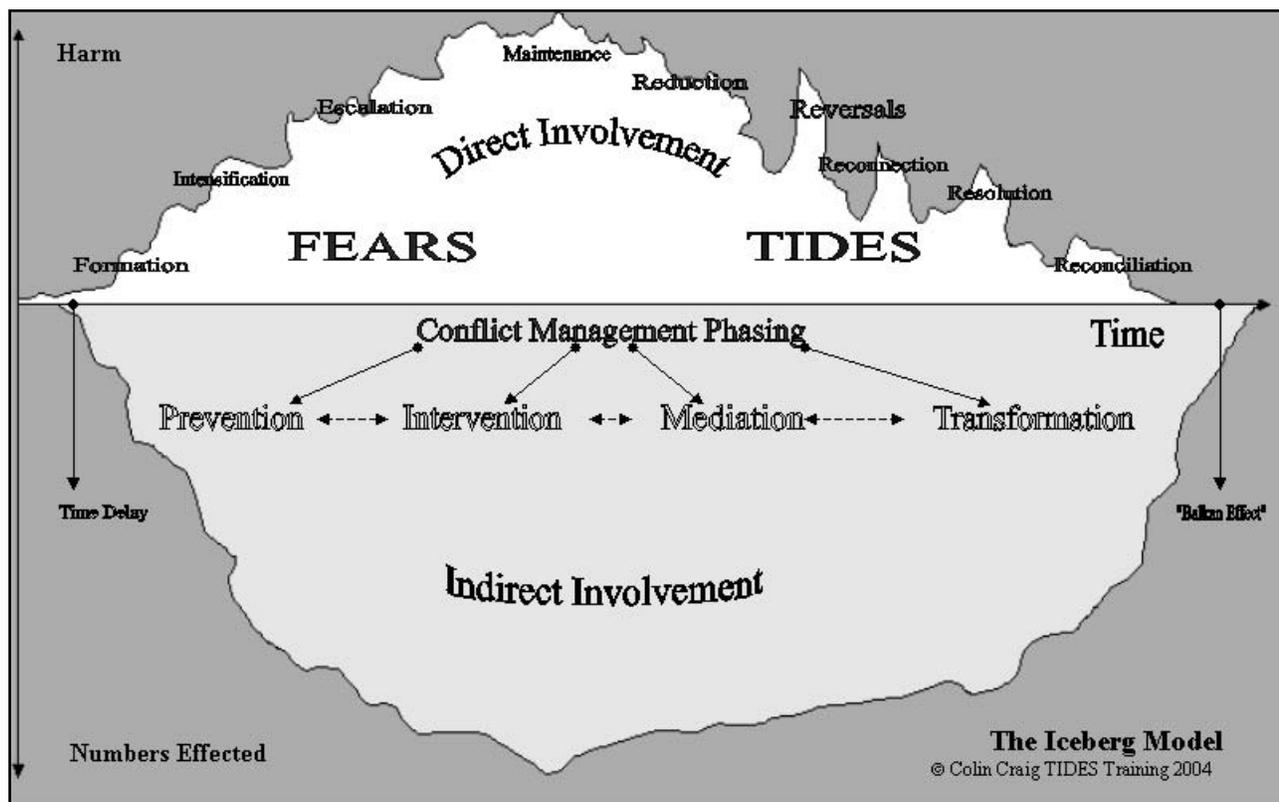
While our main focus was and is Northern Ireland, we found ourselves asked by the development agency Concern Worldwide and the PRONI Social Education Institute to design conflict management programmes in the Balkans and, in particular, Kosovo and Bosnia. This work confirmed that the model had some cross-cultural validity. We were not so much interested in asking our colleagues to adopt it but to see if it could offer useful tools to be adapted. In fact we found fairly quickly that it was very useful in helping those with whom we were working. They could begin to track more clearly the dynamics that were driving their conflicts. They could begin to design and implement programmes that could support their broken communities on their long journeys out of the devastation created by the Balkan wars.

A conversation with a group of young Muslims, Serbs and Croats from Bosnia resonated with some work we were developing across an interface in north Belfast. The iceberg model (left) emerged from this work and quickly embedded itself as part of our understanding and practice.

This model has allowed us to become more accurate, not only in mapping actual conflicts that we are asked to work on, but as a useful visual aid in helping plan appropriate levels of intervention.

The upper part of the model concentrates on describing the 'phase shifts' that a conflict can progress through. The first and most important part of understanding the model is that *conflict and peace-building are both non-linear processes*. They do not move in straight lines and thankfully most conflicts defuse through a multitude of *preventative* measures that we all utilise and have learned through our encounters with family, friends and social institutions. Hence the evolution of a conflict is specific to each situation and context.

When a conflict does develop from the *formation stage,* however, it moves through two separate and quickly more harmful phases. First, it enters an *intensification stage* through either its emotional or physical dynamics. This may or may not take a lot of time, but it can be understood as the heating-up period. The next phase shift is rapid and here the conflict starts to boil and the level of harm experienced increases sharply. This we call the *escalation stage*. Inter- and intra-community conflicts are particularly prevalent in the next phase shift. This is the *maintenance stage,* where the conflict recycles itself over and over. There are periods where the harm may diminish but this only represents a temporary 'burn down'. This period may last days, months or, in the case of Northern Ireland, decades. During these last three phases, those who are seeking a way to stop, resolve or reconcile parties to the conflict are faced with the dilemma of having to step back until the conflict itself moves on to the next phase or having to intervene directly. This can, in some circumstances, be a forceful intervention or it can be creative and non-forceful.

No conflict can, or does, last forever. Conflicts by their nature pull in huge energy and resources and at some point a *reduction stage* begins to emerge where the parties begin to look for a way out. This is when and where we see the skills of third-party intervention: a range of mediative and, in some circumstances,

arbitration approaches can be most useful. But two under-recognised phases now emerge.

The first is the *reconnection stage* and the second is the *reversal stage*. The reconnection stage is where we need to begin to bring both parties and communities back into a safe space where they can meet and explore an acceptable resolution. This is a time-consuming and difficult process in embedded, historical conflicts such as in Northern Ireland and the Balkans. There will be many whose hurt is such that any contact with the enemy is a betrayal. There are many who have found their own sense of purpose and self-esteem through the certainty of fighting the other. Changing their world from one of certainty to one where the future is unclear is frightening and is often resisted.

Moreover, the shadow world of paramilitarism and its associated criminality has often become, for a core few, their 'real world' and one to which they are personally, economically and socially wedded. If the confidence and trust-building work that is critical through the reconnection phase is not properly addressed, then 'deals' may be reached to create an apparent resolution to the conflict. This can isolate the leadership and/or be unable to stand the test of the reversals that will assault it.

Third-party mediative approaches need to give way to the parties taking the core responsibility for building and agreeing an enduring resolution. This phase shift, from *reconnection* to the *resolution stage,* has already been some seven years in Northern Ireland—with only tortuously slow progress being made.

In this model, reconciliation is the final stage of a long and difficult process. It is perhaps the most difficult phase of all. It is where those who found themselves caught up in a conflict find the grace to let go of that history and enter the 'shared space' of an interdependent, diverse and equitable living.

While I was developing this model, I had the opportunity to share it with a group of young adults from Bosnia. They worked intently with us looking at the conflict that had brutalised nearly all their lives. No one sought to validate the war they had lived through and, to a person, they described it as a descent into madness. Then they made an interesting comment: 'Yet, this is something we do in this part of the world every 40 or 50 years'. I asked them how they knew this. Was it part of the history they had been taught? The answer was yes—but not in the schools: they had only been taught 'official' Yugoslav history there. It was through their parents and wider family, and more especially through the grandparents that this fatalistic perspective had been transmitted.

The history that had prepared them for war was the history of the survivors of the previous war. This caused us to recognise three additional things that our then model did not reflect.

It is not just the experience of those who were directly involved that has to be addressed in the building of a sustainable reconciliation of communities. It is often those who where indirectly involved who find themselves most unable to accept the path and commitment to reconciliation. In Northern Ireland, a number of ex-combatants have named these the 'armchair generals'.

Those who are caught vicariously by the conflict are numerically much greater than those who are directly involved; yet they have experienced many of the same emotions and reactions. They remain largely out of sight and generally not worked with, as they are not part of the 'presenting' problem. They represent an even greater danger to resolving and reconciling the problem.

The visible and invisible parts of the iceberg are out of temporal synchronisation. It is what we call the 'Balkan effect' after our young friends who inadvertently helped us to recognise something more fully that had been in front of our noses for a long time.

With this understanding it has become clearer to us as to why we are struggling to extract ourselves from our decades-long conflict.

The pathway to reconciliation is seldom easy and in a protracted inter-community conflict it would be dangerously naïve to think it was. John-Paul Lederach has determined that it takes the same number of years to get out of this type of conflict as it took to enter it. While I hope this is not the case, to build a sustainable peace we have to face the fact that the political resolution that we hope is close will only have brought us to the hardest work of all.

In Northern Ireland, 92 per cent of our public housing is now segregated on sectarian lines. Our interfaces and many of our 'single-identity' communities live on the basis of a barely tolerated coexistence. We all carry memories of the 'troubles' in some way and yet Northern Ireland is characterised by 'neutral' workplaces and polite social interaction. The journey to a shared future can only be achieved through creating the shared space where the bonds of reconnection and reconciliation can become real and rooted. ❧

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COMMENTS ON POLITICS AND PROCESS

• I am interested in the grey area between resolution and reconciliation—what we might distinguish between the political process and the peace process, although we are very good at aligning those two things … Sometimes the political exigencies which are required, the kind of moral issues, the things we don't talk about in order to get the political deal done in the short term, are some of the things that might hinder the longer term reconciliation process. I wonder what some of the issues might be in relation to that and the complexities in the processes?

• It seems that quite a lot of what has been described is moral and value-laden ideas of what reconciliation is and where it would actually go in terms of outcomes. My question is: where is the interdependency between the political process and the reconciliation process in terms of morals and values? I am thinking in particular of some instances where it is appropriate to keep the political process apart from the reconciliation process. I would be very much of the view that the two are interdependent of one another and the settlement in some instances is often the very first act of reconciliation—it is people coming together to say 'we are working towards a shared future'.

• I question the theory that reconciliation comes after resolution. I think that has been what's gone wrong here. We have focused on the political resolution totally and have ignored the other deep and important side of reconciliation. I feel that if people—both in the republic and in Northern Ireland—had taken the reconciliation idea much more fervently and passionately from the beginning, we would be much further along in the development of a more definite and grasping understanding of each others aspirations and pasts and experiences.

• I agree with those who say it is difficult to make a very clear distinction between the two [reconciliation and resolution], as if they were very separate agendas. I don't think you can handle them as if they are two separate things. They are very interlocked and they should be dealt with as linked all the time. If the context, as it is in Burundi, is that reconciliation cannot have priority in the transitional agenda, the least you can do is ensure is that you do not take political or economic decisions that make it impossible to go forward in terms of reconciliation in the future.

• I would love to get to a stage where every government department produces policies that had at their centre principles of reconciliation instead of something that would be just as appropriate in somewhere like Yorkshire.

Views in Northern Ireland

Gráinne Kelly
Brandon Hamber

The process of reconciliation can be said to operate at the political or national, community and individual levels. National political conflicts are often causally linked to localised conflicts and cannot be divorced from them. Equally, in most societies coming out of conflict localised political conflicts have a life of their own. In January 2003, DD embarked on an 18-month research project focused on exploring what could be called 'community reconciliation' in Northern Ireland.

The research was motivated by an observation that the term 'reconciliation' is not well developed in Northern Ireland and that no agreed definition exists, despite its increasingly common usage in a range of diverse contexts. The purpose of the research was threefold and its focus was on three case study areas, based on district council boundaries. Following a detailed analysis of a range of factors, Armagh City and District Council, Omagh District Council and Ballymena Borough Council were chosen. These were diverse in location, religious mix, intercommunal violence and unrest, and community and voluntary activity. We consciously chose to focus on areas outside of the large urban centres, as these have received less scrutiny in terms of community relations. The common element among the case studies was similar population sizes, which we felt important if comparisons were to be drawn.

We interviewed 58 individuals across the three areas,[1] including:
• at least one representative from each political party represented in the council (along with a number of independents);
• the community relations officer employed by the council;
• the chief executive of the council and other relevant policy personnel;
• the Local Strategy Partnership manager and members (who have responsibility for the local distribution of EU peace funding);
• employees and board members of community and voluntary sector organisations engaged in aspects of what could be considered as

[1] **We are indebted to Dr Gareth Higgins and Tony MacAulay who undertook the field research in Armagh and Ballymena respectively.**

reconciliation work; and

• victims' groups, ex-prisoners' groups, community-development organisations, local networking or umbrella groups, youth groups and local organisations supporting ethnic minorities.

A standard set of questions was devised for all interviewees. While this proved challenging, in terms of designing a form of words appropriate to all, it was invaluable for drawing comparisons.

Issues explored included: views and opinions on reconciliation, how it related to their work and voluntary activities, relevant policies, practices and structures, relationships between and within sectors and who was deemed to hold ultimate responsibility for building reconciliation. The research generated rich data on the conceptualisation and application of reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Although it explored specifics in terms of relationships between councils and community groups, it also provided a broader picture of local views.

This chapter focuses only on the findings in relation to the conceptual understandings of reconciliation. Our conversations on this topic centred on three main questions in this regard:

• What do you understand by the term 'reconciliation'?
• What might a reconciled society look like?
• How can you relate the term 'reconciliation' to your own work?

From the data we drew the following impressions.

In general, the interviewees were open to a discussion on reconciliation
Based on discussions with the project consultation committee and other, we had formed an impression that 'reconciliation' is often perceived in Northern Ireland with dismissiveness or even hostility. We were, therefore, somewhat hesitant about how people might engage with the topic during the interviews. However, we found that, in general terms, people were quite open to a discussion on the issue and were willing to explore how it related to them and fitted with their own work.

A significant number found it difficult to engage in a meaningful way with the topic and were vague on the detail
While people were willing to have a conversation about reconciliation in general terms, a significant portion of the respondents initially appeared to have difficulties conceptualising it. Most respondents had some idea of the outcome of reconciliation (usually conceived of as 'communities being at peace with each other' or 'where an individual's religion or background ceases to matter'), but most were also fairly vague on the details of the process. This is by no means a judgment, as conceptually reconciliation is complex and difficult, and those we interviewed clearly found it a challenging issue that required further reflection.

Community relations practitioners had a different understanding from councillors and council staff
Councillors and council staff generally saw reconciliation as one of many issues faced in their

daily work, but not a priority in the midst of helping people obtain their statutory rights. This suggests a legalistic understanding of dealing with past conflicts, rather than a relationship-driven focus. It also suggests that they do not see attainment of rights as one of the components of reconciliation. In voluntary organisations by contrast, reconciliation tended to be seen in terms of building and mending relationships. Some representatives even saw it as a priority—even when their work was not explicitly so labelled.

No common definition of reconciliation existed

As we had hypothesised, there was a distinct lack of clarity amongst interviewees as to what was meant by 'reconciliation', a potential difficulty a number acknowledged. Most tended to view this lack of clarity as an obstacle to engaging people in cross-community processes or developing policies and practices to address the legacy of the conflict. This lack of clarity was also a contradiction, given that some interviewees were involved in work funded under the banner of reconciliation. The practical problems arising were summed up by one respondent who said:

> Reconciliation may sound like something which is too ambitious. But also, it has been bandied about a bit and I don't like that. I don't like the way it is being used. People actually don't have any idea what reconciliation is. When you are dealing with people who are not from an academic side, I think it is a difficult thing for people to digest.

Although it was difficult to make any clear distinctions, it was noticeable that interviewees' responses were influenced by their political convictions and religious background.

Few people used the term reconciliation to describe their activities

While we found little hesitancy towards discussing reconciliation, the respondents appeared to have difficulties relating it to their work. Many did not use the term themselves within their own contexts. We asked each respondent to describe their work for us, what they understood it as seeking to achieve and, given a choice, what they would call it. We found that reconciliation was not a term that they used in their daily work, or appeared particularly comfortable in using to describe what they did. Yet, when pressed on the detail, they could identify aspects of what we would describe as reconciliation work, or they directly engaged in work aimed at developing conciliatory behaviour.

Of those directly engaged in self-described peace-building activities, most appeared more comfortable with terms like 'community relations', 'good relations' or 'community development'. No interviewee advocated replacing these with reconciliation, although many seemed comfortable interchanging them—many were not clear about what each meant, or how they differed. A number felt 'reconciliation' had the potential to 'frighten off' those with whom they wished to engage. As one respondent put it, they might be perceived as attempting to impose something 'heavy' on them.

Concepts like 'good relations' were seen as easier to introduce to communities and it appeared that the interviewees had genuine concerns about pushing the boundaries too far. Some felt council members might see 'reconciliation' as utopian or idealistic, or as demanding a process of coming together for which they were not ready. We can only infer from this hesitancy that reconciliation must imply a much deeper process, for which some feel the communities they are working with are not prepared.

One community relations officer was hesitant about using the term 'reconciliation', particularly with those whom she would be encouraging to do cross-community work for the first time. When asked about her use of the term, she was by no means dismissive, but rather cautious:

> It is certainly relevant, but it is not one which I would use an awful lot. I would use the term peace-building as a field of work. I would prefer that, and feel more comfortable with it. I think that reconciliation is more of a mindset thing, and it is more difficult for people to understand. There are problems with it. You would have to break it down for people you work with … I go through different cycles when I am thinking about terminology. I am not sure that 'good relations officer' wouldn't be better … While community relations, in terms of terminology, is very hard to define, I think it is OK. It gives you a bit of an umbrella that other things can fall under.

Another respondent, who has been involved in facilitating dialogue across communities and sectors, was also more comfortable describing their work as 'peace-building':

> I like the term peace-building as it implies the creation of understanding between people coming from different backgrounds, traditions and cultures. If other things come out of it, like trust and integrity, then that is great. I am not too concerned about what word is being used because all words mean different things to different people. It is about creating a space in which people can let go of the layers and go beyond the artificial boundaries that have been created. It is about developing confidence.

Views of reconciliation was influenced by ideological position

We did a loose textual analysis of the responses to the questions on views of reconciliation. Perhaps not surprisingly it generated many associated words and phrases. The most common were:

- at peace with itself,
- healing,
- move forward,
- relationships,
- respect, and
- trust.

References to theology were quite common in discussion

Some interviewees made theological references when discussing reconciliation—mostly clergy and local unionist politicians. For them reconciliation should be viewed through a biblical lens. For others, however, this stimulated a

negative or cynical reaction, dismissing the term as being theological and therefore not relevant to their activity. Little reference was made to 'forgiveness', which is often highlighted as an important element in theological literature. It did not feature highly as a prerequisite of reconciliation, even for those from a religious background. If forgiveness was mentioned, it was viewed as very personal and not something which can be forced. One interviewee working with a victims' group stated:

> I would not focus on the issue of forgiveness, as it is a very personal matter—and it is certainly not something which I have been able to achieve. Forgiveness in the head is easy—but not in the heart.

Few people made reference to themselves in terms of reconciliation

With a few exceptions, the interviewees spoke about reconciliation in the abstract and made no reference to any changes required of themselves. In general, the respondents appeared not to be particularly self-reflective in this regard, or they chose not to share any such reflections with the interviewers. This suggests that reconciliation was, in the view of some at least, something 'the others' had to engage in. One might however assume that some respondents' initation of, or participation in, cross-community activities evidenced their commitment to reconciliation and, therefore, they did not feel the need to talk about it in a personal sense.

Many viewed the term reconciliation as being 'imported' from other contexts

While we had hypothesised that some interviewees would view the term 'reconciliation' as being adopted from the South African context—the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in particular—interestingly, the European Union was much more of a reference point. It was clear that EU Peace and Reconciliation funding had heavily influenced perceptions of reconciliation. Reconciliation as a concept, at least in some sense, was viewed through the prism of the EU programme, despite few being clear as to what an EU definition of reconciliation might be.

A significant portion of those interviewed from the community and voluntary sector had been in receipt of funding from the programme and were very aware of the need to show a reconciliation outcome for funding purposes. But, most felt that the EU funding bodies provided little direction. One respondent, when asked, 'what is reconciliation?' said:

> It's what you have to put down on a form to get the money. It is funder-speak and it doesn't mean much to people.

Locally elected representatives, in particular, very quickly referred to the PEACE programme, indicating how they viewed the EU as the main driver of a reconciliation agenda. Some were, or had been, members of Local Strategy Partnerships or the predecessor District Partnerships, which may have informed their responses. Only one councillor, a member of an LSP, dismissed the notion of reconciliation, which he asserted had been inappropriately imposed by the EU and was unsuitable for Northern Ireland at present. He insisted that the role of the

partnership was to support economic and social development in his area—not building relationships *per se*, which he saw as the agenda of reconciliation.

One community development co-ordinator, whose organisation received substantial PEACE II funding, spoke of these 'hurdles' to securing assistance. It ran an information-technology programme in rural areas and to fulfil the reconciliation requirements it had to conduct 'peace and reconciliation facilitated workshops with the community groups.' He said:

> For the PEACE II applications, the reconciliation bit really was a bit of an 'add-on'. There definitely does seem to be a certain level of artificialness about the way in which you have to present the project so that it fits the reconciliation criteria.

What was clear was that, wherever the term originated, most respondents did not feel it had *special* relevance to Northern Ireland and did not feel any *particular* localised ownership of it.

Having engaged in a general discussion about how reconciliation was perceived, we were interested in further exploring, conceptually and practically, how people understood the term. We decided to present interviewees with a definition of reconciliation, applicable to societies in conflict or those coming out of conflict. This was done to provide a focus for discussion, to help identify the different and relevant elements of reconciliation, to give respondents an opportunity to debate different views and to see if it was possible to develop a conceptual approach that was practically applicable to aspects of their work or experience.

In developing our definition, we identified what we felt were the main elements of reconciliation, according to various texts, and fleshed these out. The result is the working definition presented below, which is, by its nature, incomplete. We are comfortable with this imperfection, as we view it as a useful, possibly provocative, tool to stimulate discussion, rather than a definitive statement to be defended.

While all the definitions we explored were incredibly useful and informative, many were wordy and complex, and often quite inaccessible to the lay person. To generate a set of simple, yet comprehensive, elements that reconciliation comprises, we devised our own working definition of reconciliation applicable to societies in conflict or coming out of conflict.

We incorporated a composite of fundamentals identified from other sources. We explored definitions from the existing literature, including dictionaries, handbooks, academic journals and books by practitioners. We acknowledge the specific contribution of a number of texts (ADM/CPA, 2000; Assefa, 2001; Hamber, 2002; Hamber and van der Merwe, 1998; IDEA, 2003; Lederach, 1997; Porter, 2003; Rigby, 2001; and van der Merwe, 1999).

In summary, we see reconciliation as starting from the premise that relationships require attention to build peace. (For a more comprehensive explanation see Hamber and Kelly, 2004.) Reconciliation is the *process* of addressing conflictual and fractured relationships and this

includes a range of activities. Reconciliation is a voluntary act that cannot be imposed (IDEA, 2003).

A reconciliation process generally involves five interwoven and related strands.

Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society

The development of a vision of a shared future requires the involvement of the whole society, at all levels. Although individuals may have different opinions or political beliefs, the articulation of a common vision of an interdependent, just, equitable, open and diverse society is a critical part of any reconciliation process.

Acknowledging and dealing with the past

The hurt, losses, truths and suffering of the past need to be acknowledged Mechanisms include providing for justice, healing, restitution or reparation, and restoration (including apologies if necessary and steps aimed at redress). To build reconciliation, individuals and institutions need to acknowledge their own role in the conflicts of the past, accepting and learning from it in a constructive way so as to guarantee non-repetition.

Building positive relationships

Relationships require to be built or renewed following violent conflict, addressing issues of trust, prejudice and intolerance in the process. This results in accepting commonalities and differences, and embracing and engaging with those who are different from us.

Significant cultural and attitudinal change

Changes in how people relate to, and their attitudes towards, one another are also key. The culture of suspicion, fear, mistrust and violence is broken down and opportunities and space opened up in which people can hear and be heard. A culture of respect for human rights and human difference is developed, creating a context where each citizen becomes an active participant in society and feels a sense of belonging.

Substantial social, economic and political change

The social, economic and political structures which gave rise to conflict and estrangement are identified, reconstructed or addressed, and transformed.

We presented the interviewees with a short version of the above definition (overleaf) so as not to overwhelm them with detail. We did so with some apprehension as we had no way of knowing how they would react or if they could engage with it in a constructive way.

The reaction to the definition was overwhelmingly positive and was very useful in bringing the discussion to a new level. Several respondents were surprised by its complexity, admitting they had not thought the concept through in such detail. The impression we formed was that interviewees saw reconciliation as a very abstract concept and were pleasantly surprised to see it broken down into possible steps. One councillor reflected: 'It deals much

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RECONCILIATION

Our working hypothesis is that reconciliation is a necessary process following conflict. However, we believe it is a voluntary act and cannot be imposed.
It involves five interwoven and related strands:

• Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society

• Acknowledging and dealing with the past

• Building positive relationships

• Significant cultural and attitudinal change

• Substantial social, economic and political change

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more widely with it than I would have done.' But some also suggested that the definition was anything other than a helpful 'lens' through which to consider reconciliation.

Some interviewees questioned whether there were earlier steps to take before being in a position to tackle the issues proposed. One interviewee saw dealing with anger as a necessary first step: 'I think there's a lot of anger that needs to be dealt with before we can move on.' Another felt confidence-building work with communities was necessary before any of the other elements could be seriously addressed. Yet another felt there needed to be work done in getting people simply to recognise that reconciliation was important and that they needed, and had a responsibility, to be involved.

The definition starts too far down the road: why would anyone want to address the past if they feel their community provides everything they need? … The pyramid of sectarianism shows us that we're all involved. But how do you convince me that I'm involved, that I need to be part of this? So there's an earlier stage of helping people to see this as a need—this is a responsibility.

We were interested in what interviewees felt were the crucial aspects of the definition, as well as which parts, if any, they felt were controversial, unnecessary or overemphasised. We were also interested in which elements they would prioritise and how they would be ranked. Needless to say, respondents differed quite significantly.

Some suggested all features were of equal importance and interlinked: they would have to

happen at the same time, and be given equal emphasis. Others found it difficult to state a preference and felt it was dependent on the individual or community concerned and their particular experiences of the conflict. But most respondents expressed opinions as to which aspects they would prioritise and the order in which these steps could be logically taken.

Few respondents made much comment on the preamble to the definition. Of those that did, the statement was welcomed, particularly the IDEA (2003) assertion that reconciliation is a voluntary act, which cannot be imposed. But one interviewee entered an interesting caveat:

> I totally agree with that … It cannot be imposed. But certain things from a sustainability perspective have to be imposed … The emotional element can't be imposed, but in terms of structure some hard decisions have to be made.

Few interviewees spent any time commenting upon or contradicting the assertion about a shared vision, but there was some divergence between the case studies. Several respondents in Ballymena felt there should be a major emphasis on developing a shared vision, yet this did not feature highly in Omagh or Armagh. One possible explanation is that Armagh and Omagh appear to be more mixed communities and there may be a greater sense of commonality—but given the evidence this is only speculative.

Acknowledging and dealing with the past was the aspect given the most emphasis, and by a large margin. We had not predicted this, as we thought that many would read this strand as being specifically about a truth commission,

something many in Northern Ireland currently oppose. Not only was it viewed as requiring particular consideration, but many felt that it had to be the first step in any staged reconciliation process. This was the case for councillors from all political parties and for most of those working within the community and voluntary sector. One interviewee, from a victims' group, emphasised that this was the most important issue for its members but suggested that the word 'effectively' be added to the statement.

Few of our interviewees, however, specified what 'dealing with the past' would involve and they were quite vague on the detail. Some made reference to judicial inquiries, while others referred to simple acknowledgment of the past and story-telling. One voluntary sector worker noted:

> Acknowledging and dealing with the past I see at an early stage as necessary. But I don't put big play on that being a big process. I think it's something like just storytelling … acknowledging what happened. I don't think it is a very workable or practical approach to get too much involved in trying to explain the past or get individuals who may have been involved in wrongdoing to admit what they did … Even it were achievable I don't think it would be too helpful in helping people to move on.

Surprisingly, given the focus on dealing with the past, there was little emphasis on the idea of a truth commission. Few interviewees referred to it as a specific 'tool'. One said:

> I wouldn't be a big fan of the truth commission idea, because I think it tends to be

divisive rather than conciliatory. It may work for some people, but not for all. It is not the panacea for reconciliation. It may copper-fasten some already divided views … We need to be taking forward reconciliation at all levels, including grassroots projects … I wouldn't be against a truth commission *per se*, but would only support it in the context of reconciliation generally. We shouldn't put all the eggs in one basket.

Another councillor said:

There is no point in resurrecting things. It won't help at all. I don't believe in the idea of a truth commission. Things should just be left to decay naturally. We should let sleeping dogs lie.

While most respondents definitely saw a value in dealing with the past, they did not know how to deal with it effectively. Some seemed to fear anything too structured or challenging. But there was an implied view that reconciliation had to go deeper than simply dealing with current relationships and to include difficult processes such as addressing the past.

Most respondents made some reference to building positive relationships as being an important aspect, but it was the focus of little discussion. Perhaps they felt this was a self-evident point.

The responses on attitudinal change were particularly interesting, as they reflected an understanding of the term which differed from our intent. While some interviewees agreed that significant cultural and attitudinal change was important in a process of reconciliation,

others were uncertain about its meaning and implication.

We were envisaging that changes were required in how people related to, and their attitudes towards, one another—that reconciliation required breaking down cultures of suspicion, fear, mistrust and violence and building a culture of human rights, tolerance and mutual respect. But some interviewees perceived the statement as implying that people would have to change their own 'cultural traditions' for reconciliation to take place. This appeared to be particularly true of those from a Protestant background, who asserted that culture was intrinsic to communities and not something which should be changed. A community development worker with rural Protestant groups noted:

Protestant people have a real fear of losing their identity and want no part in changes in their culture. They will not take part in any reconciliation initiatives which aim to make them lose part of their own identity.

A unionist councillor also questioned the need for such change:

I don't agree that we need significant cultural and attitudinal change. It is very important that people hold on to their cultures as they are very important for people.

Another interviewee commented:

People might find significant change threatening … they might think it's getting rid of their culture. If it could be stated as 'cultural respect' and could relate to an

attitudinal change regarding difference then I would regard it as positive.

Most respondents referred to cultural and attitudinal change as being, necessarily, a slow process. Only one gave it precedence as a starting point for reconciliation.

On socio-economic and political change, the vast majority of respondents felt that this already enjoyed a disproportionate emphasis, to the detriment of relationship-building and addressing the legacy of the past. One victims' group worker said:

> I would say that, at present, 'acknowledging and dealing with the past' and 'building positive relationships' are being overlooked and that there is a focus on this idea of 'substantial social, economic and political change'.

Another did not see the value, noting:

> Substantial social and economic change—I wouldn't see that as essential. I don't immediately see why there is a need for economic change for reconciliation to take place. People's lives shouldn't depend on what politicians do, but politicians do need to be involved in reconciliation. They need to see that their political opponents' aspirations need to be considered.

But there were some dissenters, both from the community and voluntary sector and from councillors. After dealing with the past, one councillor placed high priority on social and economic change:

> On substantial political change, I think it is

happening in Northern Ireland. I do believe that social and economic change needs to have more focus on it. A lot of PEACE I funding was not sustainable because it didn't have the economic basis. There needs to be new thinking about how to support social and economic regeneration. The PEACE money has been very useful and positive things have come out of it on the ground. But we need to build a real social economy which is sustainable. I am not sure that everyone would agree but I do believe that jobs and reconciliation do dovetail in together and it is a way of going forward … I would put the economic change high up in reconciliation initiatives.

Another interviewee from the community and voluntary sector felt that this pillar had to be prioritised.

> I would prioritise political, social and economic change. I think that if that happened then we can start to build positive relationships. I don't think reconciliation is really quite understood … I think everyone has their own interpretation of reconciliation.

In conclusion, it would be fair to say that each of the respondents felt they knew something about reconciliation, and viewed it as a goal to be aspired to. For the most part, they appeared to value the opportunity to think about what reconciliation meant but few had a clearly defined understanding. As such, our research confirms the assertion by Norman Porter (2003: 25) that

> … it is probably true to say that a majority of

Northern citizens declare themselves in favour of reconciliation. The problem is that what is understood by it is often too vague or too weakly held to withstand the assaults of its detractors.

This lack of conceptual clarity is not confined to those we interviewed. It could be argued that it is symptomatic of the field in general. A practical definition that is ascribed to all work in the peacebuilding field, including by funders, is not shared across the board. The purpose of this research was not to come up with such a definition, but to explore how people themselves were working with the term and what resonances it had. Our research suggests that although some see it as an term 'imported' from the EU, they are positive about the concept and see it as relevant if more clearly defined.

Comparatively, for example, in the South African context, the reconciliation agenda has been criticised for overly focusing on relationships and ignoring the socio-economic context (van der Merwe, 1999; Hamber, 2002). It appears that the opposite is true in Northern Ireland. This suggests different emphases in priorities between the societies. It also perhaps reinforces the finding that reconciliation is understood largely through the prism of the EU and that the term has become synonymous with the PEACE programme, which currently has a strong socio-economic focus.

In the final instance, we were encouraged by some of the findings. Reconciliation is a concept to which individuals are attracted and are interested in operationalising. For some it is part of their work, although few use the term to describe it. The weaknesses, however, lie in how it is being defined and operationalised: much remains to be done if the concept is going to become a practical, relevant and locally-owned component of the peacebuilding agenda. ❥

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COMMENTS ON TERMINOLOGY

• What strikes me is that there is still a search going on for a common ground with regard to terminology. A lot of the key terms still have various meanings when they are used by communities, when used in political debates and so on. It is one of the steps that has to be taken—this finding of a common language and a terminology that is, as best as possible, common.

• I want to use a word that may be slightly out of context on the surface, but I think is germane to the topic we are talking about—and that word is decommissioning. I am not talking about the decommissioning of arms but the decommissioning of the clever wordsmiths that we have in Northern Ireland who have blighted the whole political landscape, who have caused confusion upon confusion because of their deliberate attempts to define things to mean nothing and everything. Going back to the Belfast agreement, it was ambiguity left, right, and centre, so you can read one thing one way and I can read it another way—the same word, but opposite meanings. Can we possibly get away from the use of this 'Carrollite' methodology—Lewis Carroll's idea that a word means what I want it to mean, no more and no less? Is there any possibility of us leaving behind all the deliberate ambiguity we have had thrust on us from above, so we can have some kind of clarity and know exactly what it is we are dealing with?

• I think I am getting more, not less convinced that reconciliation is the wrong term. The multitude of different definitions that there are for the term mean that if someone says they are working on reconciliation then you have to follow it on by asking: 'Well, what are you talking about?' because it doesn't actually communicate a lot. A lot of the actual workings that people have for the term are opposed to each other … One of the problems with reconciliation is that it is moralistic.

• I would argue for the word reconciliation for a bit. I want to firstly argue that just because it is a hard word doesn't mean it should be done away with. It is, for me, a layered word, a broad word, a challenging word and a word that actually integrates … It says something about meeting the 'otherness', meeting estrangement, meeting those we have been separated from, or meeting those we actually belong to but haven't actually acknowledged. I want to argue that it is a word which has lasted. Just because it is hard doesn't mean that it should be simplified or got rid of. I think, secondly, in our society we prefer words like darts and I think the 'community relations sector' are nice dart words too. You can throw them at other people and they do not come back to you. You can 'community-relate' until you are

exhausted, but sometimes if you can use the word in a particular manner it doesn't have to involve you. Words cross rooms like darts and, like darts, they can hit the wall and fall down. Most people can leave the room quite confident that their worlds have not been shattered. Reconciliation is more of a boomerang word. You can throw it out but it also comes back to you. We need to personally engage with this theme as well as institutionally, politically, socially, economically and structurally. [We] are not at the centre of public policy interrogating this word and seeing the depth and the layers and the integrated nature of the word. It is not a word that people like, in our experience.

• We must be careful not to expect too much from the concept of reconciliation. I fully accept the basic point that we must not throw out the concept. But I think we must use the concept very carefully. Of the five key elements which DD chose to use, it does not strike me as at all unexpected that the one which people picked up on as being particularly important was 'dealing with the past'. If you ask people if they want substantial political and economic change they are very likely to say that they do unless they are very conservative people and don't want change at all. We do need change in our society—we need social justice, we need partnership, equality, community development and community relations—but do we have to label all those things as reconciliation? To me, reconciliation first and foremost is getting over an argument: you have fallen out with someone, so you want to achieve reconciliation with that person, group or society. I feel that conceptually or theoretically it might be better if we restricted the use of the concept to that sort of challenge.

• Would 'partnering for peace' or 'working effectively with others' be better terminology to use? If reconciliation really is an abstract and a difficult word then the whole idea of partnering for concrete efforts to improve the lives of people or working effectively with others are real steps. So the term really does not matter that much as long as the process brings people together to work effectively for common goals, shared purposes. For me, this is something to bear in mind so that we do not get bogged down in a debate over words but really are on a search for common methods for action which bring about shared goals.

Bridging memory and hope

Ed Garcia

Recalling a lesson learned during the struggle against martial rule in the Philippines that stretched for nearly two decades, I believe that process walks hand-in-hand with outcome. If the outcome is to be sustained, then the process has to be owned. If change is to be meaningful, then the process must be understood.

In the struggle against dictatorship, democracy did not come about overnight. It was built in the midst of efforts of mobilising people to put an end to dictatorial rule. In the aftermath of the exercise of people's power, the process of rebuilding democratic practice has taken time. Perhaps it will take generations. In other words, patterns of democratic practice and participation are built patiently day by day.

Reconciliation, in a similar manner, does not take place only after a conflict is settled or when the problems in the political and economic orders are sorted out. Reconciliation, experience tells us, is a journey that one embarks on even while the effort to bring about profound social change takes place; the process of reconciliation takes place side-by-side with other undertakings.

Moreover, time and timing is of the essence in any initiative. We often speak of an idea whose time has come or the timeliness of a certain action. In Latin America, people pay attention to the precise time, the *conyuntura,* or what Christians call the *kairos* or the opportune moment. In reconciliation, the *kairos* is indispensable.

My personal journey in the Philippines was marked by the people's power upheaval of 1986, which deposed a despot, and again at the turn of the century in 2001, when Filipinos peacefully brought down a corrupt régime. I came to believe that, though one can learn lessons from comparative settings, nevertheless, each situation is somehow unique. Though similarities may abound in certain conflicts, each is unique in reflecting its history and culture, requiring shared analysis and a singular set of appropriate approaches. It is with this profound sense of respect for the uniqueness and the richness of the experiences in Northern Ireland

that I approach my task.

Based on the experiences I have lived through, or reflected on, in south-east and south Asia, in Latin America and in Africa during the past three decades, I wish to share some basic perspectives on moving from the memory of a traumatic and divided past to a shared future, where hope overcomes fear.

Reconciliation essentially aims to improve or restore relationships, to heal what is hurt, to bind the wounds of the past, to retrieve dignity and respect. It aims to transform attitudes, so that relationships are less conflictual; to transform behaviour, so that the violence and atrocious acts are reduced or eliminated; to transform structures, so that they are less unjust and more open to the needs of the vulnerable. Reconciliation, in brief, concerns a process which helps provide the conditions in which the destructive patterns of the past can be overcome, and converted into opportunities for a more constructive cycle, leading to a peace that is both just and durable.

Reconciliation essentially involves three elements. First, it is built on the bedrock of acknowledgment of the truth. To acknowledge is to remember, and the journey towards a future, different from the past, generally begins here. There are seldom, if ever, shortcuts and this period is inevitably painful. However, one must recognise that pain is part of the process and part of the healing.

Secondly, reconciliation, if it is authentic, concerns change. That is change in the way one sees things, or in the way one behaves, or in the way things fall into place—as in the structures

that engendered past enmity or resentment, present bias or bitterness. It is about pursuing justice, tempered by a measure of mercy, and—if at all possible—it is accompanied by forgiveness.

Finally, reconciliation is about building a just peace and constructing a society where people are able to work effectively side-by-side in a common quest, though they may differ or disagree in more ways than one. It is the ability to celebrate diversity, and to respect the dignity of difference in building a world that may be imperfect, but fully human.

In working with divided societies or communities in conflict, experience has shown the importance of understanding three separate, but inter-related, priority areas of endeavour. All play a part in advancing the process of reconciliation.

Cultural/psychological/religious

Reconciliation takes into account the culture in a given society, the psychology of people, and their religious beliefs and faith. Examples abound of failed attempts that do not respect the cultural sensitivities and religious practices that people hold dear or sacred. In both South Africa and East Timor, traditional ideas and methods of reconciliation were taken into account to advance the process. For example, the notion of *ubuntu*—which means that 'humanity is intertwined', that we are persons through others and that 'we are human since we belong'—played a part in making the aims of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission understood. In South Africa it was argued that 'reconciliation was part of restoring *ubuntu* in

both victims and perpetrators, for everyone is linked together' (SIDA, 2003:21).

Traditional leaders, the *lia nain*—keeper of the system of traditional law and custom of the village—played an important role in providing credibility to the hearings of the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor, established in 2001. In reinstating or repaying someone for a wrongdoing (for example, repairing a damaged schoolhouse), local ceremonial rites might involve the offender and agreement on the offender and offended eating betel nut or drinking palm wine to symbolise that reconciliation was in progress (Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor, 2002).

Socio-economic

Conflicts often have socio-economic roots or dimensions. No reconciliation can be complete without retrieving the demands of social justice and bringing about equitable development, and thus maximising access to resources and opportunities. Moreover, experience has shown the importance of recognising an economic dimension to human suffering. In both its personal and social aspects, one must make pains to compensate. In South Africa, for example, the inability of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to adequately compensate victims or witnesses economically because of inadequate resources, as had been promised, was certainly problematic. While material benefit could never resurrect a loved one, it could enable families to rebuild their lives and move on. In the case of the Zone of Peace and Development created by the 1996 peace agreement forged with the Moro National Liberation Front in southern Philippines, the inability of national and local governments to redress historical injustice by means of a sound redistributive economic programme had a huge negatively impact.

Political

Effective and accountable political leadership, good governance and the proper administration of justice are basic ingredients for advancing the process of reconciliation. Without the political will and the imagination to lay the groundwork for a sustainable peace there can be no sustained reconciliation. Respect for the other who had been previously perceived as 'the enemy' is essential. Equally valuable is acknowledging the dignity of people across the political divide, and recognising that what divides people is less important than what ultimately unites them.

Reconciliation means recourse to non-violent alternatives in settling differences and in overcoming the sources of deep-seated conflict. It means establishing the rule of law, providing a judicial framework and at times exploring transitional forms of justice. In Rwanda, the *gacaca* (a traditional participatory court system) was established to advance the process of giving closure to the past. This looked for ways of dealing with certain categories of slightly less severe crimes at a local level, with respectable judges elected by people in the home communities to ease Rwanda's overburdened judicial system. Though imperfect, it was argued that reconciliation could take place only alongside justice and with the

involvement of the people, thus advancing the process of reconciling the country's divided communities.

Shared vision of alternative future

A shared vision of an alternative future, one different from the painful past, perhaps sums up the aim and aspiration of those engaged in this thankless task. This vision is built on the belief that we are not condemned to repeat the flawed patterns of the past; we are able to redefine and reinvent ourselves and our future.

In Timbuktu, Mali, the 'Flame of Peace' bonfire destroyed some 3,000 weapons from demobilised combatants of the five armed movements in a public ceremony. Witnessed by some 10,000 people, it acted as a 'truly symbolic event to mark national reconciliation' and a powerful impetus 'to shape the historic memory of the people' (Lode, 2002). This episode also demonstrates that reconciliation events have an important place after armed conflict, as shown in one of the first systematic studies on reconciliation at the national level. Long and Brecke (2003) showed that of countries where reconciliation events took place, 64 per cent did not return to violent conflict, while of those where no such events took place only 9 per cent did not return to war.

Reconciliation initiatives can be convened at different levels:

Governmental/intergovernmental

Reconciliation initiatives were put in place, for example, as part of the peace agreements in South Africa and East Timor or, in the case of Latin America, in Argentina in 1984 and Chile in 1990-91. Truth commissions there led to the historic Sabato Report (*Nunca Mas*) in Argentina and the Rettig Commission Report in Chile. Detailed in voluminous pages, after countless hearings and investigations, the extent of the violent repression during the years of military rule was acknowledged. These processes became a basic building block in giving partial closure to the violent past in those countries.

Civil society sectors

In Guatemala and Mindanao, religious leaders, women and young people were important in advancing the reconciliation process. In particular, church-related institutions supported victimised women among the indigenous peoples of Guatemala, so that atrocities of sexual violence were recognised. In so doing, efforts to reclaim the dignity of victims were advanced.

Religious leaders can promote reconciliation on several levels: in Mindanao, the Bishops-Ulamaa Conference has provided a forum for reconciliation initiated by the religious leaders from different communities. Among the priests and *imams*, forums for dialogue have been established at the diocesan or parish levels in Kidipawan and Davao, among others. At local level, movements for inter-faith dialogue and peace have emerged in Lanao, Zamboanga, Basilan, Jolo and Ipil. The Mindanao Peace Week has been supported by religious leaders, educators and citizens' groups working to promote a culture of peace among the townspeople, as well as students in schools (including the *madrasas*).

Non-governmental / international non-governmental organisations

Human rights organisations in the Latin American countries of Argentina, Chile, El Salvador, Peru and Colombia played key roles in initiating the documentation and denunciation of systematic patterns of abuse and violations of the basic rights of people, which included members of the political opposition, trade unionists and teachers, professionals and journalists, women and young activists, and indigenous peoples.

The work of Diakonia in Kwazulu-Natal in South Africa, or the Lutheran World Federation / World Service in Liberia, as well as media work by Search for Common Ground in Macedonia and Burundi, have helped break down prejudice and bias among peoples with different ethnic backgrounds. They have also promoted respect and are among outstanding examples of collaboration by international non-governmental organisations working with local partners for peace and reconciliation.

Communities/grassroots

Peace Zones or Territories of Peace in Colombia and the Philippines are grassroots initiatives, in towns and municipalities, which have set the courageous example of people creating spaces for dialogue and development even among former enemies. In Mindanao, Muslims and Christians who clashed on the battlefield found common ground in the 'spaces for peace' built in Pikit, Cotobato, or in the zones of life for internally-displaced peoples in Tulunan, or in other 'fault-line' towns and villages supported by the *Tabang Mindanaw*, a humanitarian agency contributing to peace efforts in southern Philippines.

It is not easy to try to summarise learning drawn from diverse experiences that might help shed some light on the critical question of advancing reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, here are a few thoughts.

Complementarity: Work towards combined, multi-level approaches. To supplement, not to supplant, can be the aim of diverse organisations or institutions at different levels of society with a shared sense of purpose.

Primacy of the local: Build on local capacities. The opposite of globalisation is 'glocalisation', and in work on reconciliation it is indispensable to rely on the strengths and skills of the indigenous methods and ingenuity on the ground.

Sustainable process: Reconciliation is a long-term process often supported by short-term means. If the work is to be sustainable and effective, it demands human, material and moral resources over the long haul. Moreover, it is a process, not merely a project or a programme, and one which must be owned by the people, the stakeholders—a process that is trusted and supported by those it is meant to benefit.

Perspective of generations: Reconciliation requires a marathon mentality. To overcome patterns of the past requires the work of generations. It likewise requires a vision capable of mobilising people for collaborative and sustained action across generations.

Profound change: Without profound social

change, reconciliation cannot be sustained. Change takes place in the sphere of power and politics; thus the power of principles when people choose their future leaders.

If the politics of a just peace prevails, then reconciliation becomes less of an elusive hope. Bridging the memory of a traumatic past and the aspiration to build an alternative future is the common quest that brings us together. ❧

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COMMENTS ON INTERNATIONAL LESSON-LEARNING

• How do you learn comparatively and yet still deal with your own distinctive circumstances? Northern Ireland is not particularly distinctive. There is a commonality to human conflict which you can always learn from. On the other hand, the drivers in different places can be somewhat different. How do we take what we know here, learn from what others know in other places and bring that together? What does that process look like?

• I have heard so much about the self-imposed segregation here and want to pose a question: is it unique, is it avoidable, will it stay here forever? My answer is that it is not unique, it isn't unavoidable and it cannot stay forever. I want to argue this using my own life experience [in Belgium]. I was born in a Catholic maternity hospital and from kindergarten to university I stayed in Catholic schools. My father was a member of a Catholic union. We read Catholic newspapers. When we travelled it was with a Catholic travel agency. Our insurance company and bank were Catholic ones. The first time I left this 'world' was when I had to do my military service, and even then it was as a member of an association of Catholic servicemen. There are two differences with what happened here in Northern Ireland. We did not have segregated housing and violence was only small scale. Next to the Catholic world there were two others—one that was even bigger than the Catholic one. That was the socialist world. And there was a third, smaller one, which was liberal conservative. We called this the product of 'pillarisation'—there is no exact word for it, but it meant that Belgium consisted of three pillars. Pillars do not have windows, or indeed doors. The process of forming these started in 1880 and expanded enormously in the 1920s and 1930s. But it started to disintegrate in the 1960s and it has almost disappeared—not because we wanted it to disappear but because of the impact of external factors such as globalisation and European integration. There is no place left for islands in the ideological or societal sense within a unified Europe. Many aspects of the way we lived in the past have had to disappear and it is not something which we wanted or initiated—it had been pushed on us. That makes me say that in fact there is no future for a segregated Northern Ireland.

• How can you use the experiences of other societies? My vision is that a large part is defined and influenced by the local context, but what we know from what we have seen elsewhere is that there still are some universal things which come back again and again and they have to do with the mandate, for instance, of such truth-seeking operations. Looking at a range of examples, you can make a list of do's and don'ts which are applicable in all situations. There is a lot to learn from the lessons elsewhere.

Supporting initiatives

Avila Kilmurray

Reconciliation is a concept to conjure with. It sums up all that is wholesome, high-minded and worthy in any society—but particularly a society emerging from conflict. And yet, when we speak about being 'reconciled' to something, there can be a grudging edge to the phrase. It has overtones of the concept of 'tolerance': there is little that is enthusiastic, imaginative or outgoing about it. But perhaps this is just playing with semantics which often has as much practical value as taking the time to argue over how many angels can stand on the head of a pin.

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (formerly the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust) has long held an ethos and set of beliefs that valued cross-community contact and been committed to an understanding of society that was based on social solidarity rather than constitutionally rooted political division. Where there was a commonality of interest, whether amongst women's groups or community activists, this was facilitated and encouraged; where there was the opportunity to draw people together to discuss their differences, this was supported. The foundation administered a cross-community contact grant scheme over the rather barren years of the mid-1980s, and much of the learning from this was channelled into the discussions that led to the establishment of the Community Relations Council in the early 1990s. In the broader context there was a period in the early 90s when a range of initiatives started to mirror the sense that people were genuinely war-weary and were increasingly looking to the future rather than the past. We had the Opsahl Commission (Pollak, 1993), the 'Beyond Hate' conference in Derry (Holywell Trust, 1992) and other projects at community level. With the benefit of hindsight, we also had political contacts of which we mere mortals knew little. But whether open or behind closed doors, the movement was for inclusion rather than political demonisation.

The other trend at the time was the growing sense of giving expression to one's own sense of identity and community self-esteem—to a

sense of emotional and locational place. The Community Foundation noted this in its community arts applications and rural community development grants, but it also informed an application that we funded for a conference on community work in Protestant areas, held in 1991. In the early 90s, however, it was arguably the women's sector that got closest to squaring the circle of reconciliation and difference. They agreed to work together on issues of common interest while respecting one another's right to hold different opinions and aspirations.

Fast forward to the euphoria of the 1994 ceasefire—and despite the grumbles of some, and the misgivings of others, I would argue that it was a euphoric period. The Community Foundation, with the support of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action and the Rural Community Network, carried out a survey of community and voluntary groups as to what they felt the new agenda might include. This was published in a report entitled *Peace: An Opportunity for Change* (NIVT, 1995). Reconciliation issues raised were caught up in a broader agenda of political development, respect for human rights and a focus on the consequences of the violence. There were calls for 'The building of working links between the different communities in Northern Ireland and in the North and the South, underpinned by community infrastructure and social and economic development'. There was also support for a reconciliation approach which might 'dissolve the barriers of sectarianism and mistrust before removing physical barriers'. There was a call by one group to 'build peace' through education and prejudice reduction, and a broader

perspective which argued for the need to 'build confidence and future hope for people in disadvantaged areas engaging them in a new vision for each neighbourhood/community'. There was also a plea 'To ensure that a "real" voice and input is given to local communities rather than have academics or professional organisations purporting to put views on their behalf'.

The PEACE I Programme—the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (1995-99)—did reflect some of these viewpoints. Its strategic aim (ESF, 1995) was: 'To reinforce progress towards a peaceful and stable society and to promote reconciliation by increasing economic development and employment; promoting urban and rural regeneration; developing cross-Border co-operation and extending social inclusion.' Consequently, reconciliation was seen as the eventual product of a process that would aim to increase the sense of well-being and contact. It was further recognised that 'It will take time to build up sufficient trust for formerly divided communities to co-operate extensively with one another. It is for this reason that special attention needs to be given to the development of grassroots capacities both to engage in decision-making and investment processes and to develop effective local responses addressing neighbourhood problems.'

The experience of the Community Foundation was that over 1996-97 there was a curiosity in 'single-identity' communities about the views and circumstances of 'the other side'. There was a particular interest in Catholic areas to engage in discussion—if only because now political dialogue was the order of the day,

despite the period of the breakdown in the IRA ceasefire. There was also the excitement of the new conflict-resolution / conflict-transformation approaches as a form of social change. There were some reservations that the community-relations / reconciliation approach limited that sense of change to the re-establishment of personal relationships, or at best relationships at the level of disadvantaged communities, rather than addressing the necessary structural and social changes.

Then we had the refreshingly broad concept of 'peace-building' introduced into the equation by Prof John-Paul Lederach in the mid-90s. He posed the question 'How do we continue to build towards reconciliation over the long haul?' He suggested that the emphasis needed to be placed on developing a peace-building process within which reconciliation could be located, of necessity inclusive of all levels of society. He argued (Lederach, 1999) that 'reconciliation' was a complex phenomenon and that 'the challenge posed by reconciliation is to open up the social space that permits and encourages individuals and societies as collectives, to acknowledge the past; mourn the losses; validate the pain experiences; confess the wrongs and reach towards the next step of rebuilding the relationship that has been broken. This is not to remember and justify. True reconciliation is to remember and change.' The Community Foundation bought into this concept as it could encompass issues of equality and rights. It was premised on social inclusion and it recognised the place of the political dimensions of the challenge.

We were of course conscious of the sceptical voices. For some, reconciliation was seen as a sleek overture into a united Ireland; for others a conspiracy by the British state to blame the cursed natives for the 'troubles'. And some groups saw reconciliation as a concept developed and imposed by 'community relations' professionals. In a survey of PEACE I grant recipients by the Community Foundation (1999), one respondent said: 'The British Protestant will not willingly engage in dialogue or reconciliation work with violent Republican elements, no matter how much money is invested in the effort.' In other words, there was no confidence in 'the others'.

Meanwhile, the political uncertainties of the negotiation and implementation of the Belfast agreement seemed to leech confidence and trust within the Protestant community; while the interest and enthusiasm of the Catholic community seemed to become blunted as time progressed. The most common line from the latter was that Protestants were welcome to come around the 'peace wall' to see what was going on in west Belfast or in the Bogside; but there was a growing hesitancy in reaching out, particularly as it was perceived that a number of Protestant neighbourhoods seemed to spend their time in a state of envy at what their Catholic counterparts had built up over time. They also seemed to be concentrating on demanding the same amounts of money without considering the long-term effort that it had taken to develop many well-established community initiatives.

Then there were the vibes that were coming from the macro-political context—namely, the

zero-sum syndrome of negotiation. Cheque-book community clientelism pervaded—counting the money that went into communities, without looking much behind the headline amounts and the nuancing of aspects of the Good Friday agreement, with the persistent reiteration that 'Protestants had lost out'. This was compounded by the instability of the political system established by the accord and the lack of any shared agreement on a new underlying political culture. This was largely rooted in the lack of any shared understanding of the causes of the 'troubles'. Little wonder that people within local communities were confused and destabilised. It was not the most conducive context for peace-building, let alone reconciliation.

PEACE II was introduced with the theme of peace and reconciliation as a 'horizontal selection criterion' for any project to be funded. However, the new emphasis on economic development and employability seemed to predominate. Thus the clear link between social inclusion and peace-building, charted within PEACE I, was effectively lost. Nevertheless, the horizontal theme did offer a challenge to projects to address issues of peace and reconciliation—albeit at times within a 'single-identity' context, given the increasing fragmentation of many communities, as evidenced by the loyalist feuds.

Interestingly, much of the reaching out was between Protestant neighbourhoods and groups south of the border, a marked development since PEACE I; arguably, though, this was a less critical engagement. Nevertheless, there were other approaches, such as when the new

East Belfast Observer brokered a partnership with the *Anderstowntown News* to obtain printing facilities, within the context of the social economy and mutual interest. Invariably, however, the peace-and-reconciliation dimension took the form of meetings or cross-community discussions tacked on to the project for which a group was seeking funding—perhaps, in the context, that is all that could be expected. Yet, in some cases considerable courage was shown by individuals who opened themselves up to the experiences of others and were prepared to share their own.

What also became plain was the constantly reiterated message that many within the Protestant community did not feel that they had the confidence to engage with the Catholic community. This led to the development of PEACE II funded projects such as the East Belfast Community Education Project at Holywood Arches and the work undertaken by Trademark and many others. In the rural context, the Rural Community Network pioneered research and work in this area. Arguably less positive was the increasingly strongly held view that the Protestant community 'lacked capacity'. In some areas this was valid, but in some cases this plea could offer cover for a sense of insularity which made external engagement difficult.

Where social space was tentatively opening up was amongst 'community of interest' groups: victims of violence (the work of WAVE, the Shankill Stress Group, Relatives for Justice and others comes to mind); former politically-motivated prisoners; individuals working on rights issues, and, of course, women, who had

long been engaged in this manner. There was also contact, if sometimes interrupted, between individuals and groups working on interface issues. However, it became clear that this contact needed to have a clear purpose, and to be sustained rather than sporadic.

In short, there seems to be a need to develop a framework for peace-building that can respond to the deceptively simple question: how do we create and support the change from violent crisis to the desired shared future? This cannot be in the form of a single superstructure or theoretical approach, but a number of different initiatives can help us gain a clear understanding of the existing realities, challenges and community crises and practical responses to them. As Lederach suggested, we need an approach that is responsive in nature and that is based on the lived experiences of communities, both of interest and neighbourhood—not just a top-down agenda. But alongside this we need to sustain efforts to weave a vision of a shared future, or futures, to create a context for reconciliation. To achieve this, we also need to frame the peace-building and reconciliation discussion in terms to which people can relate. This must be an inclusive process if it is to have any long-term impact. ❧

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COMMENTS ON FUNDING AND RECONCILIATION

• The EU programme will have invested somewhere in the region of 100 million euro in peace and reconciliation by the end of 2005. This is an incredible amount of public investment. It is important to see whether or not we have made progress with that amount of public investment. I would argue that we have made a difference and allowed hundreds and thousands of community groups to engage in a process. It has allowed ownership of a political process at a local community level which would not otherwise be the case. Also, I think if we look back, society has been transformed over the past ten years and hopefully the EU programme has played some part in that … That being said, I sometimes wonder if some aspects of funding are a hindrance to furthering reconciliation and I think those of us who are involved in funding reconciliation do have to take note of the fact that society is more segregated than it was ten years ago and we have seen some very sad demonstrations of sectarianism in Belfast over the last number of months which is a reflection of the depth of the division which is still there. I sometimes feel that a lot of reconciliation work is not very resource-intensive and I wonder if sometimes we are throwing too much money at the problem and would it be more effective with less money?

• There are serious problems on funding in the Republic of Ireland … It is not as if the problem is confined to the border counties—in fact, if you go further from the border you get more hard-line and extreme attitudes which need to be challenged. This is about small sums of money being made available to small groups throughout the island to do positive work.

• Over the past number of years there have been hundreds of millions of pounds pumped into the region to support peace and reconciliation. The question I want to pose is: is there a greater responsibility on those who are funding this activity to promote a more active reconciliation ethos within that activity, in the organisations that they fund? … We have been funded through Europe for a great number of years and still there are organisations that have been funded under those monies that haven't progressed or engaged with the 'other'. Reconciliation begins with communication and if we don't communicate we cannot reconcile. I believe there is a great responsibility on those funders, whether they be governmental (Ireland or UK government), Europe and the Intermediary Funding Bodies in the region, that they actively—through their funding criteria—encourage reconciliation.

• My plea to the EU and other boards is: could we get out of the notion that everyone had to predict the outcome of a programme in three years time? Reconciliation in a post-conflict society is unpredictable—we really have to take the shackles off programmes and let small risks and failures be developed; otherwise we are not going to find any new ways forward.

Lessons south of the border

Noreen Callaghan

There are various definitions of reconciliation. The work that we have undertaken at NUI Galway in the diploma in peace-building—taught throughout the southern border counties—is premised on an understanding of the need for social reconciliation, which involves not just individuals directly affected by conflict but the whole of the community or society (Hay and O'Leary, 2000). The programme intentionally integrates the theory and praxis of reconciliation with those of community development and seeks to explore the relationships between these two inter-related practices.

Consistent with DD's research findings, an understanding—or perhaps the lack thereof—of reconciliation in the border counties can be traced back to the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. With its introduction, people referred to the term 'reconciliation' but with very little understanding of the concept and little or no direction about how to engage with (or in) effective reconciliation practices. Often, the term simply meant necessary investment in the community and economic infrastructure of a region significantly affected by the 'troubles'. With PEACE II though, and in the context of a developing peace process which is hopefully moving towards reconciliation processes, many community groups are now open to exploring issues of reconciliation and how their own peace-building, cross-border or cross-community projects can contribute to it in a meaningful way.

This progression was true of what was to become the NUI Galway diploma. In 1997, an inter-agency group applied for funding for community development training resources for Co Sligo. Under the EU PEACE programme, the group was granted the requested funding and awarded an additional sum to undertake reconciliation training and support. The NUI Galway Community Education Centre in St Angela's College in Sligo was deemed the operational organisation to deliver this programme. In the initial years of the programme, short (6-8 week) courses on conflict management, social

inclusion and reconciliation were offered to community activists. Feedback from the community sector, though, was that while these were helpful (and always over-subscribed), there was a need for broader and deeper opportunities to engage with the complex issues of peace and reconciliation, and to develop the skills and insight necessary to engage in effective practice.

This led to the development of a diploma in reconciliation practice, which was later renamed the diploma in peace-building, a title more consistent with Lederach's broader concept of reconciliation. The purpose of the programme is to build the capacity of the community sector to engage proactively in peace and reconciliation work. The value of the programme is in providing the space for community practitioners to:

• explore the issues that lie at the heart of peace and reconciliation work,

• analyse the complexity of peace-building in the context of the border counties,

• explore specifically the legacy of the conflict in the border counties and develop appropriate initiatives to address these,

• challenge previously held assumptions and broaden perspectives and understanding of the range of experience associated with the Northern Ireland conflict,

• reflect on their own practice in light of 'best practice' in peace and reconciliation work, and

• take action to strengthen and make that practice more effective.

Surprisingly little attention has been paid to articulating the legacy of the conflict in the border counties. While some reports have articulated the structural and economic deprivation experienced in the region (Pringle *et al*, 2000), few have examined the social and psychological impacts. There has been little opportunity for individuals or communities to articulate their experience. A culture of silence around issues related to the conflict is still palpable and predominant.

That said, the Irish Platform for Peace and Reconciliation (a federation of 16 non-governmental organisations actively committed to peacebuilding work, based in the republic) has raised some of the issues particular to *Peacebuilding in the Republic of Ireland,* in its discussion document of the same name (Irish Peace and Reconciliation Platform, 2002). It found that most people in the republic do not see themselves—or the state—as having any responsibility for the 'problem' of peace or reconciliation or a role in finding the solution. The problem is often considered to be 'up there'—a perception that both abdicates responsibility for finding solutions and undermines the experience of those directly affected by the conflict, particularly in the border region.

This widely held view has underpinned manifestations of civil apathy which have permeated society in the south over the past 70 years. The discussion document also raised issues regarding the lack of meaningful contact between groups and communities north and south, which perpetuated and accentuated the absence of mutual understanding and dialogue between traditions on the island. It found that rigidly nationalist and majority-religion mindsets had prevailed since the state's inception. It posited that pervasive ignorance, and therefore

unwillingness to seriously address the unionist tradition had contributed to a situation where the position of people living in the republic, especially in the border counties, who maintained a unionist mindset went unacknowledged. The report also found a readiness to scapegoat Northern Ireland and its people and to hold them responsible for their own misfortune. This had contributed to the betrayal and alienation felt by northern nationalists and, in particular, those displaced to the border region.

The report concluded that ordinary people had not been empowered to play their part in building peace and in contributing to reconciliation. It suggested capacity needed to be built in the NGO peace sector.

I t is in this context that the diploma in peace-building has developed. In 2004-05 we have 45 participants from community organisations engaged in peace and reconciliation work throughout the border region. They invest the year in a reflective analysis of their cross-border and cross-community work. They seek to broaden their perspective, deepen their understanding and make more effective their peace and reconciliation work. We provide a space that not only presents the theory of peace and reconciliation but tests that against the challenges groups face on the ground. We constantly challenge participants in their perspectives by making space during sessions for previously 'silent' voices and communities and through field trips to communities grappling with the complexities of deep division.

This has not been an easy journey for any of us. Referring back to the definition of social

reconciliation introduced earlier, it is true that while this broader definition focuses not just on the individual but on the community or society, in reality each individual needs to move for the whole of society to change. Social reconciliation is a *collective* process for which we all need to take *individual* responsibility.

What that has meant in practice is not only creating supportive space for previously silent voices but also challenging ourselves about the conditions that created such silence in the border context. It has meant constantly challenging our subtle but prevailing assumptions that the republic is Catholic. The result of these challenges, though, is that Protestant participants in last year's programme indicated that they had felt an emerging acceptance not previously experienced. One participant said:

> The most significant impact of the course, personally, is that I've come to accept my identity as a Protestant. At the start of the course, I think I was ashamed of being a Protestant. Now I believe very strongly that people should not have to be ashamed of their identity. A peaceful society does not ask its residents to hide part of themselves.

From a political point of view, the predominance of nationalist or republican perspectives in the border counties has meant that these, at times quite entrenched, viewpoints often go unchallenged. The course has tried, through exposure to alternative perspectives, to broaden or open our mindsets, not necessarily to change political ideologies but to advocate respect for others' right to their perspectives. One participant who works on a project for men

marginalised for their political belief said:

> The course's greatest impact is that I now look at people in a different light. I'm prepared to listen to and respect their point of view, yet not needing to accept it. Previously, if I didn't agree with a person's point of view, I started a debate just to score points. Now I try to listen and ask questions in order to understand where they are coming from. It's not important to win the debate.

The issue of apathy highlighted in the *Peace Building in the Republic of Ireland* report is too often discussed in negative terms. Judging people for being apathetic is not going to get them involved. We need to find creative ways to engage and support groups in effective peace-building activity. We need to educate rather than admonish:

> Previous to the course, I was interested in peace-building but had no real connection or understanding of the conflict in the north. I can now see the impact of the conflict and am shocked to see so many people in the border counties lethargic and disinterested just the way I was. The course has helped raise awareness of silent culture and sectarianism in the border counties and republic.

The opportunity to network long-term with other peacebuilding groups has proved invaluable. Too often groups are practising peace and reconciliation work in isolation. Valuable lessons are being lost, dangerous mistakes repeated unnecessarily. More than anything, the value of the diploma in peace-building has been in advocating reflective practice. Overworked peace practitioners have too few opportunities to reflect on their actions and to adapt their practice based on these lessons. Over the course of the year, participants engage in extensive research, evaluation and planning processes with regard to peace and reconciliation work. Each participant is assigned an individual tutor to guide them toward best possible practice—a term I do not use lightly, because 'best' practice in peace and reconciliation work can be somewhat elusive and is constantly developing. It is because of the unfolding nature of peace-building that we must engage in reflective action if peace and reconciliation efforts are to be effective. The administrative shackles imposed by funding bodies need to be relaxed and freedom granted to community groups to enact lessons learned in a more timely, and less time-consuming, manner.

One useful tool or framework we have employed in assisting groups to reflect on their practice is the Reconciliation Matrices which have been produced by ADM/CPA, the intermediary funding body for many of the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Recon-ciliation measures in the border counties (ADM/CPA, 2003). The matrices indicate different actions and levels of reconciliation work. Actions are divided into healing, relationship-building and reconstruction. Levels move from basic contact, to joint projects, addressing core conflict issues and structural change. The *Intention* Matrix outlines the aim and desired outcome of reconciliation work. The *Practice* Matrix illustrates the means by which reconciliation might be achieved. Based on the matrix, individuals are asked to do an audit of their group's

reconciliation work and to analyse the potential to progress that work.

The matrix has served as a tool for encouraging groups, when appropriate, to move deeper into the more challenging aspects of reconciliation work. It also serves to illustrate the need for groups or communities to first build a solid foundation before undertaking the more difficult processes. A collective audit of participant groups' reconciliation work indicates that the vast majority of reconciliation initiatives undertaken in the border region still fall into the Basic Contact / Joint Projects / Healing / Relationship quadrants of the matrix. Few groups are yet undertaking the Raising of Conflict Issues / Structural Change / Reconstruction elements. This is consistent with accepted wisdom that reconciliation is a long-term process, but also indicates the need for continued and active investment in moving communities towards deeper levels of reconciliation.

Luc Huyse opened our discussion about reconciliation with the striking poem of Cabazares, which challenged those of us who speak of reconciliation to do so with the utmost integrity and awareness. Ed Garcia spoke about the need for authentic reconciliation which concerned change—in the way one sees things, the way one behaves and the way that we structure a more just society.

In conclusion, I offer a line from one of our own great poets, Seamus Heaney, which implores movement and meaning—two qualities we could well employ as we seek to reconcile ourselves. ❱❱

Move lips, move minds and make new meaning flare.
Beacons of Bealtaine

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COMMENTS ON THE CHALLENGES OF RECONCILIATION

• The challenge, as I see it, is that reconciliation is rarely strategically thought through by both practitioners and those who have a personal interest, and there is that whole question about whether or not the term reconciliation is the right term, or whether it causes more problems than it solves. We are probably at an earlier stage of development than I had previously thought and this long-term process really is long-term and slow.

• I am very conscious that it is a silent majority which is across the border, who, if we continue the way we are going, and if we allow ourselves across the border to abdicate responsibility for the conflict, we are going to have a flawed reconciliation. We need to be at the table and hearing the tough questions—like 'Where were you for thirty years?' We need to be in those dialogues. My plea is for those of you who work with us for help in getting these dialogues going and those not at the table now, to the table.

• Significant sections in Northern Ireland society perceive both the theory and practice of reconciliation as part of a cynical political agenda that is somehow designed to impose something upon them which is not in their interests—which is designed to somehow homogenise them or artificially create a single common identity which will replace their own, valued, separate identity and that might be dangerous to their constitutional aspirations.

• With regard to the republic there is a huge problem that we have not embraced the issues of the conflict nor were we challenged and forced to embrace it. We need to go through a long self-examination.

• What strikes me is the suggestion that instead of coming to meet each other your society is still building more isolation. I think this is quite a normal process in a post-conflict situation. In Belgium the Flemish were a demographic majority but for a very long time they were a political, cultural and economic minority. For a very long time in the evolution of the Flemish movement, the emphasis was on isolation. They had to win a certain self-confidence and they had to do it by isolating themselves in many ways—culturally stressing the importance of culture, identity and language and so on. But after a few steps towards a more balanced power relation in Belgium, the need to retreat decreased. In Northern Ireland such need to retreat will, I guess, also decrease, when each community has reached that minimal degree of self-confidence … One of the factors is not just that winning of self-confidence, but also some of the factors were external, like the influx of immigrants which changes the whole context. Also the blurring of borders and the impact of globalisation. So, various elements play a role in diminishing the need to retreat in a single-identity environment.

• We need imagination about how we do reconciliation work. It is not a single piece of practice: it is a whole raft of things which will mean different things to different people. It is about changing patterns and habits of separation.

Concluding comments

Monica McWilliams

The whole issue of reconciliation is obviously one that we have to struggle with, given the awful years most of us have experienced. When a group of Northern Ireland politicians visited South Africa, we met President Mandela. He was very shocked with us and he said in effect: I don't know how you people think you are going to get to where you want to go when you cannot agree on where you have come from, in terms of what has caused your conflict.

As Avila Kilmurray pointed out, if we have not got agreement on why the conflict occurred, then how are we going to move to knowing why we are not going to do it again? That is an extremely important question. It is something the politicians did not 'reconcile' when we signed off on the Good Friday agreement. Having been one of the participants in the final stages of the negotiations, it struck me that we were building up a lot of problems for ourselves in the implementation stage. We had not become reconciled to the cause of the problem and therefore we had not really understood what we were going to do to implement the political solution, the agreement.

A second issue is risk. What risks do we have to take to achieve reconciliation? We have focused so much on our fears and our 'bad' risks that have never really thought what 'good' risks would look like. We have a negative peace or, as was referred to, 'a comfortable stalemate'. A negative peace may prevent or stop violence but it is not what a positive peace should look like: a positive peace is about justice and human rights.

I remember Senator Mitchell, the talks chair, saying to us: violence will continue to take away your lives in Northern Ireland, but intransigence will continue to take away your hopes. Intransigence has dissipated the hopes we had from 1994. I still remain a very hopeful person, however. Reconciliation is a process of hope and it does need us to invest much more in risk-taking.

I have often reflected on how expensive a little country we have become and how much world attention we have demanded, years and

years after having potentially signed an international peace treaty. The piece of that that we didn't pay enough attention to—I know we didn't from being there—was the political dimension of building reconciliation.

We have introduced policies, such as the statutory obligations on public bodies to promote 'good relations' and equality, and yet we expect that they can do one without the other. The political dimension of reconciliation should be brought to the surface.

Community development is way ahead, particularly in working-class communities. It is those in the middle-class communities who need to address reconciliation. There is a dilemma here that the most impoverished and deprived communities are setting the examples of good practice and role-modelling and yet people are constantly asking us to change this society and make it more equal.

We are strangers in the political world. When we met for the first time as assembly members there were lots of people queuing up to get into the 'Strangers' Gallery', which is what we call the visitors' gallery in Parliament Buildings. I remarked that it was wrongly named and the Strangers' Gallery was where the politicians sat. The visitors were all probably friends and neighbours who had come together as a group to watch these strange proceedings taking place below them. We—the politicians—were the strangers.

As Norman Porter would say, it is about building right relationships and creating fair interactions and acknowledging the legitimacy of the 'others' in our midst. Part of the difficulty is the pain people feel, and rightly so. But it is also a matter of power and control, and that is hard to shift.

The final R is being radical—and that is about both the personal and the political. I have had to learn to be aware that when I speak I do not put pain into someone else's life. I have had to literally transcend myself—not to deny my roots or where I was coming from, but really to understand and reach out. While I was a political representative in the Women's Coalition I was a representative of women who were coming from very different backgrounds and it was a process of transcendence, not compromise.

I take some hope from the fact that we are moving from our isolation, though it is going to take us some time to move to a recognition of our interdependence—whether that be across borders, or between us in this tiny community in which we live. ❧

Ed Garcia

I would like to explore three more R words: rhetoric, relevance and reflective practice. Reconciliation can actually be rhetoric if it is manipulated to avoid differences and utilised to postpone imperatives. At the same time, it can be relevant if it is inspired by a vision of a future which is different from the past— a process which is long-term, broad and home-grown.

Reconciliation places importance on acknowledging the past, with some form of closure, and putting respect at the heart of relationships. Obviously bringing about change,

especially in structures—not just political, but also social, economic and cultural—is vital.

I would like to end with a few words on reflective practice, which came out in the papers by Noreen Callaghan and Avila Kilmurray, for highlighting the practical aspects of reconciliation. What I particularly liked was the emphasis on the historical context.

We were brought to realise that we did not arrive where we are overnight. There is a history of engagement attempted over many years. The reasonable risks for peace that people have undertaken have got to be acknowledged.

I am often in Colombia for my work—and every time Northern Ireland is brought up in conversation it is a source of inspiration. There are no magic formulae, but comparative experiences provide us with landmarks and signposts. This is a task of generations and one that requires a marathon mentality. There are no fixed roadmaps, but the sources of hope are there.

In Colombia they say: 'Meterle pueblo al proceso'—you have to put people at the heart of processes. And very often when the focus is on political leaders, the élites, this is easy to forget. What gives hope to many in difficult situations, including Northern Ireland, is the courage of people to dare people to build peace. ❧

Contributors

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Monica McWilliams is professor of women's studies and social policy at the University of Ulster, where she introduced the first accredited access courses for women returning to education. She is a founding member of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition. Elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly in 1998, she represented South Belfast for five years, having played an instrumental role in the multi-party negotiations that led to the Belfast agreement. Her publications include several pieces relating to the Northern Ireland peace process and two books on domestic violence. She was awarded the doctorate of humane letters from Lesley College, Massachusetts, for her work on the impact of political conflict and domestic violence on women's lives in Northern Ireland. ❥