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Difficult conversations

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CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

For many in the British and Irish Isles, 2016 is a centenary year for important events that continue to shape modern aspects of cultural and national identity.

The impact and legacy of historical events like the 1916 Easter Rising and the Battle of the Somme continue to reverberate strongly within communities. While much focus has been on commemoration, the opportunity to bring communities together in new dialogue on our shared history has not been lost.

This edition of Fund Focus looks at the issue of creating and facilitating difficult conversations between divided communities. This is an area where the Fund has made significant and ground-breaking progress and our new Community Consolidation – Peace Consolidation 2016-2020 Strategy will advance our work within many constituencies that remain deeply divided.

In this year of commemorations, we are grateful for the insightful contribution

from historian Dr Éamon Phoenix, Stranmillis University College, who outlines his perspective on how views of the past can be a powerful tool for reconciliation. His article is compelling and I'd encourage all readers to reflect on how history can be used creatively to break down ancient barriers.

In March, I made my fifth visit to Washington DC as Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland and many conversations touched on how the Fund was facilitating fresh debate with younger generations in interface areas. I was proud to report our successes in areas where communities are equipping young people to become leaders, remove the blight of sectarianism and contribute to conversations on the future of Peace Walls.

This edition features examples of this work including the work of

Twaddell / Woodvale Residents Association, which operates in one of the most complex areas of Northern Ireland, and the Unheard Voices Project, which has enabled many women affected by violence to break the harmful cycle of silence.

This milestone year also marks our 30th year of operation – a remarkable achievement. These three decades of essential work would not have been possible without our international donors and we remain grateful for their enduring support and encouragement.

Dr Adrian Johnston,
CHAIRMAN

International Fund for Ireland commits £1.9m/€2.7m towards 20 peace projects

In February, Peace and Reconciliation projects in Northern Ireland and the southern border counties received a welcome boost as the International Fund for Ireland committed £1.9m/€2.7m towards 20 initiatives.

The funding, approved at the organisation's Board Meeting in Limavady, includes £381,000/€536,000 for four new Personal Youth Development projects (PYDP) that will support vulnerable young people who are unable to access or remain in traditional education and training provision.

More than £760,000/€1m was allocated across nine PIP projects working to transform marginalised communities; and a further £756,000/€1m was allocated to seven initiatives that are developing new dialogue on the future of Peace Walls. Since 2012, the Fund has committed more than £4m/€5.6m towards Peace Walls projects and played a key role in the recent removal of a division on the Crumlin Road in Belfast.

Dr Adrian Johnston, Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland said: "This is a timely commitment that

concentrates much-needed funding towards 20 projects that are stabilising communities and giving young people new positive options. Today's announcement is our largest in the last four years and strengthens our reach in some areas that have been opposed to the political settlement.

"With our assistance, many communities that are vulnerable to violence have become more resilient and remained with the Peace Process. We are supporting groups who are taking measured risks and developing new ideas to transform their communities. The achievements of this approach in recent years are significant and set us apart from other funders."

In November 2015, the Fund unveiled plans to allocate up to £45m towards a range of peace and reconciliation programmes over a five-year period through its 'Community Consolidation –

Peace Consolidation 2016-2020' Strategy. Further information about all the beneficiaries from the International Fund for Ireland's latest funding package is available at www.internationalfundforireland.com



ABOVE: Pictured at the International Fund for Ireland Board Meeting in Limavady are Board Members: Siobhan Fitzpatrick, Allen McAdam, Dr Adrian Johnston (Chairman of the Fund), Hilary Singleton and Billy Gamble.

Remembering the Future: Using History to Embed Reconciliation

Dr Éamon Phoenix



‘In Ireland we have a common history but not a common memory.’

This comment is particularly relevant as the island celebrates the centenary of the 1916 Rising. While Irish Nationalists and Republicans view the Easter Rebellion as the pivotal event in the emergence of the modern Republic, Unionists and Loyalists in Northern Ireland are focussed on a different ‘blood sacrifice’ – that of thousands of Ulster Protestants in the 36th Ulster Division at the Battle of the Somme in July 1916.

Since 2012, Northern Ireland - already in the throes of a fragile Peace Process - has been challenged by the unrolling of a decade of historical anniversaries connected with the Irish Revolution of 1912-22. These include the signing of the Ulster Covenant in 1912, the rise of the opposing political armies – the Ulster Volunteers and Irish Volunteers - (1913), the Great War (1914), the 1916 Rising and

Partition (1920-22). Unsurprisingly, these controversial events still evoke vastly different reactions from the polarised communities that the International Fund for Ireland has been engaging with.

While the ‘Troubles’ have ended and a corner has been turned, feelings remain raw with no agreement in sight on how to deal with the recent past, let alone the events of a century ago. It was perhaps inevitable that political and cultural organisations would celebrate those historic events to which they felt an affinity. But it seemed clear from the outset that government, local councils, museums and heritage bodies had a responsibility to approach this ‘Decade of Anniversaries’ in a proactive, sensitive and inclusive manner which would build on the progress made by the politicians since 1998.

This would seek to place centennial events in context while promoting constructive dialogue and mutual respect. In a landmark series of public talks on the history of Ireland from 1912-22 in 2012, the organisers - the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council and Heritage Lottery Fund - stressed that we in Ireland must take care ‘to remember the future’ as well as the past.

In particular, any funded initiatives dealing with 1912 or 1916 must follow certain guiding principles: they must be based on the historical facts; seek to explode myths and propagandistic distortions and acknowledge differing narratives. Not only should the 1912 Ulster Covenant be seen in the context of the Home Rule crisis of 1912-14, but it should be pointed out that there were two opposing Covenants: the

In a whole range of imaginative ways individuals and interface communities have been enabled through Fund-supported initiatives to explore events outside their historical comfort zones.

iconic document signed by Carson and 218,000 Ulster Protestants, and a pro-Home Rule Protestant Covenant calling for 'friendship and reconciliation' in Ireland. It is also essential in any public debate to explore the links between Ulster Protestant resistance to Home Rule and Irish Nationalist reactions.

As the historian, Michael Laffan has noted, in rejecting the right of the British Parliament to impose an all-Ireland Home Rule on the Protestant North and launching an illegal army (the UVF), the Unionist leader, Sir Edward Carson 'rekindled the Fenian flame' of revolutionary nationalism - until then in abeyance. The secret Irish Republican Brotherhood praised the UVF which had (unwittingly) provided the necessary 'spark' for the launch of the Irish Volunteers and the subsequent Rising. Without the martial tramp of 'Carson's Army' in the North in 1913-14, the 1916 Rising could not have happened.

Despite the challenges and, indeed, dangers of 'remembering' such events in a divided society, one of the most positive and uplifting aspects of the 'Decade of Centenaries' in Northern Ireland has been the willingness of marginalised communities - on both sides of the politico-sectarian divide - to engage in shared activities and dialogue. Many of these events - talks, dramas, cultural workshops and expert historical tours - have been supported by the International Fund for Ireland.

This funding has, for example, enabled young people from Loyalist and Republican areas, including the Inter Estate Project in Antrim, to visit sites associated with '1916' in Dublin.



In Mid-Ulster the Sperrin Cultural Awareness Association has used support from the Fund to deliver an educational roadshow that examines both the Somme and Easter Rising Centenaries.

A collaboration between three Fund projects, Leafair/Carson/Ultoniae, will take people of both traditions to remembrance events with the aim of using historical events to deepen mutual understanding of the communities today.

In isolated border areas events highlighting the local impact of the Rising and the Great War have helped to ease tensions and promote vibrant cross-border and cross-community engagement. One of the Fund's Peace Impact projects led by Leitrim Orange Order has produced a book that uses World War I as a way to identify shared heritage and common narratives between communities in the county.

In a whole range of imaginative ways individuals and interface communities have been enabled through Fund-supported initiatives to explore events outside their historical comfort zones. A great Irish historian once wrote: 'To understand the past in Ireland is to cease to live in it'.

Thus, the centenary of 1916 affords an opportunity as well as a challenge: an opportunity to cut away the cobwebs of myth and misunderstanding and promote a more informed and balanced view of the past. History - long a source of division - is helping to break down ancient barriers and promote reconciliation.

Dr Éamon Phoenix is Principal Lecturer in History and Head of Lifelong Learning



at Stranmillis University College, Queen's University Belfast. He chaired the successful public lecture series in the Ulster Museum on Centenaries, Remembering the Future. He is a member of the Taoiseach's Expert Advisory Group on Centenaries and an historical consultant on community historical engagement.

TOP: Sperrin Cultural Awareness Association (SCAA) is using support from the Fund to deliver a roadshow examining both the Somme and Easter Rising Centenaries. Pictured is Darren Richardson, SCAA Development Officer

BOTTOM: The County Leitrim Orange Order Peace Impact Project published a book, 'Leitrim, A County At War', which used World War I to identify shared heritage and common narratives in the county.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Young People involved in the TRIAX Peace Walls Project pictured at a study visit to Dublin.

CASE STUDY:

Twaddell Woodvale Residents Association

The North Belfast interface between Twaddell Avenue and the Crumlin Road is one of the most complex and contentious areas of Northern Ireland.

In 2013, the area became the site of a Loyalist protest camp following a decision by the Parades Commission to restrict an Orange Order parade from marching past the largely Nationalist Ardoyne neighbourhood.

The protest, which is still ongoing, has had a detrimental impact on the residents living in Twaddell Avenue. Access to and from the area is restricted on a nightly basis, all meaningful cross-community work has ceased and, as the neighbourhood became stigmatised, some statutory agencies were disengaging.

Last year, the Twaddell Woodvale Residents Association gained £68,749 of support from the International Fund for Ireland for a Peace Impact Project that has operated adjacent to, but is not aligned with, the Twaddell protest camp. The project has established new links with statutory authorities and rebuilt confidence and capacity among residents with the aim of stimulating

positive transformation in the area. Colin Anderson Chairman of Twaddell Woodvale Residents Association acknowledges the difficulties of delivering a peace project along the interface. "There are unique challenges in this area that will take time to unlock, but it's important that the community has opportunities to develop and transform", he said. "This project is supporting residents to take part in honest and open conversations about difficult community issues and giving people access to skills that can change lives for the better."

In just 10-months residents have been driving a resurgence and secured positive and sustainable changes in their area. The project has also enrolled more than 300 people on a wide range of training and learning programmes. Its success has encouraged the Fund to recommit additional resources to extend and expand the work of the project for a further 12 months.

Colin says: "many of the courses delivered in our first phase were oversubscribed and we expect interest to be high again in the year ahead. This is a proud community that has been unfairly labelled because of circumstances beyond our control. Projects like ours are assisting residents to



address negative perceptions and reconnect with statutory authorities. Confidence is returning and there is a sense that we are beginning to collectively turn a corner."

Twaddell Woodvale Residents Association is a registered charity established in 1992 and works to promote all residents of the Twaddell and Upper Woodvale area and its environs by co-operating with the statutory authorities, voluntary and community organisations and residents.

ABOVE: International Fund for Ireland Chairman Dr Adrian Johnston Pictured with participants from the Twaddell Woodvale Residents Association Project Jonathan Kinner (left) and Kevin Hu.

CASE STUDY:

Tyrone, Derry and Donegal Action

The partition of Ireland and the recent conflict have had, and continue to have, a profound impact on the Protestant communities in Ireland's minority border counties.



Over several decades, a decline in the Protestant population and sense of vulnerability and isolation reinforced the belief that the community should keep their heads down and keep to themselves. The closure of cross-border roads during the Troubles led to further isolation with many cut off from their friends, neighbours and in some cases they would have to take a considerable journey to attend their regular church as the direct route may have been closed.

Albert Allen, Programmes Director for Tyrone, Derry and Donegal Action (TDDA) based in Raphoe, says Fund support is helping to break decades of self-imposed silence.

"When we designed this project we were conscious that there was a certain amount of 'silent sectarianism' in the county. Evidenced not by direct discrimination, but rather that the majority community can sometimes seem oblivious to the needs of the minority. This, together with pressures felt by Protestants in Donegal

during upsurges of violence in the North has led to a certain amount of "keeping their heads down".

TDDA recognises the difficulty in getting people to open up about the challenges facing the community. But, with Fund support, it has organised a number of workshops on such themes as Protestants and the Irish Language, men's health, parading, victims and survivors, the role of churches and cultural organisations in peace building and the attitudes of Protestants in the Republic. Ex-combatants also got involved in the process.

Albert says: "The story telling sessions, where victims and survivors related their experiences during the Troubles, were very powerful and quite dramatic. They showed what some people had come through and how terrible the community divisions were."

LEFT: A Tyrone, Derry and Donegal Action study visit in 2015.



Unheard Voices - Peace Impact Project

A ground-breaking anthology that captures 28 lost stories from women directly or indirectly affected by the Troubles was launched in Derry-Londonderry in March. Developed by the Unheard Voices Project with support from the International Fund for Ireland and Creggan Enterprises, 'Beyond the Silence' is the first publication to focus exclusively on the experiences of women who have suffered through the conflict but have been forgotten in the Peace Process. Since 2013, Unheard Voices has engaged with more than 1,500 women in the Derry-Londonderry area. Pictured (L-R) are Sharon Austin and Marie Newton, two of 28 women to recall their 'lost' stories, with the Unheard Voices Project Coordinator Carol Cunningham and International Fund for Ireland Chairman, Dr Adrian Johnston.

Sligo Young Enterprises – Peace Impact Programme

Residents and community representatives in Sligo recently came together in February to launch the third year of the 2016 Football in the Community programme. The innovative youth training project, administered by the Sligo Young Enterprises and supported by the International Fund for Ireland, has already successfully engaged with 60 young people aged between 16-25 years. The youth development project gives young people the chance to gain accreditation qualifications and become leaders in their communities. Pictured at the launch event are Garda David Clarke; Steve Feeney, Ballinamallard FC; Catherine Ryan, International Fund for Ireland; Ciaran Kelly, Football in the Community Sligo; and Sergeant Padraig Cunnane.



AMBIT

In March, community leaders from Northern Ireland and the southern border counties teamed up with US community groups to share exemplars of good practice as part of the annual AMBIT programme. Organised by the International Fund for Ireland and the U.S. Consulate in Belfast, the study visit selected 16 participants from projects supported through the Fund's Peace Impact Programme (PIP) and Peace Walls Programme (PWP) and engaged with community, voluntary and public sector organisations in Boston and Washington DC. The 2016 AMBIT group is pictured with guests at the Irish Embassy in Washington DC.

