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Removing Violence

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CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

During the 30 years of the conflict, hundreds of people suffered brutal attacks meted out as non-lethal justice by gangs within their own communities.

Commonly reported as 'punishment attacks' and carried out regularly on both sides of the sectarian divide, attacks often involved victims receiving life-changing injuries either by gunfire or blunt weapons.

While there has been a near cessation of organised bombings following the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement, beatings and forced exile have continued. Statistics from the Police Service of Northern Ireland show that the number of punishment-style shootings doubled in the last year and more than 300 attacks have taken place in the last four years.

Many of the victims and perpetrators have lived their adult lives in the Peace Process and each attack is a disturbing reminder of the damage that the conflict

continues to inflict on young lives.

This edition of Fund Focus looks at the issue of 'Removing Violence' and we are pleased to welcome the contribution of the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC), a newly formed watchdog that will monitor progress on tackling violent organised crime in Northern Ireland.

The establishment of the IRC is an important milestone in addressing some of the most challenging and intractable issues that impact upon communities. The Fund is playing its part in delivering a safe and stable society and we look forward to analysing future reports that the IRC will deliver.

Through our Peace Impact and Personal Youth Development programmes,

the Fund is creating opportunities for communities to disrupt the cycle of violence and weaken the grip of armed gangs. The risks that projects are taking, with our support, are paying dividends at a challenging time for communities and the Peace Process.

We can only do this because individuals and communities are willing to take the risks with us. The projects we have supported, and continue to support, should be commended for their bravery in providing strong leadership and stepping up to make a difference.

Dr Adrian Johnston
CHAIRMAN

International Fund for Ireland commits €4.6m/£3.8m to 32 community projects

In November, the International Fund for Ireland confirmed €4.6m/£3.8m of financial assistance that will be shared between 32 community projects in Northern Ireland and the southern border counties in Ireland.

The funding, approved at the organisation's recent Board Meeting in County Cavan, will see €2.2m/£1.9m shared among 15 projects that support vulnerable young people to re-engage in training and learning activities and reduce the risk of being drawn into violence, crime and addiction.

More than €1.6m/£1.3m will be shared among 12 Peace Impact projects that work to address difficult issues linked to the legacy of conflict and will engage with young people who are at risk of becoming involved in sectarian or anti-social activity.

A further €770,000/£641,000 has been allocated to five initiatives that are developing new dialogue on the future of Peace Walls.

Commenting on the announcement Dr Adrian Johnston, Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland, said: "We are pleased to award financial assistance to the 32 projects and commend them for their bravery and leadership in challenging environments. Sustained political deadlock, reduced public spending and Brexit have placed new pressures on marginalised communities. This allocation of funding is timely and supports urgent action at a community level.

"The risks that projects are taking are paying dividends at a difficult time for communities and the Peace Process. They have been active in creating new opportunities for people to engage in peacebuilding activities, transform lives and disrupt the cycle of violence."

He added, "our work over the decades has been conducted in parallel with a political process. While the crisis facing the political institutions in Northern Ireland cannot be underestimated, it remains our hope that the political parties will resolve once again to form a partnership government."

For further information about all the beneficiaries from the International Fund for Ireland's latest funding package visit: www.internationalfundforireland.com



ABOVE: Pictured at the International Fund for Ireland Board Meeting in County Cavan are Board Members (back row) Allen McAdam, Dr Adrian Johnston (Chairman of the Fund), Paddy Harte, Billy Gamble and (front row) Siobhan Fitzpatrick, Dorothy Clarke and Hilary Singleton.



Introduction to the Independent Reporting Commission

Under the Fresh Start Agreement of 2015 a vision for bringing about an end to paramilitarism in Northern Ireland was set out. These proposals included some of the most far reaching commitments ever taken to uphold the rule of law and end paramilitary activity.

The Agreement provided a policy framework and a range of measures by which the vision expressed in Fresh Start would be achieved, including a new body to report on progress towards reaching that goal. This body, the Independent Reporting Commission (the IRC), has been established by means of an International Agreement between the UK and Irish Governments and enabling legislation in Dublin and London.

The IRC's overarching objective is to promote progress towards ending paramilitary activity, support long term peace and stability and

enable stable and inclusive devolved Government in Northern Ireland.

In playing its part in the implementation of the Fresh Start vision for the "continued transformation of our society", the IRC will report on the progress to ending paramilitary activity, through criminal justice interventions alongside societal focused measures. Among its activities the IRC will monitor progress on the implementation of the Executive Action Plan on tackling paramilitary activity, criminality and organised crime, based on recommendations

from the report of a panel established by Fresh Start to develop a strategy to disband paramilitarism and to adopt a comprehensive, transformational approach in its delivery.

The Commissioners, who were nominated in December 2016, have been working together informally since January 2017. They are John McBurney, a County Down based solicitor, Monica McWilliams, former Human Rights Commissioner, Tim O'Connor, former Irish Consul General to New York, and Mitchell Reiss, former US envoy to Northern Ireland.

Welcoming the launch of the IRC on 29 September 2017 Commissioner McBurney, one of the NI Executive's appointees, stated that "While there have been challenges in recent times, the overall direction of travel in Northern Ireland remains positive, and the IRC aims to make a positive contribution."

Commissioner McWilliams, also appointed by the NI Executive, noted that the Commission "will focus on promoting and supporting practical and effective measures to help end the coercive control of paramilitaries and to bring about a more peaceful society. We have embarked on a long term initiative with the full backing of both governments, local organisations and communities and we look forward to producing our first report in the coming months."

Commissioner O'Connor, who was appointed by the Irish Government, welcomed the establishment of the IRC, noting that it places the ending of paramilitarism in a comprehensive policy framework for the first time.

Commissioner O'Connor added that this "is important in the long term development of society on the island of Ireland, as it makes the ending of paramilitarism the official policy of both Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive. I believe that the IRC can make a significant contribution to that journey."

Commissioner Reiss, appointed by the UK Government, added "I am grateful for the opportunity to continue to play a role in creating a safe and prosperous Northern Ireland with the establishment of the IRC. I hope the Commission's initiatives will help to bring about the continued transformation envisioned by the British and Irish Governments, and all those involved in the political process here in Northern Ireland"

The IRC will report annually on progress towards ending paramilitary activity with its reports highlighting good practice. It will also identify where improvement is required, by those delivering criminal justice interventions

and societal focused measures. In doing so, the IRC will consult with the Irish Government and the UK Government, the Northern Ireland Executive, local councils, relevant law enforcement agencies and other statutory agencies alongside communities and civic society organisations.

LEFT: The Independent Reporting Commission (left to right) John McBurney, Monica McWilliams, Tim O'Connor and Mitchell Reiss.

BELOW: A public protest against punishment attacks in Belfast.



CASE STUDY:

AMBIT – Exploring Transatlantic Lessons

In the nearly two decades that have followed the signing of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, much progress has been made in the journey towards reconciliation and political stability.



Yet, as a society we have yet to really begin to resolve the hurt and damage done by almost thirty years of the ‘Troubles’. Even if blatant sectarianism is in decline, the impact of violent conflict leaves an enduring legacy that can threaten the long-term well-being and competence of post-conflict communities.

Such trauma is not limited to Northern Ireland and the southern border counties and the sensitive process of resolving violence cannot take place in a vacuum. In 2003, the International Fund for Ireland with support from the US Consulate in Belfast developed AMBIT, an intensive transatlantic study programme. It brings together local community leaders from both sides of the border and engages with exemplar projects in the United States of America that address complex community issues.

Now in its 14th year, the programme has enabled more than 150 participants to benefit from specialised training and networking that reflect a broad annual theme. The 2017 theme related to supporting young people at risk.

The learning from this focused study visit is then invested back into participant’s fields of work that are closely aligned with

the Fund’s interests. For communities, the opportunities created by AMBIT have enabled the development and adoption of new intervention models to divert young people away from sectarianism and antisocial behaviour. Interlinked actions have also helped improve life outcomes, supported wider regeneration efforts and established innovative solutions to complex issues linked to the legacy of violence.

Many past participants have gone on to claim prominent roles in politics, civic life and community development and have gained a considerable base of expertise and influence. The accumulated learning and influence of the AMBIT network is significant and in September 2017 the first official programme Alumni event took place in Belfast, offering all past participants a chance to reconnect, establish new contacts and share experiences. Coordinated by the Washington Ireland Program, the inaugural event featured a guest address from Jake Sullivan – a former security adviser to Vice President Joe Biden – who invited guests to consider new approaches to influence policy before representatives of the 2017 AMBIT peer group shared reflections of the most recent study visits to New York, Philadelphia and Washington DC.

Key areas of learning for the 2017 group included the critical need for integrated ‘wrap around’ services – rather than piecemeal and siloed approaches – and a heightened understanding of trauma and its impact on individuals, communities and society over a prolonged period.

The impact of past violence on current and future generations was a central consideration for the group. They also explored the growing need for policy and services that are geared towards alleviating deprivation and the continuation of violence in a post-conflict setting.

The AMBIT Alumni is an important conduit that encourages richer and sustained collaboration on a cross-border, cross-community and transatlantic basis.

ABOVE: Pictured at the AMBIT Alumni event are (L-R) Sarah Lorimer, AMBIT participant, Billy Gamble, International Fund for Ireland Board Member; Jake Sullivan, former adviser to Vice President Joe Biden; and Andrea Myers AMBIT participant.



Community Policing Cluster Event

Civic leaders, voluntary groups, and law and justice agencies from both sides of the border came together at Crumlin Road Gaol in Belfast to examine how to create better partnerships between communities and police. The event explored how communities, An Garda Síochána and PSNI are building trust and addressing sensitive legacy issues. It also had a discussion on policing approaches and tackled a range of issues including; engagement with young people, lawful society and methods of transitional justice. Kabosh also performed the drama 'Green & Blue' which explores the painful and humorous issues faced by those who patrolled the border during the conflict. Pictured are; PSNI Assistant Chief Constable Chris Noble, An Garda Síochána Chief Superintendent Collette Quinn and IFI Chairman Dr Adrian Johnston.

Peace Walls Programme Attitudinal Survey

Six in-depth local studies commissioned by the Fund, which look at attitudes to Peace Walls were launched at Girdwood Community Hub in Belfast. The survey is the first of its kind to engage directly with those residents who are most likely to be impacted by changes due to their proximity to peace barriers in Belfast and in Londonderry/Derry. Community groups supported by the Fund's Peace Walls Programme carried out the surveys, which have been analysed and presented in a report for each area. Pictured at the launch are IFI Chairman Dr. Adrian Johnston and representatives from Imagine Project, North Belfast; Greater Whitewell Surgery, North Belfast; Duncairn Community Partnership, North Belfast; Twaddell Ardoyne Shankill Communities in Transition (TASCIT), North Belfast; Black Mountain Shared Space, West Belfast and BBI, Londonderry/ Derry.



Border Life 2017 – Peace Impact Programme

Participants of Diversity Youth Project from Dundalk Youth Services along with representatives from Louth Comhairle na nOg and Newry & Mourne Youth Council attended a 'Border Life 2017' seminar in Dundalk recently. The event marked the end of a three-year programme funded by the International Fund for Ireland under its Peace Impact Programme with Dundalk Youth Services and partners Ti Chulainn in Mullaghbawn. The project aims to bring together young people to develop skills and knowledge and attitudes in the areas of diversity and leadership. The seminar also explored the theme of living along the border, related issues and how to deal with them. Guest speaker at the seminar was former GAA star Oisín McConville who recalled his own experiences of growing up living along the border. Pictured at the seminar are; IFI Board Member Allen McAdam (left); Oisín McConville (right) and participants from the project.

