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The Boston Globe

**March** 24, 2002, Sunday ,THIRD EDITION

## CITY WEEKLY / CAMBRIDGE; AT HARVARD, FACE-TO-FACE ON THE TROUBLES 13TH SESSION HELD WITH IRISH LEADERS

**BYLINE:** By Eileen McCluskey, Globe Correspondent

**SECTION:** CITY WEEKLY; Pg. 9

**LENGTH:** 453 words

Forty men and women emerge from a classroom at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. They are leaders from 14 disparate political parties in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, and Great Britain, including Northern Ireland's Sinn Fein and its Progressive Unionist Party.

For a week, they've been discussing thorny issues in a neutral environment through a program sponsored by the **Project on Justice in Times of Transition**. Through sessions like this one, the Justice Project has made a name for itself in Northern Ireland.

Monica McWilliams, a leader of the centrist Women's Coalition Party and a past participant, calls the project "the unsung hero of our peace process."

"They get us to see that terrible conflicts have happened in other countries, that the other countries' leaders saw their way through and implemented peace agreements," she said. "We have to do this, too."

"They have us all in one room, which is quite spectacular, given our history," said David Ervine, chief negotiator for the Progressive Unionist Party.

The March 11-15 program brought in leaders like former Ecuadorian president Jamil Mahuad, who spoke about how he might have done better when he tried to affect basic economic changes there - efforts that got him ousted in a military coup. Participants were also immersed in the classic Kennedy School of Government case study method, discussing real-life situations from other countries that dealt with situations parallel to those faced by Northern Ireland today.

It was the Justice Project's 13th program for the area over the last six years. Created in 1992 as part of the New York-based Foundation for a Civil Society, the project is now an initiative of Harvard University. It brings leaders from distressed countries like Guatemala, South Africa, and Israel together with those from other troubled nations that found their way to more peaceful times.

Cecilia Keaveney, a member of the Republic of Ireland's Fianna Fail party, said she was glad she came. "We've got the [Good Friday] agreement," she says. "Now we need the leadership skills to ensure the agreement's successful implementation. Through this program, I was challenged to ask myself whether what I'm doing contributes to the success of the peace process, or to the mess."

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WITH IRISH LEADERS The Boston Globe March 24, 2002, Sunday

"We don't push a political agenda," said project co-founder Timothy Phillips. "Instead, we create a neutral forum where people can feel safe to speak their mind, knowing that what they say will not leave the room."

"We're not here with mandates to resolve the issues," Sinn Fein member Conor Murphy says. "We're here to stand on the balcony and look down at the dance, to get a wider perspective."

**LOAD-DATE:** March 30, 2002

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

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