



Transition

INITIATIVE REPORT

COMMUNITY AND GOVERNANCE IN A TIME OF TRANSITION

BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND

DECEMBER 9 - 10, 1999

On December 9 and 10, 1999 The Project on Justice in Times of Transition and the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust (NIVT) co-sponsored an exciting and timely conference in Belfast entitled, *Community and Governance in a Time of Transition* for over 250 political and community leaders from throughout Northern Ireland. The two-day program was designed to address a growing gap in communication between community and political representatives in Northern Ireland and to provide a neutral setting in which they could identify common concerns and lay the foundations for future cooperative work.

The conference was held one week after the new Executive was formed and self-governance was returned to Northern Ireland for the first time in 25 years. This historic event, which followed weeks of difficult negotiations between Sinn Fein and the Ulster Unionist Party on the issue of devolution and the creation of new institutions of governance, provided a particularly auspicious backdrop to the conference. The breakthrough that led to the creation of the Executive in early December was made possible only after the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was promised the establishment of inclusive governing institutions and in exchange agreed to send a representative to the decommissioning panel headed by General De Chastelain. During the week prior to the conference in early December, 10 ministers were appointed and the National Assembly began meeting on a regular basis for the first time. With the new Executive in place and the IRA committed to devolution, important steps toward guaranteeing peace in Northern Ireland had been made. Politicians in the National Assembly now confront the real challenge of formulating policies to address the many problems facing Northern Ireland as a result of more than 30 years of intractable violence. As great distrust still exists throughout Northern Ireland, and some members of the National Assembly

continue to openly oppose the peace process, it will be particularly important for politicians to work closely with community leaders to ensure that their legislation reflects the needs of the communities and finds support among them. The *Community and Governance in a Time of Transition* conference provided a unique venue for politicians and community leaders to acknowledge the urgent need to work together and an opportunity for them to prioritize issues of concern for Northern Ireland, to clarify their respective roles in this process, and to identify the institutional mechanisms needed to guarantee future collaboration.

METHODOLOGY

The Project on Justice in Times of Transition was first approached with the idea of convening a conference on the growing gap between politicians and community leaders over two years ago. Rapid developments toward peace at the higher echelons underlined the need for the consolidation of peace on all levels in Northern Ireland, and The Project's past programming involving both politicians and community leaders situated it well to guarantee participation from both sectors. In addition, The Project's methodology of bringing together leaders to discuss common dilemmas faced in peace building processes would be used in this case to suggest that the gap between politicians and community leaders in Northern Ireland is not a unique phenomenon.

Planning for the *Community and Governance in Times of Transition* conference was begun in collaboration with the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust in late 1998 with the establishment of a steering committee to discuss how best to ensure broad participation from all communities and to begin the design of an inclusive program. The committee met regularly throughout the spring of 1999 and included:

Paul Arthur (University of Ulster), **Ciaran de Baroid** (NIVT), **May Blood** (Greater Shankill Partnership), **Kate Campbell** (NIVT), **Reg Empey** (Ulster Unionist Party), **Kate Fearon** (Northern Ireland Women's Coalition), **Teresa Kelly** (Derry Women's Center), **Paddy Logue** (Area Development Management/Combat Poverty Agency), **Felicity McCarthy** (NIVT), **Mitchel McLaughlin** (Sinn Fein), **Gary McMichael** (Ulster Democratic Party), **Monica McWilliams** (Northern Ireland Women's Coalition), **Conor Murphy** (Sinn Fein), **Sean Neeson** (Alliance Party), **Paul Nolan** (Workers' Educational Association), **Tommy O'Reilly** (Springfield Intercommunity Development Project), **Alan Sheeran** (Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust) and **Joanne Vance** (Women into Politics Project). Several of their meetings took place at the parliament and representatives of all political parties were invited to attend.

The main objective of the conference was to initiate a dialogue between politicians and community leaders, and therefore the program was designed to include presentations by international speakers as well as separate working-group sessions. Six distinguished speakers from Canada, El Salvador, Israel, Slovakia and South Africa described the experiences of community leaders and politicians in their countries. There were also formal responses to the international presentations by members of the Northern Irish community. During the working-group sessions, which met twice between the formal conference presentations, participants were asked to discuss a specific set of questions designed to identify the hopes and fears associated with the peace process as well as possible mechanisms for collaborative work between elected officials and community leaders. Every group consisted of approximately 20 people, including a broad array of community groups, politicians and representatives from business, trade unions and academia. Members of each group were pre-selected in order to ensure balanced participation, and discussions were co-facilitated by a political leader and a social activist in order to stimulate dialogue. The exercise was designed to encourage communication between politicians and community leaders on concrete issues, to facilitate relationships between them and to assist them in formulating strategies for working together on an inclusive program for social and economic change. Finally, the working-group discussions were summarized and reported back to the conference floor for general consideration. This format, combining presentations and working-group sessions, allowed participants in the conference to learn about the experiences of other

countries and to apply these lessons in their discussion of the situation in Northern Ireland.

PARTICIPANTS

The working-group sessions, along with numerous opportunities to mingle informally over coffee breaks and meals, allowed participants to network and discuss issues raised in the course of the conference. The NIVT and The Project were able to attract a broad spectrum of community actors and to secure attendance of representatives from most political parties in Northern Ireland. Representatives of the Alliance Party, the Democratic Unionist Party, the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition, the Progressive Unionist Party, Sinn Fein, the Social Democratic and Labour Party, the Ulster Democratic Party and the Ulster Unionist Party attended the conference. Key members of community groups from throughout Northern Ireland were present as well, a representative selection of the breadth of that attendance would include: the Ballybeen Community Forum, the Bogside & Brandywell Initiative, the Ex-Prisoners' Interpretive Center, the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, Survivors of Trauma the Rural Development Council, the Tar Isteach, and the Women into Politics Group.

The international speakers, who were carefully selected to represent both the community and political leaders point of view, were a diverse and powerful group as well. The international presenters included:

Kim Campbell, Canada

Kim Campbell served as Canada's nineteenth Prime Minister and was the first female to hold the post. She previously held cabinet portfolios as Minister of State for Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Minister of Justice and Attorney General, and Minister of National Defense and Veterans' Affairs. She was the first woman to hold the Justice and Defense portfolios in Canada. Ms. Campbell is currently Consul General of Canada in Los Angeles. She is also Chair of the Council of Women World Leaders at the John F. Kennedy School of Government and a Senior Fellow of The Gorbachev Foundation in North America.

Naomi Chazan, Israel

Naomi Chazan is a member of the Israeli Parliament representing the Meretz Coalition. She is currently Deputy Speaker of the Parliament and serves on the Education Committee and on the Committee on the Status of Women. Former posts include membership

on the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committees. Until her election to the parliament, she was chair of the Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She has been a Visiting Professor of Government at Harvard University and she has lectured and written extensively on comparative politics, women and politics, Arab-Israeli relations, and African politics.

Brandon Hamber, South Africa

Brandon Hamber is a clinical psychologist based at the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in Johannesburg, South Africa, where he coordinates the Transition and Reconciliation Unit. Working mainly in the area of violence and trauma, and currently coordinating the Center's project on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Hamber's work has focused on the psychological implications of the TRC, reconciliation as a theoretical and applicable concept, the truth recovery processes and comparative research on violence and crime in countries in transition.

Marek Kapusta, Slovakia

Marek Kapusta is Program Officer at Nadacia pre Obciansku Spolocnost and Executive Director of Global ReLeaf Slovakia Foundation. He is also Project Coordinator of *Rock Volieb Export* in Slovakia. From March to December 1998 he acted as National Campaign Coordinator for *Rock Volieb 98*, an initiative designed to encourage people to vote in the elections in Slovakia. Mr. Kapusta is currently involved in exporting similar initiatives to other countries. He is a consultant to the Freedom of Choice Coalition in Ukraine and Glass 99 in Croatia. Prior to his involvement with *Rock Volieb* Mr. Kapusta worked for the International Republican Institute as an election observer in Ukraine and for the OSCE as a Polling Supervisor in Bosnia.

Roelf Meyer, South Africa

Roelf Meyer is a United Democratic Movement Member of Parliament who has played a key role in South Africa's post-apartheid transition. He was elected to Parliament in 1979 and subsequently acted as Minister of Constitutional Development, Justice, Communication, and Provincial Affairs. He was the De Klerk Government's Chief Negotiator at the Multi Party Negotiating Forum which led to a national consensus on a new South African constitution and the historic elections of April 1994 which followed thereafter. Meyer is currently Deputy President of the United Democratic Movement.

Saul Suster, El Salvador

Saul Suster is Senior Advisor to President Francisco Flores of El Salvador as well as Senior Advisor to former President Alfredo Cristiani in the latter's capacity as president of the ruling ARENA party. During the Cristiani administration Mr. Suster was Ambassador at Large and in that role acted as direct liaison between the government of El Salvador and the US, the UN and all Latin American administrations. He was also Minister of Communications from 1989 to 1994 and Senior Advisor to President Cristiani on the implementation of the Truth Commission recommendations between 1992 and 1994. Additionally, Mr. Suster is a businessman and co-owner of the Omnisport Company in El Salvador.

INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

In the course of the two-day program a total of six presentations were made by international speakers. The talks raised many of the important themes that pervaded the general discussion during the meeting and defined the overall tone of the event. Roelf Meyer and Naomi Chazan, who spoke during the first day, launched the dialogue by emphasizing the need for collaborative work between community groups and politicians. As key actors involved in negotiation processes, their descriptions of their respective experiences in South Africa and Israel greatly inspired many of the participants. Both talks focused on the distinct roles different actors play during the transition, and these presentations helped shape and direct the discussions that were held in the separate working-groups.

The contributions by Brandon Hamber from South Africa, Marek Kapusta from Slovakia and Saul Suster from El Salvador focused more specifically on distinct problems faced by transitional societies, such as how to confront the past, how to keep the political process issue-based, and how to set priorities for economic development. Their presentations directly addressed some of the explicit concerns identified during the working-group sessions as important issues that needed to be deliberated upon and carefully approached in Northern Ireland.

Kim Campbell, the former Prime Minister of Canada, closed the conference on an optimistic note with her discussion of the institutional mechanisms used successfully in Canada to manage cultural differences. Participants were excited to hear about

the Canadian experience as Kim Campbell pointed to specific mechanisms that might be useful in effectively managing distinct and divergent identities in Northern Ireland.

Risks and Opportunities: Managing the Transition of Peace-Building

Dermot Nesbitt of the Ulster Unionist Party introduced Roelf Meyer, member of the South African parliament, who began by congratulating the Northern Irish participants for having reached this important phase of the latest agreements. Mr. Meyer visited Belfast for the first time during The Project's first conference there in 1995. He recalled that at that time no one believed that Northern Ireland would achieve self governance so quickly. Mr. Meyer took the occasion to caution that the hard work toward sustainable peace had just begun. He proceeded by outlining three issues that had to be addressed in order to establish sustainable peace in South Africa and that he felt were relevant to the current situation in Northern Ireland. These issues were: decommissioning, the political process, and the role of civil society.

Meyer noted that for months the peace process had been stalled in Northern Ireland because the Unionists feared that the IRA still had access to weapons and would continue to use these at will. The problem of decommissioning was a thorny issue in South Africa as well, one that took several years of careful talks to resolve. Mr. Meyer had been Defense Minister during the negotiation period in South Africa, and he advised the participants to keep two important points in mind with respect to the decommissioning issue in Northern Ireland:

- ♦ It is vitally important to establish direct negotiation between the fighting actors in order to create a sustainable peace. In South Africa direct interaction was established, first secretly and then formally, between the South African Defense Force and the paramilitary wing of the African National Congress - bitter enemies who had fought each other for over 20 years. These meetings laid the groundwork for the establishment of trust necessary to stop the armed struggle.
- ♦ In South Africa it would have been unthinkable to leave the issue of decommissioning solely in the hands of generals. Therefore, Mr. Meyer suggested that politicians in Northern Ireland should become directly involved with General De Chastelain's International Disarmament Commission in order to show that they are willing to take some responsibility for implementing any agreement that might be reached in the process.

The new government in Northern Ireland was just beginning to govern and, as Mr. Meyer reminded the audience, the tone of the debates in the National Assembly would determine the path of the political process. Mr. Meyer offered three lessons he learned in South Africa with respect to the political process and the role of civil society:

- ♦ There should not be a time limit in the agreement regarding the period for joint governance. There is none in the Good Friday Agreement and Mr. Meyer urged the audience to make sure it stays that way. In South Africa, President F.W. De Klerk withdrew from the Government of National Unity three years before its prescribed mandate ended, and Mr. Meyer felt that this destabilized the process.
- ♦ It is very important for the politicians to take the moral high-ground by maintaining a positive outlook of the future. In South Africa their optimistic attitude set a standard and resulted in the extremist groups marginalizing themselves through their own pessimistic language.
- ♦ It is similarly essential for civil society as a whole to take the moral high-ground so that politicians remain committed to peace. The voice of civil society was crucial at several difficult junctures in the South African peace process, and it played a pivotal role in getting the politicians back to the negotiating table, finally resulting in the peace agreement of September 1991.

Mr. Meyer encouraged the politicians present at the conference to make sure that the issues now being discussed in the National Assembly were taken to the community level for feedback and discussion. He also urged civil society leaders to remain actively involved in the peace process. Finally, Mr. Meyer emphasized that throughout this process, it is essential for both political and community leaders to create new role models that will help sustain the peace.

Mr. Meyer's comments were welcomed by the participants at the conference and many questions followed his talk. Participants were particularly curious to hear more about how politicians managed to marginalize extremist groups and the role that civil society plays today in South Africa.

Bridging the Gap Between Community and Political Leaders

In the second presentation, Naomi Chazan, Deputy Speaker of the Israeli parliament, spoke to the conference participants about the lessons learned in Israel in its peace process and about the importance of maintaining collaboration between community

groups, civil society and politicians during the crucial period after a peace agreement has been signed. At the beginning of her talk she summarized: "...the key to the success of the implementation of the agreements...is this ability of civil society and communities to cooperate, collaborate and coordinate with political leadership. If there is not civil society/politician coordination this crucial stage is going to fail." Unfortunately this simple motto was not followed in Israel, and as a result a bitter and painful lesson was learned. As Naomi Chazan explained, there were three cycles of relations between civil groups and politicians in Israel. The first cycle involved close collaborative work that sought the establishment of a peace agreement. This cycle ended with the signing of the Oslo declaration. The second cycle began with the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and was characterized by very little cooperative work between politicians and civic groups. This allowed the opposition to gain the upper hand and win the next elections in Israel, derailing the peace process. The third cycle began with the recent election of Prime Minister Ehud Barak, and it represents a new opportunity for community leaders and politicians to work together to establish lasting peace in Israel.

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—Naomi Chazan, Israel

Given that Northern Ireland had just created the new Executive, one of the main objectives of Naomi Chazan's talk was to stimulate thought about why the close relationship between politicians and civil society fell apart in Israel at a similar point. Her experience in Israel suggested several specific reasons:

- ♦ The concerns of community leaders and politicians tend to be different once an agreement is reached. Politicians are interested in changing the political ground rules and their concerns are short-term, while community leaders and civic groups are interested in asserting rights, promoting interests, and addressing long-term issues. Accordingly, politicians and civic leaders work in different time frames.
- ♦ Politicians and civic leaders tend to drift apart after peace agreements are achieved, because tensions decrease and organizations undergo

transitions in staff and leadership as they are no longer intensely focused on a single goal.

Naomi Chazan warned that a common danger confronting all actors at such a time is the temptation to celebrate and an inability to adjust to new roles. She pleaded for politicians and civic groups in Northern Ireland to resist the temptation to rejoice and urged instead that they keep working towards peace and take on distinct and different roles while working together to implement the points of the Good Friday Agreement. More specifically, Naomi Chazan reminded the participants to keep in mind that: "[Political] leaders implement, but the ideas and the planning have to come from the community."

These issues resonated deeply with both politicians and community leaders attending the conference. During working-group sessions prior to Naomi Chazan's talk, civic leaders in particular had articulated great uncertainty about how to relate to politicians within the new political institutions and feared that they would be left out of the decision-making process. Several activists from victims groups voiced concern that the problems of victims would not be given priority in the new government and that funding would be cut.

Politicians, on the other hand, expressed apprehension that too many issues were on the table and that they could not address all of them at once. Both groups exhibited unease about what the priorities should be and how to go about defining them.

Toward the end of her talk Naomi Chazan suggested five types of activities to help create strategies for approaching the difficult issues confronting Northern Ireland. Some of these activities have been utilized in Israel. Others, to her regret, have not yet been adopted.

- ♦ Politicians and civic groups need to create a vision for the future. It is very important to have organized thinking with involvement of actors on all levels about what the future should look like.
- ♦ Spaces have to be created where politicians and civic leaders can meet and share ideas.

- ♦ Institutional mechanisms for coordination between politicians and community groups need to be established in order to ensure collaborative work.
- ♦ Political rotation is a good mechanism to ensure communication between politicians and civic groups. Community leaders should consider running for elected positions and vice versa.
- ♦ All actors have to be very cautious with their use of words. The wrong language can lead to setbacks in the peace process. Ambiguity and self-restraint are important virtues that help to ensure that the peace process continues.

Naomi Chazan's presentation energized the conference. Her description of events in Israel and her analysis of why the peace process went awry helped participants to grasp the continued importance of collaborative work between politicians and civil society. In addition, the strategies she suggested to bridge gaps between community and political leaders dominated the discussions in many of the working-group sessions that followed her talk.

The Challenge of Embedding Peace

Reconciliation and the need to break the silence of the past were issues identified during the separate working-group sessions as particularly critical to Northern Ireland, and thus Brandon Hamber's talk was eagerly anticipated. Many of the conference participants were interested to learn more about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: what it did and did not do for South Africa, and whether it could act as a model for Northern Ireland. There was a clear recognition that the pain of the past needed to be confronted, but great uncertainty regarding how to go about this in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Hamber, of the Center for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation in Johannesburg, confirmed that the past cannot be escaped and needs to be confronted. He also acknowledged that the real issue is how to manage this confrontation with the past. Referring to his experience with the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), he outlined several dangers involved in trying to embed peace by confronting the past:

- ♦ It is easy to conflate the needs of society with the needs of individuals, but they are not the same.
- ♦ Society and individuals need to recognize that healing is complicated and that it is not as

simplistic as politicians make it sound. It often takes two generations or more to overcome a painful past.

- ♦ Truth should not be confused with closure. Truth often brings more pain at first.
- ♦ Reparations are a double-edged sword. They can never really be sufficient. Only the victims can determine when there is closure. At the same time everyone must recognize that only a small window of opportunity exists during which society is willing to deal with facing the past.
- ♦ Often forgiveness and reconciliation are understood as one and the same, but they are actually two distinct things. It is important to acknowledge anger and to find out if expressions of desire for revenge are legitimate.
- ♦ Trauma work is often incorrectly associated with the notion of dealing with the past. Victims are sometimes raising important questions about justice, rather than simply expressing traumatic experiences and wounded feelings that need to be healed. There is an important difference.

Mr. Hamber encouraged conference participants to think about these points carefully as Northern Ireland begins to construct mechanisms for dealing with its past. He felt strongly that they should not embark on developing a truth commission that was a carbon copy of the South African TRC. According to Mr. Hamber, the South African truth commission was effective at addressing vertical violence (what the state did to its people), but it was not very good at addressing horizontal violence (violence within communities) of the kind found in Northern Ireland. In his opinion, Northern Ireland would do better to create a homegrown mechanism to deal with its past, one that evolves out of the many victims groups and civic initiatives already in existence. More generally, it was Mr. Hamber's impression that there was little consensus on this issue in Northern Ireland and that while many wanted to hear the truth from the other side, most were still not willing to give their version of the truth in exchange.

Mr. Hamber's presentation did not render the easy answers some had hoped to hear, but instead provided food for thought. He made it apparent that the process of confronting the past was just at its beginning in Northern Ireland and that more debate would be needed before institutional solutions to address the past could be found.

Developing Strategies for Social Change

Marek Kapusta, Program Officer at Nadacia pre Obciansku Spolocnost, began his talk by explaining that 1998 was a critical year for Slovakia. Since the division of Czechoslovakia in 1992, the political situation in Slovakia had become increasingly dire. Despite a very active civic sector, Vladimir Meciar, a leader from the communist old guard, remained in power and continually prevented the establishment of a free and open society, a step that needed to be taken to prepare for Slovakia's eventual entrance into the European Union. Many voters, especially among the young, had become increasingly skeptical and apathetic. Recognizing that the youth represented a progressive force, and one that also could be turned into a large voting block for change, Mr. Kapusta's organization created *Rock Volieb*, an initiative to encourage voter turn-out among the youth during the 1998 Slovak elections.

Rock Volieb pursued a focused strategy to combat apathy among the population and sought to make voting seem "cool", especially among the young. As Kapusta explained, the media in Slovakia were free and open, but lacked diversity of opinion. As is sometimes the case in societies in transition, the media in Slovakia tended to appeal heavily to emotions and personalities. One of *Rock Volieb's* main goals was to diversify the information presented by the media and to force the election campaign to become more issue-based. In addition, the hope was that a more issue-based media would compel politicians to become more accountable. A second goal was to ensure the fairness of the electoral process, and *Rock Volieb* trained over 2,000 people to monitor elections. The results were extremely rewarding. Not only was Meciar removed from office, but there was a high voter turn-out and 80% of the eligible youth participated in the elections.

The conference participants were fascinated by Mr. Kapusta's talk. While the Slovak experience seemed quite different from the Northern Irish, both societies confront the problem of political disillusionment and apathy among its youth. Many participants felt that a reintegration of young people into the political process was important for creating a new vision for Northern Ireland and, more importantly, for ensuring that this vision is realized. In addition, there was a general recognition that issue-based politics would be important to maintain in order to prevent the peace process from descending into an emotional discussion, one which

would only serve to exacerbate existing divisions in Northern Ireland.

Developing a Strategy for Economic Development and Restructuring

Economic restructuring and the creation of new jobs in Northern Ireland were among the most urgent issues identified in discussion groups. While El Salvador may have initially seemed to conference participants an unlikely model, Saul Suster's elucidation of his experiences acting as advisor to President Cristiani on issues related to economic development and reconciliation in the early 1990s appealed to many at the conference.

The early 1990s brought an end to 12 years of cruel civil war in El Salvador. The country had been run by military rulers backed by the US government since the 1930s, but the end of the Cold War cut off arms supplies and finally enabled negotiations to conclude the war. The challenge confronting the new administration at that time was to create a lasting peace and to restructure the economy in a way that would allow the country to prosper while at the same time embedding peace. The new administration learned quickly that economic development was vital. As Mr. Suster put it: "War is expensive, but peace is even more expensive."

Much-needed investment would only come if peace was guaranteed, and therefore the government of El Salvador had to address the issue of the past. A general amnesty was proclaimed in order to begin the healing process and transcendence of deep divisions in El Salvador. The motto was: *Forgive, but do not forget*. In addition, several policies were implemented to ensure the re-integration of former combatants into society. These included establishing re-training programs that built on the skills fighters had developed during the war and setting up good pension plans for older generals. As in Northern Ireland, one of the difficult issues confronting El Salvador after the war was the issue of decommissioning. While it took several years to solve, El Salvador ran a successful program in which guns were bought back from former fighters and civilians. Finally, an extensive social service plan was developed and efforts were made to provide equal access to it.

As Mr. Suster described, in order to pay for these services El Salvador needed to attract investment. The economy was opened up and state-owned companies

"War is expensive, but peace is even more expensive."

-Saul Suster, El Salvador

were privatized. American and foreign companies were guaranteed status equal to that of local companies. At the same time, the new administration appealed to the many El Salvadorans who fled to the US during the war to reinvest their fortunes in the country of their origin.

Mr. Suster's emphasis on the need to see economic restructuring, the establishment of a social service net and the confrontation of the past as an interrelated process made a strong impression on the participants. A similar sentiment was shared by many in the working-group sessions and some expressed fears that these issues were not being addressed adequately in Northern Ireland precisely because they were often approached as separate issues by the media and politicians.

Acknowledging Differences, Overcoming Divisions

As many of the preceding speakers had talked about their struggle confronting specific issues faced by societies in transition, Kim Campbell, the former Prime Minister of Canada, used the Canadian experience to describe some possible mechanisms for addressing the challenges of governance that are not directly related to civil conflict, but exist within the context of the cultural tensions. Canada's institutional framework has both mitigated and reinforced the divisions Canada lives with today, and Ms. Campbell felt strongly that Canada's experience could provide several significant lessons for Northern Ireland.

First, Ms. Campbell suggested that the Canadian policy of equalization could act as a model for Northern Ireland. This policy seeks to provide a balanced redistribution of wealth to all regions of Canada, and it has been used successfully to get around regional differences related to sectarian divisions. Through the policy of equalization, every province and every city, irrespective of the vitality of its economy, is able to provide a minimum level of social service to its population. As a result, access to quality education is much more widespread in Canada than, for example, in the US. The equalization of regional and city resources serves to decrease competition between groups on a local level and Kim Campbell pointed out that such a policy could help unify the divided religious communities of Northern Ireland.

Ms. Campbell also urged participants to think carefully about the structure of the education system in Northern Ireland and how it affects the teaching of history, especially the history of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. She described eloquently how Canadians today are still learning very different

versions of the history of their own country and how this has sometimes led to significant communication difficulties. These competing histories are in part the result of the institutions that the Canadian state created early on to acknowledge cultural differences between Canada's two oldest cultural groups, the French and British. In order to avoid clashes between the French and British the Canadian educational system was set up along denominational (Catholic and Protestant) and linguistic (French and English) lines. In addition, direct administrative responsibility for anything that had cultural or linguistic salience was left to the regions to manage. While this system mitigated conflict and helped the French to maintain their language and culture, it also reinforced differences and ghettoized the language communities from each other.

In addition, Ms. Campbell pointed out that the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms is currently being considered in Northern Ireland as a mechanism through which to combine a written bill of rights with parliamentary supremacy. While the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms has greatly empowered the courts, Kim Campbell explained that it has also made Canadian political culture less inclusive. Primarily, in her opinion, it has led to a "fetish for codification" in Canada, meaning that because rights are written down and specified, someone or some group will necessarily be left out and feel discriminated against. Also, the Charter of Rights tends to allow parliament to sidestep issues by leaving difficult decisions to the courts. The courts, however, can only make judgements and not debate the different sides of issues. Ms. Campbell indicated that Northern Ireland consider this carefully before adopting a new bill of rights.

Finally, Ms. Campbell suggested that Northern Ireland take a close look at its patronage culture. In countries where there is a deep sectarian divide such as in Northern Ireland, politicians and administrators have to be very aware of their own biases and work transparently in order to avoid unnecessary aggravation and conflict.

Ms. Campbell's presentation ended the conference on a very positive note. Her description of the Canadian political structure made many participants realize that there are institutional mechanisms for managing conflicting cultures and that it is now their task to create the right ones for Northern Ireland.

RESPONSE TO INTERNATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

As was hoped by the conference planners, the presentations by the international speakers helped to

convey that the mistrust and uncertainty that persisted between political leaders and community groups in Northern Ireland was not particular to this one case, but rather was a common phenomenon encountered in peace processes. Brief presentations by **Jim Dougal** from the European Commission Office, **Chris Gibson** of the Confederation of British Industry, **Seamus McAleavey** of the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, and **Inez McCormack** of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions served to articulate the Northern Irish response to the international contributions.

The speakers from Northern Ireland concluded that many societies in transition confront similar problems related to "governance in transition" and that luckily there are many models to learn from. In their assessment, the challenge for Northern Ireland was for political and community leaders to learn how to use the new institutions in partnership to address such important issues as economic restructuring, breaking the silence of the past, ensuring issue-based politics, and maintaining a balanced culture of equal rights for everyone. The fact that a very mixed group of people were gathered at the conference - including politicians and community leaders from all parts of the political spectrum - was perceived to be a good sign, one reflecting a genuine potential for collaboration.

Jim Dougal from the European Commission Office also emphasized the need for partnership between politicians in the National Assembly and community groups. His brief presentation primarily addressed the issue of funding for community groups and he assured everyone that the European Union recognizes the continued need for financial support in order to sustain the transition to peace in Northern Ireland. As many community leaders had raised the issue of continued funding in the working-groups, participants at the conference were interested to hear more detail about the European Union's plans. Inez McCormack spoke for many in the audience when she emphasized that without funding, the ability of community groups to remain active in the peace process would be greatly reduced.

WORKING GROUPS

The topics and discussions which grew out of the presentations were reflected in all 12 of the separate working-groups that met twice in the course of the conference. In addition to the themes raised through the presentations, the working-groups addressed a set of specific questions designed to identify the key issues of concern in Northern Ireland and how best to approach

them. The specific questions the working-groups were asked to discuss were as follows:

- ♦ What are the main issues currently facing Northern Ireland and the constituencies within it?
- ♦ What are the fears and challenges that are related to these issues?
- ♦ What are the hopes and aspirations that people hold?
- ♦ What mechanisms can be developed to facilitate communities, social partners and politicians to work on a co-operative basis?
- ♦ What issues can be prioritized for collaborative work?

The questions helped to focus the discussions of the 12 working-groups, the liveliness and productiveness of which exceeded all expectations. Participants were clearly eager to share their concerns with the other members of the working-group.

Avila Kilmurray, Director of the NIVT, and **Paul Arthur**, Professor of Politics at the University of Ulster, summarized for the conference body the discussions held in the 12 separate working-groups. Both noted that there was a definite optimism among conference participants about the recent political changes in Northern Ireland. Several groups expressed great confidence that the Northern Ireland Assembly will survive political challenges and felt that the broader society was ready to assist in building the peace. Others, however, remained more cautious and worried that the issue of decommissioning might still disrupt the process. In their summary Avila Kilmurray and Paul Arthur set forth the priority issues identified by the discussion groups as follows:

- ♦ All groups expressed concern about economic restructuring and growth. Prosperity was the promise of peace, and there is a great need for sustainable jobs and an end to high unemployment. Some groups worried that social issues (such as childcare) would be overlooked in the economic restructuring process and that privatization would take precedence over social welfare concerns.
- ♦ The issue of equality was raised in several workshops. Participants felt that there needs to be a recognition that Northern Ireland is a diverse, pluralistic society with many identities (not just Catholic and Protestant). All groups need to be given an equal sense of belonging.
- ♦ There was a general recognition that the physical and mental divisions (peace walls and sectarian

attitudes) that exist in Northern Ireland needed to be talked about and broken down. Members of the groups agreed that great mistrust still exists between the communities in Northern Ireland, and while the confrontation with the past will not be an easy one, it is necessary.

- ♦ Many groups raised issues closely related to the outcomes of the violence. (What should be done about victims of violence? How should Northern Ireland confront the issue of ex-prisoners and their reintegration into society?)
- ♦ The issue of funding and whether European Union funds would continue to be extended to the community and voluntary sector was raised.
- ♦ There was quite a bit of discussion about the new political process and the importance of maintaining a partnership between politicians and community leaders. Many were concerned that the political process remain inclusive and not attempt to exclude grassroots and voluntary sector organizations.

Although very little time remained for a thorough discussion of how concretely to go about addressing the issues confronting Northern Ireland in a collaborative way, Avila Kilmurray and Paul Arthur found that several specific institutions and priorities were identified by many of the working-groups. First of all, the workshop groups almost universally emphasized the need for partnership between different groups of society and recognized the urgency for politicians and community activists to work together more closely. Second, the social partnership of various sectors of society in the Republic of Ireland and their National Economic and Social Forum were mentioned as possible models for Northern Ireland. Third, the Civic Forum, a new institutional body created to facilitate dialogue with community groups in Northern Ireland, was discussed at length in all working-groups. While there was general confusion about the mandate and scope of the Civic Forum, many hoped that it would indeed act as a venue for politicians and civic groups to work collaboratively. Finally, there was a general recognition that community leaders need to maintain frequent and direct contact with politicians and to report back to their communities on a regular basis in order to facilitate communication between the local and national levels.

While many participants wished that there had been more time for discussion, most agreed that the working-group sessions were very helpful in initiating a dialogue between politicians and community leaders. As this conference represented one of the first efforts to bring

politicians together with civic groups in Northern Ireland, it provided a rare opportunity for many of the participants, both formally and informally, to discuss their concerns directly with elected officials. Similarly, politicians were given an occasion to convey their policy ideas to community leaders. The conference also afforded participants from community groups across Northern Ireland the chance to meet and share experiences. Politicians and community leaders alike expressed great appreciation for this opportunity to assemble and exchange points of view.

CONCLUSION

Given the break-through in the peace process with the creation of the new government in Northern Ireland, there was tremendous need for and excitement about a forum that would bring together a diverse group of political and community leaders. The *Community and Governance in a Time of Transition* conference effectively attracted a broad range of politicians and community leaders and provided them with a unique opportunity to acknowledge the urgent necessity to work together and initiate contacts for future collaborative projects. In addition, the conference format - mixing presentations by international speakers and separate working-group sessions - successfully stimulated discussion about the main issues confronting Northern Ireland and identified possible mechanisms through which political and community leaders could address them. As it is difficult to build trust and lasting relationships in only two days, the success of this conference ultimately will depend on the participants' continued determination to remain in contact with each other and work together to effect positive change. Nevertheless, by all accounts the conference was an unequivocal success and The Project on Justice in Times of Transition and the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust are currently exploring possible follow-up programs on related issues.

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This report was written by Ina Breuer.

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The Project on Justice in Times of Transition is an inter-faculty initiative of Harvard University under the auspices of the Kennedy School of Government, the Law School, and the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. Originally founded in 1992 as part of the New York-based Foundation for a Civil Society, The Project assists states emerging from repression or conflict to engage in dialogue across national, ethnic, religious and ideological boundaries with the intention of preventing legacies of the past from jeopardizing their progress toward democracy and peace. The December 1999 conference in Northern Ireland was the 21st of The Project's distinct initiatives which have provided an extraordinary stimulus to pragmatic problem-solving by offering a broad spectrum of leading policy-makers exposure to international experiences in ending conflict, establishing peace and building civil society. Among the countries and regions in which The Project has worked are South Africa, Northern Ireland, Central and Eastern Europe, and Central America.

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The Northern Voluntary Trust (NIVT) was established in 1979 as an independent charitable grantmaking organization whose aim is to create a more just and caring society by enabling people to engage in positive action. In recent years the NIVT has played a key role in implementing EU programs focusing on peace building and the development of community infrastructure in Northern Ireland and has actively engaged community activists and groups in these processes. In 1999 the Trust worked closely with community development groups addressing the needs of victims / survivors of the Troubles and ex-prisoners.

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