



WORKSHOP ON STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING TRUST IN NORTHERN IRELAND

March 2-5, 2003
Cambridge, MA

In March 2003, the Project on Justice in Times of Transition of Harvard University and the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland co-sponsored a three-day **Workshop on Strategies for Building Trust in Northern Ireland**. The session was designed for political and community leaders from Northern Ireland and held at the Kennedy School of Government in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The purpose of the program was to bring together a group of 18 community and political leaders to tackle the issue of lack of trust in Northern Ireland, specifically between Catholics and Protestants and between the community and political sectors. The program was designed in response to feedback from individuals in Northern Ireland who noted that, despite the fact that it had been nearly five years since a peace agreement had been reached, there was still a significant divide between people at the community and political levels in Northern Ireland. They indicated that leaders of these sectors often lacked ways to communicate effectively, especially in the absence of the Legislative Assembly. In addition, many people in Northern Ireland expressed a desire to figure out how to deal with continuing sectarian violence within the context of the peace process, to consider what is to be gained by building trust, and to come to terms with the past in a constructive way so that they can move forward. They also raised important questions about how to change attitudes and behaviors in order to build trust, and the conditions that are needed for this to occur.

Accordingly, our aim in organizing the session was to bring participants to a neutral venue so they could examine the barriers to trust in Northern Ireland and think about the structures and relationships that should be created in relation to this issue. We hoped that the session would enable participants to consider how to develop a strategy for communication and cooperation between political and community leaders in Northern

Ireland, and would result in a commitment and work plan for addressing this topic once participants returned home. The three-day program included case studies taught by Harvard faculty members, presentations by practitioners who have worked to build trust in difficult environments, facilitated working group sessions, and informal activities.

Participants were selected in order to represent a range of political parties and community groups in Northern Ireland. Individuals who attended the session included:

- **Kenny Baxter** – Director, Greenhill YMCA National Residential Centre in Newcastle
- **Roy Beggs** – Member of Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly
- **Chrissie Cahill** - Urban Regeneration Officer, Upper Springfield Development Trust
- **Gerard Deane** - Co-ordinator, North-West Community Network
- **Thomas Elliott** – Member of Fermanagh District Council
- **Aideen Gilmore** - Bill of Rights Project Worker, Committee on the Administration of Justice
- **Maynard Hanna** - Cultural Projects Co-ordinator, Schomberg Society Ltd.
- **Janet Hunter** – Co-founder, Families Achieving Change Together
- **Avila Kilmurray** - Director, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland
- **Billy Leonard** – Member of Coleraine Borough Council
- **Sean MacManus** – Member of Sligo Borough Council and Sligo County Council
- **John (JJ) Magee** - Member of Relatives for Justice
- **David McAllister** – Member of Moyle District Council

- **Roisin McGlone** - Chief Executive Officer, Springfield Inter Community Development Project
- **Trudy Miller** – Member of Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition
- **Sean Neeson** - Member of Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly
- **Monina O’Prey** – Co-ordinator, Communities in Transition Programme, Community Foundation for Northern Ireland
- **Jim Wells** - Member of Northern Ireland Legislative Assembly

The workshop drew on the experiences and knowledge of several practitioners from other countries as well as Harvard University faculty members. The session began with remarks by **Roelf Meyer**, Founder of the Civil Society Initiative and former Minister of Constitutional Affairs of South Africa. Citing his experiences working in South Africa and Sri Lanka, Mr. Meyer spoke about the principles of trust-building. These included trying to understand the position of the other side; avoiding making judgments; inclusivity; transparency; separating the political and negotiating processes; creating and working toward common objectives; and engaging the widest possible group in decision-making. Mr. Meyer’s comments sparked animated discussion about the sources of violence and barriers to peace in Northern Ireland

A number of sessions during the workshop incorporated the expertise of Harvard faculty members. Law Professor **Martha Minow** facilitated a session called “Thinking about Conflict, Trust and Memory” which featured a short story by Alice Munro. In analyzing the story, “Royal Beating”, participants considered the themes of power struggles and cycles of violence. Although the subject under discussion was fictional, it was clear that the story resonated with the participants as it described the reality of human behavior.

Later that day, **Herb Kelman**, Director, and **Donna Hicks**, Deputy Director, respectively, of Harvard’s Program on International Conflict Resolution and Analysis, led a session on Interactive Problem-Solving for Inter-Communal

Dialogue. They spoke about their work in a number of countries and led a simulation exercise modeled on language issues in Kosovo.

In the next session, **Jose Maria Argueta**, who has served as Guatemalan National Security Advisor and Ambassador to several countries and is currently Vice President for International Business Development of Voxiva, talked about building trust in Guatemala and El Salvador. He described the fragmentation of Guatemalan society and the basis for the 36-year war, as well as the model of the ESTNA Center in Guatemala and Centro Demos in El Salvador, both organizations that promote reconciliation and peace domestically and in the region.

The second day of the program featured **Juan Esteban Orduz**, former Minister and Deputy Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Colombia to the United States, and **Luis Fernando de Angulo**, who created Fundación El Alcaravan, a non-profit grassroots development foundation. The two spoke about the causes of the conflict and obstacles to building trust in Colombia, with particular emphasis on issues related to land ownership, poverty, drug trafficking, the role of the military, rule of law, and civil society.

Two Harvard faculty members taught case studies as a way of examining additional issues. **Philip Heymann**, James Barr Ames Professor of Law, led a discussion on “A Community Response: Boston Confronts an Upsurge of Youth Violence”. Following that session, **Peter Zimmerman**, Kennedy School of Government Senior Associate Dean for Executive Education and Program Development, helped the group look at “Finding Black Parents: One Church, One Child”. Although the cases had very different topics, they both offered valuable insights into how to manage agencies more effectively in order to address complex issues. Professor Heymann took the group through a brief history of the Boston police department’s reform efforts, while Dean Zimmerman helped the participants understand how an agency can change its culture and, as a result, people’s attitudes toward it.

Interspersed with the presentations and cases by practitioners and faculty, the participants

from Northern Ireland had opportunities to share their ideas about the challenges of building trust in the context of Northern Ireland. However, it should be noted that participants requested that all of their comments remain off-the-record so the summary that follows is simply an overview of the topics raised.

On the second day of the workshop, participants were asked to review 10 issues and note which they considered the three most critical in Northern Ireland. The issues were:

- Divisions between political and community leaders
- Lack of operation of the Legislative Assembly
- Sectarian violence and/or paramilitary activity
- Entrenched attitudes
- Police reform
- Divisions between Catholics and Protestants
- Lack of mechanisms for communication and cooperation
- Divisions between economic / social classes
- Need to acknowledge the past
- Protection of human rights

Each person conducted this exercise individually and then the group discussed their responses and tried to reach consensus. Many people viewed certain issues as inter-related and deemed it necessary to consolidate them. The group members agreed that the top three issues were:

1. Entrenched attitudes, divisions between Catholics / Protestants, Nationalists / Unionists, lack of mechanisms for communication and cooperation
2. Protection of human rights which includes equality, social and economic rights and victims issues
3. Sectarian violence and/or paramilitary violence

The final day of the program was devoted to facilitated discussion about these issues. The large group was divided into three smaller groups of six, each of which examined one of the issues, giving consideration to such aspects as how to describe the problem; its importance and magnitude; contributing factors; resources; stakeholders; and key actors and decision-makers.

Participants also talked about desired results and the conditions needed for the issues to be addressed. As well, they considered how attitudes and behaviors could be changed in relation to these issues.

The organizers had hoped that by the end of the workshop, the small groups would be able to make some recommendations about the actions that should be taken to address the above-mentioned problems. However, during the course of the discussions it became clear that the subjects were too complex for the participants to develop any detailed plans, though they did offer some action points for potential work. Despite the fact that the session did not result in a specific strategic plan, participants felt that the workshop helped them to consider a number of critical issues, to gain understanding about others' views and dispel some misperceptions, and to begin to think constructively about how to move forward.

The March 2003 workshop, which was the Project's 14th programmatic initiative focused on Northern Ireland, was part of a multi-faceted three-year plan launched in February 2001. Four parts of the program take the form of conferences or workshops for political and community leaders in Northern Ireland, and the fifth element involves the development and use of materials documenting the experience of Northern Ireland. The overarching goals of the Project's programming in Northern Ireland are to:

- afford an opportunity for a broad representation of leaders in Northern Ireland to spend a concentrated amount of time together focused on issues of relevance to the consolidation of peace and democracy
- encourage the development of connections among the participants in order to increase trust and facilitate collaborative and complementary work on a range of subjects of concern at both the political and community levels
- provide political and community leaders in Northern Ireland with an impetus to develop solutions to some of the challenges facing their society by exposing them to examples from other societies in the world.

Acknowledgements

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This report was written by Sara Zucker.

The Project on Justice in Times of Transition

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 Harvard 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 workshop on Strategies for Building Trust in Northern Ireland was the 35th of the Project's distinct initiatives which have provided an extraordinary stimulus to pragmatic problem-solving by offering a broad spectrum of individuals 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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