

Reconciliation and a Sustainable Peace

Last month my sister Mary would have celebrated her 58th birthday if the IRA had not stolen her life. I was 14 when my sister was murdered and the sense of loss and grief never leaves. There is not a day that goes by that I do not think about her and wonder “what if?” however I know that to really celebrate my sisters life and memory she would want me to live each day as best as I can. Many families and individuals that come through the advocacy service have similar feelings of loss and indeed in some instances guilt because they could do nothing to prevent the horrendous terror foisted on them. Nothing could have been done to prevent it because the murderers’ intent was so definite and real.

This month I attended a “Reconciliation Networking Forum” event held by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Dublin. It was an interesting event and gave a lot of food for thought.

It was broken up into two panel discussions, one in the morning and the second after lunch.

The morning discussion was entitled “Fostering a positive public dialogue/ supporting a shared conversation” One speaker, Rebecca Toolan who works with a Digital project for young people called “Speak Out”, spoke about the importance of speaking and listening to others who we would not normally speak with instead of just speaking to the “echo chamber”. She recommended surrounding ourselves with people whom have a different perspective to ourselves.

Susan McKay (Journalist and author) stated that some of the best persistence of reconciliation comes from the women’s sector and gave anecdotes about a project run by the Shankill Women’s Centre, who have many conversations with women from the Falls.

The other speakers in the morning included Brian Doherty from Londonderry Bands Forum and Dr Nicola Brady (Irish Council of churches). The Londonderry Bands Forum ethos “helping bands and changing negative perception”, made me wonder how can we do similar for those who served in the Security Forces to combat the republican rewrite of history, especially with our young people.

The afternoon discussion was entitled “20 years on from the Good Friday Agreement, where next for Reconciliation?” The speakers included Alan McBride (WAVE), Dr Cathy Bollaert (Youthlink), David Price (Community relations in schools) and Prof Duncan Morrow (Ulster University). All speakers spoke about the importance of reconciliation and how we need to venture to places where we would not normally go. Dr Cathy Bollaert made an interesting point that we have become tolerant of segregation, which is not for the common good. The importance of integrating our children was also highlighted, whether through cultural events, sport or education.

Reconciliation is fundamental to moving from being enemies to being partners in a sustainable peace. Receiving acknowledgement that nobody had the right to plan, plot and carry out murder. However, reconciliation needs to be realistic. Whatever happens it needs to be sustainable through different political moments. We cannot allow dissident groups to continue to threaten us, whether through bomb scares, letter bombs or a continued threat to our personal security.

We need to challenge and ask ourselves what is the alternative to reconciliation. Just what will our future be without it? Nothing will ever bring back my sister Mary or any of our loved ones but how wonderful to be part of a change for the better.

Ann Travers



Advocacy for Innocent Victims Newsletter



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Dear Member,

Ann Travers has written a piece this month on the subject of reconciliation, and it is essential in any society as part of the healing process.

Christianity is very important to many people in NI, and in the Bible, Luke 17:3, it states, “*If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them*”.

That ‘rebuke’ comes not just from those who have been harmed, that rebuke must come from the state in the form of justice. We are being deprived of that state rebuke as it is not politically expedient to do so, they don’t want to prosecute terrorists allowed into government or in a position of authority.

David Cameron has apologised on behalf of the British State for the events of ‘Bloody Sunday,’ there does not appear to be any forgiveness in response but that is the prerogative of those who have been harmed. Likewise, we wait with baited breath for the terror organisations to show any sign of repentance; that is essential before forgiveness. I have serious doubts if they will ever admit their quilt and seek forgiveness, thereby allowing reconciliation to happen. Sinn Fein released a document in 2016 entitled, ‘Towards an Agreed and Reconciled Future’, no-where does it refer to forgiveness, or being sorry for the actions of the Provisional movement. The onus is on them and the Loyalist organisations to assist this society to move forward.

The contract for our research assistant, Rachel, finishes at the end of this month. I would like to put it on record our thanks for her support and valuable assistance over the last year, she will be profoundly missed.

Please be advised that the next Advocacy Steering Committee meeting is on Thursday 4th April at the usual place, I hope that all the different representatives can attend.

Yours Faithfully

Ken Funston

Advocacy Support Manager

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The View Magazine

This month's issue of The View magazine is dedicated to "An in-depth look at Victims, Survivors and Legacy issues from the Troubles", www.viewdigital.org Issue 51, 2019 .

The loaded message contained within the magazine is that the structures contained within the Stormont House Agreement (SHA) are a 'fix-all' and must be implemented immediately. This message is being pandered to all in Northern Ireland and beyond that the SHA is the only way out of our present morass. I am not so sure, and I believe many, many others agree with me. The responses, some 18,000 will have varying views, yet we are almost led to believe that there is a unified thought process, and we should instigate it now. That is not the case, and when will someone in a responsible position, including the Victims' Commissioner, recognise that the SHA in its present format, does not meet our needs. The Commissioner previously said to me in a meeting, *"It is better than what we have presently."* Is that good enough, should we accept something is better than nothing? The SHA has severe structural problems, and these need rectified before we can give it our support.

In the same vein, should we accept the definition of a victim. The Commissioner responds on page 4 of the magazine to a question whether she thinks people who were injured whilst engaged in violent activities can be considered to be a 'victim'? Her response was, *"Under our law they clearly are. Under our law in respect of any type of action you've always got people who will both be victims and responsible for causing harm to others because that's how it is."* There must be acknowledgment that the definition of a victim in its current format is at best, objectionable to many, to others it is totally abhorrent. For the Commissioner to make that statement appears to reinforce communal victimhood, the notion that we were all equally to blame for what happened here, we are all part of the problem therefore all part of the solution. The Commissioner must recognise that there are many Victims and Survivors who do not agree with this definition and it is at the core of many issues. We now actually have convicted terrorists disagreeing with the definition; Patrick Magee, the Brighton bomber is quoted on page 25, *"On a personal level I could never see myself as a victim. If you were involved in any way of fighting back it's hard to wear the mantle of a victim."*

Another current topic is the pension for those severely injured, and the effect of the definition of a victim on that. The Commissioner replies to a question on how the pension has been stymied with the following retort, *"In Northern Ireland there is political disagreement between our parties. It hinges around the fact that a small number of people who may have been responsible for the harm that befell themselves might also get that pension. At the moment we have no Assembly to deal with it even though the pension scheme is regarded as a devolved matter. The only place to take it now is Westminster. I believe now that is where it should go."* If it can be taken to Westminster, then there is no reason why the victim definition cannot also be appealed alongside the pension, and the logjam can then be resolved. There appears to be no acknowledgment that many of those victims who are entitled to that pension refuse to be equated to those who caused their injuries. They did not have a voice in this special victims' magazine.

Is it not also time to put pressure on those who are not victims in an ethical sense, to withdraw so that the likes of Paul Gallagher and Jennifer McNern can receive this pension. In Jennifer's words, *"The State should look after us."* I agree, but the State should not be rewarding terrorists who injured themselves by their own actions.

As an advocate working on behalf of victims and survivors, I deal in facts. Conspiracy theories and unfounded allegations are of no help to those I support. It does them a disservice, creating a mind-set that causes further harm. I constantly have to assist and advise those who are being fed allegations that usually lack foundation, and that has to be managed. A large part of the problem is caused by lack of knowledge and truth. It is part of the State's responsibility, both in the UK and the RoI, to provide us with that truth as in that vacuum, ideologists will emerge. Lack of truth comes alongside lack of justice, and the circumvention of the rule of law has caused that.

Mark Thompson, Chief Executive of Relatives for Justice, on page 17 of The View, stated in relation to holding State actors accountable, *"And that is precisely why the primacy of the rule of law must be applied concerning every aspect of legacy when addressing egregious violations no matter who the perpetrator."* I, for once agree with him, although he may not be looking at it in the same way as myself. The primacy of the rule of law must include the investigation of those holding OTR letters, those holding Royal Prerogatives of Mercy, the extradition of those hiding in the RoI and other parts of Europe, and the proper investigation of those irrespective of the position they hold in politics today. Thompson continued with his rather accidental ironic words when referring to Karen Bradley's clumsy statement in Parliament, *"They also demonstrate that it is only by upholding rights and by applying the rule of law that justice and accountability can be achieved."*

Mr. Thompson, do you uphold the rights for all or just for one section of the community? Do you uphold the rights of Shelley Gilfillan whose uncle, Lexie Cummings was murdered in Strabane in June 1982. A rather bizarre situation unfurled last week when the man who is 'on the run' for Lexie's murder, Donegal Sinn Fein councillor Gerry McMonagle was responding to the announcement that one member of the Parachute Regiment will be prosecuted for murder in relation to Bloody Sunday. In the Donegal Daily <https://www.donegaldaily.com/2019/03/14/bloody-sunday-solidarity-protest-to-be-held-in-letterkenny-tonight/> McMonagle stated, *"I am asking everyone who feels the same way to attend a solidarity protest this evening in support of their quest for justice."* I'm sure it was not an attempt at satire by McMonagle, but his words are deeply offensive, he was charged with Lexie's murder and is OTR.

Shelley commented on this recently in the Belfast Telegraph when she heard what McMonagle had to say. *"It's the case of justice for one and nothing for the other. Where's my justice? Where's the justice for my uncle? How dare he stand up there and say things like that."*

Kenny Donaldson was afforded a token one page in the 32 page special edition of The View, *"An in-depth look at Victims, Survivors and Legacy issues from the Troubles"*, I saw little balance in the rest of the document.

Ken Funston