

Sinn Féin paper on the Peace III Programme

European Dept.

1/7/06

Sinn Féin have already laid out our views on the need for a PEACE III programme and our initial considerations for the programme in previous documents. We believe the argument for a need for a continuance of the peace programmes has been won- now we must ensure that the programme's aims and structures are as suitable as possible in continuing the work of reconciliation and peace-building. We and those we have worked closely with during PEACE and PEACE II have accumulated extensive expertise and practical knowledge of the difficulties and potential benefits of these special programmes. In this paper we outline how we believe the PEACE III programme can be improved and adapted to more accurately serve its purpose of reconciliation and peace-building.

A seven-year programme allows all concerned to take a strategic, long-term and considered approach to the implementation of PEACE III and to what should constitute the priorities of the programme. In short, we at this point have the opportunity to evaluate where we are now as a society, where we as a society want to be in 2013 and how PEACE III can help us bridge that gap. Sinn Féin have a definite vision of a united, peaceful and pluralist Ireland where conflict will be a thing of the past. If managed intelligently PEACE III can help us realise this vision.

Now as we approach the beginning of PEACE III in 2007 and the context in which the programme will operate becomes clearer we present here our guiding principles and priorities.

The guiding principles:

First of all, Sinn Féin supports those who have rejected the assertion that the PEACE III programme should be based on the "A Shared Future" document of March 2005. This is not a reflection on the concept of a shared future. However, the document "A Shared Future" does not reflect an adequately informed opinion of the depth and complexity of division in our society today. In our document outlining out initial thoughts on a PEACE III programme we set out examples of the types of fracture in society that occurred and need addressed. By focussing on the most visible and immediate signs of division only, the "A Shared Future" document fails to offer remedies at a structural level. As we approach the beginning of our third special programme for Peace and Reconciliation cosmetic changes to our society serve the interests of nobody in Ireland in anything more than the short-term. A wider, longer vision of reconciliation is required for PEACE III.

PEACE III must from day-one be genuinely based on reconciliation criteria. This in simple English means that those groups who do not approach PEACE III with the intent of engaging in the process of reconciliation should not benefit from the programme. Those from the unionist community, who have not engaged with the reconciliation agenda, including participation in cross-border projects, should now begin to do so, given

that to do otherwise is to fly in the face of the spirit of PEACE programmes. The more limited funds for PEACE III make this all the more critical. There also needs to be some space in the programme for new entrants who are only starting out on their journey of reconciliation.

The concept of reconciliation must by definition be strongly cross-border in action. In an island as small as ours no other approach makes sense. This concept must be enshrined in the ethos of the managers and participants in PEACE III, even those operating at a local level, or by 2013 little will have been added to the process of national reconciliation. In practise, this means in all cases possible emphasising the cross-border elements of all projects. The implementation of this imperative would make PEACE III programmes financially and ideologically more efficient.

Above all else, PEACE III should help create a society which is more equal. In this respect, all those involved must reject the notion of a hierarchy of victims which unfortunately is still prevalent today. The sectarian undertones of this attitude have no place in a modern society intent on reconciliation and certainly have no place in a programme for Peace and Reconciliation. Left unchallenged this notion has the potential to introduce a culture of discrimination into PEACE III which would be completely at odds with the intent of the programme.

PEACE as a programme is inherently social in its spirit. This social emphasis must be exploited as much as possible in order to give ownership of the programme to those who need it most. Sinn Féin therefore calls for social economy projects to be placed at the heart of PEACE III to allow to the greatest degree possible community ownership and local knowledge in the outworking of PEACE III to prevail. Accordingly, Public-Private Partnerships or Public Finance Initiatives should be rejected where possible.

Other essential issues for republicans in PEACE III are the Irish language community and the rights of former political prisoners. In both cases the value of each group should be recognised from the point of view of their past and potential contribution to the reconciliation but additionally the rights of both groups to fair and equal treatment must be underpinned in PEACE III.

The context:

It is likely that the PEACE III programme funds will fall far short of PEACE or PEACE II monies - approximately €270m. The implications of this drop are obvious. The importance of groups and society in general working closer together than ever before to access and make best use of the funds is evident as is the fact that a smaller number of projects receiving less funds will benefit. Sinn Féin is clear that this new context will compel all projects to be more so than ever before recognisably based on genuine grounds of reconciliation and peace-building.

On the other hand, the great body of experience built up during PEACE and PEACE II should if utilised correctly allow all projects to be more cost effective and efficiently

managed while a seven-year programme means that the excuse for hurried or rash expenditure should no longer exist.

The position of PEACE III in the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) will also impact on the nature of projects eligible under PEACE III. All groups and organisations should bear this fact in mind when considering applications under the programme. While the final version of the ERDF has yet to be presented, its general thrust and form are clear to us already.

The overly bureaucratic nature of past PEACE programmes should be no longer tolerated. In this regard, we are calling for a reduction in the number of intermediary bodies and for as strong as possible a role for the Special European Union Programmes Body (SEUPB) in the distribution of funds.

Given this context it is essential that as many stakeholders as possible engage wholeheartedly in the debate around the content of the programme from as early as possible. This paper represents a further elaboration of Sinn Féin's position in this important discussion.

Our Priorities:

We have identified four key areas where PEACE III funds can be best applied to stimulate momentum towards national reconciliation. Within each of these we provide further specific measures that ought to be part of PEACE III.

1) Citizenship and Engagement

The development and protection of citizenship is an essential part of overcoming the social results of decades of conflict, discrimination and division. Citizenship and Engagement as a priority would place human rights and equality at the heart of the programme. Denials of citizens' rights are still a major problem in Ireland, north and south today. By prioritising Citizenship and Engagement the programme can play an important role in creating a culture of active citizenship and engagement through participation by the use by citizens of their democratic rights.

Under this priority we foresee measures such as the following:

- i. Development of community-led governance programmes

By aiding the development of such programmes PEACE III could empower in a very meaningful way marginalised and disadvantaged communities to take more control and leadership through structures that are accountable, transparent and effective. By building on the best practices already in existence, PEACE III could allow communities with a historical mistrust of governance to play a fuller role within their own day-to-day governance.

- ii. Education programmes in participative democracy including interaction and engagement with the state and state institutions

Education of all types is one of the fundamental requirements of any process of reconciliation. Enshrining education into PEACE III as a measure linked to citizenship and engagement and focussing on participative democracy would create an opportunity to improve state-community relations. The perception of the state as a detached and uninterested power is not compatible with a society on the way to national reconciliation. Education in the tools of civic engagement is the key to building better relations and interactions between communities and state institutions.

- iii. Capacity-building programmes for local activists and communities

Peace programmes are special programmes and by definition are temporary, time-and-space specific programmes. While welcoming PEACE III as necessary, Sinn Féin takes the longer term view of how Irish society must develop. In this light, we believe it would be wasteful if after three Peace programmes, there were to be no permanent structures created to allow for future, generational reconciliation. Among the most critical of these structures is a well trained and highly-skilled community network of local activists. By including capacity-building for such groups and individuals PEACE III would create a lasting crucial element of the necessary longer-term infrastructure of national reconciliation.

- iv. Development of a rights-based society

The creation of a rights-based society would render the conditions necessary for future conflict far less likely. PEACE III has the capability of providing stimulus to this rights-agenda by funding the development of practices and programmes which aid the construction of which are rights-based and transparent. This would of course allow scope for funding of groups and bodies which monitor state and other bodies to ensure they comply with the highest standards of observance of rights.

2) Borderlands development

Border areas on both sides of the border are among those most affected by the arbitrary division of our island. Communities have been for decades now ripped in two by the border. The detrimental social and economic effects of partition on border communities have been well documented. Cross-border territorial cooperation represents a major priority under the ERDF and should also be prioritised in PEACE III. Such measures under the borderlands priority would be as follows:

- i. Repairing relations broken by partition

Many decades of partition have rendered cross-border community relationship building painfully difficult or even impossible. The effect of a border separating towns from their

natural hinterlands and rural areas from their urban markets is akin to the effect of a wall of separation. The existence of separate, competing currencies adds to these problems. The repairing of these crucial relationships is not about creating new imagined communities- rather it is about removing the obstacles to the existence of these natural communities. PEACE III funds could aid the removal of the artificial and contrived barriers to cross-border development and trade as a priority and as an example of good practise of territorial cooperation in the EU.

ii. Regenerating communities emerging from a state of militarisation

The borderlands of Ireland were among the most heavily militarised areas of Western Europe during the conflict. The knock-on effects for the economies and social conditions of the communities are clear. An artificial reliance on security related employment in some communities and a deliberate physical and psychological occupation in other communities are among the most blatant symptoms of militarisation. Regeneration of these communities' social and economic prospects is an essential element of a process of reconciliation. Aid to develop alternative economic activities in the space left by the military economy such as tourism should be aided in PEACE III.

3) Social inclusion and anti-poverty

At the heart of all conflict lies a combination of circumstances. Poverty and social inclusion invariably form part of this mix and must be tackled as a priority in the process of peace-building. Marginalisation of whole sectors of society and their commensurate position in consistent and structural poverty needs to be addressed if the mistakes of the past and the resulting conflict are to be avoided for future generations. Those most excluded from society must be shown the benefits of a peaceful future in practical ways at community level. Under this priority the following measures should qualify for Peace funding:

i. Developing the social economy

The social economy and social economy projects have been proven to be effective methods of creating employment and reducing poverty in areas where broader economic development has bypassed. These projects uniquely offer services and opportunities to communities and wider society that cannot be provided for by any other means. Their usefulness in this regard in ending exclusion, tackling poverty and regenerating communities cannot be underestimated and the social economy as an ideal and as a practical tool is perfectly compatible with the Peace programme.

ii. Improving early education and childcare

From a young age our children are exposed to societal influences which shape their attitudes and outlooks. By funding early education and access to and provision of childcare PEACE III can impact in a positive way on the youngest in Irish society while

also creating a chance for single parents and other full-time carers of children to play a more active role in the employment sector.

iii. Older people's role in reconciliation

Older people have lived through the darkest days of conflict and now play an important role in reconciliation. Their experience of conflict is more profound than most meaning they have a unique and important role to play in bringing to fruition a genuine process of reconciliation. All means necessary to ensure their invaluable contribution to PEACE III must be ensured.

iv. Ex-prisoners' needs

Former combatants played a key and visible role in the early periods of the peace process. Nowadays they continue to contribute to reconciliation, peace building and community development to a huge extent even if this role is not as publicly visible as it once was. Their insights and commitment to community development and reconciliation must be recognised and supported if the communities they live and work in are to reap the benefits of PEACE III. Additionally, ex-prisoners and the groups that represent them must continue to be valued and supported as citizens and citizens' groups in their own right in the distribution of resources under PEACE III.

v. Tackling rural poverty

Poverty is easier to visualise when one thinks of urban poverty and the associated poor housing and more visual manifestations of poverty and exclusion. Rural poverty is not as visible to the human eye but is no less insidious and intolerable to a modern society especially one intent on moving from a conflict-ridden past to an inclusive future. Depopulation and regressing social and economic conditions allow us to realise the extent of poverty in our rural areas. Specific and imaginative programmes to assess and remedy the causes of rural poverty must be supported by PEACE III.

vi. The Irish Language

Pluralism as a concept was frowned upon and resisted by those who held the power in the 6 counties both pre-conflict and during the decades of violence and war. This inability to tolerate other's views and to defend pluralism contributed to the outbreak and maintenance of conflict. Post-conflict resolution requires an about-turn with society embracing pluralism and alternative views. The case of the Irish language represents a litmus test in this regard. If PEACE III is to help shape a new, tolerant society then it must accommodate and encourage the use of Irish to ensure Gaeilgeoirs are not to be left in the "cold house".

Communities where Irish is strong as a language of everyday life offer a unique perspective on modern society. Their uniqueness alone demands their protection and continued support but above all else their dynamism and potential must be exploited.

Communities such as West Belfast have shown Irish can play its part in revitalising the confidence of conflict-affected areas. Employment creation and cultural achievement which all aid reconciliation and peace-building have prospered in these communities and offer immense potential which is not limited to Irish language areas but which permeates throughout society. By further empowering these areas PEACE III can help copper-fasten the principle of pluralism as well as make a contribution to cultural achievement.

4) The role of women in reconciliation

Despite their role in developing the peace process and in the reconciliation process to date women still lag significantly behind men in almost all sectors of society including politics and business. The stark reality is that if PEACE III is to be successful in aiding reconciliation it must prioritise the half of our population who have economically and socially fared worse during the years of conflict and who the pre-conflict system failed so poorly. Specifically Sinn Féin calls for the following measures under the role of women in reconciliation priority:

i. Enhancing women's role in peace-building

Women as much as men partook in the suffering and activism that characterised the conflict, yet to date they have not been represented in anywhere near approaching equality with men in the process of peace-building. Allowing one half of the population effective leadership over peace-building is as fundamentally as wrong and short-sighted as allowing one half leadership over it based on religious or political persuasion. To rectify this anomaly, projects to involve women in peace-building should be supported.

ii. Reducing the gender gap in employment participation and pay

One legacy of the conflict has been that questions apart from the constitutional issue have been sidelined or ignored. In a post-Good Friday Agreement context progressive opinion can no longer sustain this situation. The discrimination at a structural and personal level against women in the workforce and seeking access to the workforce has to be tackled. Such systemic discrimination belongs in the past; PEACE III can fulfil a symbolic and practical role in creating equality between men and women in employment matters.

Conclusions

Sinn Fein has long argued that Peace and reconciliation Programme funding should focus on the twin objectives of national reconciliation and combating the legacy of discrimination and social exclusion. The brief proposals outlined above would, in our view, go some way to addressing the complex and multi-layered causes and effects of the last 30 years of conflict. Equally it moves beyond the “box ticking” exercises, which many statutory organisations are forced into as a result of policy frameworks such as “A

Shared Future”. Sinn Fein strongly encourages SEUPB and government to take creative, bold and imaginative approaches to PEACE III, ensuring at all times that those who are intended as beneficiaries of the funds are at the core of the programmes design, implementation and review. If such an approach is taken the benefits of this new round of funding we have a profound and lasting impact on the process of peace building in Ireland.