

THE ROLE OF SOCIETY IN A PROCESS OF CHANGE



Charter for Unionist Engagement

We are in a period of transition and change. Everyone has a role to play in developing this. The opinions of all should be heard and listened to. All sections of society should be encouraged to engage positively, particularly those groups which have suffered discrimination.

Political Parties

Political parties have a responsibility to give leadership by engaging with each other to meet the challenges that change is bringing. We need to work together to represent and serve the interests of all the people who have suffered great hardship and pain through conflict within and between communities. All political parties have a responsibility to foster reconciliation and work together towards delivering a better future for all.

State agencies and departments

State agencies and departments across Ireland need to drive the process of change. This is essential if solutions are to be found to the many complex and pressing problems that face our island society. Government policy must reflect the needs of the society that it serves. Local communities must be empowered to be active partners in policy formulation and the development process.

Community and voluntary sectors

The voice of local communities must be heard. The community and voluntary sectors can enable and lead the way in encouraging dialogue and engagement at a local level, and in so doing help rebuild the social fabric of communities. Greater access by local communities to decision-making is the bedrock on which a peaceful, stable and inclusive society will be built.

Trade Unions

Trade Unions have a lead role to play in countering the scourges of sectarianism, racism and other forms of intolerance. Trade Unions can facilitate dialogue and reconciliation and advance the interests of the workers in the New Ireland. Their ethos of equality and participation can work to ensure that the environment in our workplaces is fair and protective of the security, wellbeing and health of all.

Business

Political stability, reconciliation and economic unity are essential to unlocking the economic dynamic necessary to meet the needs of all the people who live on this island. The business sector has a key role to play in this process.

Rural and Coastal Communities

In Ireland, rural and coastal communities are under pressure as never before. By coming together we can give a voice to rural and coastal communities and reverse the trends of urbanisation, depopulation, economic decline and the misuse of natural resources. Rural and coastal communities together can restore a place for farming, fishing and the rural-coastal way of life across the island.

Cultural and sporting organisations

Cultural and sporting organisations can play a positive role in shaping our new society. Change is having an impact on all groups in our society and cultural and sporting organisations must be part of that change.

Religious Institutions and Religious Leadership

Religious institutions should lead by example. The leadership of religious institutions have a duty to encourage dialogue at all levels and to encourage initiatives which promote a culture of tolerance and openness for all religious and political views within our society. Even more importantly religious institutions should be seen to be working in co-operation to break down the misconceptions that have been fostered through the years by those who oppose equality and tolerance.

Academics

The world of academia has a valuable role to play in facilitating discussions around the shape and form of a new Ireland.

The Media

In a democratic society the role of a free press is essential. The media has a responsibility to reflect the diversity of society, to set a positive context for engagement on the basis of our common humanity and to work to end all forms of prejudice, stereotyping and the degradation of human beings.

Youth

Youth are the future and are the most valuable asset in any society. Young people have the potential to be the catalyst that moves us beyond the divisions of the past and into a new future. We must educate our youth and encourage them to respect and accept difference as something that is healthy and positive in society.

Women

Women have a central role to play in shaping the new Ireland. There is a vital need for the equal participation of women in politics and in the decision-making process in every aspect of society. We cannot have a free and just society without equal opportunity for participation by women.

New Communities

Ireland's new communities should be encouraged and facilitated to participate in the process of constructing a new Ireland. Their voice represents a new and welcome dynamic in our society. Respect for the diversity of all cultures and languages will enrich us all.

Sinn Féin wants to build a new Ireland that is based on a new relationship between Orange and Green and all other traditions that make up society, where every citizen can share and have equality of ownership of a peaceful, prosperous and just future.

In our view the obstacle to achieving this thus far is a consequence of the involvement of the British government in Irish affairs. The March 26th agreement has enhanced the potential for dealing with these issues.

Dialogue and pro-active engagement between Republicans and Unionists are key to advancing all of this.

Tá beann againn ar an iomarca daoine a d'fhulaing. Tá muid faoi chomaoin acú an todhchaí is fearr a thógaíl le chéile.

Sinn Féin recognises that all our people have suffered greatly. Much hurt exists within our society. I acknowledge that republicans have contributed to this hurt. We have all contributed to this hurt. Consequently, we all share a responsibility to advance reconciliation on this island.

The people of Ireland deserve a society in which tolerance and equal treatment are standards governing all institutions and everyday life. We want to make a start on advancing that vision now by engaging with all groups on the basis of equality and mutual respect. Republicans recognise that we have a journey to travel in developing our own understanding of unionism.

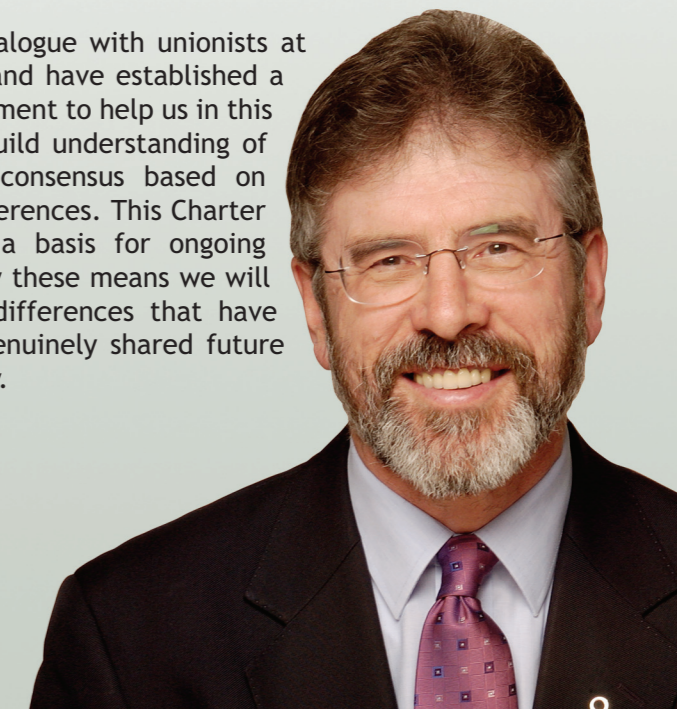
Speaking following the first meeting between Sinn Féin and the DUP on March 26th I outlined my belief that the agreement reached between our two parties marked the beginning of a new era of politics on this island.

The changes that are happening and will continue to happen in the time ahead will challenge us all. However, let us meet these challenges together and shape a vision for a new Ireland that addresses the needs of all our people.

We will seek to promote dialogue with unionists at every possible opportunity and have established a Unionist Engagement Department to help us in this work. Our objective is to build understanding of each other, and to build consensus based on respect for each other's differences. This Charter is an attempt to provide a basis for ongoing discussion. We hope that by these means we will be able to transcend the differences that have divided us in the past. A genuinely shared future can only be built on equality.

Gerry Adams

Sinn Féin President
May 2007



A NEW BEGINNING - A NEW IRELAND

Sinn Féin is committed to the achievement of a democracy based on a constitutional framework that will guarantee the protection of all the people on this island, their traditions and their communities: a democracy that affords maximum representation and participation. This Charter is intended to reassure Unionists of our good intentions and to explore with others how we can take control of our own destinies.

Sinn Féin is committed to achieving an Ireland of equals, a united Ireland which will be a new democracy. Republicans and Unionists have democratic rights, no more or less than any other section of the people of Ireland.

A New Constitution

Sinn Féin will campaign for a new agreed constitution that will be based on a separation of powers between the Executive, the Legislature and the Judiciary as a necessary means to guarantee the rights of individuals and communities. The new Constitution will come into force on endorsement by the people of Ireland. Government must act in accordance with the constitution, which will enshrine a fully enforceable Charter of Rights.

Empowering people

There will be decentralisation of decision-making to the lowest possible level to ensure the participation and empowerment of citizens and excluded minorities in decision-making processes which impact on their lives. A new Ireland can only be achieved and sustained with the participation of its entire people.

Challenging exclusion

Respect must be accorded to all - including those groups traditionally excluded from economic, social and political power. All have the equal right to pursue their own lives and ambitions according to their abilities, without discrimination. We all share the responsibility to challenge exclusion and ensure that rights and equality for all are guaranteed in a new Ireland.

Delivering equality

Inequality exists in many forms: in material disadvantage, but also in political and social exclusion. Equality is only possible when the voice of the marginalised is as loud as that of the most powerful in the country. We affirm the right of all people to play an active part in all decision-making in society and to have an equal opportunity to attain their personal goals in life. It will be the duty of government to promote and deliver equality by cherishing all of the people equally.



Ending sectarianism and promoting an inclusive society

Our society is becoming increasingly multicultural, and this is to be welcomed. The duty of Government is to promote not only tolerance but inclusivity and equality, to eradicate sectarianism, racism and other forms of discrimination and to promote a pluralist society in which difference is celebrated and cultural diversity is encouraged.

Guaranteeing Civil and Religious Liberty for All

There shall be full separation of Church and State. No religion shall have a preferential position in society. Everyone shall be free to practice their faith, or none, as they so wish.

Reconciliation

Our vision is of a society which is at peace with itself. True and lasting reconciliation among all traditions in our society will be achieved by an ongoing national reconciliation process across the island.

FRAMEWORK FOR ENGAGEMENT

A process of dialogue about the shape of a New Ireland needs to begin now. In order to have an inclusive and constructive dialogue, the following principles are proposed to provide a Framework for Engagement.

From conflict to a new beginning

This dialogue is an affirmation of our common humanity that will enable us all to challenge misperceptions we may have of each other. It will assist in building new relationships, not only with the people who live on this island, but also with our closest neighbours in England, Scotland and Wales.

Reaching out to all

All identities and cultures will be included in shaping the vision and reality of the New Ireland. Continued and determined efforts will be made to involve all those minorities that currently suffer social, economic and political marginalisation. We share a duty to reach out to all groups in our society, to set a common framework of standards for access and outcomes and in decision-making, through the participation of those hitherto marginalized in our society.

Listening to each other

We share common interests. We share this island. No body of opinion will be excluded. Everyone who wishes to engage will be listened to so that we may learn from and understand those experiences which are different from our own. The only precondition to engagement is that we accept the sincerity and integrity of all.

Dialogue without limits

No limits will be set on what can or cannot be discussed. We will discuss the past in order that we can learn from it, we will discuss the present so that we can manage it together and most importantly we will discuss the future so that we can plan it together. Dialogue, like change, is a process that evolves with each new interaction. There should be no barriers to that dialogue.

Transparent and Accessible

The dialogue should be as open and transparent as possible so that it can be put in the public domain. It must be accessible to all and be designed to clarify and overcome misunderstandings and misperceptions.

Managing change together

The changes to society that we will continue to experience will challenge us all. Let us meet these challenges together and build a new Ireland which addresses the needs of all our people; a society that is confident and at peace with itself.

Practice of compromise

Compromise is inherent within our process of change. It is a challenge which requires courage from us all.

