



PUBLISHED BY SINN FÉIN, 44 PARNELL SQUARE, DUBLIN 1, IRELAND.

Tel: +353 1 8726100 or 8726932 Fax: +353 1 8783595

Email: [sfadmin@eircom.net](mailto:sfadmin@eircom.net) Web: [www.sinnfein.ie](http://www.sinnfein.ie)

# **Sinn Féin submission to multi-party talks**

## **Peace in Ireland — Freedom, Justice, Democracy, Equality**

### **Principles and Requirements**

#### **A Sinn Féin's submission to Strand One of the peace talks**

10 October 1997

## **Introduction**

### **A Failed Political Entity**

This process, in which we are engaged, has the difficult task of redefining the totality of relationships between the people of this island and with our nearest neighbour. It is about leaving behind relationships which have not worked and a status quo which has proven disastrous to all our interests. We seek to slam shut the door on past failures and begin anew by building new relationships based on equality and mutual respect.

As Irish republicans we will be advocating and arguing for the creation of an Irish national democracy as the best means of achieving this.

The failure of British policy and partition was given graphic expression only three months ago when in July the RUC were employed to force an Orange march through the Garvaghy Road. The demand of the Orange Order to walk through a nationalist area, and the RUC battering a route through residents for the Orange Order to engage in this triumphalist display, epitomises all that is wrong with this statelet.

These events, along with the RUC's enthusiastic use of plastic bullets against nationalists, underpins the widespread sense among nationalists that the northern state is beyond redemption, is corrupt, and that there can be no internal settlement based upon this failed structure.

The reality is that the six counties is a gerrymandered statelet which was fashioned by sectarian power and privilege and in which wholesale suppression and discrimination was and is practised. The six county state has never been able to afford its citizens the justice and equality fundamental to a peaceful and democratic society. The consequence has been a cycle of repression, conflict and resistance.

Unionists cannot be solely held responsible for this. Britain's policy created a sectarian state. Since the collapse of Stormont the British government has failed to effectively tackle economic and structural political discrimination against Catholics and the continuing cultural discrimination which denies Irish children their right to be taught through the medium of Irish. It is British policy which today labels nationalists as inferior and second class.

The excesses of the British state in defence of the northern statelet have been well documented.

Every major human rights agency in the world, from Amnesty International to Helsinki Watch, have accused Britain of torture, summary execution and extensive violations of human rights. London holds the distinction of having been found guilty before the European Court of Human Rights more often than any other signatory since 1950. The British government's role in the north has perhaps best been summed up by human rights lawyer, anti-apartheid campaigner and current South African Minister Kadar Asmal who remarked: "The British government has shown scant regard for international opinion and international and

domestic legal standards ... My contention is that the United Kingdom is behaving and has behaved in the north in the same way that colonial powers exerted their sovereignty in the old fashioned empires".

This then is the reality of the northern statelet. Over 75 years on a life support of oppression, injustice and inequality. It is a history of failure. The failure of a unionist one-party state which rejected basic principles of democracy, justice and equality. The failure of British governments to recognise their central role in creating conflict and division by bolstering partition and underpinning the unionist veto. It is a measure too of the failure of nationalists and republicans throughout this island, including successive Irish governments, to develop a strategy to effectively bring about democratic change.

There can be no going back to the past. There can be no internal settlement. The days of second class citizenship, of unionist domination are gone. We must collectively think beyond these failed political structures and construct a new Ireland which can accommodate and celebrate the diversity of the people of this island - new constitutional and political structures to which we can all give allegiance.

Irish republicans believe that any new dispensation must be constructed on this basis.

Equality should now be at the heart of the British government's decision making and it must underpin our deliberations. It cannot be simply an illusion. It must be a fact. We need a wholehearted commitment to ensuring political, social and cultural rights to freedom from discrimination for all citizens, on parity of esteem and on just and equal treatment for the identity, ethos and aspirations for all our people.

The responsibility for this rests primarily with the British government - a government which has placed human rights at the top of its international agenda.

As we seek to restructure relationships this equality ethos needs to map out how we can ensure equality in employment; in economic investment; for the Irish language and culture; in education and for political representatives. It must tackle the difficult issue of cultural symbols, of flags and

emblems and of policing .

Equality is not a threat to unionists. It means civil and political rights for unionists as well as nationalists and republicans. Whether it is the right to march, or the right to worship or the right to vote or the right to seek their consent - these are civil and religious and political rights which must be guaranteed and protected.

We freely acknowledge that northern protestants have fears and that there is a huge gulf of distrust and misunderstanding and suspicion between republicans and unionists. I know that bridging that gulf will not be easy but republicans want to try.

What we seek are political conditions in which for the first time the people of this island can reach a democratic accommodation, in which the consent and agreement of both nationalists and unionists can be achieved, and in which a process of national reconciliation and healing can begin. Unionist participation in this is essential.

Republicans recognise that there will be no peace in Ireland if unionists are not a part of shaping that peace. Our wish is to reach an accommodation with unionism: We do not wish unionists to suffer as nationalists have suffered in this statelet. We want to remove injustice and inequality for all the people of Ireland.

Inequality and social exclusion are the enemies of peace. We need a partnership, based on equality, which will empower and improve the quality of life of citizens by being open, inclusive and democratic.

Marginalising and demonising and refusing to talk to others reinforces intolerance and prejudice and intransigence.

The imperative now must be to intensify our work towards a democratic peace settlement. This will not be easy. Our starting point however needs to recognise that what has gone before has failed all of us. We need a new beginning based on democracy, justice and equality for all citizens. These are the foundations for a lasting peace.