

# TOWARDS AN AGREED AND RECONCILED FUTURE

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Sinn Féin Policy on Reconciliation and Healing - June 2016





# FOREWORD

Sinn Féin is an Irish republican party. Our primary political objectives are:

- » To end partition;
- and
- » To build a new national democracy that is agreed, defined and shaped by the consent of all citizens.

In the 1916 Easter Rising centenary year Sinn Féin restates our commitment to achieve reconciliation and healing. As a key political priority this will guide our approach within all political institutions, our approach to historic commemorations and our engagement with all shades of political opinion as we seek to build a future that is defined by equality, respect and parity of esteem.

For Republicans the partition of Ireland was an integral part of the British colonial strategy. It was their ‘divide and conquer’ approach that created and sustained injustice. It was sustained by institutional sectarianism. Partition also fostered deep personal, communal and societal divisions which still persist. It was this politics of exclusion that facilitated the fear and suspicion that fuelled conflict. Ending partition and engaging with its, impact, legacy and aftermath, is vital if we are to deal with the past and build an agreed and reconciled future.

Our approach to reconciliation and healing has been informed by:

- » The need to be sensitive to all hurt, loss and pain;
- » The need for an acknowledgement of all the different human experiences of conflict felt across society, on this island and beyond;
- » The need for all political parties and sectors of society to work in pursuit of the common good and to ensure that the legacy of the past does not prevent healing, sharing and the hope for a better future;
- » The need to create a popular and inclusive coalition that will lead and enhance a public discourse on reconciliation and healing;
- » The need to shape public policy that has reconciliation at its core and which seeks to improve community relations and improve the material well-being and life opportunities of all citizens.

This reconciliation policy has its origins in the Uncomfortable Conversations initiative launched in March 2012. This initiative was an explicit acknowledgement that: “Republicans have to address the genuine fears and concerns of Unionists in a meaningful way”. In this policy we set forth thinking on how we understand reconciliation, and how reconciliation can assist the creation of a better future. The policy also outlines a number of practical actions that will enhance the reconciliation process.

# HOW WE UNDERSTAND RECONCILIATION

Reconciliation is both a goal, something to achieve; and a process, a means to achieve that goal. It is the public space within which we can collectively engage with the key challenges of truth, justice, and acknowledgement within the context of building for the future. For the purposes of this policy we focus on the construction of reconciliation as a process: a process that is open and which seeks to position the possibility of reconciliation outside the thrust of daily politics.

In our view there are several underpinning assumptions that should define a meaningful reconciliation and healing process:

- » Reconciliation offers the means of re-energising politics while opening a new phase of the peace process;
- » Reconciliation is an all-encompassing process. It must be open to all and inclusive of all opinions, identities and aspirations. It must also have an all-island and East-West focus;
- » Reconciliation processes must be bespoke and responsive to circumstances. Just as the Peace Process was designed to address the conflict, so too the design of a reconciliation process must create new sets of relationships capable of creating the conditions for political progress and also enhancing reconciliation locally, regionally and nationally.
- » Reconciliation and healing will take time.

## Why the Need for reconciliation?

Irish society has yet to deal with the harms, fears and mistrust from the conflict. Despite the contribution from Republicans, and many others, the legacy of conflict and division stills casts a long shadow over efforts to build a better future. At its core a reconciliation and healing process must create the common ground to deal with the fears, the unanswered questions from the past and shape thinking and deeds that will create a pathway from the past to the future.

## Reconciliation as Common Ground

For Sinn Féin reconciliation and healing is intrinsically linked to shaping a future that assists us all to move beyond historical antagonism. It is our view that reconciliation must be politically encouraged, harnessed and supported. Reconciliation and healing must be the antidote to past conflict and hostility.

Any future reconciliation processes must seek to create common ground where the collective focus is to build for the future. This common ground must be defined by:

- » An acceptance of equality, respect and parity of esteem;
- » An acceptance of different narratives and aspirations;
- » An acceptance to challenge sectarianism, sectarian segregation and all forms of intolerance, prejudice and bigotry.

Sinn Féin acknowledges the vital reconciliation work of local communities, civic organisations, trade unions, educational institutions, business organisations, faith communities and our new communities. Advancing and enhancing reconciliation will require co-operation and collaboration across all sectors of society. Processes and activities would however benefit from maximum participation, better co-ordination and resource alignment within an agreed reconciliation framework.

To enhance reconciliation:

- » Sinn Féin is committed to supporting a public coalition for reconciliation that will harness support, and bring forward policy ideas that will assist progress and maximise participation.

## REPUBLICAN COMMITMENT TO RECONCILIATION

### Historical Origins

Sinn Féin remains ideologically committed to creating the conditions for a new, agreed and United Ireland. Our Republicanism has its origins in the political and economic ideas which swept across Europe and the United States of America in the late eighteenth century. This found expression in the formation of the Society of United Irishmen, which sought to achieve Irish Independence through the unity of Catholic, Protestant and Dissenter. They were the standard bearers of equality, fraternity and liberty. The United Irishmen were also avowedly anti-sectarian. It was they who introduced a new rights-based philosophy to Irish society.

Consistent with that vision Sinn Féin remains committed to achieve an agreed and united Ireland where sovereignty resides in all our people irrespective of their religious persuasion, cultural identity, political affiliation, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation. This commitment to universal equality and upholding the rights of all citizens is central to Sinn Féin's vision for an agreed and united Ireland.

### 1916 Easter Proclamation

The 1916 Easter Proclamation signatories envisioned a Republic that would, “guarantee religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens”. This foundation document of Irish Republicanism reminds all Republicans of our ideological commitment to equality. The 1916 Easter Proclamation remains a freedom charter that guarantees religious and civil liberty for all. For Republicans the 1916 Easter Proclamation is a living document: it is rooted in the principles of anti-sectarianism and addresses all Irishmen and Irishwomen as equals. Principles that, are as relevant in 2016 as they were in 1916. These principles have guided and shaped this reconciliation policy.

The centenary commemoration of both the 1916 Easter Rising and the Battle of Somme presents a real opportunity for Republicans to engage with the differing Unionist narratives and experiences of that period. Listening to and engaging with the multiplicity of narratives presents a real opportunity to develop new understandings that will guide and shape a shared culture of commemoration across this island.

## Republican Commitment to Reconciliation: Reaching Out

Martin McGuinness's meetings with Queen Elizabeth in Belfast in 2012, and again in 2014, at Crumlin Road gaol, are without precedent in Irish and British history. This was built upon when Martin McGuinness and other Sinn Féin party figures attended an Irish state visit reception in Windsor Castle, and the meeting of Party President Gerry Adams with Prince Charles in 2015. These meetings in a symbolic way sought to extend the hand of friendship to Unionists.

Indeed Republicans attached a huge significance to the meetings between Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams and Prince Charles, as the British royal figure most synonymous with the British military forces. They took a lot of effort, courage and tenacity on all sides to make happen. But, when undertaken in a spirit of mutual respect and equality, gestures and initiatives can have a hugely positive effect and set an example for wider society.

Such meetings while historically significant and important to advance the peace process, however, also present challenges for Republicans. This is in part due to the many open wounds within the Nationalist community that are rooted in the legacy of British partition, occupation and state violence. Sinn Féin fully understands these experiences. In all our dealings with the British Royal Family we were acutely conscious and sensitive to how their role as part of the British military establishment is understood by many bereaved families.

Evidencing our intent and commitment to enhance reconciliation Sinn Féin has undertaken a series of confidence-building initiatives. This has included Sinn Féin Mayors laying laurel wreaths at the World War I cenotaph in memory of all Belfast citizens who died in conflict. Sinn Féin representatives in civic leadership roles have also taken initiatives that demonstrate our party commitment to shaping a respectful culture of commemoration. As a party we also developed The Day of Reflection which is held on International Human Rights Day. This was our effort to value the history and culture of others and to provide civic leadership on how we as a society should recognise all who have lost their lives as a result of war and conflict.

Sinn Féin remains committed to engaging with the issue of shared commemoration with humility, imagination and vision. Indeed positive reciprocation of Sinn Féin efforts would greatly assist efforts to expand, enhance and deepen current processes.

To enhance reconciliation:

- » Sinn Féin will continue to be imaginative and creative and take initiatives that enhance reconciliation and healing;
- » Sinn Féin will commit to making a positive contribution to develop a shared culture of commemoration which is inclusive, respectful and based upon parity of esteem and which that acknowledges all lives lost in conflict.
- » Sinn Fein will respond positively to shared commemoration invitations where our presence will contribute to reconciliation and healing outcomes.

## ENGAGING WITH THE LEGACY OF THE PAST

The legacy of conflict and how to deal with its consequences continues to overshadow the political process. This has been compounded by the British government's imposition of a 'national security' veto which prevented agreement on legacy matters in The Fresh Start Agreement (2016). The British 'national security' veto relates to the disclosure of information to families which is core to both the investigative and information recovery legacy mechanisms. In good faith Sinn Féin brought forward options to address these concerns. The British government have rejected these options.

The reluctance of the British government to honour their international human rights obligations to resource and commission investigations into state killings further exacerbates the legacy issue. Their stonewalling and obstructionist approach is a continuing violation of the rights of families seeking truth and justice. In essence the British government's intransigence and political arrogance on the issue of legacy is not only indefensible, shameful and disrespectful to families but also places an undue strain on the political process. Despite this Sinn Féin remains fully committed to a resolution of the legacy issue which ensures maximum disclosure for all families.

### The need for imagination, generosity and compromise

Sinn Féin's approach to reconciliation is to ensure that the conditions that created and sustained conflict will never again be repeated. While we cannot ever forget our past, and the human consequences of loss and conflict, it is vital that future generations are not imprisoned by legacy and its aftermath. The alternative to not engaging with the legacy of the past is to recycle resentment and bitterness. This is not a tenable position.

Republicans are acutely aware that engaging with legacy matters will present challenges for all. In pursuing a reconciled future Republicans will be challenged to acknowledge the human impact of their conflict actions. This however will require those within the British establishment and Unionism to acknowledge the British state actions, and the experience of Nationalists who lived within a militarised state that openly practiced discrimination and the politics of exclusion. While there may never be agreement on the narratives of our past, or the causes of conflict, in the interests of reconciliation the existence of different narratives must at a minimum be understood and acknowledged.

Signalling our intent to progress the issue of legacy Sinn Féin compromised in the negotiations that shaped the Stormont House Agreement (2014) even though we hold that an independent, international truth recovery process would command the necessary confidence, and offers the best approach, to engage with the past.

### Acknowledging the Grief and loss of All Victims

Sinn Féin acknowledges the grief associated with each and every life lost in the conflict. All victims deserve acknowledgement and healing of their pain and loss. There can no hierarchy of victimhood when it comes to acknowledging the sense of loss experienced by so many families. We are also aware that so many live with psychological and physical scars of conflict.

The past cannot be changed or undone, nor can the suffering, hurt or pain be disowned. However it is vital that all conflict actors make a positive contribution to reconciliation and healing that assists all families. The reluctance of the British state to combat impunity and address the needs of all victims equally has unquestionably stalled progress towards reconciliation and healing. There are victims and survivors on all sides.

To enhance reconciliation:

- » Sinn Féin is committed to comprehensively dealing with the issue of legacy through the full implementation of legacy mechanisms outlined in the Stormont House Agreement;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to the delivery of high quality services at the point of need and which addresses the needs of all victims;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to embedding a gender sensitive approach to all mechanisms to deal with the past;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to continued engagements with families bereaved or seriously physically injured including those injured by or through Republicans actions. Sinn Féin is committed to progress such engagements with compassion and humility;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to exploring the transformative potential of a common act of acknowledgement. Such an initiative of common acknowledgement by all sides – British, Irish, Republican and Unionist – of the hurt and injustices caused by and to each other could introduce a powerful new dynamic to the Peace Process;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to exploring how best to remember all victims of the conflict.

## BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Building for the future will require functioning and accountable political institutions that meet the needs of all citizens on the basis of equality, respect and parity of esteem. It will also require new relationships on this island and with our neighbouring islands. Building for the future will require the creation of common vision that signals a direction of forward travel, where rights are safeguarded and where there is equal respect for all traditions: the Green, the Orange and our new communities.

### A Vision for a New, Agreed and United Ireland

The Good Friday Agreement (1998) and the subsequent political agreements that followed have provided the political framework and governing principles to facilitate the future conduct of politics on this island and with our neighbouring island. At its core the Good Friday Agreement gave expression to the three distinct sets of relationships: relationships within the North of Ireland; between the people of Ireland and between the island of Ireland and Britain that reflected our complex identities. These institutional relationships reflected our complex and shared history while also creating conditions through which all political aspirations could be democratically pursued.

The binding principles of the Good Friday Agreement were designed to engender true democratic politics: based on a new template bereft of sectarianism or attitudes. While Sinn Féin has a vision of an agreed and united Ireland we are acutely aware that others have a different vision. Sinn Féin is committed to shaping a new political dispensation in which a citizen can be Irish and Unionist, where one can also claim Britishness and be comfortable on this island.



## The Role of Political Institutions

Sinn Féin believes that the political and social context, particularly in the north, must be transformed in order for sectarianism and segregation to be comprehensively tackled. It is in this context that The Fresh Start Agreement (2016) reflects the need to enhance the effectiveness of all political institutions which have a major role in creating the conditions to advance and facilitate reconciliation and healing locally, regionally and nationally. The process of reconciliation however cannot be limited by the daily business of politics: this must be a public space within which there is commitment to build a common vision for the future.

Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring that all political institutions exercise positive leadership and agree values, standards and targets that will enhance good relations and reconciliation. We are also committed to ensuring that the Northern Assembly and the power sharing Executive leads by example and gives visual and practical expression to their commitment to build a stable and cohesive community that is defined by equality, respect and parity of esteem.

In essence the Northern Assembly and power sharing Executive, and indeed all other political institutions, must reflect and remodel the change they seek in communities. This must be supported by a commitment within Councils to also act as beacons for reconciliation and healing. In practice they must uphold their Section 75 obligations to ensure that equality of opportunity and good relations are central to policy-making, service delivery and resource allocation.

## The Role of Public Policy

Advancing reconciliation will necessitate practical policy making to effectively address sectarianism, sectarian segregation and physical division. Public policy has a role to incentivise sharing, promote integration and deliver efficient public services. This thinking is core to The Fresh Start Agreement.

Public policy has a key function to engage with the cost of division which flows from the legacy of partition and the sectarian segregation of northern society. This will be vital if governments departments, district and county council and public bodies are to deliver sustainable good relations and reconciliation outcomes.

To enhance reconciliation:

- » Sinn Féin is fully committed to ensuring that the Northern Assembly and the power sharing Executive plays a leadership role in progressing reconciliation;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring that all governments departments, district and county council and public bodies have a clear reconciliation focus which is evidenced in their commitments to equality and good relations proof all major policy decisions.

## Engaging with Sectarianism and Sectarian Segregation

Engaging with the culture and practice of sectarianism and sectarian segregation remains a major barrier to building a better future. For as long as this goes unchallenged division and polarisation will be perpetuated; intolerance and bigotry will continue; and the potential for instability and conflict will be a constant. We are committed to ensuring that political institutions exercise positive civic leadership to promote the economic and social benefits of sharing and integration.

Sinn Féin remains committed to challenging sectarianism in all its manifestations and ensuring the development of a culture of respect for all traditions. We are committed to agreeing a new legal definition of sectarianism that would be enshrined in legislation. This would include robust incitement to hatred provisions. This should draw on the substantial body of work in Scottish legislation and the work undertaken by the Nil by Mouth charity which exists for the sole purpose of achieving a society free from sectarianism where cultural and religious diversity is respected and celebrated by everyone.

Sinn Féin is also committed to ensuring that all cultural expression is affirmative, sensitive and inoffensive and guided by the principles of equality and parity of esteem. Sinn Féin is further committed to ensuring that the allocation of all public funds for cultural celebration must be done fairly and equitably and in a manner which does not perpetuate sectarianism but which is sensitive to the identities and aspirations of all others. This level of respect for all traditions is the threshold for an agreed and united Ireland.

To enhance reconciliation:

- » Sinn Féin will engage positively with the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition as outlined in The Fresh Start Agreement (2016) as it seeks to formulate recommendations that engages with the various manifestations of cultural expression.

## Reconciliation as a pathway to a better future

Sinn Féin believes that an inclusive reconciliation process can create a pathway to building a better future. Such a process will place a responsibility upon Republicans to persuade and convince all sections of our society of the merits and viability of our vision for the future. It also places a responsibility on the Irish and British governments to be persuaders for reconciliation and healing. Persuasion, debate and argument must define any future reconciliation process. Sinn Féin is committed to engagement with all sections of Irish society to listen, share and explore the shape of an inclusive and agreed future.

There is much to be learned from the Republic of South Africa's Day of Reconciliation which came into effect in 1994 after the end of apartheid, with the intention of reconcile the horror of the events of the past and the promise of a shared future together, regardless of race, culture or creed. It is a public holiday held annually on 16 December. Drawing on the experience from the Republic of South Africa, Sinn Féin is committed to designating a Day of Reconciliation that reflects different loyalties but which signals a commitment to building a better future.

## Coalition for Reconciliation: Role of Civic Society

Enhancing reconciliation and healing will require collective societal leadership and a commitment from local communities, civic organisations, trade unions, educational institutions, business organisations, faith communities and our new communities. Such a coalition could make a significant contribution to enhance reconciliation and healing by developing practical projects, maximising participation and shaping a new forward looking discourse. Sinn Féin believes that the Compact Civic Advisory Panel agreed in The Fresh Start Agreement (2016) will have a key role shaping and informing thinking on reconciliation within the power sharing Northern Executive. It is therefore vital that the panel brings forward creative and innovative thinking which considers the transformative potential that a new civic forum could have to enhancing reconciliation and healing.

To enhance reconciliation:

- » Sinn Féin is fully committed to ensuring that the Northern Assembly and the power sharing Executive plays a leadership role in progressing reconciliation;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring that all governments departments, district and county council and public bodies are flagships that have a clear reconciliation focus which is evidenced in their commitments to equality and good relations proof all major policy decisions.
- » Sinn Féin is committed to fair and equitable rotation of all civic posts
- » Sinn Féin will engage positively with the Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition as outlined in The Fresh Start Agreement (2016) as it seeks to formulate recommendations that engages with the various manifestations of cultural expression.
- » Sinn Féin is committed to engaging with all sections of Irish society to shape an inclusive and authentic reconciliation process;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to developing a new legal definition of sectarianism that would be enshrined in legislation.
- » Sinn Féin is committed to the formulation of a dedicated Reconciliation Strategy under the auspices of the North-South Ministerial Council.
- » Sinn Féin is committed to engaging with both the Irish and British governments to bring forward proposals that will enhance reconciliation;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring that all public institutions incentivise co-operation and places reconciliation outcomes central to all policy considerations.
- » Sinn Féin is committed to the designation of a Reconciliation Day (Suggested as Bank Holiday Weekend at end of May – this is the mid-point between Easter Rising and Somme Sacrifice).

# SINN FÉIN COMMITMENTS

Sinn Féin has identified a number of headline actions that we believe taken collectively will advance practical reconciliation and healing:

- » Sinn Féin is committed to supporting a public coalition for reconciliation that will harness support, and bring forward policy ideas that will assist progress and maximise participation;
- » Sinn Féin will continue to be imaginative and creative and take initiatives that enhance reconciliation and healing;
- » Sinn Féin will commit to making a positive contribution to develop a shared culture of commemoration which is inclusive, respectful and based upon parity of esteem and which that acknowledges all lives lost in conflict.
- » Sinn Féin will respond positively to shared commemoration invitations where our presence will contribute to reconciliation and healing outcomes.

On the matter of engaging with the legacy of the past:

- » Sinn Féin is committed to comprehensively dealing with the issue of legacy and is fully committed to the implementation of legacy mechanisms outlined in the Stormont House Agreement;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to the delivery of high quality services at the point of need and which engage with the needs of all victims;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to embedding a gender sensitive approach to all mechanisms to deal with the past.
- » Sinn Féin is committed to continued engagements with families bereaved or seriously physically injured including those injured by or through Republicans actions. Sinn Féin is committed to progress such engagements with compassion and humility;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to exploring the transformative potential of a common act of acknowledgement. Such an initiative of common acknowledgement by all sides – British, Irish, Republican and Unionist – of the hurt and injustices caused by and to each other could introduce a powerful new dynamic to the Peace Process;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to exploring how best to remember all victims of the conflict.

On the matter of building for the future:

- » Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring that all district and county council are flagships that promote good community relations, reconciliation and healing based on equality.
- » Sinn Féin is committed to fair and equitable rotation of all civic posts
- » Sinn Féin is committed to engaging with all sections of Irish society to shape an inclusive and authentic reconciliation process;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to developing a new legal definition of sectarianism that would be enshrined in legislation.
- » Sinn Féin is committed to the formulation of a dedicated Reconciliation Strategy under the auspices of the North-South Ministerial Council.
- » Sinn Féin is committed to engaging with both the Irish and British governments to bring forward proposals that will enhance reconciliation;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to ensuring that all public institutions incentivise co-operation and places reconciliation outcomes central to all policy considerations.

Additionally:

- » Sinn Féin is committed to enhanced dialogue and engagement with wider society. Only through dialogue can we better understand the fears and apprehensions of others;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to the establishment of the Civic Advisory Panel agreed in The Fresh Start Agreement (2016) that would act as a platform to promote reconciliation and to encourage cross-community and anti-sectarian initiatives and which would harness the efforts of local communities, civic organisations, trade unions, educational institutions, business organisations, faith communities and our new communities;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to dealing with the scourge of sectarianism and the entrenched community segregation and division in the northern part of the island;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to the creation of a new symbol of remembrance that acknowledges all those from this island who have died in all wars and battles on this island and on foreign shores;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to the creation of an anti-sectarian charter;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to the full implementation of the Together Building a United Community strategy and calls for the delivery mechanisms to be community rooted confidence building measures aimed at undermining sectarianism in the longer term;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to developing a Bill of Rights that upholds the rights of all citizens to live free from all forms of sectarian harassment, bigotry and intolerance;
- » Sinn Féin is committed to developing anti-sectarian legislation in the North to that includes robust incitement to hatred provisions.





