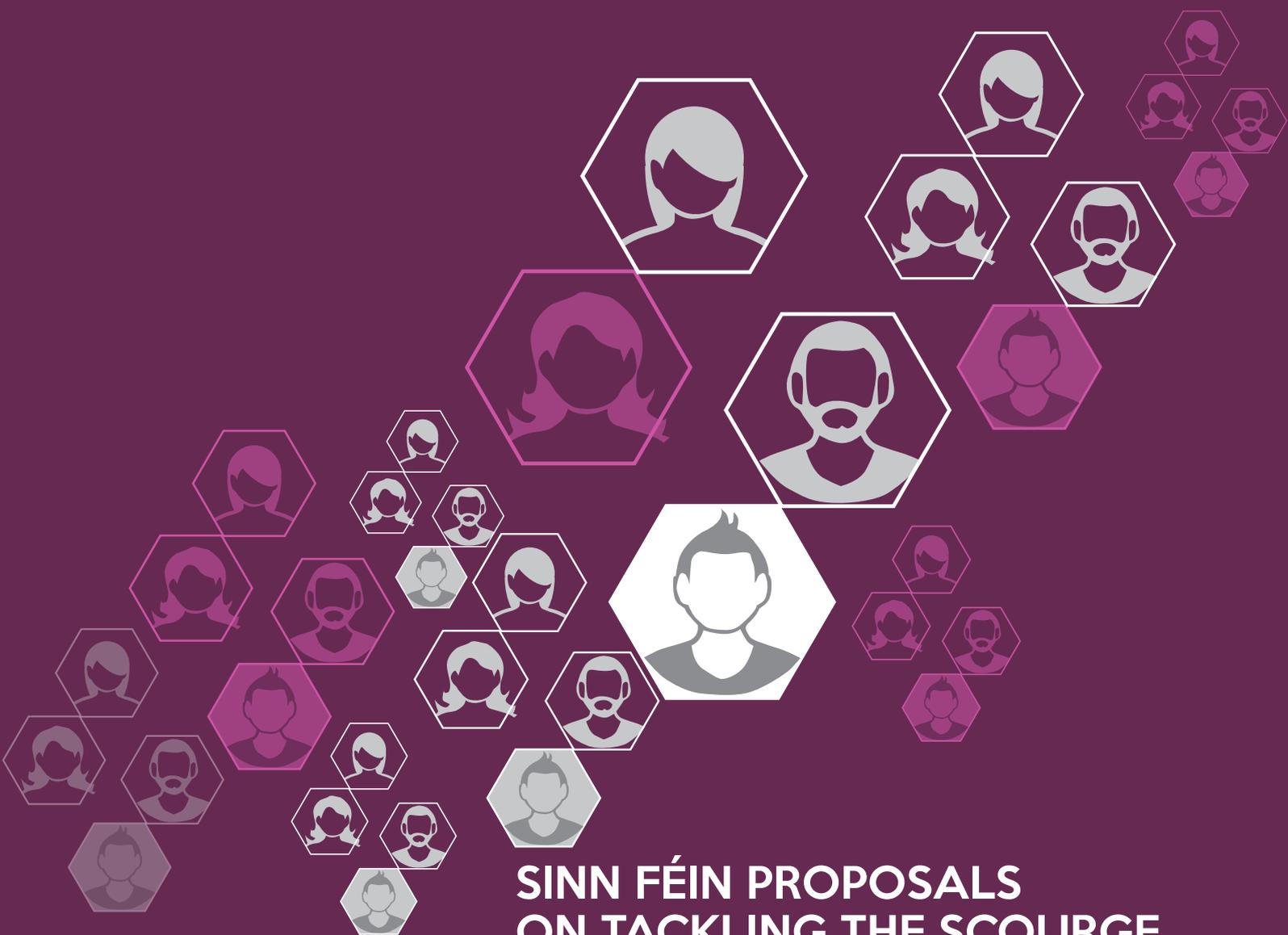


ONE COMMUNITY



SINN FÉIN PROPOSALS ON TACKLING THE SCOURGE OF SECTARIANISM IN NORTHERN SOCIETY

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INTRODUCTION

Sectarianism remains a blight on the societal and political landscape of the north of Ireland. This is a direct consequence of partition which created the northern statelet on a sectarian headcount.

Sectarianism is the antithesis of republicanism and has been fostered over centuries to divide the people of Ireland.

In the decades following partition it was cultivated to maintain divisions in the north to benefit the unionist ruling elite and create the illusion of dominance by the protestant working class over their catholic neighbours thus preventing united community class consciousness.

Sectarianism dictated employment, education, housing and voting rights.

It legitimised institutionalised discrimination, communal violence and division. In the south religious doctrine directly influenced the direction of the state and social policy, and alienated sections of the Protestant population.

Sectarianism has infected each and every level of society.

Despite political progress and the ending of conflict, sectarianism remains a cancer in Irish society; if left unaddressed it will remain an open wound to be exploited. It must be eradicated.

REALITY OF SECTARIANISM

Sectarianism and segregation influence our society's approach to educational preference; choice of sport; how and where citizens choose to live and socialise; and, to some degree, the location of their employment.

Unless the attitudes which sponsor and perpetuate the nature of division and conflict within our society are eradicated and resolved, the culture of 'them and us' will recycle divisions and continue to encourage the use of the past as a political weapon.

Sectarian attitudes are the most incendiary catalyst for violence now and in the future, and for rationalising, even legitimising, continuous communal instability and segregation.

This reality represents the biggest barrier to a shared future, and arguably the most significant challenge to dealing successfully with the past.

POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

The Good Friday Agreement (GFA) provides the political framework and governing principles to facilitate the conduct of politics, and co-existence of distinct and competing political traditions and aspirations. However, the failure to fully embrace the GFA principles of mutual respect, parity of esteem, equality and the right to both live free from sectarian harassment, and to pursue political goals on the basis of peaceful politics, means that the culture of sectarianism retards the primacy of democratic politics.

Despite some progress over the past decade through Executive led initiatives such as Together Building a United Community, grass roots community led projects, and initiatives taken by the Sinn Féin leadership to promote reconciliation, Sinn Féin believes that bolder initiatives need to be taken which set the benchmark for tackling sectarianism.

Sinn Féin acknowledges the vital reconciliation work of grassroots community projects, civic organisations, trade unions, educational institutions, business organisations, faith groups and our new communities in Ireland, north and south.

There is no acceptable level of sectarianism. It is unjustifiable. Every section of our community must demonstrate zero tolerance of sectarian actions or utterances. Legal sanctions and education must be part of this endeavour.

Sinn Féin is committed to tackling and eradicating sectarianism from Irish society.

We are committed to the principle of the Good Friday Agreement which promised to citizens “the right to live free from sectarian harassment”.

In practice this must include:

- 1) The right to employment free from sectarian discrimination, intimidation or attack.
- 2) The right to housing and to live in your home free from sectarian attack, intimidation or other discrimination.
- 3) The right to free association, recreation and to socialize at places of choice free from sectarian attack, intimidation or other discrimination.
- 4) The right to practice religious faith and worship free from sectarian attack, intimidation or other discrimination.
- 5) The duty to report or challenge sectarian speech, attack, intimidation or other discrimination when witnessed or heard.
- 6) The responsibility of the Executive and all statutory agencies, including those within the criminal justice system, to uphold and defend these rights.
- 7) A commitment from both the British and Irish Governments to pro-actively support the eradication of sectarianism from Irish society.

True democratic politics, bereft of sectarian culture or attitudes, need to work and be seen to do so successfully within our institutions, under the agreed and binding principles of the GFA.

Public representatives and political leaders must set the example and desist from language or actions which cause insult or offence against the identity of anyone in our society.

To that end, Sinn Féin proposes that anti-sectarian measures and initiatives must be brought into the mechanisms of government at both executive and local authority levels.

Sinn Féin supports the full implementation of the Transforming and Building a United Community (OFMDFM) strategy, and calls for that to be reinforced with the following strategic measures aimed at undermining sectarianism in the longer term:

- A clear legal definition of sectarianism as a hate crime entrenched within legislation adopted by the Assembly and the Oireachtas, with appropriate enforcement and legal sanction.
- Expression for the above within a Bill of Rights as provided for under the terms of the Good Friday Agreement.
- All-party unity and leadership for a popular, 32 Counties wide campaign against sectarianism and segregation.
- A citizens anti-sectarian charter which should be incorporated into the pledges of Ministers, TDs, MLAs, local councillors and all other public representatives.
- Sinn Féin proposes the adoption of a dedicated Reconciliation Strategy under the auspices of the North-South Ministerial Council.



10 POINT ANTI-SECTARIAN ACTION PLAN

1. The Executive & Assembly, local authorities and all public sector bodies will adopt a dedicated anti-sectarianism policy and make it publicly available on their websites.
2. All elected representatives will be bound to pro-actively uphold and implement the commitment of his / her anti-sectarianism pledge of office.
3. Every member of Assembly staff, civil service and public sector workers will undertake sectarianism awareness training so they may be equipped with the skills and awareness to challenge bigotry.
4. To develop a strategy with trade unions and employers in the private sector to promote policies and initiatives aimed at challenging sectarian behaviour and discrimination in the workplace and to make employees aware of relevant legislation.
5. Every successful bidder for Government contracts or public funding in the private and voluntary sectors will adopt an anti-sectarianism policy within management policy and include sectarian awareness training for staff and volunteers.
6. An extensive publicity campaign will be devised to raise awareness of the damage caused by sectarianism, highlighting the consequences of bigoted attitudes and behaviour and the cost of division and the legal protections against sectarianism.
7. A requirement that every PSNI officer will receive dedicated sectarianism awareness training.
8. Anti-sectarianism initiatives will be introduced within the education curriculum with the aim that every child in the north is equipped with a clear awareness and understanding of the issue.
9. To develop new ways of reinforcing anti-sectarian messages for young people outside of the classroom with an emphasis on anti-sectarianism training and development.
10. To develop a strategic initiative with four of the most influential sporting organisations in Ireland (GAA, Rugby, Soccer & Boxing) to promote anti-sectarianism, and oppose bigotry and intolerance across the island.