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Bairbre de Brún
(Sinn Féin MEP)

The Road to Peace in Ireland

Berghof Series
Resistance/Liberation Movements and
Transition to Politics

Bairbre de Brún:

The Road to Peace in Ireland
Berghof Transitions Series No. 6

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Berghof Transitions Series

Resistance/Liberation Movements and Transition to Politics

Editors

Véronique Dudouet and David Bloomfield

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About this Publication Series

This case-study is one of a series produced by participants in an ongoing Berghof research project on transitions from violence to peace (*Resistance/Liberation Movements and Transition to Politics*). The project's overall aim is to learn from the experience of those in resistance or liberation movements who have used violence in their struggle but have also engaged politically during the conflict and in any peace process. Recent experience around the world has demonstrated that reaching political settlement in protracted social conflict always eventually needs the involvement of such movements. Our aim here is to discover how, from a non-state perspective, such political development is handled, what is the relationship between political and military strategies and tactics, and to learn more about how such movements (often sweepingly and simplistically bundled under the label of *non-state armed groups*) contribute to the transformation of conflict and to peacemaking. We can then use that experiential knowledge (1) to offer support to other movements who might be considering such a shift of strategy, and (2) to help other actors (states and international) to understand more clearly how to engage meaningfully with such movements to bring about political progress and peaceful settlement.

Political violence is a tool of both state and non-state actors, and replacing it by political methods of conflict management is essential to making sustainable peace. With this project we want to understand better how one side of that equation has been, or could be, achieved. Depending on the particular case, each study makes a strong argument for the necessary inclusion of the movement in any future settlement, or documents clearly how such a role was effectively executed.

We consciously asked participants to reflect on their experience from their own unique point of view. What we publish in this series is not presented as neutral or exclusively accurate commentary. All histories are biased histories, and there is no single truth in conflict or in peace. Rather, we believe these case-studies are significant because they reflect important voices which are usually excluded or devalued in the analysis of conflict. Increasing numbers of academics, for example, study "armed groups" from outside, but few actually engage directly with them to hear their own points of view, rationales, and understandings of their context. We are convinced that these opinions and perspectives urgently need to be heard in order to broaden our understanding of peacemaking. For exactly this reason, each case study has been produced with the very close co-operation of, and in some cases authored by, members of the movement concerned. As the results amply illustrate, these perspectives are sophisticated, intelligent, political and strategic.

The reader may or may not agree with the perspectives expressed. But, much more importantly, we hope that the reader will accept that these perspectives are valid in themselves and must be included in any attempt at comprehensive understanding of violent conflict and its transformation. We urgently need to understand in more depth the dynamics of organisations who make the transition between political violence and democratic politics, in order to improve our understanding of their role, and our practice, in making peace.

The views expressed are those of the authors and contributors, and do not necessarily reflect the opinions or views of the Berghof Foundation for Conflict Studies or any of its constituent agencies.

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Introduction

The history of resistance to English/British interference in Ireland over eight centuries has gone through many different phases: passive resistance, agrarian unrest, armed uprising, setbacks, defeats and regroupings, temporary victories, mass movements and political agitation, language and cultural struggles, democratic gains, and constitutional and parliamentary engagement. The last is often the most challenging phase to any revolutionary movement.

This analysis could rapidly get lost or bogged down in too much historical detail or a discussion of the variety of personalities and shifting power bases and rivalries that were involved over many centuries. Thus, I will concentrate mostly on the main developments in our struggle from the time of the civil rights movement in the North of Ireland in 1968. That is how I shall address the three points that were asked in this project:

- How does a movement become drawn into armed struggle?
- What factors persuade people to move towards non-armed political strategy?
- How is that strategy defined?

Although there was of course political armed struggle and there was political non-armed struggle, for the purpose of this paper and in the context of this project, when I use the term ‘political’ I mean ‘non-armed’.

1. Early Years

Irish people, like any other peace-loving people who were subjected to occupation and dispossession, would have preferred to have their rights established without the resort to force and conflict. The enemy, the occupying power, was the occupying power precisely because it had no qualms about employing its overwhelming military might to subjugate people.

The cycle of resistance to British rule in Ireland was an established pattern that other colonised people would easily recognise. Political agitation and appeals, lasting over decades, would fail, and then, in response to that failure, and provided there were leaders and a dedicated organisation in place, resistance, insurrection or uprising would follow.

For example, the political party Sinn Féin was formed in 1905. Sinn Féin and the underground Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), the forerunner of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), were to the fore in rejecting British rule. However, at that time the Irish electorate voted mostly for the Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) which sent its MPs to the British parliament at Westminster. There, they had little or no success in their appeals to the British parliament for Irish rights. Sinn Féin’s role of politicising people and of agitating against British rule complemented the plans of the IRB to stage an armed uprising in 1916 (the “Rising”) along with the Citizen’s Army, when Dublin was seized and held for a week and an Irish Republic was declared.

Heavy-handed British retaliation – repression and the summary execution of the leaders of the Rising – alienated Irish people. Very soon they switched their support from the constitutional party, the IPP, to the Republican party, Sinn Féin, which won a majority of seats in the 1918 general election. Sinn Féin declined to take their seats at Westminster and established instead an Irish

parliament, Dáil Éireann. The British government proscribed Dáil Éireann and hunted down its leaders. The IRA then launched a war of independence against British occupation forces.

The War of Independence lasted for several years and culminated in unsatisfactory negotiations which split the IRA and Sinn Féin. Britain partitioned Ireland north-south, granting dominion status to 26 out of Ireland's 32 counties, and in the six counties in the North handed all power to the unionists who remained loyal to Britain and to the 'Union' with Britain. They were mostly Protestant descendants of the original colonisers of north-east Ireland in the seventeenth century. The southern Irish state (the 26 counties), after a tragic and bloody civil war, eventually evolved into today's *Republic of Ireland*. Britain named the northern six-county state *Northern Ireland*. It was born in violence with pogroms against the Irish nationalist community, who were then forced to live as second-class citizens. Indeed, one prime minister of that state described its assembly and administration as "a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people", the term Protestant being seen as synonymous with the term unionist (i.e. loyal to Britain).

Nationalist elected representatives regularly boycotted this parliament because they could make no impact on its legislation and were forever sidelined and humiliated. But in every decade of the state's existence there were always a small number of people, organised as the IRA, which maintained a challenge to the state, even if that challenge was not always pursued through armed struggle. This meant that there were always political prisoners in jail and a continuing culture of resistance. However, it would be true to say that the IRA made little impact until the beginning of the 1970s when, after the repression of the Civil Rights Movement, it re-emerged, was better organised and enjoyed popular support in urban working class, and poor rural, nationalist areas.

2. Civil Rights Protest

The Civil Rights Movement in the north of Ireland was inspired by the movement in the USA led by Martin Luther King. It was also influenced by the students' revolts in Europe in May 1968 and the anti-Vietnam war movement. People marched to demand very limited civil rights: an end to gerrymandering in local government; the right for every person to have a vote; the right to decent housing; and an end to discrimination in employment. Of course, Irish Republicans and many nationalists also wanted a united Ireland and an end to British rule. Many wanted a 32-county, democratic, socialist republic.

Civil rights marchers were attacked by the state police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). Water cannons, CS gas and police truncheons were used to beat people off the streets. In one infamous incident the police broke into the nationalist Bogside area of Derry and beat a man in front of his family. He later died and when an inquiry was held into his death the police refused to cooperate and no one was prosecuted. In 1969 nationalist areas in Belfast were invaded by unionist mobs and the RUC. Many people were shot dead and thousands were burned out of their homes. At the outset, the IRA was very poorly organised but as a result of this and other incidents was determined to rearm and defend the community.

Further repression intensified the growing conflict between the IRA and state forces, particularly when the British government introduced internment without trial in 1971. Despite the fact that there was widespread violence from unionist paramilitaries, including a campaign of assassination, internment was used in a one-sided manner against Irish Republicans, civil rights activists and students. In 1978 the European Court of Human Rights found Britain guilty of "inhuman and degrading treatment" of prisoners in a landmark case taken by the Irish government.

Civil rights marchers protesting against internment were shot dead on the streets of Derry by British paratroopers in January 1972 in what became known as Bloody Sunday. So alienated and frustrated had nationalists become that even John Hume, the leader of the moderate nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), which represented nationalists but opposed the IRA, declared after Bloody Sunday that the solution was “a united Ireland – or nothing”. The debate which raged within the nationalist community was whether peaceful, constitutional change via the SDLP was possible or whether the IRA’s armed campaign, which was now in full swing, could force change from the British.

At this stage the Republican demands were the traditional, fundamental ones: Britain must recognise the right of Irish people in all 32-counties to determine their own future, must declare its intention of withdrawing from Ireland for good, and must grant an amnesty to political prisoners. So, within the Republican community, the general view and the general atmosphere of the time was that armed struggle was going to end British rule; that armed struggle and *only* armed struggle was going to bring about British disengagement. The theory ran that once the British had been prevailed upon to leave, Irish people could set up a constitutional conference of the type we have seen in other countries, where people would decide their future. Everything would be on the table for negotiation, everybody being stakeholders in such a conference, and all relationships, internal and external, would be agreed and resolved.

3. Internal Debate

For historical reasons – and I suppose this is something that many revolutionary movements share – there was distrust within Irish Republicanism of constitutional and party politics. This went back to the divisions which emerged within the IRA and Sinn Féin at the time of the negotiations in 1920/21 which led to the partition of Ireland and to civil war. There was always a fear that fundamental Republican principles would be diluted, that the revolutionary edge would be lost or compromised. There was even a distrust of the word ‘peace’, given the way it had been used by opponents who viewed the military repression of the state as necessary and legitimate but classified resistance to repression as ‘violence’ and immoral. Even though those engaged in struggle were striving to bring about a peaceful situation, there was a view among many ordinary people in terms of political discourse that ‘peace’ meant surrender and that ‘politics’ meant abandoning not only the use of arms but also the objective of fundamental change in Ireland. In other words, people felt that those who went into politics often did so in order to further their own situation and not for the general good of their community. This fear is best summed up by one of the leaders of the 1916 Rising, Pádraig MacPiarais who, two years before his execution, declared: “Unarmed you will only attain as much freedom as Britain is prepared to concede. Armed, you will attain as much as you are prepared to take.”

Nonetheless, there was a lot of discussion about the responsibility on Republicans to look after the welfare of people living in areas from which they drew support. Regardless of opposition to a state, or attempts to overthrow a state, it is impossible to totally ignore or shun its institutions, its administration, or its offices. While the armed struggle of the IRA was being waged, Sinn Féin party activists were opening advice centres and were representing ordinary people in their everyday battles with bureaucracy, with state agencies, with employers, or with the courts. During this period when the police, the RUC, were boycotted, the IRA also undertook the role of policing the nationalist community, albeit in a very imperfect way.

On the one hand, the nationalist community in outlook and in its psyche almost represented “a state within a state”. On the other hand, that community, including Republican activists who were opposed to the state and dedicated to its overthrow, had to pragmatically engage with the state in order to properly represent the needs of local people.

4. The Role of Prisoners

In the 1970s political prisoners played a major role in developing Republican thinking, discussing and debating the need for community structures alternative to those controlled by the state. In all likelihood these discussions would have progressed in any case to include a discussion on the need for party-political forms of struggle to augment street politics and armed actions. However, what really accelerated the development of mass, broad-front politics, and later of party political engagement in elections, was the campaign inside and outside the jails for political prisoner status. In 1976 the British government decided to no longer recognise as political prisoners those arrested under the emergency powers and imprisoned as a result of the conflict. The British government’s strategy was to force the prisoners to wear criminal uniforms and symbolically render them non-political. By criminalising the prisoners it hoped to criminalise the political cause of Irish independence for which the prisoners had fought.

Men and women were treated brutally within the prisons. For more than four years, the men refused to wear prison uniforms and, deprived of their own clothes, wore only a blanket wrapped around them. A mass movement on the outside was mobilised to support the “blanket men” in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh¹, as they became known, and the women in Armagh Jail. Tens of thousands took to the streets, as the blanket protest escalated into the hunger strikes of 1980 and 1981 in which ten Republican prisoners died. Probably the most famous of those prisoners was IRA Volunteer and poet Bobby Sands. By the time of his death in May 1981, after sixty six days on hunger strike, he had been elected as an MP to the British parliament. His comrade, Kieran Doherty, was elected to the southern parliament in Dublin, along with another blanket man, Paddy Agnew. Their election was a total rebuttal of the argument put forward by British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher that the prisoners had no support. Owen Carron, who was Sands’ election agent, succeeded him as MP in a second election after his death, and used his elected status to expose British double standards with regard to democracy.

The campaign around the jails and the stunning election victories showed the importance of a broad popular movement. They showed that there were forms of political action, outside of political *armed* action, that could involve thousands of people, that added international recognition and credibility to the struggle and that challenged and overturned the propaganda fostered by the British government.

Undeniably, the Republican struggle in the North of Ireland now had an electoral dimension and was developing along the twin tracks of armed struggle and electoral politics, characterised as a two-fold strategy of “the armalite and ballot box”. On the one hand, Sinn Féin would aim to make electoral gains, increase its popular support and seek to win the hearts and minds of the wider nationalist community; on the other, the IRA would continue to pursue its armed struggle with the objective of putting pressure on the British government to open up negotiations.

¹ At Long Kesh prison, new purpose-built cells had been constructed, each separate block of cells comprising four wings in the shape of an H.

The 1981 hunger strike is now recognised as a political watershed in Irish history, akin to the magnitude of the 1916 Rising for those struggling in the subsequent War of Independence. The hunger strike and the subsequent election victories clearly established the problem internationally as a political problem and not as a security problem, and enabled the Republican Movement to make a relatively smooth transition into electoral politics without a split – although there were some, particularly those who thought in ‘traditional’ terms, who had reservations which would surface much later.

Republican strategy was to repudiate, resist and defeat all options and proposals the British put forward to merely “contain” the resistance instead of properly addressing the causes of conflict and the injustices and inequalities they created and sustained.

5. An Electoral Strategy

In the South of Ireland, opinion polls have repeatedly shown that the majority of people still aspire to a united Ireland. Indeed, all the major parties profess it as an objective. Sinn Féin’s criticism, however, is that those parties merely pay lip service to that aspiration and in practice have never protected northern nationalists, never effectively pressed Britain over its human rights abuses in the North, and never called for a British withdrawal. Thus, nationalists in the North always had a sense of being deserted, of being left on their own.

The all-Ireland Republican Movement kept alive the issue of Irish independence and channelled the efforts of nationalist-minded people on both sides of the border into agitation, resistance and political activity. The Republican Movement also enjoyed important and crucial financial and *materiel* support from the Irish emigrant community across the world, especially in North America, and had a lot of support from solidarity organisations internationally.

In 1986, after a long debate, Sinn Féin ended its abstentionist policy of boycotting the parliament in Dublin (the Dáil). Regardless of what ideological view Sinn Féin held, it had to recognise that the majority of people within the state, which was renamed the *Republic of Ireland* in 1949, considered the institutions of the state as being legitimate. (When Sinn Féin ended its abstentionist policy, a small number of members left the party and formed Republican Sinn Féin under the leadership of former party president, Ruairí O Brádaigh.)

Opening up an electoral ‘front’ and engaging in electoral politics was a major development, and presented a difficult challenge to the Northern state. Successive British governments had claimed they could not speak to Republicans because we had no mandate. But once Sinn Féin did win electoral support, the reaction of the British government was to wage an all-out attack on that mandate and attempt to marginalise our party.

Our elected representatives, who were anxious to engage with the British public, were barred from entering Britain² on pain of five years’ imprisonment, even though the British government argued that we were British. British ministers refused to recognise Sinn Féin MPs. The salaries of Sinn Féin Assembly members were withheld. A broadcasting ban was imposed, where the voices of Sinn Féin members were banned from radio and TV and replaced with voice-overs by actors. And loyalist death squads, often organised by British Intelligence, unleashed an assassination campaign against Sinn Féin party officials.

Of course, the irony in the British position was that back in 1972 the British government had released Gerry Adams from prison and secretly flown him and other Republican leaders to

² Note that the term “Britain” comprises the three nations on the island of Britain (England, Scotland and Wales), while the entity of the “United Kingdom” also includes Northern Ireland.

London for truce talks at a time when Sinn Féin had no mandate. And then, ten years later, when Gerry Adams had won election as an MP to the British parliament, and election as President of Sinn Féin, the British government refused to talk to him.

In introducing the broadcasting ban on Sinn Féin the British government was following the lead of successive Irish governments which had imposed state censorship against Republicans since 1973 and only lifted this in 1994 after the IRA announced its ceasefire. The media on both sides of the border were hostile to the Republican Movement and to anyone – writer, poet, musician, artist, independents – who attempted to put the conflict into context. Once, during a gardening programme on the southern state radio, RTE, the presenter discovered that the person he was interviewing on the telephone about flowers was a Sinn Féin councillor. The councillor was immediately cut off even though he was not commenting politically.

In 1985 Sinn Féin contested local council elections across the North. In an attempt to force Sinn Féin to abstain from taking its seats, the British introduced a compulsory oath that each councillor must take, forswearing the use of political violence. With revolutionary pragmatism, and with the councils in its sights, Sinn Féin refused to let that obstacle block its way, and began to take its seats in councils across the North. This was resisted by unionist councillors, who unlawfully formed sub-committees in a number of those councils which they controlled and devolved the council powers to those sub-committees, from which they then excluded Sinn Féin. Sinn Féin took legal action and won successive court battles and established the rights of the whole electorate to political representation. It was a long, hard battle during which many Sinn Féin councillors were assassinated or seriously wounded while travelling to or from council meetings or their everyday work.

6. Beginning a Peace Process

In 1987 Sinn Féin published a discussion document, *A Scenario for Peace* (see annex 1). The word ‘peace’, particularly in the mouths of our opponents, was interpreted as meaning one thing only – the defeat of the IRA. We argued that the conflict ran much deeper and historically than merely armed opponents battling for supremacy or ‘victory’. We set out to re-claim the word ‘peace’.

The basic tenets of our strategy were: to politically engage with our opponents, to bring about the exercise of the right to national self-determination and to put a peace process in place to bring this about and resolve the causes of conflict. In the document we said: “[This paper] does not represent the definitive republican position, nor is it exclusive of other proposals dealing with alternative scenarios for a British withdrawal from Ireland.”

British colonial interference was at the heart of the conflict. We called for an end to partition and for elections to a Constitutional Conference. There would be written guarantees for unionists. The conference would be responsible for determining the nature and composition of an emergent national police service and the judiciary. We stated that all political prisoners must be unconditionally released.

The resolution of the conflict, we believed, would “free unionists from their historic laager mentality and would grant them real security instead of tenure based on repression and triumphalism.”

Importantly, we said that, “A cessation of all offensive military actions by all organizations would create the climate necessary for a peaceful transition to a negotiated settlement.”

We then entered into a lengthy discussion with our political rivals within the nationalist community, the SDLP. While their supporters, like Republicans, aspired to a united Ireland, the SDLP in practice did not have a position or strategy for actively working towards that end. Indeed, their energies were largely squandered by bemoaning the situation and condemning Republicans rather than challenging the British. In our exchanges we discovered that they had never specifically asked the British to leave Ireland.

Our position was: if there are people in Ireland who do not believe in armed struggle, but do believe in a united Ireland and do believe in a new future, then they should engage with us in private and public discussion about what their role is and what they are going to do to create a united Ireland. This argument was further developed in a later document, *Towards a Lasting Peace*, in which we set out what we thought the role of other political actors in Ireland and further afield could be.

Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland (see annex 2) was presented to the 1992 Sinn Féin ard fheis (annual party congress) as part of the debate on how best to develop a strategy for peace. In it we reiterated that “Peace is not just the absence of war but is also establishing conditions which will ensure a lasting peace.”

We argued that the search for peace is everyone’s responsibility but particularly those organisations which represent the people and specifically the London and Dublin governments. We highlighted the refusal of constitutional nationalism to challenge the existence of partition and Britain’s responsibility for the current conflict: “The Dublin government should assume its responsibility in relation to reunification either in cooperation with Britain or, if necessary, independently...”

We stated that British interference in Ireland is a European issue and we called upon the United Nations to monitor partition and Britain’s central role in the conflict. In other words, we wanted to internationalise the issue, and were to do this successfully in the following years, particularly in regard to lobbying the USA.

We were aware that despite all the bluster of successive British prime ministers and secretaries of state - those who administered direct rule from London - there were many within the British establishment, including the military, who knew that they could not defeat the IRA. The British Commander of Land Forces in the North, Brigadier James Glover, had secretly written that the IRA “has the dedication and the sinews of war to raise violence... for the foreseeable future...the [IRA’s] campaign of violence is likely to continue while the British remain in Northern Ireland.”³

All boasts about the imminent defeat of the IRA in the 1970s and 1980s proved hollow, as the IRA successfully intensified its military campaign.

In 1989, the British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Peter Brooke, gave an interview after his first 100 days in office. He stated that it would be difficult to envisage a military defeat of the IRA because of the circumstances in which it operated, and that he saw the British armed forces operating at best a policy of containment. Brooke went on to say that the British government had “no selfish, strategic or economic interest” in the north of Ireland. These comments represented a subtle, but significant, shift in the public British position. Such statements were conducive to the development of the Sinn Féin peace strategy and the evolution of the peace process. Gerry Adams’ response at the time was that if the British government couldn’t defeat the IRA it had a moral responsibility to end the fighting and end the conditions that caused conflict. Later, senior British military figures were quoted in the London *Independent* newspaper stating that they believed there was a military stalemate. Despite this the fighting did not stop and loyalist killings

³ Tonge, Jonathan (2006). Northern Ireland. London: Polity, p.70.

intensified – fuelled, we now know, by British intelligence agents.

In 1990, the British government opened up a line of communication with Sinn Féin using a confidential ‘backdoor’ channel that had been in place for many years. A period of protracted dialogue ensued in private. When news of these exchanges became public in 1993 the British at first denied they had happened, then went on to misrepresent the exchanges, though an analysis by the *Irish Times* newspaper detailed major inconsistencies in the British narrative of events.⁴

While this was happening, the Republican leadership was also communicating in private with the Irish government, and continued its discussions with the SDLP, mainly through Gerry Adams and John Hume (who was later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize). This led to the Hume-Adams Initiative, which was a statement of some key agreed principles:

- that Irish people as a whole have the right to national self-determination
- that the exercise of that right is a matter for agreement between people in Ireland
- that the consent and agreement of unionists (who consider themselves British) is an essential ingredient, but that unionists can’t have a veto over British policy.

In much the same way that the ANC had outlined their position in the Harare Declaration - which was presented first to the Front Line States, then to the EU, and then to the UN - this Hume-Adams Initiative was presented first to the Irish government who were then to present it to the British government. Throughout these discussions with Hume and the SDLP, Sinn Féin and the British government were also continuing with their confidential dialogue which included the exchange of some documents. All of this was going on from 1990.

In 1993, the British and Irish governments issued a joint policy statement, the Downing Street Declaration. Although based on the Hume-Adams principles, this was a much weaker version. So in contrast to South Africa, where an agreed text then went on to be accepted by others as the basis for moving the situation forward, what was adopted by the British and Irish governments was so watered down that it had no real potential for progress. Gerry Adams asked whether it was a document with potential or in fact a masterpiece of ambiguity. But while Republicans believed that the Downing Street Declaration did not represent a solution, they did value the process which had brought it about. They believed the process of dialogue could possibly have very far-reaching potential. There was an intense debate within Sinn Féin about how to respond. Party activists had been expecting an imaginative response from the British because of the potential that had built up through the Hume-Adams Initiative, through the confidential dialogue, and through a whole series of responses from outside of Ireland.

So Sinn Féin sought clarification of the text of the Declaration, to tease out the positions of the various protagonists, whilst the party engaged in widespread debate and discussion. The IRA also followed events closely and with keen interest. Throughout the conflict it had often taken the initiative and declared various ceasefires and truces to encourage dialogue and to explore whether positions had changed.

Notwithstanding the difficulties surrounding the Downing Street Declaration, it is clear that the various elements we have outlined here; the SF/SDLP talks, the ‘Hundred Day Statement’ by British Secretary of State Peter Brooke, the reactivation of a secret channel of communication, the Hume-Adams Initiative and the ongoing work of clarification around the Downing Street Declaration were all factors that contributed to moves towards the IRA’s 1994 ceasefire.

⁴ See *Irish Times*, 30 November 1993.

Thus, on 31 August 1994, the IRA, in what was yet another major watershed, declared a cessation of its military activities in order to encourage political progress.

The process proved tortuous. Unionist politicians rejected the ceasefire and there was a missed opportunity. The British Conservative government of John Major, with its diminishing majority, relied on unionist votes for survival. This meant that there was no real progress until the Labour Party, led by Tony Blair, came to power in 1997.

7. Beginning a Political Process

Throughout the long and difficult period of building towards substantial negotiations Irish Republicans were quite nervous and were in uncharted territory. However, we took succour and comfort from ANC activists, from the negotiating process in South Africa and from encouraging statements from Nelson Mandela. On a visit to Dublin in 1990, after his release from prison, he was asked a question about the IRA and said: “What we would like to see is that the British government and the IRA should adopt precisely the line we have taken in regard to our own internal situation. There is nothing better than opponents sitting down to resolve their problems in a peaceful manner.”

Later, Mandela hosted a weekend of private talks in South Africa, which included unionists and Republicans learning about the South African experience. Among those in attendance was Sinn Féin’s chief negotiator, Martin McGuinness who went on in 2007 to become Deputy First Minister in the northern power-sharing executive.

At one point, a man who had been a provincial military commander in the ANC armed forces, Umkhonto We Sizwe, talked to Republican activists about his own doubts at the time. He had been holding debates with his grassroots organisations and activists, discussing Mandela’s letter and the negotiation process that followed, and he was going home in the evening saying to himself, “I hope Mandela knows what he’s doing.” Irish Republicans were going round at that time having similar debates with the grassroots and activists, and likewise hoping that Gerry Adams knew what he was doing.

In the late 1990s substantial negotiations began in earnest, aided and facilitated, it has to be said, by the Clinton presidency in the USA. The European Union also provided a special funding programme for peace and reconciliation in the North of Ireland which helped those previously marginalised and those most affected by the conflict to participate more actively in creating a better future for all.

I was a member of the Sinn Féin team that took part in negotiations with the other political parties, the Irish government, and the British government. The talks were chaired by Senator George Mitchell from the United States, General John de Chastelain from Canada, and the former Finnish Prime Minister Harri Holkeri.

The negotiations were highly significant. They were the first formal and public talks involving all the parties to the conflict since the Treaty negotiations in 1920 which led to the partition of Ireland. The negotiations were challenging for all of the participants because all were involved in a war which had lasted for almost a quarter of a century; several thousand people had been killed, many thousands had been injured and thousands more had been to jail. During that time republicans had been demonised by the British and unionists, particularly Sinn Féin leaders like Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness.

Although the negotiations dealt with a range of political issues which had led to and fuelled the armed conflict, overlaying the talks was the powerful emotional impact of the conflict on

the negotiators themselves. Republicans did their best to be as dispassionate as possible to keep their focus on the issues, not the personalities sitting across the table from them. Representatives from smaller unionist parties with formal links with pro-British paramilitary groups often wished to put the past behind them also. However, negotiators from the main unionist political parties often allowed their personal prejudice to interfere. This led to a situation where all the unionist political parties refused to negotiate directly with Sinn Féin figures, either in the room or outside the room.

Sinn Féin's broad approach to the negotiations was to extract the maximum amount of change from the British and Irish governments; they were after all the power-brokers.

They also engaged in an intense negotiation with the republican activist base: IRA volunteers and Sinn Féin activists. This constituency was kept abreast of developments as they unfolded, and as much as possible knew about developments before they heard about them in the media.

US Senator George Mitchell also played a vital role as chairperson of strands of the talks. By nature he is a cautious man and a very good listener. His patience and quiet diplomacy were legendary and made an invaluable contribution to the overall mood in the talks and ultimately the outcome – the Good Friday Agreement.

These negotiations culminated in the historic Belfast Agreement, or the Good Friday Agreement as it is popularly called after the day upon which it was signed in 1998. It dealt with the constitution, the political institutions, equality and human rights, the issue of arms, victims of the conflict, the release of the political prisoners, policing and justice.

In this new dispensation all sides had to compromise. The Irish government amended its territorial claim over the North. Sinn Féin dropped its policy of abstention towards a northern Assembly, and embraced a range of measures which amounted on their part to a significant compromise. They accepted the Good Friday Agreement as a transitional framework to work peacefully for reunification and independence; the party changed its constitution - a huge concession to unionists – to participate in northern administration: executive and assembly. This decision reversed a fundamental principle; a touch-stone tenet of Sinn Féin's independence policy. The party also accepted a short time frame for the release of all political prisoners instead of their immediate release. This was particularly difficult for many republicans. Sinn Féin also accepted that it would take time and a high profile campaign by the party to remove the British crown forces from the streets and to dismantle their numerous military bases across the north. The party adopted a similar approach to the replacement of the RUC with a new police service, the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI).

This menu of changes was not easy for republicans to accept after a quarter century of war and all that came with that. However, the leadership of Sinn Féin and the IRA made it all possible by the quality of leadership that they showed to their activist base over a protracted period of time.

The British had to give up direct rule, demilitarise through the withdrawal of troops and the dismantling of military bases, establish a commission on policing, and release the prisoners. Unionists had to join with Sinn Féin as equal ministers in a power-sharing executive with links to the rest of Ireland in all-Ireland and cross-border bodies.

Of course, the debate within Republicanism did not stop with the Agreement, as there were major challenges ahead in adjusting to this new situation. In particular, in relation to calls for the IRA to decommission its weapons, there were nationalist concerns about the defence of their areas, with memories of attacks on defenceless nationalist communities in 1969. However, as time passed and trust slowly grew, Republicans demonstrated their commitment to peace and their confidence in the future.

Of all the issues that republicans had to compromise over, the issue of the IRA's weapons was the most difficult. There was no demand inside the nationalist or republican community for the IRA to do anything with its arms other than keep them silent and in so doing make a significant contribution to the peace process. The demand for the IRA to 'decommission' its weapons was essentially one encouraged by the British securocrats, who were a malign influence on the peace process, and was articulated by mainstream unionist politicians. Although the issue of the IRA's arms was prominent in the media for years the leadership of the IRA crafted an approach which enjoyed the support of its volunteers, difficult though that was to achieve, while strengthening the peace process.

Political progress was the key to unlocking many difficult doors including dealing with the IRA's arms and in time ending its armed struggle. Republicans and nationalists could see the progress that was being made as time unfolded. The evolving peace process and the various initiatives taken by Sinn Féin and the IRA over a long period of time created a new all-island wide political dispensation. At Sinn Féin's insistence equality became the test for this new dispensation for all the people of the six counties. The all-Ireland nature of the Good Friday Agreement with its island wide Ministerial Council meant that never again would political life revolve around the six county state.

In July 2005 the IRA leadership formally announced an end to its armed struggle and instructed all members to "assist the development of purely political and democratic programmes through exclusively peaceful means" and confirmed in September that the process of putting arms beyond use had been completed.

Conclusion

Much progress has been made in implementing the Good Friday Agreement, including progress in demilitarisation by the British Army.

To date, loyalist paramilitaries refuse to decommission their weapons, and come under little pressure, it has to be said, from mainstream unionist politicians to do so.

Republican dissidents, made up from a small minority who at various stages rejected Sinn Féin's strategy of dialogue and pragmatic engagement, also tried to derail the peace process. They have little or no support, no political organisation, and have articulated no alternative to the strategy to which the overwhelming majority of Republican activists and former prisoners subscribe. Endorsement of the mainstream Republican position has come time and time again from the nationalist electorate in the North of Ireland which has made Sinn Féin the largest party representing that community, a position previously held by the SDLP.

There are still many battles ahead in implementing the Good Friday Agreement and in expanding upon the gains made to date. Republicans demand the devolution of more powers to the Executive in the North, including ministries for policing and justice which unionists are resisting. We demand a Bill of Rights and we demand that the truth be revealed in relation to Britain's dirty war in Ireland and how British Intelligence colluded with loyalists and rearmed them with the support of the apartheid regime of South Africa.

There is also much work to be done in moving forward to a United Ireland, and in his presidential address to the 2008 Sinn Féin ard fheis, party president Gerry Adams announced the setting up of a task force within the party to work on the road map towards achieving that aim.

However, we truly have entered a new era and believe that we have left conflict behind. We hope that the resolution of our conflict, just like that in South Africa, can act in some ways as an example to other peoples around the world trapped in the sorrows of war.

Annex 1: A Scenario for Peace

**A discussion paper issued by the Sinn Féin Ard Chomhairle in May 1987
(re-issued in November 1989)¹**

Introduction

This document is presented by Sinn Féin for discussion and as an answer to those who claim that there is no alternative to the continuation of British rule. It does not represent the definitive republican position, nor is it exclusive of other proposals dealing with alternative scenarios for a British withdrawal from Ireland.

The first section re-iterates the Irish people's right to national self-determination, the second section deals with the question of the loyalists and the final section proposes a way in which the British government could withdraw and transfer power to an all-Ireland constitutional convention and national government.

National Self-Determination

The island of Ireland, throughout history, has been universally regarded as one unit. The historical and contemporary existence of the Irish nation has never been disputed. The Irish people have never relinquished their claim to the right of self-determination.

What has been in contest is the right of the Irish people, as a whole, to self-determination and their freedom to exercise that right.

For centuries, the relationship between the British government and the Irish people has been the relationship between the conqueror and the conquered, the oppressor and the oppressed.

The perennial cycle of oppression/domination/resistance/oppression has been a constant feature of the British government's involvement in Ireland and the Irish people's rejection of that government's usurpation of the right to exercise control over their political, social, economic and cultural destiny.

From the late 17th century onwards, that usurpation provoked both revolutionary resistance and, within the narrowest confines of British constitutional legality, constitutional opposition. In the course of the 19th century, British oppression and famine caused the population of Ireland to be halved.

The only occasion on which the people of all Ireland have been permitted to hold free and fair elections to determine their political future was in the 1918 Westminster election. Sinn Féin, with a political programme demanding complete independence for the unitary state of Ireland, won the election with 69% of the vote. Those democratically-elected representatives of the Irish people formed Dáil Éireann and, on January 21st, 1919, enacted the Declaration of Independence.

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922, the partition of Ireland and the Constitution of the Irish Free State were imposed on the Irish people under the threat of "immediate and terrible war". They were not submitted to the Irish people for ratification and their imposition represents a denial to the Irish people of the freedom to exercise their right to self-determination. The pretext for partition - the wishes of a national minority to maintain British rule - holds no validity against

¹ The document can also be accessed at <http://www.sinnfein.ie/pdf/AScenarioforPeace.pdf>.

the express wishes of the vast majority of the Irish people.

Secession is not the same as self-determination. Partition perpetuates the British government's denial of the Irish people's right to self-determination. It perpetuates the cycle of oppression/domination/resistance/oppression. In the words of S_{an} MacBride, winner of the Nobel and Lenin Peace Prizes:

“Ireland's right to sovereignty, independence and unity are inalienable and infeasible. It is for the Irish people as a whole to determine the future status of Ireland. Neither Britain nor a small minority selected by Britain has any right to partition the ancient island of Ireland, nor to determine its future as a sovereign nation.”

Law

IRELAND'S RIGHT to sovereignty, independence and unity, the right of the Irish people, as a whole, to self-determination, is supported by universally recognized principles of International law.

The right to self-determination is enshrined in the two United Nations' Covenants of 1966, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights. Article 1 of each covenant states:

“1. All peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they determine their economic, social and cultural development.”

The landmark Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Co-operation Among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations declares:

“... all people have the right freely to determine, without external influence, their political status and to pursue their economic, social and cultural development and every state has the duty to respect this right in accordance with the provisions of the Charter.”

Partition is in contravention of the United Nations' Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. Article 6 of which states:

“Any attempt aimed at the partial or total disruption of the national unity and the territorial integrity of a country is incompatible with the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations.”

Loyalists

THE MAJOR stumbling block to Independence is British colonial interference. However, it suits the British and the loyalists for the loyalists to be portrayed as the real obstacle to that Independence and allows Westminster off the hook, projecting itself as the 'honest broker'.

While we in no way wish to ignore the economic challenge which reunification presents, or minimise the extent of the problem, or the great trauma that will be experienced by the unionist population, we believe that loyalism derives an artificial psychological strength from the British presence, from the Union. Indeed, the relationship between intransigence and past unconditional British support is recognised (though unacknowledged) by Thatcher's government, part of whose

present strategy, via the Hillsborough Treaty, is to rock the morale of loyalists, split the unionists and force the emergence of a pragmatic leadership which will do an internal deal with the SDLP.

The loyalists are a national minority in Ireland. According to most opinion polls, the majority of people in Britain want to wash their hands of Ireland. Increasingly, loyalists are finding themselves in an untenable position. Their protest campaign against the Hillsborough Treaty has cost them dearly in PR terms and to the British public it has only emphasized the differences between the Six Counties and Britain. Their refusal to enter into dialogue (with anyone) and their disillusionment with the British government is producing a momentum towards disaster where Civil War, or a Unilateral Declaration of Independence, or repartition are among the irrational proposals put forward by some of the paramilitaries and politicians.

Sinn Féin seeks a new constitution for Ireland which would include written guarantees for those presently constituted as 'loyalists'. This would recognize present-day social reality and would include, for example, the provisions for family planning and the right to civil divorce.

The resolution of the conflict would free unionists from their historic laager mentality and would grant them real security instead of tenure based on repression and triumphalism. We do not intend to turn back the pages of history, or to dispossess the loyalists and foolishly attempt to reverse the Plantation. We offer them a settlement based on their throwing in their lot with the rest of the Irish people and ending sectarianism. We offer them peace. We offer them equality. It is only through the process of decolonisation and dialogue that a peaceful, stable Ireland will emerge. Only when independence is restored can Ireland hope to prosper and take her place among the nations of the world. Britain must take the initiative and declare its intention to withdraw. That is the first step on the road to peace. Republicans will respond quickly and positively.

A Scenario for Peace

THE ENDING of partition, a British disengagement from Ireland and the restoration to the Irish people of the right to exercise self-sovereignty remain the only solution to the British colonial conflict in Ireland.

The Hillsborough Treaty and the processes it involves seek merely to camouflage the fact that the Six-County state is a failed entity, socially, economically and politically. The Treaty does not challenge the constitutional status of the Union but actually reinforces it.

Sinn Féin seeks to create conditions which will lead to a permanent cessation of hostilities, an end to our long war and the development of a peaceful, united and independent Irish society. Such objectives will only be achieved when a British government adopts a strategy for decolonisation.

It must begin by repealing the 'Government of Ireland Act' and publicly declaring that the 'Northern Ireland' statelet is no longer part of the United Kingdom.

Furthermore, it must declare that its military forces and its system of political administration will remain only for as long as it takes to arrange their permanent withdrawal.

This would need to be accomplished within the shortest practical period. A definite date within the lifetime of a British government would need to be set for the completion of this withdrawal. Such an irreversible declaration of intent would minimize any loyalist backlash and would go a long way towards bringing round to reality most loyalists and those of their representatives genuinely interested in peace and negotiation. It would be the business of such negotiations to set constitutional, economic, social and political arrangements for a new Irish state through a Constitutional Conference.

Constitutional Conference

FREE ELECTIONS to an all-Ireland Constitutional Conference would be arranged. The conference would consist of the elected representatives of the Irish people and would be open to submissions from all significant organizations in Ireland (e.g. the Trade Union Movement, the Women's Movement, the Churches) and would draw up a new constitution and organise a national system of government.

While the conference could have no influence on the decision by Britain to withdraw, it would play an important role in organizing the transition to a new governmental system. Should it fail agreement on a new Constitution, or on any other matter, a British withdrawal would proceed anyway within the fixed time period.

Republicans have consistently asserted that the loyalist people, in common with all other citizens, must be given firm guarantees of their religious and civil liberties and we repeat our belief that, faced with a British withdrawal and the removal of partition, a considerable body of loyalist opinion would accept the wisdom of negotiating for the type of society which would reflect their needs and interests. The irreversible nature of a British withdrawal strategy would be a major influence in convincing loyalists that we were entering into a new situation which could not be changed by the traditional methods of loyalist intransigence.

British Withdrawal

AS PART of the military withdrawal, the RUC and UDR would be disarmed and disbanded.

The introduction of United Nations forces or European forces to supervise a British withdrawal or fill any alleged vacuum would only frustrate a settlement and must be avoided. Experience in other conflicts has shown that such a 'temporary' presence would become 'permanent' and the deployment would have a political bias. Their subsequent withdrawal would become a point of contention and there would be a re-run of the bloodbath-threat scenario. Similarly, there should be a real effort to avoid the introduction of forces from the 26 Counties.

The Constitutional Conference would be responsible for determining the nature and composition of an emergent national police service and the judiciary. There is absolutely no doubt in our minds that, if Britain were to be sincere about disengaging and was committed to an orderly transference of power, this could be achieved with a minimum of disorder.

All political prisoners would be unconditionally released. A cessation of all offensive military actions by all organizations would create the climate necessary for a peaceful transition to a negotiated settlement.

As part of the settlement, the British government must accept the responsibility for providing financial support by agreeing by Treaty with the national government to provide economic subvention for an agreed period. Given the disastrous involvement of British rule in Ireland, reparations for an agreed period are the least contribution Britain could make to ensure an orderly transition to a national democracy and the harmonisation of the economies, North and South.

Annex 2: Towards a Lasting Peace in Ireland

A Summary Guide to the Sinn Féin Peace Proposal, published by Sinn Féin in October 1994²

The purpose of the following article is to provide an introduction to the main points contained within the discussion document launched at Sinn Féin's 1992 Ard Fheis (national convention) and re-confirmed in 1994. There are 14 sections in the document, each is an important consideration in devising any peace strategy.

Section One: Introduction

This section outlines Sinn Féin's criteria for a lasting peace in Ireland. Each section following takes up and develops the issues lying behind these criteria.

- An end to conflict does not necessarily lead to lasting peace and in the context of Ireland has led only to new outbreaks of hostilities after a number of years. A peace process, leading to a lasting peace, must address the root causes of the conflict.
- A genuine and sustainable peace process must be grounded on democracy and self-determination.

Section Two: National Democracy And Peace

This section looks at the role of national self-determination, democracy and democratic structures which are fundamental to a lasting peace and how Britain's denial of these rights in Ireland and the measures it takes to enforce this policy remain the root cause of the conflict.

- The Irish people have a right to peace: A right to the political structures which are capable of making peace permanent; a right to decide for themselves what these structures might be; and an obligation to ensure that they serve the best interests of all the Irish people.
- Peace is not just the absence of war but is also establishing conditions which will ensure a lasting peace. This means eradicating the root cause of the conflict by gaining national self-determination, which in turn lays the foundation for justice, democracy and equality - the safeguards of lasting peace.
- Britain's policy in Ireland is the root cause of the conflict between Irish people themselves and between Britain and Ireland; its purpose is to maintain and protect Britain's interests in Ireland. British policy denies the fundamental right of national self-determination and therefore contravenes the internationally accepted right of nations to self-determination.
- Britain's policy in Ireland is maintained through military and political coercion, through partition of Ireland into Six and 26 Counties, through gerrymandering to create an artificial unionist majority in the Six Counties (Unionists make up 20% of the people of Ireland and therefore are a minority not a majority, in Ireland), through Protestant privilege, through the unionist veto, i.e., Britain's support for the political wishes of the Unionists.

² The document can also be accessed at <http://www.sinnfein.ie/pdf/TowardsaLastingPeace.pdf>.

- Britain claims that the main reason for staying in Ireland is not to maintain its own interests but primarily to safeguard democracy; however, to protect its own interests in Ireland, Britain has given power of veto over national independence to a pro-British unionist minority which is in direct contravention of the principle of national self-determination and is therefore a denial of democracy itself.
- In reality this means defending and maintaining the inequality, injustice and the instability which are the result of a statelet founded on a political system of political, social and economic privilege.

Section Three: Irish Sovereignty: International Law & Irish Democratic Rights

This section outlines examples of the main historical documents where the Irish people's nationhood, independence and sovereignty have been reaffirmed, both in Ireland and internationally.

In Ireland on many occasions the national independence that is a unitary state governed by one government has been declared. Some of those occasions are as follows:

- The Proclamation of Easter of 1916;
- The Declaration of Independence of the first Dail, 21 January, 1919;
- The 1937 Constitution, Articles 1, 2, and 3;
- The Unanimous Declaration, Leinster House, 10 May, 1949;
- The New Ireland Forum, May 1984;
- The Dublin government's Minister for External Affairs, Dr. Patrick Hillery's address to the United Nations' Security Council, 1969;
- The Hillsborough Agreement, November 1985;
- Dublin Supreme Court in *McGimpsey vs. Ireland*, etc.

In international law the universal principle of self-determination is enshrined in the following:

- The United Nations' International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966;
- The United Nations' International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights;
- The Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation Amongst States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations;
- The United Nations' Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries & Peoples, Article 6;
- The Conference on Security & Cooperation in Europe, Paragraph VIII.

Section Four: Division & Coercion

This section is in two parts: the British strategy of division and coercion in Ireland as the root cause of the conflict. It also examines the role of the propaganda which removes blame for the conflict from Britain, and states instead that the problem is divisions among the Irish people - divisions deliberately fostered by Britain's colonial self-interest. This section challenges that Britain is a neutral force in Ireland. In the second part of this section the economic effects of partition are examined.

Part One

- Britain has operated the classic colonial divide and rule strategy in Ireland using partition. However, British propaganda has masked this cause of the conflict by distracting attention away from Britain's role in creating it. The threat and use of force has supported this British strategy, creating a state of permanent emergency with the associated military and judicial repression. For two decades a 30,000 strong army of occupation has been deployed, 3,000 people have been killed, and 30,000 injured, the equivalent in Britain of 100,000 dead and over one million injured.
- Britain's arguments for remaining in Ireland are: responding to "the democratic wishes of the Unionist majority"; to avoid a "bloodbath" in the event of British withdrawal; and more recently, that Britain has no selfish strategic or economic interest for remaining in Ireland and does so only to keep the peace (Peter Brooke, 100th Day Speech, 1987).
- However this declared 'neutrality' is contradicted by Brooke's further statement that the Conservative party is committed to keeping the Six Counties as part of the UK. John Hume drew the conclusion that Britain was neutral and by doing so placed the responsibility on the shoulders of nationalists to get Britain to join the persuaders of unionists to look to national reunification. Brooke rejected Hume's conclusion.
- The formal British government position, Conservative, Labour or Coalition, is found in Clause 1 (a) of the Hillsborough Agreement, 1985 where London and Dublin "affirm that any change in the status of Northern Ireland would only come about with the consent of the majority of the people of Northern Ireland" — thus copper-fastening partition.
- Since 1973 the British have tried to enlist the active support of Irish nationalists, the SDLP and the Dublin government for partition through: The Sunningdale Agreement, 1973; The Powersharing Executive, 1974; The Hillsborough Treaty, 1985, and The Brooke Talks, 1991.

What is being advocated is not peace but simply a program for political stability and to perpetuate partition.

Part Two

The social and economic effects of partition have been disastrous for working people, North and South.

- Partition has led to: discrimination in employment; waste of millions on maintaining the border; the external dependency of the two states; industrial under-development; unemployment; emigration; and poverty.
- Partition has further led to: conservative administrations in both states; low status of women; clerical control; stagnation in education and health provision.

A genuine peace process requires the recognition of the effects of partition.

Section Five: Conditions For Democracy & Peace

This section deals with responsibility in relation to the peace process and the criteria by which any peace process might be judged. It also explores the process of national reconciliation.

- The search for peace is everyone's responsibility but particularly those organisations which represent the people and specifically the London and Dublin governments. It is also an international responsibility. The criteria by which any peace initiative is judged is the degree to which it promotes national self-determination.
- The elements needed to bring about the conditions for peace are: a British government that makes the ending of partition its policy in Ireland; a Dublin government that has the same policy; cooperation between the London and Dublin governments to bring this about in the shortest possible time with the greatest possible consent and minimizing costs of every kind; that this be done in cooperation with unionists and northern nationalists, i.e. to begin the process of national reconciliation.

Section Six: Armed Conflict

This section traces the history of the last 20 years and places armed struggle in the context of national liberation and colonial struggles worldwide.

- During the Home Rule crisis of 1912 it was the British and loyalist forces which threatened and used violence against the reunification of Ireland. This was followed by 50 years of state oppression of the nationalist community including attacks and pogroms by state forces. In this present phase of armed struggle, state violence and armed conflict predated the IRA campaign.
- The Civil Rights campaign of the 1960s was brutally attacked by the forces of the state, official and unofficial.
- The British army was sent in not to protect the nationalists but to shore up unionism in the rest of Britain.
- From 1969 - 1971, the nationalist community was subjected to repeated RUC/loyalists/ British army attacks.

- 90% of deaths caused by loyalists have been civilians. 55% of those killed by the British army have been civilians.
- Armed struggle throughout history has been seen as a legitimate part of a people's resistance to foreign oppression.
- Armed struggle for republicans is an option of last resort.
- There is no constitutional strategy to pursue national independence.
- In the circumstances the onus is on those who condemn the option of armed struggle to advance a credible alternative.

Section Seven: British Government

This section deals with the reasons why partition must go and the responsibility of the British government in persuading the unionists to look toward a united Ireland.

- There are many reasons why partition must go: it is anti-democratic; it produces abnormal states; it has failed and will continue to fail to bring lasting peace; it produces conflict and the conditions of conflict.
- Cardinal O Fiach declared that change by the consent of only those people in the artificial Six Counties to be “no policy at all...it means you do nothing...it's an encouragement to sit tight. ”

Section Eight: Dublin Government

This section outlines the responsibility of the Dublin government in the genuine search for lasting peace.

- The Dublin government has a clear responsibility in establishing national democracy. It possesses the resources and access to the world centres of power. Since the founding of the 26-County state it has adopted a negative role towards national democracy, taking up the issue only for electoral gain.
- Since the Hillsborough Accord it has been actively involved in supporting partition. A Dublin strategy for peace must involve persuading: the British that partition is a failure; the unionists that reunification would benefit them; the international community to support Irish national rights.
- Furthermore Dublin be defending the democratic rights of northern nationalists and resisting any further erosion of Irish national rights through diluting of the 1937 Constitution.

Section Nine: A Strategy For Change

This section outlines Sinn Fein's views on what needs to be done by both the Dublin and London governments if they are serious about pursuing a genuine lasting peace.

- Britain has a responsibility to: recognize the right of the Irish people to self-determination; change its current policy to one of ending partition and giving sovereignty to an all-Ireland government; influence unionist attitudes to this end; consult with Dublin to agreement on ending partition.
- If Britain refuses to do this then Dublin should; win international support for Irish national rights; mobilise support for this among Irish people and their descendants living abroad; use every international forum at its disposal; mobilise in Britain on Irish national self-determination; initiate debate with Northern unionists regarding national reunification; mobilise support in every aspect of Irish life to secure national independence; review every treaty with Britain re. such issues as extradition; organise nationally and internationally in defense of democratic social and economic rights; and establish democratic structures through which the above can be implemented.

Section Ten: The Role Of Nationalists Parties

This section highlights the contradiction faced by the SDLP and Fianna Fail in their refusal to challenge the existence of partition and Britain's responsibility for the current conflict.

- Fianna Fail and the SDLP have considerable influence in the world power centres'. They could and should reject the British propaganda view of "Britain as a honest broker."
- If they believe that partition is not a viable solution to the conflict, they must firmly reject any proposed solution which involves partition.
- They should demand that Britain follow to its logical end the claim that they are neutral and formally accept the Irish people's right to self-determination.
- They should highlight all abuse of human rights in Ireland and demand that the CSCE should monitor human rights abuses currently happening in the Six Counties.

Section Eleven: The Unionists

This section looks at the impact unionists have on the demand for self-determination and outlines Sinn Fein's approach to discussion with them in relation to this.

- Unionists are 20% of the Irish people and have a considerable impact on the peace process. Peace requires a settlement between Irish nationalists and Irish unionists.
- This debate cannot begin as long as Britain guarantees the continuation of the unionist artificial majority in the Six Counties. The 'unionist veto' must be ended. To achieve national reconciliation the deep rooted fears of people must be addressed. All gain from a democratic settlement.

Section Twelve: The European Dimension

This section looks at the various changes that have been taking place in Western and Eastern Europe and places Irish reunification in that context.

- The process of political and economic restructuring which is taking place in Europe has raised the issue of national self-determination. The partition of Ireland, anomalous in international law, should be considered in this context. Many European governments have already accepted Irish reunification is a necessity for durable peace to be established. Already various EC reports have recognized the ‘anomalous’ status of Britain’s remaining jurisdiction in Ireland.
- The Conference of Security and Cooperation in Europe is empowered to carry out checks on human rights abuses. It should be invited to do so in the Six Counties.

Section Thirteen: The United Nations

This section deals with the role of the United Nations in resolving conflicts with suggestions as to how these might be applied in the context of Ireland. The situation in the North is a failure of the normal political process and there is little reason to have confidence in either government’s willingness or ability to resolve the conflict. In such a case it is possible for the United Nations to be requested to help with the resolution.

- The United Nations Secretary General and the UN’s Decolonization Committee share a duty with member states to create the conditions in which the “freely expressed will of the people concerned” can be reliably ascertained.

This means, firstly, removing all forms of repression. In Ireland this would mean the removal of every barrier created to enforce partition.

- Those concerned with peace in Ireland should ask the United Nations to: request annual reports from Britain on its role in Ireland in line with Article 73 of the UN Charter; ask the Decolonisation Committee to hold an annual review of the toll of partition.
- Sinn Féin does not support placing UN troops in Ireland.
- Any deadlocks encountered during the process of British withdrawal could be assisted towards a resolution by the United Nations.
- The United Nations could be requested to convene a conference of all parties involved.

Section Fourteen: Summary

1. Peace requires the conditions of democracy, freedom and justice to eradicate the causes of war.
2. The Irish people have the same historical right to sovereignty and nationhood which is recognized by international law. Partition contravenes these laws and frustrates national democracy and national reconciliation.
3. British rule in Ireland has no democratic legitimacy and has rested on division and coercion. They should recognize the failure of partition.
4. The Dublin government should assume its responsibility in relation to reunification either in cooperation with Britain or if necessary, independently.
5. The unionist minority have nothing to fear from a united Ireland. Removing the veto will open up the possibility for constructive dialogue.
6. Irish republicans are committed to playing a constructive role in building national democracy when the British government finally adopts a policy of withdrawal from Ireland.
7. The partition of Ireland and the British claim to jurisdiction over the Six Counties is a European issue.
8. The United Nations has the authority and mandate to monitor a decolonisation process in Ireland. As an interim measure Sinn Féin would propose that the United Nations monitors partition and Britain's role within it.

Annex 3:

Glossary

Ard Fheis	Sinn Féin’s annual party congress
Ard Chomhairle	Sinn Féin’s National Executive
Dáil Éireann	House of Representatives of Ireland (Dáil for short)
IPP	Irish Parliamentary Party
IRA	Irish Republican Army
IRB	Irish Republican Brotherhood, forerunner of the IRA
PSNI	Police Service of Northern Ireland
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
Sinn Féin	Irish Republican party, name translated as “we ourselves”
UDR	Ulster Defence Regiment

About the Author

Bairbre de Brún is a Sinn Féin Member of the European Parliament for the North of Ireland. Born in Dublin, she lives in Belfast. She is a teacher by profession and taught in the sector of Irish medium education. Bairbre was a member of the National Committee against the H-Blocks and Armagh Gaol before and during the hunger strikes in the early 1980s. She worked in the Sinn Féin Women's Department and was head of both the Cultural and International Departments. She was a member of the Sinn Féin negotiating team during the talks that led to the Good Friday Agreement. She has travelled extensively both in Ireland and abroad to promote the peace process. Elected as a Sinn Féin Assembly member for West Belfast in 1998, Bairbre served as Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety in the first power-sharing government in the North of Ireland (1999-2002).