



INCLUSION AND RECONCILIATION IN A NEW IRELAND

November 2019

This document is accompanying motion 4:

This Ard Fheis notes the changed political circumstances in Ireland, and the potential for constitutional and political change and a new national democracy being established. As Irish republicans in the tradition of Wolfe Tone, and United Irish men and women, we recognise that a real Republic will only be achieved when all the people of Ireland are content that a new Ireland will be inclusive of our diverse traditions and identities and that the rights of each citizen will be guaranteed. All our citizens must have an equal stake in the development of a new Ireland. In acknowledging the pain and suffering experienced by the people of Ireland due to centuries of conflict and division as a result of colonialism, sectarianism, inequality and partition, Sinn Féin believes that full reconciliation and healing among our people will only be achieved through a reconciliation process which is institutionalised and mainstreamed throughout Irish society. To that end, this Ard Fheis adopts the new policy document “Inclusion and Reconciliation in a New Ireland” as a further contribution by Sinn Féin towards the aim of achieving reconciliation and lasting peace in an agreed, united Ireland.

INCLUSION AND RECONCILIATION IN A NEW IRELAND (2019)

1. INTRODUCTION

British state policy towards Ireland has for centuries adversely affected the development of Irish politics and society.

The Irish peace process and its political architecture in the form of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) (1998) changed all that. It opened up new horizons of peace and stability; new political and economic opportunities; as well as the potential of continued democratic transformation and change for the entire island, both North and South.

The political environment on our island has witnessed further dramatic change since the Brexit referendum of June 2016.

The Brexit dynamic has unquestionably accelerated the prospects of fundamental constitutional change.

Brexit has swept away all of the previously established assumptions about the constitutional, political and economic status quo and placed at the heart of political debate the undemocratic nature of Ireland's partition by Britain and the negative repercussions of British policy in Ireland which have perpetuated political conflict in Ireland.

Yet, while many are now beginning to contemplate a future no longer defined by partition, the divisions and fault lines caused by past events remain unresolved.

Irish society has been deeply scarred by political conflict. Enduring hurt and division have never been healed. No reconciliation process was ever put in place after the 1922/23 civil war or the preceding Tan War. The most recent devastating phase of conflict has yet to be reconciled or healed.

Such enduring fault lines present major challenges today for all who seek fundamental constitutional, political and societal change in Ireland.

The outworking of Brexit has accentuated the deep divisions in northern society. The space for developing a proper community dialogue to tackle the scourge of sectarianism and sectarian segregation has been narrowed in northern society.

However, it is essential that the complex political, social and cultural fault lines which exist are addressed.

The need for a reconciliation process in Ireland is beyond dispute.

Its achievement cannot be taken for granted. A new phase of the Irish peace process will be needed to bring that about.

The empowerment of a popular community coalition to inspire, develop and implement new initiatives and strategies is required to tackle sectarianism and bigotry, and to advance reconciliation and healing.

Sinn Féin believes that healing the divisions in Irish society is inseparable from the new and building momentum for a new, agreed constitutional democracy in Ireland.

Political and Social Context

The political landscape is changing rapidly across this island.

Brexit, demographic change in the North and the demise of the unionist voting majority, are contributory factors in creating fresh thinking about the constitutional and political future of this island.

The institutions of the GFA have not functioned from January 2017. This is untenable and unacceptable.

A stark juxtaposition has emerged between Brexit and Irish Unity.

Unity Referendum

The GFA makes provision for a unity referendum in circumstances where there is likely to be popular support for constitutional change.

Brexit has brought the prospect of a unity referendum into sharp focus.

The GFA provides an agreed democratic roadmap to help guide, facilitate and manage constitutional change.

Creating the positive conditions in which a unity referendum is held will be as important as the outcome of the referendum.

This means addressing sectarianism, and its manifestations; promoting reconciliation; and dealing with the legacy of the past. It also means facilitating an open, inclusive and informed societal dialogue that engages the broadest section of stakeholders, including all political parties on this island, and for example, the trade union movement, women's groups, faith communities, the business community, wider civil society, local communities, and of course, our new communities.

The failure to ensure the Brexit referendum campaign was properly informed should act as a lesson in how not to prepare for constitutional change in Ireland.

Sinn Féin have developed detailed thinking and proposals for a Unity Referendum as the necessary first step in the creation of a new national democracy.

We do not own, or claim to own, the sole rights to the process of constitutional change.

While we have a significant contribution to make in building a better future, Irish republicans alone cannot create a new and agreed Ireland.

Our focus is to be persuaders, to work in partnership to convince people that our collective interests, hopes and aspirations are best served in a new national democracy.

Our vision of a New and Agreed Ireland is of a future shaped and determined by the people of Ireland alone; an Ireland that upholds, guarantees and safeguards the rights of all citizens; which affirms, values and cherishes diversity and difference and which is shaped and determined by the consent of all citizens.

Contributing to the Dialogue

As a contribution to the ongoing and evolving dialogue around the shape, form and governance of a New and Agreed Ireland, Sinn Féin has published two significant policy statements: “Towards an Agreed and Reconciled Future – Sinn Féin Policy on Reconciliation and Healing” (2016) and, “One Community: Tackling the Scourge of Sectarianism in Irish Society – Sinn Féin Anti Sectarianism Policy” (2017).

Both policies point to the need to develop progressive thinking on the specific challenges of reconciliation and anti-sectarianism. Each details proposals and recommendations for community, political and legislative action that seek to address sectarianism in particular and the pursuit of a reconciled society in general.

This document "Inclusion and Reconciliation in a New Ireland" (2019) sets out Sinn Féin's position on the strategic importance of ending partition, and eradicating sectarianism and sectarian divisions, as essential foundations for the achievement of an agreed, united Ireland and the objective of institutionalising national reconciliation within the fabric of fundamental constitutional change in Ireland.

2. THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

The Good Friday Agreement (1998) drew a line under political conflict in Irish society and provided a model to oversee future change.

It set forth a vision of a rights based, non-sectarian future.

It also made the connection between the past and building a better future, by stating that:

“The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.” (GFA 1998, Declaration of Support, Point 2)

The Agreement also created a new institutional architecture and rules of governance whereby constitutional change would be managed, implemented and sustained through purely peaceful and democratic methods. It further recognised, that:

“It is for the people of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts respectively and without external impediment, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a United Ireland, accepting that this right must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland”. (GFA 1998, Constitutional Issues, Point 1, i)

The GFA gave all citizens the opportunity to decide their future together. Underpinned by the principles of equal treatment, parity of esteem and mutual respect, the Agreement provides a political framework for peaceful coexistence and pathway to constitutional change in a divided society.

A Rights Based Future

Sinn Féin is committed to upholding, protecting and safeguarding the rights of all citizens. We are committed to the principles of the GFA including:

- The right of free political thought;
- The right to freedom and expression of religion;
- The right to pursue democratically national and political aspirations;
- The right to seek constitutional change by peaceful and legitimate means;
- The right to freely choose one's place of residence;
- The right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender or ethnicity;
- The right to freedom from sectarian harassment; and
- The right of women to full and equal political participation.

It also provided for an all-island Charter of Rights to protect the status, rights and aspirations of all citizens.

Yet despite the Agreement and the stated commitment to rights and 'the achievement of reconciliation', the overall ambition of social transformation has still to be achieved.

Resistance from within political unionism and the failure of the British and Irish governments to uphold their obligations as co guarantors have prevented full implementation of the Agreement.

Overcoming division, dealing with the legacy of the past and mainstreaming key equality and rights provisions must remain priorities for all who are genuinely committed to the full implementation of the GFA.

3. LOOKING TO THE FUTURE AND CHANGE

The GFA provided a peaceful, democratic alternative within which everyone could pursue their democratic aspirations in an exclusively peaceful manner. It delivered new political institutions and designed a political framework to facilitate the creation of new relationships on an all island basis, and between Britain and Ireland.

The exercise of the right to self-determination under the terms of the GFA is a legitimate way to address and resolve the constitutional and political crisis, and uncertainty caused by Brexit.

A space has been opened up for all citizens to have a conversation about the type of future society they want.

So there is an obligation on those making the case for Irish unity or conversely the union with Britain, to offer a coherent and persuasive view of what the future will hold for the north under new arrangements, and what it will mean for the south.

A properly informed and facilitated debate about constitutional change is needed in Irish society north and south.

The detailed information, analysis and planning that guided the Scottish Government's approach to the independence referendum offers a template for the type of informed national dialogue required for constitutional change in Ireland.

Sinn Féin believes it is essential that citizens engage with questions around the protection of democratic rights, taxation, health care, education, tackling sectarianism and much more. Citizens have every right to expect, shape and debate plans to overcome division, tackle sectarianism and to discuss how they expect the rights of all identities, cultures and traditions to be protected in law. They have every right to input into plans to enhance and grow the economy and to influence all Ireland policies on health, taxation and foreign policy.

In summary, citizens voting in a future Irish unity referendum must have a clear idea about the consequences of their decision.

Sinn Féin believes that the objective of achieving reconciliation in Ireland must be central to any discussion on Irish unity.

In our firm view, a reconciliation process must be institutionally embedded within the political and civic structures of any new, agreed national constitutional framework.

4. PLANNING FOR RECONCILIATION AND NATIONAL UNITY

The GFA creates the framework for all citizens to decide our future together.

It contains within its provisions the democratic option to end partition, introduce a new national democracy and enshrine constitutional safeguards and protections for all citizens.

Partition and sectarianism are the greatest barriers to achieving an agreed Ireland and a new, national constitutional democracy.

Brexit has proved beyond doubt that partition has indeed run out of road.

The immediate priorities for all sections of Irish society are to look beyond partition and begin mobilising a popular momentum against the scourge of sectarianism.

Tackling Sectarianism and Sectarian Segregation

Sectarianism and sectarian segregation remain major barriers to building a better future. They represent significant blockages to achieving a future defined by respect, inclusion and equality.

For as long as we fail to successfully address sectarianism and division, then intolerance, bigotry and fear will continue: The potential for instability and conflict will be ever present.

Sinn Féin is absolutely committed to challenging sectarianism in all its manifestations and ensuring the development of a culture of respect for all identities, cultures and traditions.

We believe an integrated strategy is required which protects and values places of religious and cultural significance. Issues which must be addressed by wider society include:

- Physical walls of division and societal segregation
- The erection and flying of flags in the public space
- Contentious bonfires

The intolerance, bigotry and fear which perpetuate sectarianism and sectarian segregation will not be wished away.

Sinn Féin calls for agreement on a new legal definition of sectarianism, entrenched in law and with force of legal sanction against actions which are motivated by sectarianism, and including robust incitement to hatred provisions. This would draw on the provisions of existing Scottish legislation, and the experience and practice of the Scottish Nil by Mouth charity which exists to challenge sectarianism and promote a society where cultural and religious diversity is respected and celebrated by everyone.

All cultural celebrations and expressions should be governed by the principles of respect, equality and parity of esteem. The allocation of all public funds for cultural celebration must be disbursed fairly and proportionately, and on the basis of mutual respect and sensitivity for the identities and aspirations of all others.

Mutual respect for all traditions should be the benchmark for progress towards a shared society.

Reconciliation as Common Ground

Sinn Féin views reconciliation and healing as common ground to empower and assist everyone to move beyond the historical antagonisms of the past. This places an obligation on all involved in political, public and civic leadership to encourage, harness and support efforts to challenge sectarianism and promote reconciliation.

Reconciliation and healing must be the antidote to past conflict and hostility.

Practically, this means dealing with sectarianism in all its manifestations and embedding an anti-sectarian ethos, culture and commitment at the heart of all political and public discourse.

It must also mean:

- An acceptance of equality, respect and parity of esteem
- A recognition of the birth-right of all the people of Ireland to identify themselves and be respected as Irish or British, or both, as they may so choose
- A recognition of multiple narratives of the past and differing constitutional aspirations
- An expressed willingness to challenge sectarianism, sectarian segregation and all forms of intolerance, prejudice and bigotry

Achieving reconciliation will require maximum co-operation and good will across all sectors of society.

Sinn Féin acknowledges the vital reconciliation work of local communities, civic organisations, trade unions, educational institutions, business organisations, faith communities and our new communities.

The British and Irish governments carry as essential responsibility to lead the public discourse on the achievement of reconciliation and healing.

Irish Government Obligations

The role of the Irish government, in particular, will be necessary to facilitate a new national dialogue on constitutional change.

The Irish Government has an obligation to be a primary persuader for an all-island national democracy. A progressive public declaration by the Irish government in support of reunification would be influential in encouraging a policy step change by the British government, the European Union and the wider international community. This is consistent with its obligations under the GFA.

A national dialogue on unity must engage with the fears, ambitions and aspirations of all citizens. It must be sensitive to the legacy of partition, division and pain. It must seek to persuade and assure unionists that a united Ireland will protect, guarantee and uphold their rights and identity.

The Irish government should:

- Introduce a national dialogue on the future of Ireland.
- Determine, in consultation with all stakeholders, the format of such a dialogue.
- Begin planning now for future constitutional change and political transition.
- Commence discussions with the EU on the role it can play in the transition to Irish unity, drawing in particular from the experience of German reunification.

The GFA provides the reassurance that there can be no constitutional change without the consent of citizens. The Agreement contains within it both a safeguard, as well as an open invitation to all citizens to reflect on the future of this island.

It is Sinn Féin's view that the preparatory work for Irish unity should begin now.

As a result, the Irish government should:

- Publish a Green Paper on Irish reunification.
- Appoint a minister of state with responsibility for Irish unity and national reconciliation.
- Establish a national convention including all political parties, social partners, and civic stakeholders to discuss the shape of a new Ireland.

5. SINN FÉIN PROPOSALS TO BUILD FOR THE FUTURE

The legacy of conflict and division still casts a long shadow over efforts to build a better future.

Irish society has yet to deal with the hurt, fear and mistrust caused by generations of British colonial interference and resulting political conflict.

For example, Ireland's civil war almost one hundred years ago still overshadows modern Irish history and politics. No effective reconciliation process was ever undertaken by the southern state to deal with that catharsis in our country's history.

At its core, an authentic reconciliation and healing process can create the common ground to deal with the many unanswered questions from the past. It should be a pathway from the past to the future.

We also acknowledge the unique obligation on Irish nationalists to persuade our Unionist neighbours (and all who may hold different aspirations) of the benefits, rights and entitlements that would be enshrined and safeguarded in a new, agreed and united Ireland.

Sinn Féin recognises the need for a national dialogue which meaningfully engages with the legacy of partition, division and pain. In support of this approach, Sinn Féin has also developed proposals on a range of other important issues including:

- Commemorations,
- Dealing with the Legacy of the Past
- The Role of Political Institutions
- Political Leadership and policy
- Community & Civic Society

Commemorations

Sinn Féin supports the development of a shared culture of commemoration in Irish society north and south. At its core, this must be based upon the principles of mutual respect, dignity and sensitivity.

In furtherance of this, Sinn Féin will:

- Continue to be imaginative and creative in taking initiatives on commemoration and remembering which enhance reconciliation and healing
- Commit to making a positive contribution to a shared culture of commemoration which is inclusive, respectful and based upon parity of esteem, and which acknowledges the pain and division caused by all lives lost in conflict
- Respond positively to shared commemoration invitations which contribute to reconciliation and healing outcomes

Dealing with the Legacy of Conflict

The past cannot be changed or undone, nor can the suffering or pain experienced in our society be disowned.

It is vital that all conflict actors, including state actors, make a positive contribution to acknowledgement, reconciliation and healing.

There are victims and survivors on all sides.

There can no hierarchy of victimhood when it comes to acknowledging the loss experienced by many families. Many still live with the psychological and physical scars of the conflict.

Sinn Féin acknowledges the grief associated with all lives lost, on all sides in the conflict.

All victims deserve acknowledgement of their pain and loss as a first step towards a healing process.

Sinn Féin believes that the best way to achieve that is through the establishment of an Independent International Truth Commission. This has always been our preferred model, but in an attempt to assist building a wider political consensus our Party compromised on this policy position and accepted the Stormont House legacy mechanisms agreed in 2015.

In furtherance of building that consensus, and in spite of British government bad faith and duplicity over the handling of legacy issues, Sinn Féin remains committed to:

- Comprehensively dealing with the issue of legacy through the full human rights compliant implementation of legacy mechanisms outlined in the Stormont House Agreement;
- The delivery of high-quality services, which address the needs of all victims, including the provision of a pension for all seriously physically and psychologically injured;
- Embedding a gender sensitive approach to all mechanisms for dealing with the past;
- Continued engagement with families living with bereavement or serious injury including those affected by Republican actions. Sinn Féin is committed to progressing this work with compassion and humility.
- Exploring the transformative potential for an initiative of common 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;
- Exploring how best to remember all victims of conflict in Ireland, and the introduction of a National Reconciliation Day.

The Role of Political Institutions

The GFA principles of mutual respect, parity of esteem, equality, the right to both live free from sectarian harassment, and the right to pursue constitutional change through purely peaceful and democratic methods have never been fully embraced within the political institutions of the north.

The culture of sectarianism continues to retard the primacy of democratic politics within the northern state.

We believe the robustness of the political process depends upon anti-sectarianism being embraced at the heart of the political institutions.

In furtherance of this, Sinn Féin will:

- Seek the incorporation of a citizen's anti-sectarian charter into the pledges of Ministers, MLAs, TDs and local councillors across the island.
- Seek the full implementation of the Together: Building a United Community strategy in the north.
- Introduce a clear legal definition of sectarianism as a hate crime within anti-sectarianism legislation with appropriate legally enforceable sanctions.
- Encourage all-party unity and leadership for a popular campaign against sectarianism and segregation, North and South.
- Support the establishment of a civic forum in the north as a platform to encourage cross-community and anti-sectarian solidarity within civic society.
- Support the introduction of an all island reconciliation strategy under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council.

Enhancing Political Leadership and policy

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 GFA principles.

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

In furtherance of this, Sinn Féin proposes that:

- The Executive & Assembly in the north, local authorities and all public sector bodies adopt a dedicated anti-sectarianism policy and make it publicly available on their websites.
- All elected representatives will be bound to pro-actively uphold and implement the commitment of his / her anti sectarianism pledge of office.
- Every member of the civil service and public sector workers, including staff within the Assembly, will be provided with sectarianism awareness training so they may be equipped with the skills and awareness to challenge bigotry.

- Full compliance with equality and anti-discrimination legislation of Fair Employment & Treatment Order will be actively promoted for successful bidders for Government contracts or public funding in the private and voluntary sectors; and that previous compliance record be taken into account when awarding contracts.

Engaging Community & Civic Society

Despite some progress over the past decade through Executive-led initiatives such as Together: Building a United Community, grass roots community-led projects, and other initiatives taken by the Sinn Féin leadership to promote reconciliation, our Party believes that bolder initiatives must be adopted across society to tackle sectarianism.

Sinn Féin acknowledges the important work of local communities, civic organisations, trade unions, educational institutions, including the integrated and Irish medium sectors, business organisations, sporting bodies, faith communities and our new communities in tackling bigotry, intolerance and division.

However, all sections of society must agree that there is no acceptable level of sectarianism; that it is unjustifiable; and that every citizen in our community must demonstrate zero tolerance against its pervasive influence.

In furtherance of this, Sinn Féin advocates:

- That an increased strategic focus is explored by the trade union movement and employers' organisations in the private sector to promote policies and initiatives which challenge sectarian behaviour and discrimination in the workplace; and to make management and employees aware of relevant legislation.
- That an extensive publicity campaign is undertaken to raise awareness of the damage caused by sectarianism, highlighting the consequences of bigoted attitudes and behaviour and the cost of division.
- That anti-sectarianism modules and initiatives are integrated into the education curriculum with the aim that every child in the north is equipped with a clear awareness and understanding of the issue.
- That mainstream and diversionary youth development organisations are encouraged to bring forward new and creative ways of reinforcing anti-sectarian messages to young people outside of the classroom including through youth divisionary projects with an emphasis on anti-sectarianism training and development.
- That all main sporting organisations are supported in the development of new strategic sports initiatives to promote anti sectarianism and oppose bigotry and intolerance
- That the Irish government will convene a citizen's assembly to address the impacts of sectarianism and intolerance across Irish society, which will submit proposals on tackling sectarianism and segregation, and, on the promotion of national reconciliation, to both the Oireachtas and Assembly.

6. CONCLUSION

This policy paper asserts Sinn Féin's view that sectarianism and partition are the greatest barriers to achieving an agreed Ireland, and a new, constitutional democracy.

We believe that the current public discourse on constitutional change in Ireland must also address the challenge of building a reconciliation and healing process.

It is essential that reconciliation is institutionalised within the political and civic structures, and public policy of any future national constitutional democracy.

The circumstances of Brexit have created new political, social and economic uncertainties for Ireland and Britain. But significant new realities and opportunities have also emerged.

While the debate on future constitutional change has become mainstreamed, the transition to Irish reunification will require significant planning. An informed debate about the future must be facilitated. We believe that a reconciliation process must be integral to that debate.

A new phase of our peace process based upon reconciliation and healing is now even more urgently required. This will demand an entirely new strategic focus on addressing the reality of sectarianism and sectarian segregation.

Notwithstanding the chaos of Brexit, demographic changes in the north have inspired a growing demand for change as new generations look for a better future.

Tackling the scourge of sectarianism must now become a collective and shared political and civic priority. This will require bold and decisive leadership and a new approach to the design, development and delivery of public policy. In this document Sinn Féin present proposals and measures on how this can be done.

We believe that political and civic institutions should work on an all island basis towards that end.

Our political institutions and, in particular, the North South Ministerial Council, needs to re-orientate towards the strategic challenge of advancing reconciliation in the immediate term. It should adopt and oversee implementation of a reconciliation strategy.

Despite the unprecedented constitutional and political flux and instability, the achievement of a reconciled Ireland at peace with itself must become a priority.

This policy document sets out Sinn Féin's proposals on building for the future with regard to commemorations; legacy; the role of political institutions; political leadership and policy; and community and civic society.

The struggle to eradicate sectarian mindsets and divisions and to finally end partition should be paramount.

The peoples of Ireland have displayed resilience and determination through many difficulties and hardships.

Those same qualities must now be channelled towards the common aim of creating an agreed United Ireland where equality, reconciliation and healing are the bedrocks of a new constitutional framework.

A new national dialogue has already begun about future constitutional change. The Irish government should accept its responsibility to facilitate that discourse.

A defining watershed has opened in respect to relationships in Ireland and between Ireland, Britain and the European Union.

It is time to commence a planned transition to Irish reunification. Sinn Féin asserts that national reconciliation must be at the heart of this transformational process. "Inclusion and Reconciliation in a New Ireland" (2019) is a substantive contribution from our Party to advancing this discussion.

We look forward to sharing this vision and strategy with others, and hope it will provide a stimulus for deeper discussion on the way forward towards an agreed, united Ireland.

November 2019