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DEALING WITH OUR PAST WILL SECURE OUR FUTURE

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Finding ways to deal with our troubled past will not be easy and everyone will have to look beyond their own beliefs and perceptions if we are to have a brighter and better future where all traditions are accommodated and respected.

That was the challenge issued by the co-Chairs of the Group, Lord Robin Eames and Denis Bradley, today in Belfast.

In a wide ranging speech the co-Chairs highlighted the key issues the Group believe need to be addressed if Northern Ireland is to deal with the legacy of the past. Today's speech comes ahead of the Groups final report to be published later this year. The report will contain recommendations on how to deal with the legacy of our troubled past.

Lord Robin Eames said, "**Anyone who knows the history of Ireland will have been greatly encouraged by the developments we have seen in Northern Ireland over the last number of years.**

"It has also given our communities a sense of purpose and new direction that points to a

better and shared future where religious and political differences can be accommodated and respected.

"Despite the appearance of moving forward the reality is that we live in a society that is still divided. There are issues from the past that must be dealt with if we are to truly ensure that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

"Dealing with our past will secure our future."

One of the key challenges identified by the Group is how far the justice system can deliver for victims and survivors.

Denis Bradley said, **"Many people have put their faith in the Criminal Justice system delivering for them. Even while knowing people would only serve a maximum of two years under the early release scheme, it was important for them that justice was seen to be done. We sympathize with this desire for justice.**

"However it is difficult for us not to listen to those experts who are telling us that the reality is that as each day passes securing justice becomes less and less likely. In many historic cases witnesses have died, exhibits are no longer credible or have disintegrated over time. This is the reality of the situation."

Other topics highlighted by the co-Chairs included the role played by the State during the

conflict, the deep hurt in both communities, the role of the Irish Government and services provided for victims and survivors.

Lord Eames also made a plea to our local politicians, **"Perhaps the most important people when looking to the future and considering our violent past are our local politicians in the devolved administration. They have taken huge strides over the last number of years to make our society a better place for everyone. But it is now time for them to lead on this issue.**

"Sectarianism, the most poisonous legacy of our past, will only be banished from our communities if the political will exists."

In his closing remarks Denis Bradley said, **"As a group we are committed to addressing the legacy of the past in a way that will promote a greater goal of reconciliation within and between our people. We recognise that reconciliation remains an elusive and contested concept.**

"For some of us this will mean being reconciled to the fact that our future is together, that we do share the land and its resources and a common sense of belonging to this place.

"For all of us it will mean bringing a new measure of common purpose reflected in greater cohesion, sharing and integration in our communities. We have no choice. There is no better future without a shared future; there is no shared future without reconciliation."

