

Dear Committee Members,

We are submitting this paper to you in the hope that we can contribute something to your discussions around the issue reviewing the government policy of TBUC. Interaction Belfast is conflict transformation organisation based on the Interface in North and West Belfast since 1988. We believe that our collective experience and those of the many people from both communities who we have worked with over the past 26 years may give us some insight into the issues of the review of TBUC.

We would also like to request an oral hearing with the committee with our CEO Roisin Mc Glone and joint Chairperson Harry Maguire.

Having been involved progressively in Inter-community work, Interface work, conflict resolution and laterally conflict transformation work our organisation passionately believes in the civic society approach to peace building and has consistently provided evidence as to the success of this approach in an area that was one of the most deeply divided communities in our society.

We believe that some of the lessons we have learned about trust building, reconciliation and the making and keeping of agreements are key aspects to making progress in peace-building.

Although we are primarily concerned with future progress for interface communities we believe that successes and lessons learned in the Interface Communities provide key indicators of possible success for our peace process. Parades, Flags and the Past have defined the issues at Interfaces and shaped life for those who live in their shadow. More importantly they are the places where things can go wrong and so Interfaces are the true testing and learning grounds for our wider peace process.

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1. Introduction

“Only governments can write peace treaties, but only human beings- citizens outside governments – can transform conflictual relationships between people into peaceful relationships” Harold Sanders

The issues of trust, peace building and are just some of the issues which are central to almost all ‘peaceline’ communities in Belfast and beyond. Interfaces have and continue to be the demarcation line between one community and the other and have in the past been the focus for sectarian violence and murder. This has cultivated a culture of fear and mistrust of those on the other side of the wall. For residents in these communities ‘peace walls’ are both central to their sense of security and well being and the source of stress on an ongoing basis due to their proximity to potential violence in times of raised tensions.

Those of us working in the sector of improving Community Relationships in divided communities, have for many years dispelled the myth that there is anything ‘peaceful’ about the walls that divide our communities. These walls were designed and built to keep warring communities apart and make people on either side feel safer, but these areas closest to Belfast's 26 'peace lines' are still the most likely to provide opportunities to unravel our peace process.

Interfaces (as we living and working prefer to refer to them) became synonymous with violence and the micro manifestations of the macro political war ongoing on this part of the island. The walls themselves are just a symptom of much deeper divisions across our society; their existence condenses the performance of violence into distinct space. Nonetheless there have been enormous strides in terms of our peace process, and our organisation has seen much improvement in terms of relationships between community representatives on the ground at interfaces.

In our own location, although we have seen much suffering and violence we are proud of the fact that the Springfield/Falls/Shankill interface is one of the most settled in Belfast. But be clear, we do not and must never be complacent about that. We believe we have put in place the building blocks to sustain robust working relationships between activists in both communities but we never take the relative peace for granted and continue to be diligent and reflect on our successes in order to be prepared for all eventualities.

Over the past 26 years we have responded to a number of challenges that have faced our communities. Through trial and error and by listening to the communities we work with, coupled with lessons and experiences from academics and practitioners from ours and other conflicts, we have developed a number of processes which has

enabled us to broker agreements which have sustained and contributed to the peaceful resolution to difficult challenges. These have included agreements and protocols around Flags, Parades, Policing and Community Safety, dealing with violence, and developing positive and robust relationships.

We want to detail our experience and the conditions in which we have inched toward progress over 20 years in the hope that it will encourage progress.

We believe strongly that not enough sustained effort has been made to build relationships at a leadership level within our peace process. We strongly believe the processes developed and the subsequent achievements of organisations like our own who have worked at a grass roots level has much to teach our political and cultural leaders. Good local leadership can change political and cultural landscapes. Structured dialogue is the answer. Communication leads to dialogue which leads to relationships being formed. In turn relationships lead to trust which leads to understanding and negotiation, agreement and synergy and ultimately success. Successful organisational change comes with careful attention to the process of change and not focussing solely on its intended results this is also true of societal change.

We also believe that if sustainable funding is not provided for this work to continue we will slip back into violence on Interfaces and more residents will drawn into violent extremism to solve issues and grievances.



2. Our Conflict analysis and prevention strategy

Fear and Mistrust and memory

We do not offer our thoughts lightly, much of our progress and successes have been hard won. We in interface communities have suffered some of the worst of the violence in the past 40 years. Residents in these areas have had to suffer both in terms of being in the worst 20% of areas suffering multiple deprivation and carrying the burden of the legacy of our proximity too and ongoing potential for the violence of the troubles.

Interfaces which had been planned as temporary security measures became permanent structures. This had come about because of the many sectarian murders and to nightly attacks and riots.

The resultant fear and mistrust between communities on both sides was almost absolute, which in turn compounded the experience of those residents and communities living there. A key symptom of these experiences, in terms of interpreting the meaning and nature of interfaces, is that of memory. Interfaces are an enduring 'aide-memoir' of harm done and of potential threat unstated.

The impact of these experiences of murders, violence and both the proximity to, and potential for violence, created communities filled with fear and mistrust. Later, after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement when stones or petrol bombs came across the walls, the community at the receiving end did not distinguish if the missiles came from a group of children or were paramilitary directed. So all attacks, no matter what their origin were perceived to be orchestrated attacks by, or on behalf of the 'other' community. This was compounded by the rumours that spread like wildfire across other interfaces the city. Where incidents could start life as a few stones being thrown across a wall, through mis-reporting of the story, fuelled by fear and siege mentality, they became stories of orchestrated attack of one community on another. Often these incidents would then escalate, resulting in both communities defending itself against attack by attacking the other. Often this would spread from one interface to many. This has resulted in Interface communities and residents symbolising the distinct and competing narratives so evident in wider society and our legacy of fear.

Peter Shirlow and Brendan Murtagh from the University of Ulster discovered that nearly 70 per cent of Troubles-related murders took place less than 500 yards from Interface barriers, which were meant to protect the rival communities from one and other, and that nearly 85 per cent of the killings in the conflict occurred within 1,000 yards of the walls and barriers. They also revealed that cases of intimidation in these

areas doubled from 56 to 108 between the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and 2001.

*"Cultural and political differentiation is both significant and undeniable. **Interfaces** are also a constant reminder of harm done and of threat implied. Their existence compacts the performance of violence ... they present a script from which community loyalty can be read. **Interfaces** both divorce and regulate intercommunity relationships, and in so doing they compress space"*

Shirlow records that the nearness of the killings to people's homes had created a population obsessed with the Troubles. *"The context of these barriers was supposed to be security and impede the capacity of killers to move between communities. What they became actually were markers indicating the "other side". Therefore you got a situation where it was easier to target the rival community."* He argued that interfaces still are the place where you are going to have violence and that continued sectarian separation was creating a 'Balkanised Belfast.' *"There is Balkanisation at present; in a benign way it could turn into ethnically-divided Belgium, or in a malign way towards the former Yugoslavia."*

In terms of dealing with the past Shirlow comments *"I think one of the reasons why you have discord is that these murders were burnt into the community's memory. But the memory is only exclusive to your own side. Violence on your doorstep leaves a lasting imprint. The geography of violence and its power of memory is still alive and keep segregation strong."*

So in this context Interaction Belfast believes that the work of dealing with the past must involve dealing with the legacy of our segregated communities and the inherent sectarianism in all its manifestations.

Building trust and making and keeping agreements in a divided society

It was the organisational view that the conflict was between two communities, states, and two ideologies over nationality and territory and that it was important not to blame either side for it, but to seek ways in which conflict could be positively addressed.

We confront and deal with the issues which divide our communities at the grass roots level in the day to day working of any community. Our aim is to improve the quality of life for those residents who have borne the brunt of the conflict for 40+ years. We have made much progress and would be considered one of the more stable Interfaces in the North. Our main weapons has been to build trust and develop mechanisms

where community representatives and communities make agreements and promises and hold each other to agreements and promises made.

We have also grounded our work in the framework of reconciliation. We see Reconciliation as the process of addressing conflictual and fractured relationships. We believe that reconciliation is a core issue for us living and belonging together and to that end we use a working definition of Reconciliation by Brandon Hamber and Grainne Kelly

The definition involves 5 strands –

1. Shared vision of an interdependent and fair society
2. Acknowledging and dealing with the past
3. Building positive relationships - building trust and confronting prejudice and intolerance
4. Significant cultural and attitudinal change
5. Substantial social economic and political change.

Reconciliation is not either a new concept or the property of our peace process.

In 1958 Hannah Arendt, French philosopher and holocaust survivor, details the implications for us living together and amongst other people – as meaning our lives to some extent are determined by what others do. Yet we also have the freedom to act, which can be self-serving or altruistic. She identified that we can only create our future *together* by making and keeping promises to each other.

She identifies two dilemmas associated with this which make us vulnerable;

1. Life is irreversible and cannot be replayed to change hurt or harm that has been caused to others.
2. Life is unpredictable and we cannot know with certainty either what is ahead of us or how others will feel or act toward us.

So both forgiveness and the making of promises to one another are essential to the building of relationships and so to reconciliation. The issue of forgiveness is a personal one and cannot be legislated for or in fact expected. But making and keeping promises to one another is a fundamental concept that we can work on daily.

In order that we can make and keep promises, (or what modernity would classify as agreements,) trust between parties is critical. Building trust after violent conflict between communities and between those communities and the state is neither easy nor apolitical.

Trust has been identified as a key element of successful conflict resolution. This is not surprising insofar as trust is associated with, enhanced cooperation, information

sharing, and problem solving. The political implications of trust were outlined by Onora O'Neill in the 2002 Reith lecture. O'Neill made her explicit focus on Northern Ireland as '*the exemplar of a society where relations of trust and mistrust have broad social significance*'. She constructs her argument around the relationship between mistrust, fear and terrorism and the potential of a resurgence of trust as a means of exiting a spiral of violence. Trust has to be built, and how do we build trust between individuals, communities and organisations? For O'Neill the answer to the problem of restoring trust is not to be found in the discourses of human rights and democracy but rather that these discourses as being reliant upon a basis of trust and not vice versa "*Trust engenders democracy rather than democracy providing trust.*"

As an organisation our role is to facilitate difficult conversations with the aim of building trust between former enemies in order to impact on the political process, provide models of good practice thereby improving the quality of life for residents on Interface's.

Capacity building/dialogue

"Dialogue means we sit and talk with each other, especially those with whom we may think we have the greatest differences. However, talking together all too often means debating, discussing with a view to convincing the other, arguing for our point of view, examining pro's and con's. In dialogue, the intention is not to advocate but to inquire; not to argue but to explore; not to convince but to discover." -- Louise Diamond, the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy

These two processes of trust and capacity building are linked because facets of capacity building help people approach dialogue with confidence and security. It is appreciated that different levels of dialogue will happen at different paces and that such dialogue will include issues of common ground, differences and difficulties. It is also accepted that such issues will be a blend of the local and big pictures.

The signing of the Good Friday Agreement opened up a whole new era for our organisation. We were faced with the prospect of the work we were doing becoming supported by political structures and championed by the political elites. But this new beginning didn't come quickly. We conducted a substantial consultation with 60 key groups along the interface in order to identify their current needs and how we needed to adjust our strategic planning. They identified that they wanted to focus on clearly identifying new approaches to inter- community conflict, analysis development and recording the work so as to identify best practice and build mature and sustainable relationships, and development robust mechanisms for everyday dialogue for former enemies. We have produced five research reports since that time, and have developed the following mechanisms/process.

We have been involved in and initiated a number of key trust building process's resulting in a number of mechanisms being developed where accountability has been central some of these initiatives, programmes and projects are detailed in the following section

3. Sharing security Responsibility;- Case studies Interaction Belfast –

De-escalation of violence - MPN

The Mobile Phone Network had been established in 1996 and was an innovative, organic project designed to address sectarian incidents and violence at interfaces. At its most active there were 28 phones distributed to a diverse group of voluntary community activists: representative of a range of ages, gender, and political differences.

Each is given a small card listing the numbers of the other phone holder and their geographical area of responsibility. When an incident occurred or violence broke out between communities, phone holders would contact each other across the interface in order to resolve the issues that had contributed to the outbreak.

De-escalation involves changes within each of the adversaries as well as new forms of interaction between them. In most cases, de-escalation does not occur until the parties have reached a prolonged stalemate in which both sides are being harmed by continuing the confrontation. Once the parties realize this, they are more likely to be willing to take part.

Springfield Inter - Community Forum

Emerging from our work on the de escalation of violence **SIF** was a network designed and facilitated by our organisation composed of 30 Community Activists from Community organisation along the Interface and who have a commitment to developing and sustaining relationships between activists, groups, and organizations on those interfaces in order to address contentious issues, community development, and quality of life issues.

Their work involved four core areas: Transforming relationships and resolving differences; reducing conflict and violence; exploring diversity; and increasing community capacity. This development came after the GFA when it was incumbent on us in civic society to develop mechanisms which would create the opportunities for activists and thereby communities to be able to make promises and to keep those promises as building blocks towards trust building and community development across the interfaces. So the forum became that mechanism. What these developments meant was that we could deal with both promise making and we could

build trust by that very keeping of promises. Nothing breaks trust more than promised being broken and by promises we mean agreements.

Specific Trust-building processes

In 2003 we were involved in the Kwa Maritane trust building process in South Africa which resulted in our organisation beginning its relationship with Brian Currin, who became an advisor to our organisation and is also an international human rights lawyer, a member of the Northern Ireland Sentence Review Board and an international expert on Conflict Transformation processes. In 2003 Brian came to Belfast and we run a trust building process between activists from both communities. We developed a week long trust building process from which we developed action plans to guide our work over the following two years. Known as the 'Farset Minute' we kept a running minute of the process and agree action plans which we revisited on a three monthly basis over the subsequent years. This process enabled numerous programmes and projects to develop out of the intense and honest discussions between activists from the two main communities in west Belfast Interfaces –some of which are detailed here.

Flags protocol

In the early 2007 we facilitated a process with key stakeholders to address the issues of the proliferation of flags, marking territory and intimidating on the interfaces. With the support of the stakeholders we supported the development of a flags protocol which has sustained to the present and which has left most of our interface flag free.

Interface violence/ incidents protocols

In 2006 we developed with both communities and the local district police a set of protocols for joint dealing with interface violence and incidents of intimidation.

Contested Space – Parades

“Orange parades are political rituals which reveal the nature of relations between Protestant and Catholic communities in Ireland. They also expose key political divisions within Unionism and the relationship of the Protestant community to the British state.” Dominic Bryan *Orange Parades, the Politics of Ritual, Tradition and Control'*

Parades are an issue that is obviously central to so much else and requires more than local action. However, one of the local needs we identified was the need to stop violence on both sides of the parades dispute in order that the protagonists could have space to dialogue. We developed an intense conflict analysis on the basis of

consultation with all parties involved and offered a number of solutions some of which have been implemented. This conjunction with this the local residents group '5 point plan' has resulted in peaceful protests since 2003. With the exception to the parade of 2005 the parade has also been peaceful

4. Inclusive approaches to 'Policing with the Community' - Case study **Interaction Belfast**

Policing In Partnership

Leading on from the Farset process a further trust building process was developed. This work started in 2004 with the acknowledgment that policing in both communities had a central role

A strategic 'Policing in Partnership' project was developed and run between 2007-2010. This process carried out with Brian Currin, was a trust-building process, between Republican and Loyalist activists and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The project was initiated at a time when this type of work was so fraught with risk it had to remain confidential and funded from outside Ireland. The project which began with the senior management team in the West Belfast District Command Unit of the PSNI in 2004 named 'Managing Change' spread to work with all Police districts across the North, with specialist units within the PSNI engaging with senior Republican and Loyalists' representatives.

The 'Policing in Partnership' programme was implemented in June 2007, supported by and engaged with by the PSNI with the agreement of the Chief Constable, Sinn Fein's Policing and Justice Committee and the leadership of Northern Ireland's two main Loyalist groups. From June 2007 through to April 2008 the Policing in Partnership programme delivered a total of nine two day workshops to a total of one hundred and forty four senior managers in the PSNI from across the North ranging from Chief Superintendent to Chief Inspector and including management teams from the PSNI's tactical support units and senior Republican activists, including SF members of DPPs and the Policing and Justice sub group and separately with loyalists and the PSNI.

In addition to the original programme the team organised and facilitated three additional processes involving the Chief Constable's top team and Sinn Fein at Hillsborough Castle, the eight District Commanders and Sinn Fein's policing and justice sub group and finally a three day trust building programme involving senior managers from the eight PSNI District Command Units and Loyalist representatives from the PUP and UPRG at Wilton Park in England.

The PSNI's CARE forum which incorporates the RUC widows, Parents Association, RUC GC Association, Disabled Police Officers Association, Retired Police Officers Association and Police Federation after briefings fully supported the rationale and need for this type of engagement. As the process has developed it became clear that much more work needs to be carried out at a grassroots level, although at a strategic level a great deal of progress has been made.

5. Conclusion

For those of us involved and working in Interaction Belfast we keep the following possibilities in mind; peace walls can be retained, replaced or removed. By not considering removal, in the range of hopes and possibilities, we have resigned ourselves to segregation.

We had hoped that success on the many other issues post Good Friday Agreement would ultimately make the walls redundant. That would be our vision, but the conditions are not right for communities to consider their full scale removal. For many outside these communities these walls appear a travesty, for us working alongside walled communities the complexities of the issues make their current state palatable in the short term to medium term. For us the recent building of new Interface walls is testament to the segregation in our communities and that segregation shapes our politics.

We have the solutions to our problems; the question is have we the will to implement them? These solutions center on dialogue and making and keeping agreements.

In terms of Parades, dialogue between the key stakeholders at local and strategic level is critical. Some capacity building with some parties in parallel may be necessary.

In respect of flags- an implementable protocol must be developed from the grass roots up, with statutory agencies monitoring it and reflecting back to the grass roots.

The key to the issues of Flags and Parades is about looking forward and not back. Our experience would demonstrate that once participants have made that psychological leap, significant progress can be made as was seen in the action planning workshops in all of the trust-building processes we have developed.

Furthermore changes, which were initially seen as negative, are now highlighted as examples of how participants have changed and developed positively. Unless attitudes are addressed, conceptualised problems will occur in the future. Trust is vital to the success of parties in a democratic society, community outreach is essential for gaining trust.

This lack of trust between the main political parties severely restricts the ability of the Stormont to implement policies. There is a history of negativity towards Republicans within the ranks of unionism, which is mirrored within Republicanism, these forms the greatest block to any progress. Building trust between republicans and unionists, and the community they serve is a core part of any democratic process.

This government TBUC strategy provided an excellent opportunity to develop and roll out a number of specifically designed 'awareness rising' 'peacebuilding' or trust building process between political, cultural and civic society leaders over a number of years, an opportunity which has not been grasped.

If this review of the strategy only looks at the gaps in the TBUC strategy then the OFMDFM committee also miss an opportunity to vision a reconciled society and suggest possible programmes and projects. There will be nothing beneficial in our representatives being part of a process that apportion blame or attempts to claim the higher moral ground.

Trust-building processes can be greatly enhanced at an early stage by the development and implementation of dedicated trust building and action planning processes between former enemies, which will expose and interrogate underlying prejudicial attitudes in a constructive and progressive manner and contribute to effective planning in the future.

In terms of our outstanding issues in our peace process, we must engage in dialogue which enables and encourages the protagonists to make agreements on what can be agreed. Build in processes to monitor these agreements. Appoint observers to oversee/monitor the development of agreements, whilst continuing to attempt to agree that which has not been agreed.

Develop processes for trust building over a range of issues and groups whilst building capacity of the parties

We must also frame all of this work in a structure and the language of reconciliation. The issues of dealing with the past has most rightly been framed around those who have lost loved ones or been injured in the conflict. The experience of groups working specifically with those people best informs the way forward. Our own experience is of traumatised communities and the inherent difficulties they face. We must continue to provide opportunities for residents in these divided communities to see the humanity in the 'other'.

We must also give them hope and you on the committee can be an exemplar of that. It is your responsibility to give us hope for the future.

And finally to resources Interaction Belfast is not a large organisation. Over the years we have had limited funding and capacity and yet we are very proud of the work we have been involved in our innovative approach to peace-building – all of the work has been funded by the CRC, European Union Peace I and Peace II, the International Fund for Ireland, the Irish Government and the Joseph Rowntree Charitable foundation.

This funding has mainly been on 1 year contracts or short term project funding. We have never received mainstream funding from central government. As these funding sources leave the stage WHERE is the money coming from for us, as a society to continue our journey of Reconciliation? The TBUC strategy does not address this critical question. Long term, sustainable and supported programmes developed by grass roots organisations are a critical ingredient of peace-building in Interface communities and must be central to any government strategy for reconciliation. The expertise is out here, astute governments would use it, both in terms of financial prudence and in terms of effective progress in a divided society.

Roisin Mc Glone
10th October 2014

