



## Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland



I'm  
Sorry

# Apologies, Abuses and Dealing with the Past

# Project Overview:

Using N. Ireland & Republic of Ireland as a case-study, exploring the role of apologies for past harms linked to:

- ❖ NI Conflict
- ❖ Institutional Child Abuse
- ❖ Economic Crisis

## Key Themes:

- ❖ Apologies & the Law
- ❖ Apologies & Accountability
- ❖ Apologies, Acknowledgment & Truth
- ❖ Apologies, Timing, Choreography & Performance
- ❖ Apologies, Legitimacy & Audience
- ❖ Apologies & Leadership
- ❖ Apologies, Reconciliation & Follow-Through
- ❖ Apologies & National Imagination



# Stormont House Agreement

Dealing with the Past Elements (Paragraphs 21-55)

## IRG:



### Implementation and Reconciliation Group (51-55)

Thematic Report (51)



Acknowledgement (53)



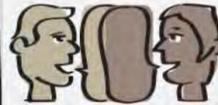
Outstanding Investigations (55)



**HIU:**  
Historical  
Investigations  
Unit  
(30-40)



**ICIR:**  
Independent  
Commission  
on Information  
Retrieval  
(41-50)



**OHA:**  
Oral History  
Archive  
(22-25)



NHS & VSS (26-29)



Legacy Inquests (31)



Reconciliation (52)



### PRINCIPLES (21)

1. RECONCILIATION

2. RULE OF LAW

3. NEEDS OF VICTIMS AND SURVIVORS

4. PURSUIT OF JUSTICE AND INFORMATION

5. HUMAN RIGHTS

6. BALANCE, PROPORTIONALITY, TRANSPARENCY, FAIRNESS & EQUALITY

© Healing Through Remembering



# Project Methodology:

## Academic Literature Review

- ❖ Law, Transitional Justice, Anthropology, Sociology, Psychology, History, Political Science

## Semi-Structured Interviews (n60-90)

- ❖ Interviews with victims and apologisers across each of the three key sites of analysis (n20-30 per sector)
- ❖ Research Instrument themes

## General Population Survey (n=1000)

- ❖ Sample of population of Ireland, North & South

## Focus Groups (n=120+128)

- ❖ 12 focus groups with victims (4 groups per sector)
- ❖ 14 focus groups with general population (drawn in part from general population survey)



# APOLOGY & ACKNOWLEDGMENT

- A recognition of a hurt deliberately or negligently inflicted which is named
  - An admission of individual, organisational or collective responsibility for that hurt.
  - A statement of remorse or regret related to the wrongful acts or omissions.
  - A promise of non-recurrence
  - Delivered with due respect and dignity to the victimised
  - Made without reservation, qualification or justification
- 
- The key difference between apologies and acknowledgements is that an apology is an officially sanctioned statement.
  - Acknowledgment may be a much broader process involving not just statements but complementary processes e.g. plaques, memorials etc.

1. I'M SORRY  
2. IT'S MY FAULT  
3. WHAT CAN I  
DO TO MAKE IT RIGHT?

THAT WON'T  
HAPPEN AGAIN,.

# Tracking Public Apologies (& Denials)

- ❖ **230** republican statements of apology, regret or saying sorry (35 in first sweep)
- ❖ **42** from state agencies (first sweep)
- ❖ **13** loyalist (first sweep)
- ❖ **13** unionist political party (first sweep)



# Apologies: Voice, Audience and 'Hearing'

“Mr McGuinness makes no apology for the IRA campaign, but that should not preclude him for saying sorry”

*[Belfast Telegraph, 21 Jan 2017]*

“The legacy of the Shankill bomb will stay with the bereaved families and our entire community for many years. It’s a legacy all republicans will share with sincere regret and sorrow. The fact is this tragedy was caused by republicans. The reality of republicans’ responsibility for it; the grief and heartache created for the bereaved; and, their understandable feelings about what happened must be acknowledged. The result of that IRA action 20 years ago cannot be defended. However, I do not, as a republican leader, seek to hypocritically distance myself from the loss of so many innocent lives on the Shankill and the scores of people injured. Instead, I and other republican leaders have dedicated ourselves through the Peace Process to ensuring events like the Shankill bombing never happen again.”

*[Daily Mirror, October 2013]*



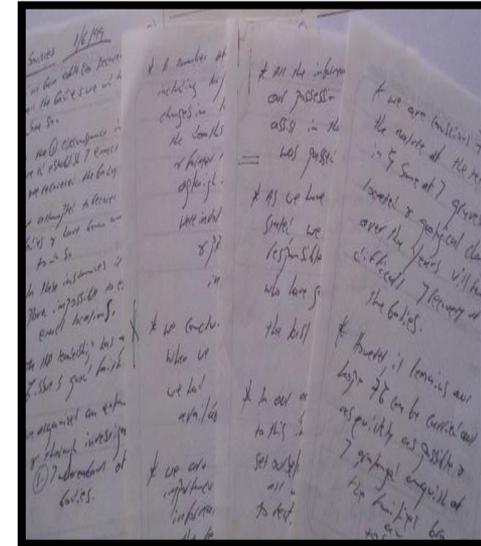
# Combined Loyalist Military Command (CLMC) Ceasefire Statement 13 October 1994

*“In all sincerity, we offer to the loved ones of all innocent victims over the past twenty years, **abject and true remorse**. No words of ours will compensate for the intolerable suffering they have undergone during the conflict.”*



# IRA Statement 6 April 2002 (just before the 30th anniversary of Bloody Friday)

*'While it was not our intention to injure or kill non-combatants, the reality is that on this and on a number of other occasions, that was the consequence of our actions. It is therefore appropriate on the anniversary of this tragic event, that we address all of the deaths and injuries of non-combatants caused by us. We offer our sincere apologies and condolences to their families. There have been fatalities amongst combatants on all sides. We also acknowledge the grief and pain of their relatives'.*



# Queen Elizabeth II, First State Visit since independence, Dublin Castle Speech, May 2011

*'...It is a sad and regrettable reality that through history our islands have experienced more than their fair share of heartache, turbulence and loss. These events have touched us all, many of us personally, and are a painful legacy. We can never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families. To all those who have suffered as a consequence of our troubled past I extend my sincere thoughts and deep sympathy. With the benefit of historical hindsight we can all see things which we would wish had been done differently or not at all.'*



# Reaction to Queen's Apology

“I thought it was hugely significant. With apologies it all depends **who** is saying it, **what** they say, and the **context** of what they are saying.

So first it was the Queen, the Head of the British state and someone who has suffered herself at the hands of Republicans.

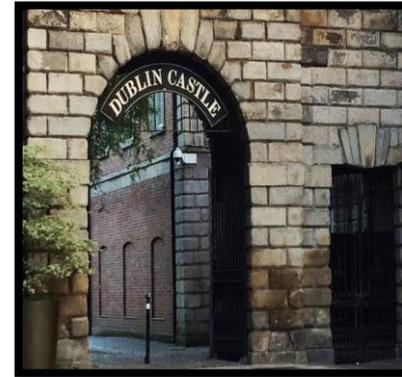
Second, what she said - for me, it was an acknowledgement of British culpability as an actor in the conflict.

Third, the context. It was in Dublin Castle, the seat of British rule in Ireland.

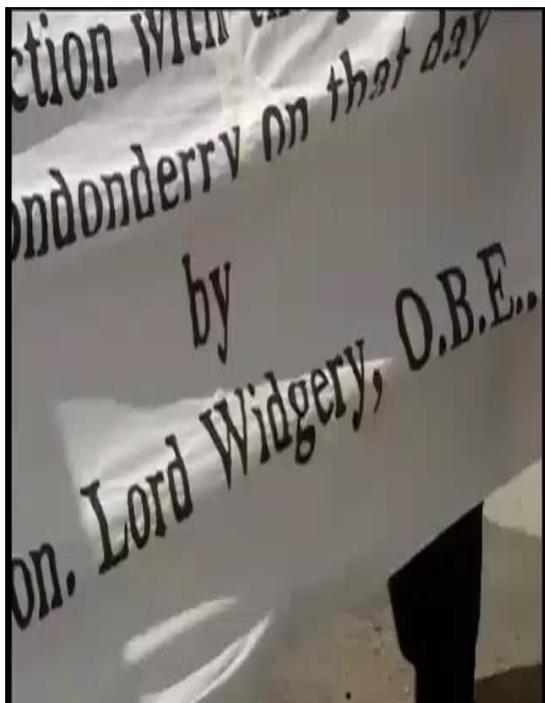
Also it was accompanied by the Queen paying tribute to Republican dead at the garden of remembrance, those who had fought against British rule.

I thought it was a seminal moment in history.”

*[Interview with senior republican]*



# BLOODY SUNDAY: A CASE-STUDY



## PRIME MINISTER CAMERON

*I am deeply patriotic; I never want to believe anything bad about our country; I never want to call into question the behaviour of our soldiers and our Army, which I believe to be the finest in the world... But the conclusions of this report are absolutely clear: there is no doubt; there is nothing equivocal; there are no ambiguities. What happened on Bloody Sunday was both unjustified and unjustifiable...But what happened should never, ever have happened...Some members of our armed forces acted wrongly. The Government are ultimately responsible for the conduct of the armed forces, and for that, on behalf of the Government-indeed, on behalf of our country-I am deeply sorry."*

# Victim Reaction to Cameron's Apology

“Cameron's office had liaised with us about what the **families wanted to hear** beforehand.

Getting the **choreography** right was obviously important.

Of course we still didn't know what he would actually say.

When he said the word, 'sorry' - that the murder of our loved ones was 'unjustified and unjustifiable' - it was like a weight was lifted from all of us, probably the whole of Derry. It was like a current went through us all. I have never experienced anything like it.

It still makes me very emotional thinking about it.”

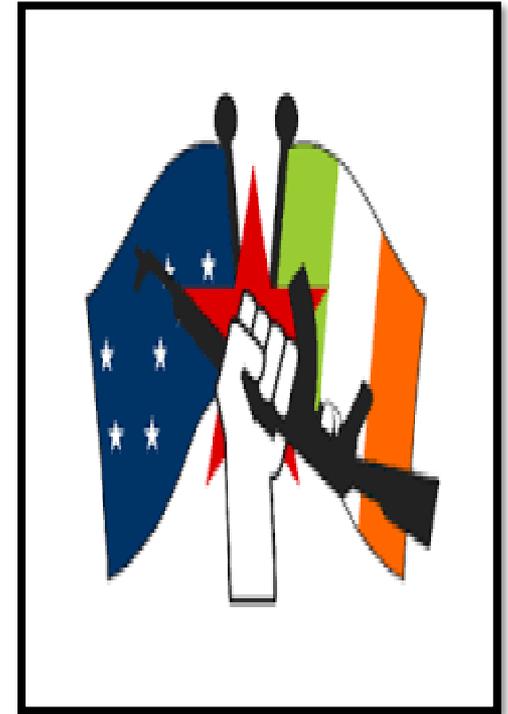
*[Interview with Bloody Sunday victim]*



# Apologies as Justification

*“ We acknowledge and admit faults and grievous errors in our prosecution of the war. Innocent people were killed and injured ...For this we as Republicans, as Socialists and as Revolutionaries do offer a sincere, heartfelt and genuine apology...**We have however nothing to apologise for in taking the war to the British and their Loyalist henchmen.**”*

**[INLA Ceasefire, 22 August 1998]**



# SOLO RUN APOLOGIES

Mick Hayes, BBC, 2017 re.  
Birmingham bomb of 1974  
in which 21 civilians were  
killed

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjaZ\\_FYFKzQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjaZ_FYFKzQ) [2.40-3.05]



# APOLOGY AS A MORAL IMPERATIVE

Reconciling notions of:

past sacrifice, legitimacy of violence, and the humanising of ‘the other’

“The reasons for offering an apology are both political and moral. As a revolutionary political organisation, everything we do is political, everything. But we also see the requirement at a human level, at a moral level. We all have moral as well as political responsibility for our actions. If we can find ways to acknowledge or apologise for actions that hurt people then we have to try. And we can’t do it in expectation of anything. We have to do it because it the right thing to do, expecting nothing in return.”

*[FORMER REPUBLICAN PRISONER]*



# Concluding Remarks

- ❖ Apologies as peace-making - a verbal commitment to the end of 'armed struggle' (De Greiff)
- ❖ Apologies as truth recovery, the acknowledgement or 'righting' of a wrong (Brewer)
- ❖ Apologies as a justification of 'armed struggle', or the obfuscation and denial of past wrongs (Cohen)
- ❖ Apologies as a moral imperative





Northern Ireland  
Assembly



**QUEEN'S  
UNIVERSITY  
BELFAST**



**The Open  
University**



**Ulster  
University**

## Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland