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## Stability

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## CHAIRMAN'S INTRODUCTION

As recently as November 2016, the First and Deputy First Ministers of Northern Ireland penned a joint statement reaffirming the two largest parties' commitment to work together.

Yet by January, a rapid erosion of trust within the partnership government resulted in a second election and raised serious concerns about the durability of the political institutions.

A serious and worrying development, the collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive has the potential to unsettle the journey towards sustainable peace. It is our hope that the political parties can form a productive partnership government.

The Fund is acutely aware of the impact that political uncertainty has on society, particularly in areas that have yet to realise a direct dividend from the Peace Process. This edition of Fund Focus looks at the theme of Stability and examines how vulnerable

communities are continuing to progress even during uncertain times.

Over the last 30 years, the Fund has provided important, consistent and apolitical support. It has proven critical during many periods of political challenge. The current impasse highlights the continued importance of our work and the need for an independent organisation to challenge and encourage communities.

Despite the turbulence, the recent months have been a very active and fruitful period for the Fund with many new groups taking forward bold and ambitious projects in areas that have previously been vulnerable to negative influences. I am pleased to share recent success stories

in this edition of Fund Focus.

We cannot and do not seek to control the external factors that impact on communities, but we can help foster the resilience needed to overcome existing and emerging challenges. We know there are risks that still need to be taken for a lasting peace and the quality of our interventions has never been more evident.

The essential work of the Fund is only possible because of our international donors and we remain grateful for their enduring support and encouragement.

**Dr Adrian Johnston**  
CHAIRMAN

## International Fund for Ireland commits €3m/£2.6m to 22 community projects

In February, Peace and Reconciliation projects in Northern Ireland and the southern border counties received a welcome boost as the International Fund for Ireland committed €3m/£2.6m towards 22 initiatives.

The funding, approved at the organisation's recent Board Meeting in County Donegal, includes €1.8m/£1.5m for 10 Peace Impact (PIP) projects that will assist marginalised communities to resolve complex issues relating to identity and the conflict.

A further €1.2m/£972,000 has been awarded across 11 Personal Youth Development projects that will encourage young people to make positive life choices, take part in good relations activities and remain in traditional education and training provision.

Meanwhile, the Fund's Peace Walls Programme has granted €149,500/£124,500 to Twaddell Ardoyne Shankill Communities in Transition (TASCIT) in support of its efforts to build

cross-community confidence and dialogue on interface barriers.

Commenting on the announcement Dr Adrian Johnston, Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland, said: "For more than 30 years, support from the Fund has helped reduce tensions and promote positive transformation during periods of social and political uncertainty. The Fund is focused on equipping communities, and young people in particular, with the means to resist and disrupt the dangerous spiral of division and disaffection.

"We are pleased to award financial assistance to 22 projects and commend them for their willingness to take calculated risks to support individuals and communities in challenging environments. Ground-breaking projects, like these 22, have been successful in tackling underlying causes of youth involvement in violence and the corrosive influence of sectarianism. We know there are risks that still need to be taken for a lasting peace and the quality of

our interventions has never been more evident."

For further information about all the beneficiaries from the International Fund for Ireland's latest funding package visit: [www.internationalfundforireland.com](http://www.internationalfundforireland.com).



ABOVE: Pictured at the International Fund for Ireland Board Meeting in County Donegal are Board Members: Billy Gamble, Paddy Harte, Dr Adrian Johnston (Chairman of the Fund), Dorothy Clarke, Allen McAdam, Siobhan Fitzpatrick and Hilary Singleton.



# Consolidating Communities and Supporting Stability

Dr Adrian Johnston

In the months following the May 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly Elections, it appeared that devolved partnership government was more secure than at any time since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Commitments from the two largest political parties signalled genuine cross-community partnership and the prospect of resolving many of the outstanding issues that have bedevilled politics in the region.

Yet towards the end of 2016, the alarming and very public deterioration of relations between the two main parties – resulting in a collapse of the institutions and a second election within a year – underscored the persistent fragility of the political institutions and raised concerns about the future of devolved government.

This development, in the midst of uncertainties around Brexit, has been a bitter disappointment for the International Fund for Ireland. We had hoped political stability would accelerate progress towards reconciliation and

a truly shared society. Historically, prolonged political insecurity and mistrust has compounded these issues and increased community tensions.

Though efforts to form an Executive following the March elections have not yet borne fruit, it is our hope that the institutions can be re-established. Any prolonged hiatus will impact directly on plans aimed at ending the corrosive influence of paramilitaries and sectarianism and delay the implementation of a Programme for Government that focused on improving the lives of the population. A return

to direct rule is in no one's interest and would diminish efforts aimed at permanently moving society away from division and towards sustainable peace.

Over the last 30 years and during similar periods of political upheaval, the Fund has provided a steady, consistent and independent presence. It has encouraged and supported communities to remain with peace building activities and to resist regressive influences that would take us back to the tragedies of the past.

The stark fragility of political structures after a decade of power-

sharing, illustrates the compelling need for the Fund to continue its role as an independent, internationally supported organisation that can support communities in their journey towards lasting peace.

Our ability to challenge and assist groups to take measured risks during difficult times has enabled communities to remain supportive of the Peace Process and resilient to polarisation. In recent years, the Fund, often alone, has prioritised its effort in marginalised communities where the current political settlement has been opposed, though not through violent acts. It has made timely interventions in these areas where disaffection, historically, may have sparked violence.

Many of our ground-breaking projects have been successful in tackling underlying causes of youth involvement in anti-social behaviour and the influence of paramilitaries over young people. There are many powerful testimonies to the fact that without the support of the Fund, communities and individuals who may previously have been drawn to violence, have stayed with the Peace

Process. Progress, at a community level, has grown stronger and more durable as a result. The achievements of our approach are significant and set us apart from other funders.

Progressive community engagement and transformation must be met by equal political engagement and transformation if a sustainable Peace Process is to be realised. The Fund actively supports communities to advance at a pace that is appropriate for them. The complex issues that continue to divide society can only be resolved by a consolidation of the community and political journeys.

Sustaining and building peace is a task that requires constant work. While complications within coalition governments are not unexpected, the impact of instability and inactivity on a society emerging from decades of conflict cannot be ignored. There is urgent need for greater resources and targeted interventions to consolidate communities and arrest potential regression.

We recognise our role is not to deliver the type of change proposed by the

Programme for Government, nor are we resourced to singlehandedly tackle the persistent and outstanding problems around legacy, the past and paramilitaries. Today, we operate on a smaller budget than during our previous three decades, yet we continue to be the most consistent and active funder for innovative and meaningful community change.

The challenges facing local political parties should not be underestimated. It is our hope that they can resolve once again to form a partnership government and breathe life back into the institutions that were hard won, but could be so easily lost for the foreseeable future. The stakes are high.

For 30 years, the Fund has helped underpin the Peace Process and assist the British and Irish governments in their efforts to deliver a lasting peace on the island of Ireland. We have constancy of purpose and, with the support of our International Donors, will continue this work for as long as is necessary.

**Dr Adrian Johnston is Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland.**



CASE STUDY:

# Twaddell Woodvale Residents Association (TWRA)

In the last 40 years, more than a fifth of all people murdered as a result of political violence died within two square miles of the Ardoyne/Crumlin area of North Belfast.

It remains a challenging area and, in 2013, a standoff in the nearby Woodvale Road and Twaddell Avenue area spiralled into a three-year protest that cost over £21 million in policing and severely damaged fragile community relations.

In 2015, concerned about the impact of the camp and potential for young people to be drawn into violence, Twaddell and Woodvale Residents Association developed a project within the Fund's Peace Impact Programme.

It has been successful in not only rebuilding confidence in the area but has also provided employment focused training and activities aligned with conflict transformation and peacebuilding. More than 600 people have taken part in these courses and demand remains high.

Colin Anderson, Chair of The Association said: "Community appetite for our work here has never been greater and we hope that we will be able to continue to support peace building and employability in this area. Confidence is definitely returning and there is a sense that we are beginning collectively to turn a corner."

The group was instrumental in negotiations regarding the future of the protest camp and in October 2016, a major breakthrough ensured its removal. The Fund was the only funder that was willing to take the risk in the area and was prepared to work with the residents while the camp was ongoing.

The next phase of the project will develop cross-border and cross-community linkages in particular with young people who would have had a role in the protest camp. The group also wants to work with women within the area and play a vital role in the new Community Forum.



Evelyn Bennett, volunteer at TWRA, said: "There are unique challenges in this area that will take time to unlock, but it's important that the community has opportunities to develop and transform. This project is supporting residents to take part in honest and open conversations about difficult community issues and giving people access to skills that can change lives for the better."

ABOVE: Twaddell residents Alfie McCrory and Evelyn Bennett.

CASE STUDY:

# Community Restorative Justice Newry/Armagh (CRJNA)

Across Newry and South Armagh, Community Restorative Justice Newry/Armagh (CRJNA) is working hard with local communities to provide stability and opportunity for young people.

It is a challenging area where the legacy of violence has isolated many people and fostered a reluctance to engage in peace building activities.

With support from the Fund's Peace Impact Programme, CRJNA has provided a range of activities that open new opportunities



for young people and promote stability. These cover important issues including anti-social behaviour, alcohol and offer young people skills that enhance their employability.

In the last two years, more than 630 participants have enrolled in training courses and the project has won praise for its role in reducing community tensions. Mediation around sensitive and volatile issues has also helped establish trust between local communities and the police.

Ewan Morgan, CRJNA project coordinator said: "This project supports young people to develop skills and gives them an active role in shaping their local communities for the better. The areas within this project rank within the top 30% of deprivation here, so it's important that we continue to reach out and work with young people to reduce risk.

"At the end of 2016 more than 30 young

people completed a training project, which focused on safer driver and community relations. Identifying driving hazards were at the heart of this but it touched on much deeper issues, which can lead to potentially fatal consequences such as crime, drugs and alcohol."

The next phase of the programme includes plans to create a collaborative forum to develop strategies in partnership with other statutory agencies including the PSNI. The project will also engage youths who currently engage within the 'Black Economy' and offer routes to legitimate employment.

LEFT: Pictured at a recent CRJNA event are (back) Marita Quinn and Méabh Morgan, CRJNA Co-ordinators; Dr Adrian Johnston, International Fund for Ireland Chairman; and project participants Naomi McLaughlin and Matthew Dowdall.



### Effective Policing Partnership- Peace Impact Programme

Civic leaders, voluntary bodies and law and justice agencies came together in Dundalk recently to examine how better partnerships could be created between local communities and the police. Organised by Camlough Community Association and Muirhevnamor Community Youth Project, the 'Effective Policing Through Partnership' enabled discussion on a range of sensitive issues including community influences, diversity, responsibility and community leadership. The conference was designed to examine how positive partnerships could be developed further and lessons shared to help create safer communities. Pictured (back row L to R): Gary Shewan, Greater Manchester Police; Tim Mairs, PSNI; Sean Ward, An Garda Síochána; (Front row) Muirhevnamor Community Youth Project Participants Tiah McConnell and Brendan Finnegan with Paddy Harte, International Fund for Ireland Board Member (centre).

### Clones 'Peace of Mind' project – Peace Impact Programme

Clones Family Resource Centre (FRC) and Oak Healthy Living Centre in Lisnaskea recently brought together residents and community representatives to officially launch a new cross-border project, 'Peace of Mind'. It will work with individuals, families and community groups from the local areas through facilitated discussion, events, training and networking. The project aims to empower people and rebuild relationships across the border by promoting reconciliation, mutual understanding and learning between communities. Pictured from left: Peter McAleer, Chair Clones FRC; Dara McGabhan, Project Co-ordinator; Gwen Lanigan, International Fund for Ireland; Allen McAdam, International Fund for Ireland Board Member; Johnson McMasters, Irish School of Ecumenics Belfast and Angela Graham, Clones FRC.



### Schomberg Society (NI) – Personal Youth Development Programme

Schomberg Society based in Killeel, County Down recently launched its 'Fair Fa' Ye To The Future' Media Youth Project. It will encourage young people aged 16-25 to explore cultural identity, personal development, good relations, skills and employment opportunities. The 12-month cross-community project will provide training related to culture, media, tourism and arts with the aim of improving employment prospects and better connecting young people with the wider community. The project will also establish a range of practical personal development courses. Pictured from Left: Olga Gallagher, Rural Development Council; Steffan Hanna and Marianne Mel, project participants; Roberta Heaney, Project Co-ordinator and James Donaldson, Schomberg Society.

