



European Forum of National Laity Committees
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Glencree and the Unfinished Peace

In this paper, I will give a brief outline of the conflict in Ireland and its consequences; the role and work of the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation with specific reference to our work now as we deal with the legacy of that conflict. In this short paper, I will concentrate on Glencree's 'modus operandi' the facilitation of dialogue that enables people with diverse positions and interests to listen to the concerns of 'the other' in an authentic way which creates new understandings thus helping new solutions to emerge to often what seem like intractable problems. I will draw on the learning from over 50 Political Dialogue workshops held at Glencree between 1997/2007 and end with my hopes for a sustainable peace on the island.

It is becoming increasingly clear to those in diplomatic circles that conflicts between civil, religious or ethnic groups, however long or intense, have no real security or military solutions. The experience of the Irish Peace Process illustrates this issue very well, civilians on either side were often participant protagonists while large amounts of innocent civilians were 'caught in the middle', many still suffering today from the trauma and loss they experienced.

The use of greater force against one or other group is often a mistake made by policymakers in the belief that it will quell the violence and restore both order and security to the situation. However this often produces further estrangement and sectarianism at the expense of an equal level of effort on the political and diplomatic front. It therefore postpones the essential political dialogue for producing a possible agreement.

What is meant by Dialogue?

As human beings, we do not listen well, we debate, take positions, mediate and advocate but we don't listen well. A dialogue is used to refer to a conversation in which people that have different beliefs and





perspectives seek to develop mutual understanding. While doing so, they typically experience a softening of stereotypes and develop more trusting relationships. They often gain fresh perspectives into the cause of a conflict and begin to see new perspectives and possibilities for dialogue outside the room. Bringing people in conflict into a room to dialogue requires thorough preparation and careful planning. The nature needs and extent of the differences, the expectations of those engaging and the ability to respond to the emerging needs of participants in the room are all crucial components of a good process. Communication agreements are also necessary that can discourage negative ways of talking and encouraging genuine inquiry.

Between 1994-2007 over fifty three day weekend Political Dialogue Workshops were held at Glencree enabling protagonists to build new relationships of trust and understanding during the negotiation phase of the Northern Ireland Peace Process. These have been credited with keeping lines of communication between adversaries, proving space for critical thinking and building relationships which translated into building relationships of trust. Although these happened over ten years ago, however, they reflect a way of working which is consistently used by Glencree today to engage with contentious issues regardless of whether they are working with victims, ex combatants, people of faith, young people, women etc.

The Dialogue Process

Glencree offered:

- a safe residential and non-threatening dialogue space to sub-leadership politicians from different political traditions in Ireland and Britain
- An opportunity to explore and develop understanding around particular issues and problem areas where blockages were occurring and where possible develop consensus on a way forward.
- The ability to make connections and build relationships with a range of influential stakeholders, often at a number of different levels – top, middle and community level.
- To Distil Learning points / outcomes by facilitators after the workshop to enable ideas to be fed back by the participants to their respective parties and policy making fora.





- The observance of confidentiality under ‘Chatham House rules’ (the principle of anonymity where comments are not attributed to named individuals).
- The offer of Facilitation in a non-directive style because it was felt that overly structured sessions could be counterproductive.
- A relaxed atmosphere

➤ **Four layers**

of

Interactive Dialogue Process

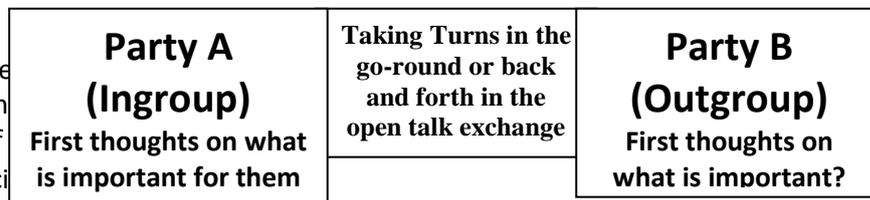
interactive

political dialogue



➤ **Layer 1.**

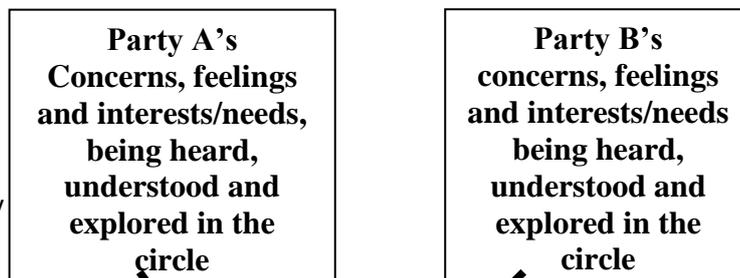
- Creating safe space
- hearing the opening
- concerns/issues of
- each party in the ci



- go-rounds

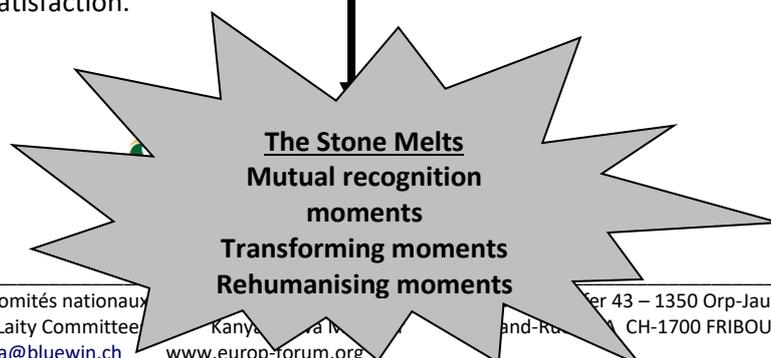
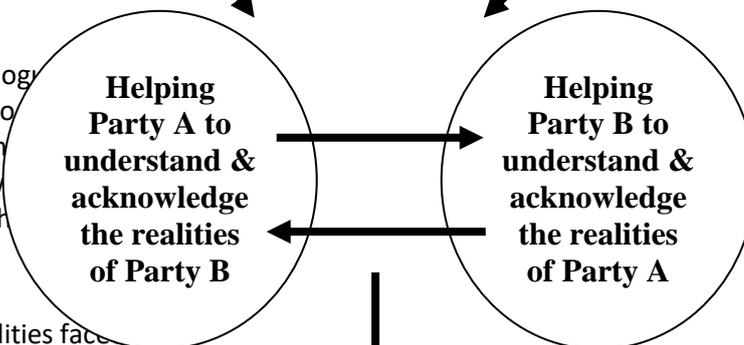
➤ **Layer 2.**

- Hearing their party story from their own personal perspective and collective narrative.
- Exploring beneath the party position to identify key symbolic issues, fears and Future focused interests.



➤ **Layer 3.** Productive dialog

- supporting each party to face and engage with the other, hear and acknowledge
- What is important for the
- Enabling each party to understand/recognise the constraints and realities face
- The other party to their satisfaction.





- - **Layer 4.**
 - The inter-group hostility dissolves
 - bit by bit as each feels heard and
 - acknowledged by the other;
 - as new understandings
 - emerge with new insights into the
 - complexities of the conflicted issues;
 - from which a new relationship of
 - Trust gets built.
- ↓
- **A common platform of shared understandings gets formed**
 - **for co-creating mutual solutions and unexpected outcomes on the journey**

Political Dialogue: Building Critical Relationships (Ian White and Geoffrey Corry)

The Legacy of the Conflict

‘If we do not deal with the past, the past will deal with us’ Eames Bradley Report (2009)

All societies emerging out of conflict wrestle with the legacy of the past and how to address it. What to remember and how to remember it carries with it the unmistakable implication of ethics. Some people argue that the burden is too painful, too heavy and serves no purpose but it is now widely accepted that however painful, there is need for acknowledgement, restoration and forgiveness if possible for things done. The late Paul Ricœur suggested in one of his later writings that, ‘To be forgotten is to die twice’.

In Northern Ireland today, many look now for ‘Truth and Justice’ for their lost or harmed loved ones. However there is no consensus on how this might be achieved.

At Glenree, informal storytelling can sometimes take on the role of an informal truth recovery process, one there people are allowed to tell their story sometimes to others in a circle and sometimes to those in power. Storytelling is another core part of a dialogue process which sometimes can lead to healing. Glenree facilitates dialogue workshops between people who have unanswered questions about their dead relatives, friends and family; it facilitates the telling of stories of trauma and loss to each other and to those in power. It sees the importance of a victim’s experience being heard,





understood and acknowledged, it stresses the importance of hearing not just interests and needs but also the meaning, context and emotional attachment underneath the interests. Until people are fully heard and understood and given the opportunity to vent and express emotion, they are unable to fully hear or empathise 'with the story of the other'. Through a series of restorative questions, the use of drawing or art, small group work, understanding can be deepened which enables people to speak their truth and to be heard.

Today Glenree believes that while conflict is inevitable, violence is not and continues to promote and support Peace Education in schools and works with young people, many of whom have experience intergenerational trauma from the conflict. It also helps to develop their critical thinking powers and encourages them to confront stereotyping in and between their communities.

Glenree supports groups in conflict in marginalised poor communities that have few economic opportunities and have suffered greatly as a result of the conflict. Glenree recognises the disproportionate suffering of women and children in conflict but also recognises the vital role women play can and have played as peacemakers. Therefore, it supports the empowerment and politicisation of women to take leadership roles at local and national level. This often carries with it significant risk in patriarchal communities which often a strong para military presence. As former President of Ireland and UN Commissioner Human Rights, Mary Robinson has said,

'We have seen first-hand in countries from every region, the critical role that women play as peace-builders, as community organisers, as voices of those who are marginalised. We are convinced that strengthening women's leadership at every level is key to advancing sustainable peace, sustainable development and human rights in the 21st century'

Conclusion

My hope for my world and my grandchildren's now is that there will develop another way of solving problems rather than resorting to violence and the money spent on arms and drones and bombs can be spent on developing mechanisms to dialogue before buttons are pushed to destroy life.

My hopes for my country is that this conflict will never happen again, that we will continue to build relationships between both parts of the island not just in tourism, infrastructure and business because





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that is the easy part and that peace will be felt in the everyday and ordinary, that the peace will be sustainable and real, that it will not be just about co-existence but about reconciliation and forgiveness on all our parts in the destruction that followed us for forty years and beyond.

My hope for my country is that we can learn to dialogue with each other in a respectful and restorative way, that we can go beyond the polite superficial chat chat of strangers and that we can develop relationships where we are at ease with one another!

We are not there yet!

Thank you

Barbara Walshe

