

Peacebuilding in the 21st century

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Thank you. Good afternoon everyone. My name, as Shin san (MC) has said, is Kate Fearon. I currently work for the European Union, External Action Service, but today I want to speak to you about my involvement in the Northern Irish Peace Process and to share with you a little bit of our experience there and what we learned in our very small part of the world. I hope that you might find some interesting parallels with some of your work here.

I want to talk a little bit about, as the last speaker Professor Park did, of peace building not so much the physical reconstruction (as Dr Abe did), but the political reconstruction. It's very difficult to talk about, a small, but complex problem that's about 400 years in duration in 20 minutes, so I skip right to the beginning of the mid-1990s when the Northern Irish issue had reached mutually hurting stalemate. I just want to check with you, how many of you are anyway familiar with the conflict in Northern Ireland? Hands-up. Okay, so some not, some are. Okay, maybe I will go back a little bit.

In Northern Ireland, it's very, very small country and the center of our world is Europe, as we see it. So, Northern Ireland, a very small part of the island of Ireland, which previously was colonized by the United Kingdom right up until the early 20th century, was colonized, so in 1922, the southern part of Ireland became a republic, became independent, but the northern part remained part of the United Kingdom and remained so to this day, but the fact of its remaining part of the United Kingdom was very contentious and was contested physically in a violent conflict, many times over the centuries since 1609 to be precise, but most recently in a conflict mainly in Northern Ireland beginning in 1969-1970, and lasting right through until 1996. But, around the start of the 1990s, what we call a mutually hurting stalemate basically that no side was going to win, was the status. So the British government had the army on the streets of Northern Ireland and lots of police there as well, and there were paramilitary groups that were fighting against the British government.

There were paramilitary groups that were fighting against nationalist community. The nationalist community wanted to become part of a political whole island of Ireland. The Unionist community wanted to retain the link with the United Kingdom. So, by a mutually hurting stalemate – just to give you an idea of the conflict – in that 30-year period, there were around 3,000 people were killed. Around 40,000 people were injured. There were around 52,000 incidents and that's about five incidents a day, every day for 30 years. That's around 11,000 days and every day there were, sometimes small, sometimes larger incidents.

So, obviously this couldn't go on. This was a conflict that was taking place in the domestic territory of a member of the UN Security Council. A member, at the time, certainly of the most developed countries in the world, so it was quite an embarrassment for the UK government and even though the UN troops were contemplated at one stage, the British government never wanted to internationalize the conflict, so the way of defining the conflict was also a site for contention and arguably remains so. There had been a number of attempts by the time we come to the peace process that I will address, a number of attempts to resolve the conflict on the constitutional means and in 1996, there was a new process proposed and this was because several of

the paramilitary organizations had declared a ceasefire and so the British and Irish governments concluded that the conditions held potential for the first time to really get everybody around the table and to have a new discussion certainly.

As part of that process, I along with a group of women lobbied very strongly for the traditional parties to include the women's agenda and to include women in their own political parties in the negotiations about the peace talks, but the political parties completely ignored us and that was their first big mistake because we didn't like it so much that we were ignored so explicitly. So we decided to form our own political party and we did that about 6 weeks before the election, and we formed a political party that would ensure that women's concerns were brought to the fore. We were concerned with widening the agenda somewhat and the traditional parties were chiefly concerned with the constitutional question. So, they were concerned with essentially the relationship at a regional parliamentary level within Northern Ireland. The relationship between the rest of the United Kingdom, the government in London and the government in Belfast and then the relationship between the government in London and the government in Dublin.

What we were concerned about was the actual process, how the process would be handled? How it would be managed?

What it would look like? We were very concerned always to, when we got elected, to ensure that we reached out to the local communities to ensure that we reflected their views within the formal political process, so we tried to include as many people as possible in our policy discussions and to constantly include by consulting the community. What we wanted to do in terms of the actual agenda which was narrowly focused on these constitutional issues, we wanted to expand the agenda. We wanted to make the pie bigger before we divided it up between ourselves. So, the Northern Ireland Peace Process lasted for about 2 years, from 1996-1998. It was chaired by the US Senator, George Mitchell, and the British government and the Irish governments were heavily involved in that. While there was eventually a resolution on the constitutional issues, it really was that Northern Ireland would remain within the United Kingdom, so there was not enough appetite within Northern Ireland for this little place to become part of the republic of Ireland, but there was agreement on a regional parliament, an assembly, as we call it – and agreement on parliament and an agreement to have a formal relationship between Belfast and Dublin, the two sides, north and south of the island and, but there were some additional things which we as a Women's Coalition wanted to put on the agenda and successfully put on the agenda and they were things like the incorporation

of the European Convention on Human Rights into our domestic legislation, which was the first place, I believe, in the United Kingdom where that happened.

We wanted the establishment of a Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, which would have the power to propose a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, which would take account of the specific context of the conflict from which we had come. We wanted, and were successful in requiring, that public bodies obliged to have regard to equality in their public duties. We also were really the only party that put forward proposals on reconciliation and dealing with the past and they weren't popular at the time with any political party when we proposed them, but we made the case successfully. However, we didn't get as strong provisions as we would like, but references to those issues were in our agreement and the agreement was passed by popular referendum, so we were able to use those in the years since as building blocks to move forward on those agendas.

In terms of the implementation of the peace agreement, these things take time. In our experience, you can move forward, move backwards. There are times of great hope and there are times of great despair, but you need to have faith in the process and that was really why we had our real concerns about how the process was designed in the first instance because if the

process is strong it will withstand the rollercoaster ride that is frequently a peace process or reconciliation process or in fact any negotiation process, so being strong on the process and allowing things to settle down and giving things time to settle down for people to get used to new realities, new normalities and new changes. I think that can't be overestimated since when people are ingrained in a certain mentality that's been handed down to them for 300-400 years, it takes a little time and you don't change that in 2 or 3 years.

It's important to try to build trust. Some people actively resist trusting others but you have to have faith and have some degree of optimism in a process like this. I believe there needs to be some transparency. Not everything can be negotiated in public, but certainly I believe parties to negotiations should make the broad thrust under principles very, very public, but it needs the willingness of all parties to that so having determination to move things forward. Also something which was important in our process was mentoring from external actors, but also kind of external actors pushing you forward, so we had a very strong input from the United States government when it became at times of high tension for example, we will be at the level where Bill Clinton the President at the time would be phoning the political leaders, phoning Gerry Adams, phoning Ian Paisley, saying this is the time

you've got to do it, so having that external actor was very important as well as having the British and Irish governments there all the time. I would also say the notion of money is important. Part of what happened with our process and what helped sustain our process was that we had a great deal of – in a sense – reconstruction money. It was a peace and reconciliation agenda structural funds for communities who had been living for a long time with high levels of unemployment who were impoverished, who had low educational attainment and so special programs were designed which the European Union funded which ensured that people were able to be included and maintain a sense of optimism of participating in or having a stake in the future and this was – now it would be over 20 years and it's like 300 million, even more. The European Union monies were especially important for border communities, so people living in border areas, so on this side on the northern side of the border and on the southern side of the border. So, introducing people to each other and ensuring that the peace would hold that once there is an agreement, you really need to ensure that it is knitted into the fabric of the society and that's what we tried to do with making sure that things like social inclusion was a strong principle in our peace process even if there were no explicit provisions saying A, B and C, but these kind of, what would be seen as more

soft power issues, were something that we promoted as a Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and that we think have stood the test of time since. I noted earlier the tendency for a peace process is to go up and down and there were times when certain people were kicked out of the talks process because the paramilitary groups had committed violent acts again and broke their ceasefire, but again you need to remain committed and to keep the faith in the process.

Dealing with the past is something that we referenced in the agreement, but we haven't been able to move on and part of the reason we are back in a political stalemate at the minute and part of the reason is, in my view, that this issue of dealing with the past was not properly addressed at the time, when we did the agreement in 1998, almost 20 years ago now. It took 2 years of really intensive negotiations, 1996 through 1998, to get the agreement and we have been trying to implement it for the last 20 years, and for some parts we have done it, but for large part also it's found wanting. That's not necessarily because the agreement was flawed although certainly wasn't perfect, but it's got to do with the political will of political parties to actually implement it and to continue to reach out to the local community.

So, I think that for political negotiations, for peace negotiation, it's

important to include a range of voices and important that local communities see themselves reflected in the people who are doing the negotiations and it's important that that continues through the implementation phase under the – that when you start an implementation phase, I think you have to be very conscious that it takes some time and the issues which may seem the softest like reconciliation or dealing with the past, they can be the hardest to deal with because it's such an emotional thing for everyone and they often can't admit that what actually happened, so we don't have a definition of what actually happened in our past and that will prevent us from moving forward to claim a better future.

Thank you.