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*The Mediation Network*



*for Northern Ireland*

Cross party  
meetings as  
interfaces  
(summer '02)

**REPORT TO THE BELFAST INTERFACES.**

A discussion paper by

**Director of Mediation Northern Ireland.**

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to manage enmity and maintain social order in interface areas of  
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product. Some enduring realities need to be factored in and worked with rather than played  
down. For instance, mistrust is likely to prevail for quite a while, as will the loss of confidence in  
other people's integrity. Hence the importance of Third Party involvement, rather than leaving  
people to work bilaterally with each other.

In my view, regardless of what model is used, the situation must advance within three broad  
dimensions:

**Security:** which relates to the activity of police and citizens, either separately or in  
varying levels of co-operation, in restoring and maintaining order on the ground. In the  
following model, security is addressed in terms of technical arrangements.

**Community:** which involves a range of activities which are customised to meet the  
needs of each particular area.

**Politics:** which refers to the need for sustained cross-party and governmental talks about  
the macro issues emerging from the current situation of instability on the interfaces.

I am setting out a hypothetical model below, focusing on the east of the city. The east would be a  
better starting point than north Belfast, where interfaces are more numerous and differences are  
more complicated. Progress in the east could be adapted for the north in due course.

**An Outline Model.**

**Security.**

By the middle or second half of September, an Inter-Neighbourhood Watch pilot scheme  
is established with the objective of helping maintain order along the interfaces. It has four  
tasks:

- Monitoring disturbances in interface areas and efforts by local communities to  
respond to unrest. It also monitors police performance.

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## RESTORING ORDER TO THE BELFAST INTERFACES.

A discussion paper by

**Brendan McAllister, Director of Mediation Northern Ireland.**

### Introduction.

This paper is being circulated to a number of people with whom I have had discussions about practical steps to end violence, manage enmity and maintain social order in interface areas of Belfast. It should be viewed as a contribution to ongoing discussions rather than as a finished product. Some enduring realities need to be factored in and worked with rather than played down. For instance, mistrust is likely to prevail for quite a while, as will the loss of confidence in other people's integrity. Hence the importance of Third Party involvement, rather than leaving people to work bilaterally with each other.

In my view, regardless of what model is used, the situation must advance within three broad dimensions:

**Security:** which relates to the activity of police and citizens, either separately or in varying levels of co-operation, in restoring and maintaining order on the ground. In the following model, security is addressed in terms of technical arrangements.

**Community:** which involves a range of activities which are customised to meet the needs of each particular area.

**Politics:** which refers to the need for sustained cross-party and governmental talks about the macro issues emerging from the current situation of instability on the interfaces.

I am setting out a hypothetical model below, focusing on the east of the city. The east would be a better starting point than north Belfast, where interfaces are more numerous and differences are more complicated. Progress in the east could be adapted for the north in due course.

### An Outline Model.

#### Security.

By the middle or second half of September, an Inter-Neighbourhood Watch pilot scheme is established with the objective of helping maintain order along the interfaces. It has four tasks:

- Monitoring disturbances in interface areas and efforts by local communities to respond to unrest. It also monitors police performance.



- Assisting communication across the interfaces and with police.
- Supporting local citizens in efforts to maintain calm.
- Reporting on events on the ground.

The scheme centres on a mechanism, managed professionally by a 'Third Party agency acceptable to all sides. It utilizes a broad team of volunteers, made up of local citizens with credibility within their respective communities as well as outside volunteers from the likes of the trades unions and the voluntary sector. These volunteers are given initial training, separately if necessary, and developed further during the pilot scheme.

The volunteers are recruited in sufficient numbers to form teams on each side of the interface and deployed on a rota basis as the need arises.

The mechanism is overseen by a Steering Group, made up of the scheme organisers and people representative of both sides of the interface. The Steering Group determines the strategic direction of the mechanism, including decisions on when and where it should be deployed.

### **Community.**

A cross community Working Party is established with the objective of reaching common understandings of the causes of interface instability and identifying proposals for positive development. The Working Party includes members of key 'constituencies', including party representatives and people who can access the mind of respective paramilitaries. It meets on a regular basis throughout the period covered by the pilot scheme. It receives monitoring reports from the Mechanism.

### **Politics.**

At a higher level a Reference Group on Interface Stability is made up of senior politicians from the various parties. It receives reports from the Mechanism and the Working Party and engages in a sustained dialogue regarding the political implications and challenges. The outcome of such discussions should be twofold:

- infusing political dialogue with a better quality of insight regarding events on the ground;
- enabling the macro thinking of political leaders to inform people on the ground.

Above all there is an urgent need to re-frame the terms within which the current debate about the interfaces is going on. We are locked in a circular argument of blame and counter blame. Agreement on issues needs to emerge, followed by joint problem solving.

**End.**