

FORUM FOR PEACE AND RECONCILIATION

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS HELD AT
DUBLIN CASTLE ON FRIDAY, 14 JULY, 1995

Chairperson: Judge Catherine McGuinness

I hereby certify the following to be a true and accurate transcript of my shorthand notes of the above-named proceedings.

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DR. MCGARRY: I will be very brief. The pace is moving quite slowly, and the last two weeks haven't been good. We had the Lee Clegg decision, that was a bad one. We had riots in Nationalist areas. We we had the ugly face of traditionalist Unionism and Trimble and Pasley during the week, but the obstacles to peace aren't isn't just in Northern Ireland. Last nights decision by the Meath Hospital Board was an equally bad obstacle.

I come to this debate from the point of some view of someone whose father was student in the Mater Hospital in Northern Ireland, and apart from a year worked there until 1989 when he retired as a

consultant surgeon. In Northern Ireland the Mater Hospital was funded entirely by the Catholic Church until 1972. It was taken over by the Department of Health but into it's chartered was written that the special charter of the Mater Hospital will not change, and quite rightly so. The Mater Hospital is a hospital that had a staff now from all religious backgrounds, just like the Adelaide here, most of whose staff are indeed Catholic. The special ethos of the Mater Hospital is there and must be maintained quite rightly so. If the position of the Mater Hospital building was crumbling and perhaps had no future, I am sure that people in this Forum would join with Cardinal Daly is saying this is an outrage and something must be done.

Over the last 10, 15 years the debate has been about the movement of the National Children's Hospital, the Adelaide, and the Meath Hospital to the new Tallaght Hospital site. Heads of agreement agreed in May 1993, the Minister of health Mr. Howlin, the Chairpersons of the boards of the three hospitals. The building is already partly erected, to be opened in two years time. However, the stumbling block is a lack of agreement on the charter. The charter was agreed as you know last July last year by the Adelaide and the National Children's Hospital Board, but the Meath Hospital has blocked this, and because it has to go before the Dail, that again is it put over for another few months, and that decision of the Board of the Meath not to allow the charter to be accepted means the hospital probably will not open in two years time.

I have gone through the charter of the new hospital. What the charter, it is not a charter for a Protestant hospital. I looked in vein for a particular Presbyterian or a Church of Ireland ethos. All the charter is saying is that any medical procedure

permitted by the law of the land which is medically appropriate and agreed by the patient consultant shall be available in the hospital. That is not a Presbyterian ethos. That is the traditional ethos of any hospital around the world. It is not a peculiarly Protestant ethos.

The Mater in Belfast, quite rightly, has its uniquely Catholic ethos and I worked there myself as well as my father, but there is a grave concern that already the date for the new hospital has been put back and it does seem that the reasons really can only be regarded as coming from a basis of a certain fundamentalist prejudice, dare I say it, towards those of the liberal and Protestant tradition. Of course the vast bulk of patients in Adelaide are Catholic of course, and I work as a doctor in Belfast and among my Catholic patients the divorce rate, the contraception use, the abortion rate, is no less than among Protestants, and that is the bottom line, and we all know that in Northern Ireland. So, I would say that last night's decision of the Meath Board is a very unfortunate decision indeed, and it certainly would confirm the prejudices of those who wish to be prejudice against Republican Northern Ireland will confirm the prejudices of Unionist hardliners. It shows you when it comes to it the South is a sectarian State. I know very well it is not a sectarian State, and I am well aware of the many developments, but I have written to the Minister to ask for a meeting because the Meath Board could have put their reservations to the Minister of Health, and I hope that he will exercise his judgement in moving this very important issue on, and important (A) because the hospital will be ready in two years time, and you need to have a Board up and running ready to run the hospital from a practical point of view, but (B) given the two weeks, the two very, very bad weeks we have just had, it is an indication, a symbol of perhaps of certain

regressive attitudes in the Republic of Ireland.
