



A NEW VOICE FOR NEW TIMES

PRESS STATEMENT: JUNE 30th, 1998

EMBARGO 10:30 a.m., June 30th, 1998

NI Women's Coalition sets its Agenda for the Assembly

The NI Women's Coalition was founded on three core principles: **Equality, Inclusion, and Respect for Human Rights**. These principles informed our position at every stage of the Talks process. We go into the Assembly convinced that these principles are the strongest possible safeguards for ensuring that the Agreement is implemented in accordance with its founding spirit.

We will continue to press for the Agreement's equality and human rights agendas to be defined in the broadest possible way, so that the Assembly truly serves all Northern Ireland's people, regardless of religion and political opinion; gender; race; disability; age; marital status; dependants; and sexual orientation.

Designation of Women's Coalition Assembly members for voting purposes

When there is a vote in the Assembly, the Women's Coalition will consider whether a decision would be acceptable to all sections of the community. We will assess the decision in relation to our three core principles of equality, inclusion and respect for human rights. We believe that all the parties should cast their votes in accordance with these considerations.

The Women's Coalition is dissatisfied with the three 'designation' options currently in place, and with the voting system that adds extra weight to the votes of those designated 'unionist' and 'nationalist' on key decisions. We will press for changes in the way key votes are measured, with a view to placing on an equal footing the votes of those members who do not wish to be defined as unionist or nationalist.

Given the current situation, the Women's Coalition is considering two options for registration. Women's Coalition Assembly members may decide to register as 'other'. Alternatively, one of our members may register as a nationalist and the other as a unionist, with the proviso that both members will always vote the same way.

If we take the second option, we would do so on the basis that: a) our membership includes unionists and nationalists and therefore Women's Coalition decisions are already based on negotiation between unionists and nationalists and therefore would serve as a good measure of the acceptability of decisions across the communities; b) that we believe that, ultimately, decisions must be made on the basis of how well they can serve all sections of the community, and not on the basis of constitutional identification.

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Approach to membership and operation of the Executive

In keeping with our principle of political inclusion and the principles of democracy, the Women's Coalition believes that all parties elected in sufficient numbers must be entitled to take their seats in the executive immediately.

We are further suggesting the establishment of an eleventh executive seat, designated for the smaller parties in the Assembly -- currently the Progressive Unionist Party, the Women's Coalition, Alliance and the UK Unionists. This seat would rotate among the smaller parties.

Proposals for Presiding and Deputy Presiding Officers

It is unacceptable and runs contrary to the spirit of the Agreement for parties in the Assembly to veto Presiding Officers on the basis that they do not find them 'acceptable.' Therefore, the Women's Coalition is proposing that a panel of presiding officers be established, with one drawn from each party in the Assembly. Presiding Officers would rotate the position.

Proposed new Ministries

The Women's Coalition is proposing two new ministries for the Assembly:

Environmental Protection and Public Health: Neither the environment nor public health can be treated in isolation -- they are intimately inter-related and inseparable from all other areas of policy making. This ministry would be responsible for assessing all government policies and programmes in terms of their impact on the environment and public health, with the environment defined broadly to encompass the natural, built and social environments.

Children, Youth and Families: One of the best measures of fairness and justice in a society is in how well it upholds the rights and serves the needs of its youngest members. The work of raising children benefits the whole of society. That work must be recognised, valued and supported through government policies and programmes designed to serve the needs of families in all their various forms. The Women's Coalition believes that young people are not just the citizens of tomorrow. They are citizens of today and must be treated as such.

Review mechanisms and a Committee of 'Parties to the Agreement'

The Women's Coalition is proposing the establishment of a committee drawn from the 'Parties to the Agreement', including the Ulster Democratic Party and the Labour Coalition. This committee would contribute to political stability by performing a number of roles vis-à-vis the Assembly. The group could act as 'guardians of the Agreement', commenting on the progress and implementation of the terms of the Agreement. It could safeguard their own party interests in relation to the Agreement. The group could be established as the start of a process of review both of particular aspects of the Agreement, and of the provision in the Agreement for a review of "these arrangements, including the details of electoral arrangements and of the Assembly's procedures, with a view to agreeing any adjustments necessary in the interests of efficiency and fairness."

Further, the Women's Coalition intends to make full use of the review procedure to press for such changes as we feel will be in the interests of promoting the Agreement, including the right of women to full and equal political participation.

Manifesto

Abortion



[The following text is extremely faint and largely illegible. It appears to be the body of a document or manifesto, possibly related to the topic of 'Abortion' mentioned in the handwritten notes. The text is mirrored across the page, suggesting it is bleed-through from the reverse side.]

Civic Forum:

The Women's Coalition proposed the Civic Forum as a means of broadening and deepening democracy in Northern Ireland. We are determined that it will be established so as to promote the participation of the widest range of interests in democratic life. The Civic Forum must not become another QUANGO. Therefore, we completely oppose any move to decide its membership via political appointment. The different sectors must decide their own representatives, in accordance with principles of equity and balance in relation to gender, age, rural and urban interests, and perceived community background. The Women's Coalition is determined that young people will be directly involved in the Civic Forum as of right.

For further information contact Robin Whitaker: 0467-271184 or 01232-382421

30/6/98

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Lessons to be learned

- ⇒ decisions
- strategy of
- criteria for candidates
- other people taking responsibility

~~A decision~~ ^{position} I never want to be part of again.

* Structures + decision-making procedures

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* Constituency → local issues

Harrogate
candidates
815211