

Forum for Peace and Reconciliation

Obstacles in the South to Reconciliation

1. In paragraph 6 of the Joint Declaration, the Taoiseach undertook to examine possible ways of removing those elements in the democratic life and organisation of the Irish State that could be represented as a real and substantial threat to the Unionist way of life and ethos, or as not being fully consistent with a modern democratic and pluralist society. This examination was to take account of the desire to preserve inherited values arising out of the historical and cultural experience of the people of Ireland.
2. When the Forum devised its initial work programme, Obstacles in the South to Reconciliation was identified as one of nine specific topics worthy of detailed examination. The first Forum debate on this issue will take place during the afternoon Plenary Session on 24 February and this paper has been prepared by the Secretariat as a possible aid to the discussions.
3. In their opening statements and in subsequent contributions, Delegations have drawn attention to the importance they attach to this aspect of the Forum's work. Many of the public submissions received from individuals and organisations contain suggestions as to various changes in the South that would assist in promoting reconciliation in Ireland. This paper identifies, under a number of headings, the various issues related to this theme that have arisen in the course of the Forum's work to date. As a compilation of issues raised, it is not exhaustive and not all of the following are of equal weight or importance.
4. The points raised can be grouped under four broad headings - constitutional/political, moral/religious, educational and symbolic. It is evident that these categories overlap and that issues relevant to the Obstacles in the South discussion also arise under other Forum topics (e.g. Constitutional Issues and Political Structures, Education, Reconciliation and Understanding). In looking at the following issues, it may be pertinent, as with other Forum topics, to ask two related questions, i.e.,
  - \* **to what extent do these issues fall within the Forum's competence and**
  - \* **what distinctive contribution can the Forum make in advancing consideration of these issues?**
5. Constitutional/Political:
  - *Articles 2&3.* While this is dealt with elsewhere in the Work Programme, it is the issue most frequently cited in contributions from Delegations and in submissions which refer to changes required in the South. The views expressed on Articles 2&3 are varied and by no means all favour change. A number of submissions looked for a more general overhaul of the Irish Constitution.
  - *A more tolerant and pluralist society.* A point made frequently in submissions, but with little elaboration on what precisely this might mean. There may be



scope for further examination of the way in which a developing pluralism might contribute to reconciliation. There is considerable recognition of the extent to which Irish society has changed in recent decades, but a view persists that this process needs to go further.

- *Anti-discrimination legislation.* Specific suggestions include the idea of incorporating the European Convention on Human Rights in domestic legislation.
- *Separation of Church and State.*

#### Moral/Religious

- *Review of Legislation reflecting a Catholic ethos (e.g. divorce).* Insofar as Unionist views have been reflected at the Forum, the principal fear expressed relates to the political influence of the Catholic Church in Ireland.
- *Broadcasting of the Angelus.*
- *Removal of the moral dimension from the Constitution.*

#### Educational

- *Non-denominational and multi-denominational education*
- *A more pluralistic curriculum.* Education geared towards mutual understanding.
- *A more open ethos in schools.*

#### Symbolic/Cultural

- *The National Anthem.* Quite a number of submissions take up this point.
  - *Respect in the South for the Unionist tradition.* For some, this would include improved British-Irish links, the question of Ireland's relationship with the Commonwealth and recognition of role played by Irish people during World War 2.
  - *Sport.* A new flag and anthem for all-Ireland sporting occasions. The attitude of the GAA towards the Unionist tradition.
6. After the debate on 24 February, it is proposed that the Chairperson and the Secretariat bring forward a set of proposals, based on the contribution of members in that debate, on how the Forum might take forward its work in this area.



1. Separation of Church & State. (Nation & State)
2. Sharing with the minorities.
3. Valuing of Southern Movements - do they have the  
 chance of citizenship & progress. moral value
4. ~~Standard / Relevant / Liberal Society~~: (request for difference  
 Sport / Culture / Commonwealth. 12th Anniversary Day  
Finalists at the Bogue. request to leave unorth.  
 (Language)  
 - reference to Northern Ireland  
 as of Canada.  
 failed entry.
5. Antipathy to things British. (not just Commonwealth  
 but on other)

Marginalism -  
 Valuing of minorities -  
 Antipathy to the other -

support for- like  
 ideas.