

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

LORD ROOKER'S SPEECH

**CRC POLICY CONFERENCE "SHARING OVER
SEPARATION"**

THURSDAY 27TH APRIL 2006

GROSVENOR HOUSE, GLENGALL STREET, BELFAST

Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to be here. This is a very important week in the community relations calendar. Peter Hain sends his best wishes to you all. On Tuesday in Newry, Peter set out in very clear terms this Government's commitment to A Shared Future.

I am delighted to be here in this marvellous building, which through the darkest years of civil unrest in Northern Ireland was an oasis for so many. Many great individuals (like Rev Eric Gallagher former Moderator of Methodist Church) whose name resonates with peace building graced these halls. Many of you will know of his involvement in the Feakle Talks over 30 years ago. A forgotten episode in Irish history - talks that inspired the longest ceasefire in the Northern Ireland conflict until the current peace process came into being.

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It is fitting that you are holding your conference here. I am delighted to be able to address you. I should like to offer my congratulations to Community Relations Council (CRC) and all the organisations who are participating in nearly 200 community relations events this week. They are showcasing the major contributions community relations makes to the everyday life of everyone.

I would like to also pay tribute to the work carried out by the CRC and other organisations represented here today (and those who could not be here) for their ongoing and sustained work to bring about real opportunities for peace-building and reconciliation.

I hope you got a chance to hear (or read the coverage) of the Secretary of State's speech made at the NICICTU conference on Tuesday. Peter has robustly reaffirmed the government's **full** and **total** commitment to *A Shared Future* and let me reiterate:

“there is no alternative to A Shared Future. Segregation and division is not an option”.

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My purpose today in coming here is threefold:

- **to launch** the Shared Future **first** Triennial Action Plan (TAP) – **along** with its sister document the Racial Equality First Implementation Action Plan;
- I want, in my speech, to give a flavour of what we are going to do. Not merely to restate the objectives or make aspirational commitments but, to say what will be done, by whom and for what purpose.
- I want also to ratchet-up the collective public consciousness of A Shared Future. It is in my view an important public policy (if not the most important). Separate but equal may be the reality or desire at present for some people, but it can't be our future.
- And finally, to make clear that government has a special responsibility not only to provide leadership in tackling the “twin evils” of sectarianism and racism **but** in setting out the framework to tackle both. I plan to map out for you over the course of the next 15 minutes or so what we intend to do.

LAUNCHING THE ACTION PLAN

So what is this action plan going to do to help build this new modern society? I can of course only give you some of the important headlines of what is within this substantial document within this speech.

In Education

We will promote and prioritise sharing in all levels of education. When the decisions are made by the Department on new schools, on reorganisation or rationalisation of existing schools, proposals will have to demonstrate that options for collaboration or sharing on a cross-community basis have been fully explored. It will also be our position that such proposals are likely to justify financial support if they are shared or operate across the community divide. These specific commitments will be taken on in the context of the current review of education being led by Sir George Bain.

In Social Development and Housing

We have set several strategic plans in place to deliver on shared living, dialogue and relationship-building at community level:

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- Within social and economic renewal projects - the promotion of good relations, particularly at interface areas and in divided communities will be a requirement. This will also be a requirement in relation to rural estates.
- The Housing Executive will be developing two pilot “Shared Future” housing schemes this year and laying the groundwork for potential host sites for future schemes. As part of this work I have asked OFMDFM to review the current provisions of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order to ensure and to bring forward proposals to facilitate mixed housing schemes.
- A consortium of Departments along with the Arts Council will be implementing the “Re-Imaging Communities Programme” this year to work with communities to replace aggressively sectarian and racist images. This is about putting confidence back into communities and sending out positivity rather than negativity.

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I would want to emphasise that all of the actions in the plan are contributions to the Shared Future vision. Some actions, such as the examples I've just given will be "more headline grabbing". However, it's the sum of all the parts that will be the overarching outcome. Again to illustrate these other parts:

- The commitment by the Department of Finance and Personnel not to consider any public expenditure proposal that does not include a good relations assessment is very significant. Particularly as we enter the work on the Comprehensive Spending Review for 2007.
- Making sure that Shared Future objectives are embedded in the outworking of the Regional Development Strategy is crucially important. That document is key to future land use management and balanced regional development. It is imperative that a Shared Future is central to it.
- The detailed set of commitments and actions for the Police Service are essential to build a safe environment for all. This is not just about tackling

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hate crime, but also about making further progress in the new era of policing in Northern Ireland.

I suspect some of you will think that the action plans do not go far enough. That perhaps some of the issues are not addressed or challenged in a robust and proactive fashion. That these are “paper commitments” which you will believe when you see them

There is nothing wrong with healthy scepticism.

However, I say to you we are taking the first steps into new and challenging territories. It is a steep change for everyone.

Northern Ireland is changing and changing rapidly. This increasing culturally diverse society should not be defined by the challenges it brings, but by the opportunities it presents. So this action plan is an opportunity agenda that I, the Secretary of State, my ministerial colleagues and with the commitment of our Departments are resolved to achieve.

The issue of our time

Division is costly to everybody in Northern Ireland – economically, politically and socially and that division is

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the consequence of antagonistic sectarian and racist attitudes.

As the issue of our time, if the delivery of public services is not set-up to counter these sectarian attitudes and racial inequalities, then, inevitably, it will continue to reinforce those divisions and inequalities.

The negative economic impact of parallel service delivery is one that is already widely recognised and the need to reduce these “costs of division” equally agreed.

In order to quantify the extent of the cost, we have commissioned research to obtain data that will help direct planning of services in the future. A competitive economy may be regarded as the terminology of the economist but it means a lot to the people of Northern Ireland when jobs are lost to other, more competitive parts of the world.

Sectarianism, racism, division all cost jobs and damage prosperity. In addition, to being socially unjustifiable it is economically unsustainable.

Government will continue to drive forward actions to promote good relations and good race relations **but** in the long run sustained progress requires leadership at local,

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civic and community level. **But perhaps most importantly it requires political leadership.**

Part of my objective today is to **challenge** local political parties to take up this mantle and make the policy a reality - a new common sense for all who live on this island.

We have engaged in a series of presentations to elected members at council level and with parties. “A Shared Future” is certainly becoming a part of Northern Ireland’s vocabulary today. But, let’s remember what we mean by A Shared Future:

- all individuals are considered equal;
- differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere;
- people are treated impartially; and
- equity, respect for diversity and recognition of our interdependence.

As we move towards a new construct of local government these are the Shared Future values that we will see built into the RPA arrangements.

We are not unique: cohesion, sharing, diversity, building good relations and reconnecting with state institutions

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those who feel – for whatever reason – most alienated or marginalized are challenges in Britain and across Europe.

The leadership that Northern Ireland needs is to build good relations which benefit everyone and threaten no-one. At all levels we can judge ourselves if the attitudes we hold (or see displayed by others) are rooted in mutual recognition and trust.

I am reminded by a quote from Sir Jonathan Sacks when he said -

“Individuals who make moral choices and act upon them can and do make a difference. They demonstrate that those who actively oppose prejudice, racism, persecution and murder can make a difference.”

I use this to say something to everyone in this room today – me included. I am using this speech to ensure we understand the impact that sectarianism and racism have on society in Northern Ireland. I’m also saying, knowing this isn’t enough – that knowledge brings a moral choice for each of us – are we willing to do something to make a difference? Are we?

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Today's launch of the first shared future action plan - is an important milestone – it clearly signposts the direction of travel on many different fronts – on education, housing, on tackling sectarianism and racism, and on reclaiming shared space in the public realm.

This is a **rolling 3-year** action plan and specific actions focus, in the main, on the first year.

The focus is – commitment, delivery, review and renew – a sound policy process on which we seek your active engagement.

Future action plans will mature and grow in line with delivery, outcomes and measurement - along with the benefit of your practical experiences.

About the conference recommendations

This conference has produced important outputs and recommendations to help the outworking of the triennial action plan.

I very much welcome these and I look forward to them being taken forward by the Community Relations Council

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in collaboration with the Good Relations Panel, which will be established to oversee how we implement A Shared Future.

The role of the Community Relations Council will be crucial to the planning mechanism and I commend the Council for this conference today and for being the conduit for *A Shared Future* whereby these research papers have been produced. This is an example of the support / challenge function which CRC has with Government.

Good Relations Panel

I plan to establish the Good Relations Panel (chaired by Nigel Hamilton, Head of the Civil Service) to champion and oversee the good relations agenda and the implementation / development of Shared Future plans across Government departments. The good relations indicators' framework which we are also developing will be a vital tool in aiding that delivery and challenge function.

As I said earlier, one of the first actions of the Good Relations Panel will be the establishment of a mechanism to underscore through 'civic' partnership working how collectively we can shape and evolve this policy through the outworking of the action plans.

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We will announce details of both the panel and the supporting mechanism by the end of June.

Concluding remarks

In closing, can I say that we have a golden opportunity here in Northern Ireland. It is a changing society which offers us the opportunity to examine the way in which we - not only view those who have come to live and work among us – but, also how we have traditionally viewed each other within Northern Ireland. **It is in my view about shifting the paradigm of relationships.**

Growing diversity can have a genuinely leavening effect on a divided society and has the power to alter the attitudes that have maintained the divide.

I commend the first Shared Future Triennial Action Plan and the Racial Equality Implementation Action Plan to you. As I said in the foreword to the Shared Future Triennial Action Plan – “This is doable!” so let’s begin today and turn the risks of not beginning to do something into the opportunities of tomorrow.

Finally, I’d like to share a personal view with you. I am personally humbled to be associated with something: a

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“movement”, which will deliver a range of good things for all of us. For the people of Northern Ireland as we together help shape tomorrow’s shared future today.

Let’s us – you, I and all of us give the commitment to work together to change hearts and minds. Let me finish with two quotes. First, it was John F Kennedy who said:

“One person can make a difference and every person must try.”

The second quote is from Václav Havel. He said

“Work for something because it is good, not because it stands a chance to succeed”

Ladies and gentlemen not only is A Shared Future something good, but it will succeed. **It is the new common sense.**

Thank you for listening to me and if time permits I’ll now take a few questions from the floor.

END.