



A NEW IRELAND FOR ALL:

Ending
Sectarian
Segregation



INTRODUCTION

In April 2023, the Good Friday Agreement marked its twenty-fifth anniversary.

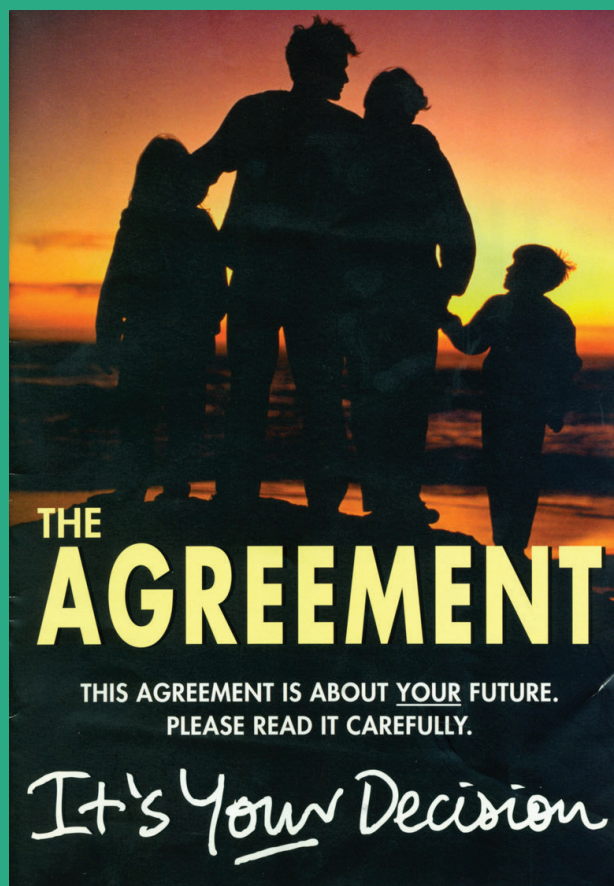
The Agreement transformed the context on this island with a new architecture of political institutions. It provided a roadmap, underpinned by a framework of values and rules, to manage democratic change, and ongoing change within society.

Twenty-five years on, the imposition of BREXIT, against the democratic wishes of a majority in the north, has injected both momentum and a reality, into the conversation around future constitutional change.

BREXIT cut off an economic lifeline for the north to the EU. It has brought into sharper focus the sustained underinvestment in the north over decades by successive British governments. However, thirteen years of Tory austerity has exacerbated substandard economic performance, low productivity, low educational achievement, and the worst health outcomes of any region in these islands. It is against this backdrop that more and more people are considering what type of future will best serve their needs.

Building a new Ireland will require sustained engagement, debate, and dialogue on a future model of governance and provide opportunities to build a new national health service, an all-island education system and determine how the economy is integrated and developed. It will also bring in to focus how the whole island can rejoin the European Union in the event of reunification. Overriding this will be the need to reassure the Unionist section of our community that all rights will be safeguarded and protected in a new Ireland.

Political leadership is a necessary requirement to engage with the legacy of sectarianism and segregation in building towards the achievement of reconciliation and a shared society.





THE POLICY CONTEXT

Throughout the last decade, civic organisations, trade unions, educational institutions, business organisations, faith communities and our new communities have made contributions to assist reconciliation and further embed the peace process.

SINN FÉIN HAS ALSO TAKEN INITIATIVES AND PUBLISHED SIGNIFICANT POLICY DOCUMENTS ENDORSED AT SUCCESSIVE ARD FHEISEANNA INCLUDING:

- ➔ Towards an Agreed and Reconciled Future (2016),
- ➔ Tackling the Scourge of Sectarianism in Irish Society (2017),
- ➔ Inclusion and Reconciliation in A New Ireland (2019).

Each policy document sets out clear proposals and recommendations to engage with specific challenges such as commemoration, dealing with the past, the role of political institutions, the role of political leadership and policy, and the role of community and civic society.

The Sinn Féin Commission on the Future of Ireland was launched in July 2022 as a key strategic initiative to promote popular grass roots participation in debating Irish unity through a series of People's Assemblies. Alongside party policy this process reflects the party's commitment to engage with and listen to the broadest cross-section of opinion on the hopes and aspirations of citizens, and to set out how to address sectarianism and promote reconciliation as we build towards a new and agreed Ireland.

The following policy document builds on all this work. It reaffirms our commitment to the promotion of reconciliation and addresses what more must be done, particularly in the context of designing public policy and the governance of democratic institutions.

THE VISION

Sinn Féin is absolutely committed to a shared and better future for everyone; one which is shaped by the people of this island together. All citizens must be cherished, respected, and protected in a new national constitutional democracy. Future governance arrangements should be shaped and made by people, from all traditions and backgrounds, who share this island as their home.

The Good Friday Agreement gave all citizens the opportunity to decide their future together. Underpinned by the principles of equal treatment, parity of esteem and mutual respect, the Agreement provides a political framework for peaceful coexistence and pathway to constitutional change in a divided society.

SINN FÉIN BELIEVES A NEW CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY MUST BE RIGHTS BASED. CENTRAL TO ITS DEVELOPMENT MUST BE:

- ➔ The right to free political thought.
- ➔ The right to freedom and expression of religion.
- ➔ The right to pursue democratic national and political aspirations.
- ➔ The right to seek constitutional change by peaceful and legitimate means.



- ➔ The right to freely choose one's place of residence.
- ➔ The right to equal opportunity in all social and economic activity, regardless of class, creed, disability, gender, or ethnicity.
- ➔ The right to freedom from sectarian harassment; and,
- ➔ The right of women to full and equal political participation.

Our changed political and societal landscape has increasingly focussed the public discourse on the agreed process for dealing with the constitutional question, under the Good Friday Agreement (1998) provisions. This must be linked to an agreed process for bringing about reconciliation. Such a process should seek to engage with questions of the past, deal with challenges of living together in the present and seek to unlock the potential of living together as equals in a new future.

Some are genuinely anxious, apprehensive, and have concerns about political and constitutional change. That needs to be openly acknowledged and affirmed. Continuing to make progress also means that we also must continue to engage, listen, and act in the interests of all sections of our people. That is why Sinn Féin is absolutely committed to accommodating the Orange tradition and British identity in a new Ireland.

Together, as a society, we must seek to engage with the challenges of the past and yet look to the future with common cause. To that end this document presents refreshed proposals and recommendations to engage with the specific challenges of tackling sectarianism and promoting reconciliation.

FRAMING THE CHALLENGES

Sectarianism and sectarian segregation remain major barriers in the north to building a shared and better future. Yet despite these pervasive shadows the north is changing.

Marriage equality and a woman's right to healthcare has been secured. Significantly, so too has official recognition for the Irish language. Notably, progress has also been made around contentious bonfires and parades. However, more needs to be done to reduce the erection of flags intended to mark out territory, harass and intimidate.

While much has changed, there is so much more that can be done. More progress is needed to deliver economic and social equality, and a Bill of Rights. Confronting sectarian segregation and breaking the cycle of sectarianism requires a constant focus.

Sinn Féin believes this needs to be embedded within public policy processes which are future proofed.

Tackling segregation in the north is a strategic challenge. It will require ambition, political leadership, and a commitment to innovative public policy development.

A NEW SOLUTION FOCUSED AGENDA IS REQUIRED THAT:

- ▶▶ Builds integrated and shared communities,
- ▶▶ Educates children together,
- ▶▶ Builds a society free from sectarianism and,
- ▶▶ Protects the rights of all victims of the conflict.



Successful planning for a shared and better future must be based upon engaging with, and overcoming the barriers to change, and resourcing the policies, interventions, and programmes capable of affecting positive change.

A deeper engagement with those from Protestant, Unionist and British backgrounds is needed. Their views, aspirations and concerns need to be heard and understood.

PROPOSALS TO BUILD FOR THE FUTURE

Twenty-five years on from the Good Friday Agreement peace accord was signed, Sinn Féin believes there is a need for a new dialogue about sectarian segregation, as well as the legacy of the past, which directs and mandates our public institutions to work for a shared and better future.

SINN FÉIN STRONGLY ASSERTS THE NEED TO:

- ➔ Address sectarianism and segregation,
- ➔ Deal with the legacy of the past,
- ➔ Enhance the role of political institutions in promoting a shared future,
- ➔ Expand political leadership and policy development.

ENDING SECTARIANISM

Ending sectarianism is inseparable from building for the future.

That will entail the delivery of an all-island strategy to contribute to promoting understanding, tackling sectarianism, and promoting reconciliation.

It also means positively supporting the availability of integrated education, creating inclusive communities, and implementing a framework to deal with identity related issues.

A step change is required. Anti-sectarianism should be put at the centre of all public policy development.

Integrated Education

The passing of the Integrated Education Act by the northern Assembly in March 2022, despite opposition by some, is a very clear example of what can be achieved when progressive parties work together.

This Integrated Education Act is a positive and progressive step forward, as it seeks to ensure that families who wish to send their children to an integrated school will have that choice met.

That is why Sinn Féin supports the delivery of the Integrated Education Act.



Creating Shared Communities

Sectarian segregation is a political, practical, and psychological obstacle preventing the emergence of shared neighbourhoods and shared space. Dealing with segregation and creating integrated, vibrant communities is a complex challenge that calls for a collaborative and inclusive approach.

Sinn Féin is committed to pursuing the removal of physical interface barriers through processes which have the participation and support of local communities.

This will require a commitment to the allocation of public housing based on objective need, and a resolve to eradicate paramilitary control and racist intimidation from all relevant stakeholders, such as government bodies, police, NGOs, community organisations, and most importantly, residents themselves.

In the past, planning policies were framed in a way that viewed certain areas and communities, as problems to be solved rather than valuing them as cherished communities. These policies often disrupted communities, relocating residents to newly constructed housing estates on the outskirts of cities and towns.

The political conflict worsened this issue. A British state security policy of ‘defensive planning’ was implemented in a way that uprooted communities and increased segregation. This policy drained the economic strength from these areas, contributed to stagnation, dereliction, and a sense of despair.

Sectarian segregation has a direct correlation to social and economic inequality. The removal of segregation requires community based economic, educational and health interventions. Decent jobs, educational opportunities and good quality housing should be central to anti-sectarian strategies driven by government. These processes should be overseen and implemented with ministerial direction from within the northern power-sharing Executive.

TO ADDRESS THESE CHALLENGES, SINN FÉIN PROPOSES THE FOLLOWING:

➔ Policy Reform

- ▶▶ Ensure housing policy is based on objective need.
- ▶▶ Focus planning policies on creating vibrant, integrated, mixed-use neighbourhoods that encourage social interactions and economic sustainability.
- ▶▶ Promote the regeneration of areas divided by physical structures and segregation by addressing socioeconomic inequalities. This regeneration needs to address community need, develop ownership of land and assets with a focus on connectivity and reversing the defensive planning of the past.

➔ Community Engagement and Empowerment

- ▶▶ Ensure active involvement of communities in decision-making processes related to housing, development, and integration initiatives.
- ▶▶ Ensure housing is developed and delivered based on need.
- ▶▶ Link housing to regeneration and the building of thriving communities
- ▶▶ Foster dialogue and understanding among different communities.

➔ Community Wealth Building

- ▶▶ Build a more resilient and sustainable local economy, strengthening social cohesion and overall well-being by ensuring ownership and empowerment within the community.



- ▶▶ Prioritise creating jobs within the community, offering opportunities for residents with fair wages and benefits.
- ▶▶ Focus on reducing inequalities and ensuring economic benefits are distributed more equitably across the community, particularly to historically marginalised groups.

➔ Infrastructure and Connectivity

- ▶▶ Enhance infrastructure and transportation networks to improve connectivity between communities, encouraging interaction and integration.

Engaging with Identity Issues

The Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition (FICT) Commission was formed in 2016. With representatives of all five main parties on the Commission it was mandated to make recommendations on how to deal with these contested issues within our society. The FICT report was finally presented to The Executive Office in July 2020.

The Report contained 45 recommendations and while it does not provide all the solutions it offers a roadmap to address issues at the heart of division in the north; and made recommendations on how cultural traditions and identities can be celebrated and commemorated on the basis of equality and mutual respect.

However, Unionist political opposition within the power-sharing Executive, resisted all attempts and subsequent deadlines to present a plan to the full Executive on implementation of the report's recommendations. This represented an abject failure of political leadership.

Despite repeated efforts by Sinn Féin, progress was blocked on the delivery of the FICT Report recommendations.

Implementation of the FICT report will be challenging. That's why producing an implementation plan is the correct thing to do.

In the Executive, Sinn Féin will seek the implementation of the Executive's FICT Implementation Plan.

DEALING WITH THE PAST

Engaging meaningfully with the issue of legacy, pain and loss in a manner that upholds the rights of victims will require broad community and political consensus. The unilateral action by the British government in bringing forward anti-democratic 'amnesty legislation' which violates international law has been rejected locally by political parties, the Churches and by the international human rights community. It is an affront to the rights of all victims. Any approach to engage with legacy matters must be victim-centred and human rights compliant in accordance with Article 2 ECHR obligations.

SINN FÉIN WILL CONTINUE TO:

- ➔ Seek the implementation of the Stormont House Agreement (2014) legacy mechanisms in a human rights compliant manner.
- ➔ Seek support for an initiative of common acknowledgement which recognises all past injustices, hurt and loss.
- ➔ Seek support for a National Reconciliation Day which remembers all victims of conflict in Ireland.



ROLE OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Leadership from the democratic political institutions throughout Ireland is fundamental to progress towards a shared and integrated future.

The principles of equality, mutual respect and parity of esteem are core to the functioning of all political institutions, both north and south.

TO THIS END SINN FÉIN WILL SEEK TO:

- ➔ Ensure the Executive and Assembly in the north, local authorities and all public sector bodies adopt a dedicated anti-sectarianism policy and make it publicly available on their websites.
- ➔ Ensure that elected representatives will be bound to pro-actively uphold and implement the commitment of his / her anti sectarianism pledge of office.
- ➔ Advocate for a revised “Together: Building a United Community” strategy in the north, which is co-designed with local communities, which makes provision to fill gaps in provision and which clearly sets out a roadmap toward a shared and better future.
- ➔ Advocate for a clear legal definition of sectarianism.
- ➔ Incorporate a citizen’s anti-sectarian charter into the pledges of Ministers, MLAs, TDs, and local councillors across the island.
- ➔ Encourage all-party unity and leadership for a popular campaign against sectarianism and segregation, north and south.
- ➔ Support the establishment of a civic forum in the north as a platform to encourage cross-community and anti-sectarian solidarity within civic society.

NATIONAL DIMENSION

Irish society has yet to deal with the hurt, fear and mistrust caused by generations of British colonial interference and resulting political conflict on this island. The civil war over one hundred years ago still overshadows modern Irish history and politics. No effective reconciliation process was ever undertaken by the southern state to deal with that catharsis in our country’s history.

Partition and sectarianism remain major barriers to achieving a new, national constitutional democracy. The delivery of an inclusive national reconciliation process designed to acknowledge loss, address concerns, and build new relationships can inform a roadmap to the future. That is why strategies for dealing with sectarianism and planning for a reconciliation process must be core to preparations for constitutional change.

This places a responsibility on the Irish government to expand the work of the Shared Island Unit and also to play a leadership role in persuading and assuring all who share this island that their rights will be protected in a new national democracy.



TO ASSIST THIS WORK SINN FÉIN PROPOSES:

- ➔ That the Irish government convene a citizen's assembly to address the impacts of sectarianism and intolerance, and which will bring forward proposals to promote national reconciliation.
- ➔ An expansion of the work and remit of the Shared Island Initiative in the Office of An Taoiseach
- ➔ The development of an all-island reconciliation strategy to be implemented under the auspices of the North South Ministerial Council.
- ➔ The development of a shared culture of commemoration in Irish society north and south based upon the principles of mutual respect, dignity, and sensitivity.
- ➔ Exploration of the potential of a National Reconciliation Day.

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND POLICY

The Good Friday Agreement set out a new form of political architecture based on partnership, inclusion, parity of esteem, respect, and equality.

At this stage in the north, that is best done within the power-sharing institutions in which political parties can plan, work and deliver together. This strand of governance is inseparable from and interdependent on the North South Ministerial Council and all-island institutions.

All public representatives, political parties and leaders across the island have a responsibility to work for all, and commit to doing so, when elected. Respect for the democratic process must be paramount.



CONCLUSION

The Good Friday Agreement and the peace process have transformed Ireland, north and south.

It is time for the next phase of our peace process to begin.

Our challenge is to make the political process work and plan for the next 25 years. That will include planning for a unity referendum in this decade, while actively working to address sectarianism and progressing reconciliation and healing.

Reaching out the hand of friendship to advance reconciliation is the common ground, where together all sections of society can build for the future and do so in a manner that reflects the diversity of allegiances, identities and aspirations is about maturity and civility in this era of change.

Our shared ambition must be to engage all the people who share this country together.

It must also be about governing and legislating for all citizens.

To achieve a new Ireland for all – that is Sinn Féin's commitment.



