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OSCE Chairmanship Conference
'Shared Future: Building and Sustaining Peace,
the Northern Ireland Case Study'
Dublin, 27 April 2012

Introduction

- Thanks for invite and opportunity to share experiences
- Justice powers devolved two years ago this month, some 12 years after the Good Friday Agreement; while sufficient trust existed in 1998 to achieve political accommodation, that trust didn't extend to justice powers until 2010;
- Required development of political trust, as well as very elaborate architecture, involving legislative safeguards, protocols, accountability and inspection mechanisms, all designed to guarantee policing, prosecutions service, courts system, judicial appointments and policing and prisons Ombudsmen independence of political control.
- Also required special mechanism for election of a Justice Minister, by a cross-community vote in the Assembly – the only Minister that is elected rather than appointed

- But the devolution of justice powers from the London Parliament to the Northern Ireland Assembly was a significant stage on the long journey that has been our peace process – it reflected the progress that had been made before and since the Agreement of 1998, and it has allowed us to move further along the road to a more normal society.

Policing

- Biggest single factor in securing the devolution of justice powers was the creation of a police service over which everyone in our community felt ownership. Pay tribute to Judith, and her colleagues at every level of the police service, who work every day to maintain that level of community support...

Justice becomes “local”

- Since devolution, we have been working to broaden that sense of ownership to the rest of our justice system...
- Devolution has allowed us to develop a justice system that is owned by, and accountable to, the people of Northern

Ireland – people now see local politicians, in the Assembly, debating and being held to account for issues that used to be remote and removed from local control.

- As a locally elected Minister, I am closer to the ground, and better able to respond to community concerns
- In order to ensure that we identify, and respond to the concerns of local communities, we are in the advanced stages of creating Policing and Community Safety Partnerships – small, local groups made up of elected representatives, local police, independent members of the community, and a range of agencies who meet together to identify local needs, priorities and action plans for making their communities safer.
- Taking other steps to reform our justice system to make it more clearly one that works for everyone – that is faster and fairer, that is less costly and wasteful of resources, that goes further in responding to the needs of victims – in short, to create the kind of justice system that would be desired in any normal society!

- Where we have been able to secure political consensus, we've been making real progress – an agreed programme of work for the Department of Justice; a major piece of legislation, passed by the Assembly in little over a year after devolution, including significant reforms to many parts of the justice system; political consensus that allowed me to make dramatic cuts to the fees paid to lawyers, and face down the legal professions when they withdrew their services;
- Other areas are more challenging, but I'm determined to press on: Prisons – considered too difficult by Ministers sent over from London to run Northern Ireland's justice system, but now being tackled by a local Minister, moving the focus of our prison service away from the idea that we keep society safe by simply locking people up to an approach based on the belief that society is made safer when we use prison to reform and rehabilitate, and thereby reduce the rates of re-offending.

Other Challenges

- Of course there are challenges:

- There remain some who are determined to stop us moving on; who are wedded to a violent struggle for which there is no justification, and no significant political or community support.
- I commend the police services in both parts of our island for their successes in disrupting and preventing the attacks that these misguided individuals continue to plan and carry out.
- Police Officers continue to be at significant risk and I commend the courage and bravery they show as they continue to work to protect the community. Young men and women, from all sections of our community, who have signed up to deliver community-focussed policing and improve the lives of all.
- The willingness of recruits to serve, and the way in which they are doing so, is seeing growing levels of community confidence in policing.
- The Chief Constable said publicly only last week that while terror attacks have reduce significantly over the past year, the threat would never be fully dealt with

until the dissident grip on certain troubled areas was broken. That must be right.

- So while the ongoing threat is being tackled by police, the solution does not just lie in the hands of the police alone. Politicians and others have a role to play too. We must show leadership in working together to promote a shared future and to tackle the problems faced within our communities.
- Positive moment some months ago when one political party tabled a motion for debate in the Assembly condemning attacks on police officers; given our past, potential to be divisive – more so when amendment tabled by another party from a diametrically opposing political background; but following debate both amendment and motion were passed. As I said then, we showed that while we may not always be unanimous, we must stand united in our desire to build a peaceful future.

Cross Border Policing Co-operation

- And partnerships aren't limited to Northern Ireland - I want to highlight, and pay tribute to, the excellent

practical and strategic co-operation between the PSNI and An Garda Síochána.

- We have a **Cross Border Policing Strategy** which highlights the breadth of co-operation that exists and the determination of both police services to use all the tools available to them to ensure that those who would seek to exploit the border for criminal ends will not succeed.

Peacewalls

- Those of you familiar with Northern Ireland will know that part of the challenge of building the future is dealing with our shared past. This is one of *the* great challenges for political leaders in Northern Ireland.
- Edna Kenny on a recent visit to Belfast said that ‘the true test of peace’ is an absence of peacewalls and that we need to hold stronger and deeper cross-community trust and respect.
- And that is why a key strand of my vision of the future includes the removal of the so-called peace walls in Northern Ireland.

- These structures are symbols of sectarian division, keeping communities segregated and reinforcing mistrust.
- We are making that objective a key element of a new Community Safety Strategy, reflecting my belief that real safety for our communities isn't achieved by building walls between them, but by building connections between them, and by moving towards a truly integrated, shared society.

Conclusion

- So we have made progress – the very fact that I am here today as a locally elected Justice Minister is evidence of that, and the devolution of justice powers has provided opportunities to make more progress.
- All of us will have experiences of how justice issues have potential to reveal political fault lines in any society – not unique to Northern Ireland

- But last two years have shown us that justice issues, while sometimes divisive, have also the potential to be unifying, and to allow us to move further along the road towards moving societies away from conflict, and towards normality.