



# **Victims, Survivors & Forgiveness**

**Issues and Themes for those Affected by  
Conflict in Northern Ireland and Beyond**



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Michael Potter  
Policy and Research Officer  
Training for Women Network  
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## ↔ **Foreword** ↔

As the Chief Executive of the Training For Women Network (TWN) I am delighted to present to you “The Victims, Survivors and Forgiveness Report”. This befitting title encapsulates the ethos and reason this report has been prepared.

The concept of ‘Forgiveness’ has been an important issue in the peace building, reconciliation and cross community efforts that have continued throughout the Northern Ireland conflict and other conflicts throughout the world.

The object of this report was to explore and highlight the difficulty that the notion of ‘Forgiveness’ poses in attempting to accept and resolve issues about historical events. Many people affected by inter-community violence have viewed the idea of forgiveness as a sign of surrender or weakness. The report recognises this as well as the need for continued ‘Truth Telling’ sessions to allow those who have been victims to relate their experiences and express what the concept of ‘Forgiveness’ means to them.

The report itself has been a result of a close working partnership between TWN, The Institute of Governance (QUB), The Forgiveness Project and various community, victim and voluntary groups across the Northern Ireland. The weeklong exhibition and seminars in June 2005 allowed members of the general public also to participate and contribute to discussions in this report.

I would like to pay tribute to all those involved in making this report a true and accurate reflection of the views within our communities. I would certainly urge each and every one of you to ask yourself what you can do to take the recommendations forward.

NORMA SHEARER  
Chief Executive

## ↔ Introduction ↔

The most recent conflict in Northern Ireland, depending on when it is deemed to have begun or ended (if it has indeed ended), has claimed between three and four thousand lives<sup>1</sup>, caused tens of thousands of physical injuries and left hundreds of thousands emotionally scarred. In a survey on the effects of the conflict in 1999, 30% of the respondents exhibited symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)<sup>2</sup>. The human legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland has, therefore, left a lasting imprint on the lives of individuals and society as a whole.

Training for Women Network (TWN) has worked towards addressing the legacy of the conflict through the allocation of European funds under the Programme for Peace and Reconciliation since 1998. In 2003, engagement began with a working group drawn from groups working with those directly affected by the conflict through personal loss and trauma to investigate how the 'victims sector' would like issues important to them to be presented. A research report, *In Their Own Words: A Research Report into the Victims Sector in Northern Ireland*, was launched in 2004 and included a list of recommendations resulting from the opinions expressed in the project. One of the key commitments from that engagement was to continue to work with those affected by the conflict in whatever ways they feel appropriate.

In late 2004 the Institute of Governance at Queen's University Belfast expressed a commitment to contribute to work on issues affecting victims of the conflict, and in early 2005 planning began to host a series of events to explore outstanding issues in the sector. It was decided that a series of seminars would be arranged to take place at the Institute as a neutral venue.

It was already intended to work in some way with the Forgiveness Project as a catalyst for discussion

regarding the human impacts of conflict, using the F-Word exhibition as a medium for introducing difficult issues to the process of post-conflict debate. This exhibition uses the stories and images of a range of individuals who have engaged with the notion of forgiveness, including those involved in conflict situations from around the world<sup>3</sup>. It was decided to coincide bringing the exhibition to Belfast with a series of seminars for those affected by the conflict in Northern Ireland. The exhibition was to be displayed for public access for the week 14–17 June 2005 at the Institute of Governance and discussion sessions arranged in seminar rooms at the Institute on 14–16 June.

The seminars to complement the exhibition encompassed the main questions for victims of the conflict, which were responses to the government consultation on services for victims and survivors of the conflict<sup>4</sup>, how experiences from other conflict areas can be informative to Northern Ireland's transition to a peaceful society and the interim report of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee on ways forward for Northern Ireland<sup>5</sup>. With the presence of the powerful material from the F-Word exhibition, a session on the notion of forgiveness was arranged and a discussion on forgiveness was organised for young people, drawing on cross-community representation.

Arrangements for the exhibition and seminars were a product of discussion and consultation between TWN, the Institute of Governance, the victims sector working group from the research carried out by TWN and the Forgiveness Project. This report is the product of the proceedings of the sessions arranged during the week and lessons from working around the difficult issues associated with forgiveness, victimhood and post-conflict transition in Northern Ireland.

<sup>1</sup> Bew and Gillespie list 3304 1969–1998 (Bew, P and Gillespie, G (1999), *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968–1999*, Dublin: Gill and MacMillan), Sutton 3523 July 1969–December 2001 (Sutton, M (2001), *An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland 1969–1993*, Belfast: Beyond the Pale, revised for the CAIN website), Bloomfield 3585 to December 1997 (Bloomfield, K (1998), *We Will Remember Them*, Bloomfield Commission on victims of the conflict) and Smyth 3601 (Smyth, M (2000a), 'The human consequences of armed conflict: constructing 'victimhood' in the context of Northern Ireland's troubles' in Cox, M, Guelke, A and Stephen, F, *A Farewell to Arms? From 'long war' to long peace in Northern Ireland*, Manchester: University Press, p.119).

<sup>2</sup> Fay, M, Morrissey, M, Smyth, M and Wong, T (1999), *The Cost of the Troubles Study*, Derry/Londonderry: INCORE.

<sup>3</sup> The range of testimonies can be seen on the website of the Forgiveness Project, <http://www.theforgivenessproject.com>

<sup>4</sup> The consultation is centred on the document *Services for Victims and Survivors*, Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, Belfast, March 2005.

<sup>5</sup> House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, *Ways of Dealing with Northern Ireland's Past: Interim Report – Victims and Survivors*, Tenth Report of Session 2004–05, 6 April 2005.

## ↔ **The F-Word Exhibition** ↔

*The F-Word: Images of Forgiveness* was the brainchild of Marina Cantacuzino and Brian Moody and brings together a range of stories and images of personal tragedy and forgiveness from around the world. It is a powerful demonstration of the efforts by individuals to process the issues surrounding the notion of forgiveness, sometimes bringing victim and perpetrator together.

The exhibition has both permanent sites and several touring versions around the world, which is available for hire. In addition to the images and stories, many of the contributors are available to tell their own stories and engage in discussions around their experiences and the subject of forgiveness. The concept comes as a package, combining pictures, words and discussion to draw individuals on a journey to explore their own understanding of the notion of forgiveness.

The exhibition was launched on the morning of 14 June 2005 at the Institute of Governance with an invited audience from a range of relevant organisations and the press, including the major daily newspapers of Northern Ireland and television and radio stations. In attendance were individuals connected to the Northern Ireland context whose stories appear in the exhibition: Alistair Little, Pat Magee, Jo Berry and Margaret McKinney.

Alistair Little joined the Ulster Volunteer Force at age 14 and at 17 he killed a man, an act for which he spent 12 years in prison. During his time in prison, Alistair renounced violence after a long journey coming to terms with the consequences of his actions. Today, he works with groups in a variety of contexts in Northern Ireland and other areas of conflict to facilitate processing issues around conflict and loss, and he is the Northern Ireland representative for the Forgiveness Project<sup>6</sup>.

Jo Berry's father, Sir Anthony Berry MP, was killed in the Brighton bombing in 1984 during the Conservative Party Conference. She has since visited Northern Ireland several times, seeking answers and understanding of the conflict that took

her father's life. In 2000, Jo met Pat Magee, a Belfast-born IRA activist who was convicted of the Brighton bombing. In a radio interview, Jo was introduced as having forgiven Pat. She was quick to correct this assertion. Jo has not forgiven him, but they have embarked on a journey that recognises each other's humanity and have formed a relationship in which they can engage with each other<sup>7</sup>.

Margaret McKinney's son Brian was abducted and killed by the IRA after he carried out a robbery on a social club. The organisation did not admit his killing until years later and his body was not recovered until 1999, 21 years after he disappeared. After years of turmoil for Margaret and her family, she has finally found her peace. Today she is involved with WAVE, an organisation that supports people who have been affected by the conflict<sup>8</sup>.

During the media launch, there was much interest in particular in Jo Berry and Pat Magee, as the phenomenon of victim and perpetrator meeting and forming a relationship is particularly sensitive. The Forgiveness Project gives equal status to both victim and perpetrator, because those who have committed violent acts can also be in some sense victims also. This point was picked up internationally. The first question of an interviewer from Colombian Radio was "How could those who have committed atrocities meet with their victims?" It is a notion that is just as controversial in the context of the conflict in Colombia, as it would be in conflict zones around the world, offering insights for Northern Ireland into parallels regarding how the effects of conflict are processed elsewhere.

Speakers for the launch were Dr John Barry, acting Director of the Institute of Governance, Norma Shearer, Chief Executive of Training for Women Network, Marina Cantacuzino, Director of the Forgiveness Project, Jo Berry and Alistair Little, both contributors to the exhibition.

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<sup>6</sup> Alistair's story is on the Forgiveness Project website, <http://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories/?id=2>.

<sup>7</sup> The story of Jo and Pat is on the Forgiveness Project website, <http://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories/?id=22>.

<sup>8</sup> Margaret's story is on the Forgiveness Project website, <http://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories/?id=16>.

## ⇌ **Forgiveness Seminar, 14 June** ⇌

Immediately after the launch of the F-Word exhibition, a session was organised to enable those present to process some of the issues that had been brought up by the stories they had read and to explore some of the debates around forgiveness. There were 17 participants; the session was facilitated and notes were taken by staff from the Training for Women Network. Confidentiality was assured for all participants.

A television camera crew requested permission to film the session. Permission was granted if the period of filming was limited and participants were in agreement. It was agreed that the crew could film for ten minutes during the preliminaries and that personal statements could be kept until the camera had been switched off.

### *Forgiveness – What Does it Mean?*

The complexities of the term ‘forgiveness’ were explored, challenging the traditional view that forgiveness is an event that takes place and there is a ‘forgiver’ and ‘forgiven’. In fact, feelings around forgiveness can change according to circumstances, and the act of forgiveness can be retracted or seen differently by the forgiver at different stages. Forgiveness is a journey – there is a ‘road to forgiveness’ that has many twists and turns and can double back on itself. Indeed, the destination may not always be reached.

There were questions regarding the many different situations where forgiveness may be considered, complicated by factors such as the severity of the transgression, time elapsed since an incident, whether there is one person or many people responsible for hurt, if indeed the perpetrator or perpetrators are known. Different events or situations may have different outcomes, or the same events may have different outcomes for different people, each individual journey being personal and unique.

### *Ready to Forgive?*

Discussions extended to the act of forgiveness and the readiness of the individual to forgive. Forgiveness is a personal feeling that is unique to the individual. This cannot be dictated by others, as the feeling may ebb and flow according to the individual’s emotional state.

There may be community pressure affecting the act of forgiveness. If there is a community tradition of not forgiving the acts committed by the ‘other’

community or other actors in the conflict, such as those representing the state, then it is very difficult for an individual to be seen to be embarking on their own journey of forgiveness. Likewise, in some contexts there may be an assumption of a group act of forgiveness, whereas the individual may not be ready.

Families may put an individual under pressure, particularly where one member is exploring the road to forgiveness but other family members are not ready to do so. This causes those who have experienced similar circumstances of loss to proceed at different speeds and the readiness or lack of readiness to forgive sets family members apart from each other.

The role of the church was particularly criticised as using moral blackmail to compel people to forgive, as they would be considered ‘bad Christians’ if they did not. This form of ‘forced forgiveness’ puts individuals at odds with their faith, where they may not feel ready to grant forgiveness where it is expected of them.

### *The Destructiveness of Forgiveness*

Forgiveness is often seen as a positive phenomenon, but the negative side was also highlighted. The act of forgiveness or even its consideration can divide families. This leads to a feeling of betrayal where other family members cannot bring themselves to embark on such a journey, where the act is seen by other family members as unforgivable. Families may be divided over who can be forgiven and who cannot, giving the original act of destruction lasting potency well beyond the incident or incidents themselves.

The pressure of the church to forgive was reprised as a destructive force, isolating those who may not feel ready to follow the expected path.

Community pressure could be particularly destructive. This would be the case where individuals considering forgiveness for acts committed against them or their community might be regarded as traitors to a cause or to their community. Those on the difficult journey of forgiveness could find themselves as outcasts from their own communities.

A process of national forgiveness may likewise be destructive for individuals who do not follow the assumed route. An act of forgiveness may be an assumed part of a peace process that is hoped to lead to a peaceful society, for example, a notion

that the Belfast Agreement in 1998 would see an end to animosity and result in a new engagement, putting the past behind those affected by the conflict. This is linked to a media expectation, particularly from outside Northern Ireland, that an idea of forgiveness is part and parcel of the peace process.

Personal guilt can be destructive, particularly where an individual may feel they should forgive, but cannot. The bitterness associated with personal loss can be all-consuming, but forgiveness may come as at least a partial release from these emotions. It is disappointing when it does not, or when thinking about forgiving is just too difficult.

The passage of time is sometimes considered to have healing properties. The notion of “sure, it happened years ago” and that loved ones should have recovered by now was challenged in the discussion. For many, the hurt of thirty years ago is just as strong today as it was then and remains undiminished by the passage of time.

Forgiveness was challenged when there is a lack of justice. If a perpetrator is not brought to account for actions, any notion of forgiving an act may be considered far off. An approach to forgiveness, therefore, may be interpreted as condoning an unresolved injustice.

### *Barriers to Forgiveness*

Forgiveness was considered difficult where there has not been acceptance of responsibility by the perpetrator or no personal acknowledgement of the hurt caused. In a context where those committing acts of violence consider themselves to have acted with just cause, an act of remorse for having inflicted pain on others hampers possibilities for forgiveness.

In terms of apologies or expressions of repentance offered by governments or organisations, it was considered that such collective responsibility was easier than personal responsibility. This leaves the forgiver in a difficult position if the gap between official repentance and individual repentance leaves a feeling that such acts are not genuine.

Again, community or family pressure was considered as a barrier. The notion of “how could you talk to the enemy?” was a deterrent for those considering forgiving. In terms of a community that has suffered collectively and has a particular stance with respect to the ‘enemy’, an act of forgiveness may be seen as weakness. In these circumstances, forgiveness cannot be openly demonstrated, in case it is seen as stepping out of line.

### *Media Impressions and Views from Outside the Conflict*

The media was deemed by some in the discussion as having a false impression of what forgiveness entails, particularly from those outside Northern Ireland. There was a perceived lack of understanding of the conflict itself and the difficulties associated with forgiving, particularly regarding the historical context or the attitude of “have you not got over that yet?”

### *Religion*

The religious aspects of forgiveness were again expanded upon, suggesting there was pressure to forgive from Christian denominations. The notion that “the grace of God will give you the ability to forgive” was criticised as unhelpful to those who find forgiveness difficult. Also, the idea that forgiveness was necessary to bring about closure was raised.

### *Personal Issues*

For the individual, a range of personal issues was raised. There was a wish not to show weakness by the act of forgiving. Also, there was a sense that closure could be brought about through forgiveness, that it was a step on the road to healing.

The sense of hurt and pain of loss were still great for some in the discussion. This was a considerable impediment to forgiveness. There was also a sense that there was now more emphasis on those who carry out acts of violence than those who have suffered. This sense that victims are losing out to perpetrators in the current stage of transition from conflict was a particular difficulty for some present.

### *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*

Forgiveness was linked to the process of reconciliation. For reconciliation to be effective, there was a need to ask for forgiveness for past wrongs. But there were still many unanswered questions related to the loss of loved ones. There was perceived by some to be a need for justice, either in the sense of revenge or through the criminal justice system.

Forgiveness was difficult if it was not known who should be forgiven. Either the person may not be known, just the organisation responsible, or even the organisation may not be known or admitted. Information about incidents was seen by some as being important to process forgiveness, including who did what and why.

Sometimes it is not so much the act of forgiving that is important to the reconciliation process, but of letting go. For some, reconciliation can be the first step on the road to forgiveness, for others it is forgiveness that needs to come before one can be reconciled.

Some ideas around the separation of the person and the action were discussed. One participant stated: "I can forgive the murderer but not the murder". But the process is difficult if the circumstances of loss are continuing, as for some, the conflict was not over.

### *Victims Groups and Community Groups*

Some discussion took place around the notion of victimhood and victims groups. Groups can offer mutual support as members are united by the common bond of suffering. But victims groups, it was noted, only represent one section of the community.

One participant recognised the impulse to forgive above personal need: "I find it difficult to forgive, but I know it will benefit the community". This challenges some of the earlier points about the community need being damaging to the individual in that the positive side of forgiveness from a

community perspective can in some circumstances override the emotional position of the individual.

It was noted by some that there was a lack of support for those who had taken part in the conflict on behalf of the state. Former members of the security forces have security fears, there is no assistance regarding the threats they face and there is a lack of support regarding service provision and assistance for those experiencing the effects of stress. It was also noted that issues of state violence tend not to be included in the issues discussed.

### *General*

Specific themes recurred during the discussion, particularly regarding the ambiguity of the process of forgiveness, the fluid nature of the emotional relationship of the forgiver and forgiven, the barriers and complications involved in engaging with those who had harmed others and a sense of personal, individual journeys rather than general definable processes.

The enduring impression from the session was that individuals experience loss and hurt differently and so the approach to forgiving will be different, but this is complicated by external pressures and expectations that are inappropriately imposed on those who have suffered.

## ⇨ **Consultation on Services to Victims and Survivors** ⇨ **by the Victims Unit, Office of the First Minister and Deputy Minister, 14 June**

### *Introduction*

John Clarke of the Victims Unit attended the Institute of Governance, Belfast, on 14 June to give a presentation on the consultation on *Services for Victims and Survivors*<sup>9</sup> and to take questions on the process. There were 14 attendees from Belfast and other areas, including Lurgan, Newry, Newtownstewart and Markethill. The Victims Unit facilitated the session and a member of TWN took notes.

At the outset, there were some questions raised regarding the publicisation of the event, as the consultation was to close on 30 June and some had only just heard about the process. The time available for response, therefore, was considered too short under the circumstances.

### *Background*

The consultation builds on the proposals in *Reshape, Rebuild, Achieve*<sup>10</sup>. The definition of 'victim' is taken from this document. The current document draws on information from the consultation so far and focuses on services. This excludes memorials, truth and justice processes, truth commissions and compensation.

It was contended that the proposals were limited if they did not deal with these issues. Questions were raised as to when these issues would be handled and the comment was made that the Victims Liaison Unit was set up to address the issues raised in the 1998 Bloomfield Report, but was now defunct without having fulfilled its purpose.

### *The Need for Change*

Issues raised as leading to the need for change were as follows:

- lack of co-ordination
- lack of trust in statutory agencies
- lack of stability due to short term planning
- lack of information about services
- a need for victims to influence government policy.

### *Strategic Approach*

There is a variety of needs and these needs change over time. A role was envisaged for victims groups to reach those who are in need.

An individual contested that services should be provided for individuals, and no support given to 'self-elected, self-imposed' group leadership. The government funds groups, which gives them power, which is misused.

### *Services Planning*

It was planned to enhance the role of Trauma Advisory Panels (TAPs).

Comments were made for and against TAPs, including:

- the reach of the TAPs does not extend to certain areas, particularly west of the Bann
- they are excellent on an individual basis in some areas, but there should be more victims involved
- it was questioned whether it should be assumed that TAPs will still be there, leading to a discussion as to whether they should be reformed or abolished
- they are just 'talking shops'
- they are supposed to be for victims with the participation of victims, but they are not fulfilling that task
- it is a bit late in the day to be asking about 'needs' – the Troubles have been going on for 30 years and there have been consultations and needs assessments for years
- money is wasted on structures instead of victims
- there should be referrals to groups from statutory agencies.

### *Service Planning Support Arrangements*

There is an intention to look at the outcomes for different therapies. There is concern over the lack of standards in counselling provision.

<sup>9</sup> The consultation document is available on the website of the Victims Unit, <http://www.victimsni.gov.uk/consult.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> *Reshape, Rebuild, Achieve* was published by the Victims Unit in April 2002, setting out a strategy to support those affected by the conflict (<http://www.victimsni.gov.uk/pdf/victimsbrochure.pdf>).

It was contended that there is a lack of confidence in statutory provision. People need to know and trust those doing the counselling. Personnel are not security cleared to work in counselling settings. The importance of peer counselling and support was reiterated.

### *Support for Individuals*

A Victims and Survivors Advisor is proposed, as are a One Stop Shop for access to a range of agencies, including victims groups and support for carers.

### *Victims and Survivors Commissioner*

He/she may take forward proposals for a Victims/Survivors Forum, but this needs a support structure to function.

### *Questions*

Queries from the participants centred around the proposed Victims and Survivors Commissioner. It was asked whether the Victims and Survivors Adviser would be linked to the Commissioner, but the Commissioner was to remain independent. Yet it was contended that the Commissioner may not be independent if he/she were appointed by the government. Questions were also raised as to the remit of such a Commissioner. It was also suggested by one participant that the Commissioner might be appointed by the proposed Forum.

Responses were that the Commissioner's remit would be as listed in the consultation document, but the role would be more than that of an advocate. The appointment procedure would take some time, but there would be need for confidence across the sector. As for the Forum appointing a Commissioner, this would not work because the Commissioner was to convene the Forum and hence would pre-date it.

### *Conclusion*

Reflecting the high degree of emotion connected with conflict, loss and transition from conflict, the discussions were sometimes heated. But the session provided a neutral forum for information to be gained on current government proposals for supporting those affected by the conflict, a medium for government officials to receive opinions on the approach of the government to victims and survivors and a venue for the continuing commitment by government departments to consult on policy with those most affected by the proposals.

In the context of the seminars, the session put into perspective the difficult issues that face those encouraging debate about forgiveness and the real and lingering legacy of the conflict that can prove a barrier to engagement.

## ✈️ **Forgiveness – A Youth Perspective, 14 June** ✈️

When the seminars were being discussed, it was envisaged that parallel sessions would be run for young people on the topics being discussed. After some consultation, it was decided to run a youth session on one evening on a topic which would draw out many of the issues that would arise in the other sessions. Groups were approached on a cross-community basis and interest gauged for such a session.

Four groups were expected to attend the youth session, one each from nationalist and unionist areas of both Portadown and Belfast. A programme was jointly designed and facilitated by individuals who work with young people in the Loyalist Shankill Road area and the Republican Short Strand area, intended to stimulate discussions on what forgiveness means to young people.

On the evening, seven participants arrived from the Republican Garvaghy Road area of Portadown and five from the Republican Short Strand area of Belfast. Only two individuals attended from Loyalist communities. All of the participants were female, except for one of the individuals from a Loyalist community. In addition, Alistair Little from the Forgiveness Project also attended and notes were taken by a TWN staff member.

The workshop was divided into two sessions. The first explored issues around anger, fear, hatred or bitterness and confidence. The second looked specifically at forgiveness.

### *Anger*

Participants explained their experience of anger as pain, confusion, hurt, losing control and manifested in violence. Reasons given for this anger were arguments, jealousy, differences and ignorance. Issues relating this anger to communities were then explored and participants noted factors such as trust, past treatment, safety, bad experiences, fear – particularly of the unknown, a sense of being wronged, respect, human rights and a lack of services.

Participants then described how anger makes them feel. Responses included not being in control, feelings of bitterness, being passionate or a sense that it could destroy the self or others. Personal accounts of the result of anger included “I do stupid

things”, “it’s why I got involved”, “it can be helpful if controlled” and “it lets me show my emotions”.

### *Fear*

Issues around fear were then explored, defining what fear means to the participants. Responses included the following:

- waiting for something to happen
- it builds tension, leading to ill feeling
- it prevents integration
- it creates ‘no-go’ areas.

This last point was expanded to ideas that going into certain areas was “not worth taking the risk”, leaving the community isolated and with restricted movement and difficulties getting home. The example of Robert Hamill in Portadown was used to illustrate that there was insufficient protection from the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI)<sup>11</sup>. Some participants maintained that the police “think they are always right” and that it is the same people – police and Loyalists – who give them a hard time now as had been giving them a hard time while they were growing up.

Other concerns included the following

- service provision is in the wrong areas
- “I can’t tell people where I’m from”
- “I’m treated like a second class citizen”
- a lack of amenities force people into certain areas
- there is a lack of local government response or help
- there is some response, but it is not enough and it is too slow
- “the government has let us down”
- “my first thoughts are ‘who are you? Where are you from?’”

With reference to the communities where participants were from, there were fears that individuals cannot go ‘against the grain’ and cannot speak out. There is a lack of knowledge of other communities and a lack of interest in getting involved. There were also complaints that there was very little involvement in joint activities by Protestant youth groups so ‘it is a waste of time’: “Only one community turns up – they always get cancelled”.

<sup>11</sup> Robert Hamill was killed in Portadown in 1997 by a crowd of loyalists. A subsequent inquiry by Judge Cory concluded that the police took insufficient action to assist Hamill and the actions of police officers during the incident and in the follow-up investigation were sufficient collectively to satisfy his definition of collusion, warranting a public inquiry ([http://www.nio.gov.uk/cory\\_collusion\\_inquiry\\_report\\_\(without\\_appendices\)\\_robert\\_hamill.pdf](http://www.nio.gov.uk/cory_collusion_inquiry_report_(without_appendices)_robert_hamill.pdf)).

## *Hate/Bitterness*

In this discussion, the combination of anger and fear was deemed to lead to hate. Bitterness was considered to result from an action or atrocity, whether a political act or 'by the state'. One participant stated: "Bitterness and hate eat you up and it makes you ill". Feelings connected with bitterness and hate included symptoms of trauma, being left feeling numb and without hope. There was also a feeling of "why did it happen to me?"

## *Confidence*

Ideas about confidence were explored. Thoughts about confidence included:

- being ashamed to be from a place reduces confidence
- being proud to be from somewhere increases confidence
- confidence is about "understanding who I am"
- "understanding my history and background"
- "not just being like everyone else in my area"
- "allows me to form my own views...voting for something I believe in and not who everyone else does".

There was a discussion on politics in the contexts the participants were living in. Responses included:

- it is not just Sinn Féin or the DUP [Democratic Unionist Party]
- no confidence in politics
- "I would vote for others but I am not confident they can do anything"
- fearful of a two-party state
- opposition from own community
- voices not being heard
- voting is pointless
- "can't make a difference"
- "used to not voting or being involved in politics"
- "I have other/better things to do"
- lack of personal contact with politicians
- "they are only interested when they want my vote"
- "what can you do for me/us?"
- "my da votes [for a particular party], so do I".

Some ideas were then gathered about what young people have in common, regardless of background. These included:

- drinking too much
- drug abuse
- anti-social behaviour
- unemployment
- teenage pregnancy
- limited education
- dislike of the police
- peer pressure
- wanting to do well in life
- prejudices
- lack of access to services, e.g. National Health Service.

The discussion then moved on to what unites young people, which included youth centres, cross-community activities and humour – usually dark humour and an ability to laugh at oneself.

## *Forgiveness*

Alistair Little gave an account of the circumstances leading up to his becoming involved in a Loyalist paramilitary organisation and subsequent imprisonment<sup>12</sup>. This set a context for the discussions to follow.

Some issues about forgiveness included that asking for forgiveness may be for the benefit of the perpetrator, but not necessarily for the victim. Also, talking about an event may help in understanding it, but may not necessarily help a person to forgive. Ideas about the giving of apologies as a link to forgiveness were then explored, including the following:

- in an ideal world an apology would be accepted, but it proves difficult in reality
- the admission of guilt makes forgiveness easier
- saying sorry amounts to admitting responsibility
- governments have said sorry for example, about the Guildford Four or Republic of Ireland gun shipments<sup>13</sup>
- it must be meaningful
- an apology can bring closure
- it "puts things in the open"
- it must be universal and independent

<sup>12</sup> Alistair's testimony is on the website of the Forgiveness Project (<http://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories/alistair-little>).

<sup>13</sup> The Guildford Four were Gerard Conlon, Patrick Armstrong, Carole Richardson and Paul Hill, who were convicted on unsafe evidence for the Guildford pub bombings in 1975. They were released in 1989 and their convictions overturned in 1991. Prime Minister Tony Blair apologised for the miscarriage of justice in July 2000 and again in February 2005, when apologising for a similar miscarriage of justice regarding the Maguire Seven.

- if the apology is not genuine, it can cause even more pain or hurt
- not everyone will be truthful
- there is a need to tell the whole story.

Apart from individual apologies, the idea of groups saying sorry was discussed, including organisations, communities or governments. The following thoughts were offered:

- it can increase confidence
- it acknowledges that the war is over
- it must come from all sides
- there must be the same rules for all groups – the IRA has apologised and delivered arms, but there has been no Loyalist decommissioning<sup>14</sup>
- “I believe in what I did, so why should I say sorry?”
- “I’m sorry I caused personal pain, but I still believe that my actions were correct and I’m not sorry for that”.

The notion of justice was discussed in connection with apology and forgiveness. Ideas recorded were as follows:

- politicians are only interested in ‘their’ justice
- justice must be universal
- it is a two-way process
- answers may allow moving forward
- it is important to hear the other community’s views
- acknowledgement of the past
- no finger pointing
- it must not be hypocritical
- there are difficulties with the interaction with combatants
- still fearful

- still hurting
- still suffering.

Ideas were then exchanged as to what might bring about forgiveness. These included truth, acknowledgement, being able to forget, reaching closure and a reduced fear that history will repeat itself.

The workshop closed with ideas that the participants had for a way forward. These included the following:

- “to move forward to achieve a real solution, forgiveness and acknowledgement of the past is a must”
- “don’t forget the past, but remember how bad it was and don’t return to it”
- “the need to learn about the other community’s history, culture and society”
- “difference is something I once feared but once I started to learn and experience different cultures, I started to enjoy it. This enabled me to gain trust and I wanted to experience more”
- integrated schools
- community integration
- build on existing bridges.

At the close of the session, participants felt it was worthwhile and there was an expression of interest in working on future projects of a similar nature. There was an obvious imbalance in representation, when even on the night, there was an expectation of greater attendance on the part of young people from the unionist community. It was acknowledged during the session that this was a familiar pattern of similar events, despite efforts to encourage a more equal representation. Nevertheless, the participants found the event useful and expressed interest in continued engagement.

<sup>14</sup> The IRA (Irish Republican Army) has issued various apologies for their actions, for example, for bombings in Belfast in 1972 issued in July 2002: “While it was not our intention to injure or kill non-combatants, the reality is that on this and on a number of other occasions, that was the consequence of our actions. It is therefore appropriate on the anniversary of this tragic event, that we address all of the deaths and injuries of non-combatants caused by us. We offer our sincere apologies and condolences to their families. There have been fatalities amongst combatants on all sides. We also acknowledge the grief and pain of their relatives”. The Independent International Commission on Decommissioning has overseen three acts of IRA disposal of weapons, most recently in October 2003 ([http://www.nio.gov.uk/report\\_on\\_3rd\\_act\\_of\\_ira\\_decommissioning.pdf](http://www.nio.gov.uk/report_on_3rd_act_of_ira_decommissioning.pdf)). The Combined Loyalist Military Command ceasefire statement of August 1994 included an apology: “abject and true remorse” to the “loved ones of all innocent victims”. There has been no decommissioning from Loyalist paramilitary groups.

## ↔ International Perspectives, 15 June ↔

The aim of bringing individuals with experience of other contexts to a seminar to speak about their experiences was to give other perspectives to those who have been affected by the conflict in Northern Ireland. Mary Blewitt<sup>15</sup> was invited to speak of her experiences of the Rwandan genocide of 1994 and Roberta Bacic of her experiences of human rights campaigning and truth recovery in Chile. Mary's story is part of the F-Word exhibition and Roberta is a Chilean academic and human rights campaigner who has written and spoken widely about conflict and non-violence. There was then a facilitated discussion of the issues raised. A member of the Institute of Governance facilitated the first section, a facilitator from The Junction conducted the discussion section and members of TWN staff took notes. There were 21 participants from a range of backgrounds, including from overseas.

### *Mary Blewitt*

Mary spoke about her experience of losing her family, drawing on personal experiences rather than addressing the subject of forgiveness. She was born to a refugee family and had experienced conflict before, but within three months in 1994, she had no family left. "When you lose everyone around you, it is very different: there is no one to talk to, no one to listen to you".

Mary talked about how she felt and how she processed the loss, using terms such as: "I had to move on without dealing with the issues"; "The genocide was too big to deal with"; "Everything I believed in about humanity stopped"; and "You become numb – it's such a big issue".

Then Mary talked about her work with those who had survived the genocide and described their experiences and emotional state. Speaking about the women she met, Mary used terms such as: "Outside they seemed okay, inside they were shells"; "They had lost belief in humanity"; "They had no self belief"; "Women watched their whole families being killed"; "Raped by HIV positive men so that they would suffer the genocide the rest of their lives".

Moving on to how the situation is being dealt with or processed, Mary explained that there was a need to start grieving for the loss, feeling the pain and that there was a need for a healing process. There was also a need to build trust, collectively take responsibility and ask for justice. The structure for dealing with issues is not for victims. There is a structure for ex-prisoners, but not for victims – even through the international community. There are no structures for the victims to be heard.

Thoughts about forgiveness included that peace has to come from the heart, from inside. There is a need to achieve. "Forgiveness is about you as a person". People need to come forward and ask questions – there is a need for dialogue. Victims need a voice – people should be allowed to be angry.

Mary ended by saying that forgiveness is not spoken of in Rwanda and it may be fifty years or more before forgiveness is thought of. They are still dealing with the enormity of the genocide, HIV deaths, having to raise money for coffins and funerals and a lack of medication. But for some there is a wish to leave and move on. Peace is a journey – an individual journey.

### *Roberta Bacic*

Roberta began with a slide show of ordinary people affected by the military regime in Chile, telling some of their individual stories. A handout was given with more stories of the experiences of individuals (see Appendix 3)<sup>16</sup>.

The presentation looked at what happens to a society in conflict and then at what puts a society back together again, noting that ways to recovery are different.

Roberta described life under Pinochet. There had been optimism for a democratic transition to socialism, which was halted by the coup. Everyone's life changed dramatically. "A university lecturer would be no one – life started to have no meaning". No one was allowed to discuss anything political or historical. This was the power of dictatorship.

<sup>15</sup> Mary's story is on the Forgiveness Project website, <http://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories/mary-blewitt>.

<sup>16</sup> Roberta's presentation was based on the regime of General Augusto Pinochet in Chile. Pinochet overthrew President Allende in a violent military coup in 1973. He ruled until losing elections in 1989 and standing down in 1990. During his rule, around 3000 people were killed or disappeared and a further 27,000 arrested or tortured. He remained a senator, but was arrested when in Britain in 1998 and charged with human rights abuses. He returned to Chile in 2000, but was ruled unfit to stand trial in 2002. This was reversed in 2004 and led to a conviction, but this was again reversed in 2005.

Many people had relatives who disappeared for political reasons. Some people disappeared.

Protests against the regime included campaigning against torture, graffiti appeared on walls, although it was never allowed to stay there, and protests could last no more than sixty seconds, so that no one was arrested or tortured.

The process of dealing with what happened after Pinochet fell from power was then described. Processes included organising and giving testimony, setting up the truth commission, recorded storytelling and sharing the pain that was experienced. It is often asked when is the best time for a truth commission. But there is no 'best time'. It depends on when a group is ready. The first truth commission was only allowed to deal with the disappeared without naming anyone. But each truth commission built on the last one.

On the subject of reconciliation and forgiveness, these are outcomes and as such cannot be committed to beforehand. There is a problem of living together. There are questions such as "Why did the disappearances happen?" How can people forgive? It is all very well confronting history and saying "I won't do it again", but there is no "I am sorry" in the vocabulary. It is said that there is a right to 'truth', but there is no such thing. But there are human rights abuses, which are universal.

Roberta closed by stating there is a new commission for survivors. Cases have been reopened. 28,000 people came to give testimonies.

### *Questions and Answers*

The presenters were asked about forgiveness and who to forgive, as this is a big issue in Northern Ireland. In Rwanda, a single person over 100 days could be wronged by 500 or 1000 people, doing so many different things. If one person comes and asks for forgiveness and admits what s/he has done, that is one thing, but each experience has to be dealt with, so how can every person who has done wrong be reached? It is very difficult to put anger aside and address issues on a one-to-one basis after years of pain inflicted by the government, the church and neighbours.

It was suggested that forgiveness is between the individual and God. It is one's own peace of mind dealing with grief and coping over a period of time. But there cannot be complete forgiveness. Time can heal, but healing does not mean forgiving. The issue will remain even after forgiveness.

It was contended that forgiveness does not work and the government was accused of victimising victims in Northern Ireland.

Forgiveness is a huge demand on people. Some might say: "I would deny my son if I forgive. Let me live with my pain." No one can know what people have been through when they have lost someone.

It was asked specifically how on an individual level one can carry on. In response, it was said that there are good days and bad days. Things have not been bottled up, but talked about with others. Survivors confide, so it is not appropriate to break down. By allowing oneself to be vulnerable and letting friends help, it can create strength instead of conflict. Doing things helps to get it out of the system. It is no use sitting and blaming, but doing things can move the situation along. Helping other victims helps. It is no good standing still.

### *Discussion*

There followed a facilitated discussion in a circle. A range of views and opinions was expressed regarding victimhood and forgiveness.

For some, time does not heal, as it is no better now than 20 years ago. It is hard to step forward. Some felt that terrorists gained out of the troubles in Northern Ireland, as there is help for them and their families, but not for victims. It was agreed that victims are rarely given much regard, but helping other victims can be healing and it puts energy into them. The term 'survivor' was preferred by some participants, as a positive term. By calling oneself a 'victim', one's own strength is reduced, but the term 'survivor' means 'you have survived'. Victims get victimised.

It was contended, however, that 'victim' is a horrible word, but something horrible has happened. People have been victimised in a horrible way, but they have survived. In Northern Ireland, many people are stuck, because when they do something to move forward, something happens and they step back again. They do not to remain victims, but they are forced into it. Victims are institutionalised as such. There was no consensus on this point and it was suggested that time may change that and the strength to unite and work together until they are ready. Anger can get things done, and when you fight you are no longer a victim.

Questions were raised as to what justice or a point of satisfaction would look like. It was hoped that people could live a normal life again. Financial means to support those affected by the conflict would be necessary for victims' groups. But, it was claimed, the justice system has failed people. It was unlikely that those who had harmed others would be adequately punished. It was stated that there was not the political will to bring people to justice.

But, it was argued, that kind of justice may not come, so where does it leave people? A belief in the ultimate justice of God was expressed by some, one adding that it was only this belief that prevented him becoming a terrorist as well. The justice system had simply not been able to catch up with the numbers of murders. But there was concern that the young do not have such faith and would be more susceptible to becoming involved in violence.

The discussion shifted to international comparisons and the media. There were 100 days of violence in Rwanda and the world did nothing, but the 'world stood still' after the September 11 attack<sup>17</sup>. The difference, it was suggested, was that those in Rwanda were black, there was no oil and it was portrayed in the media as a tribal fight. But victims are victims. There are poor families all over the world, bombed Iraqis are just as much victims as those in the September 11 attack. Again, it is victims without a voice. If it is said to be genocide, the international community has to do something.

It is important to address the needs of victims, as they are the ones who are suffering.

The discussion moved on to the use of international perspectives. Victims are not homogenous and some want to move towards peace and reconciliation. There cannot be a specific policy for all victims. So what is the benefit of bringing international perspectives to Northern Ireland? It was suggested that justice and trauma are serious issues. Coming from an area where there have been 96 murders and only ten solved, reconciliation work is a luxury. Victims are made to feel guilty and there is the numbness of trauma. Having an international perspective is useful in realising that there are the same problems elsewhere.

In a round-up of the session it was concluded that trauma is the same throughout the world and it was good to talk about these things in a safe environment.

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<sup>17</sup> On 11 September 2001 aircraft were flown into the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, killing around 3000 people.

## ↔ Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Inquiry ↔ Interim Report, 16 June

The last seminar in the series was to discuss the interim findings of the inquiry by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee: Reconciliation: Ways of Dealing with Northern Ireland's Past<sup>18</sup>. The inquiry was announced in May 2004 and was to begin with gathering evidence from victims and survivors of the conflict. The gathering of evidence was suspended in May 2005 for the UK General Election and an interim report published<sup>19</sup>. A presentation on the interim findings of the inquiry was given and a discussion was facilitated and notes taken by TWN staff. There were eight participants.

The preliminary observations of the inquiry report were an acknowledgement of the good work done by individuals and organisations working with victims and survivors, but there were some intractable problems. These were the disputed definition of 'victim', the meaning of 'reconciliation' and whether the conflict had actually ended. It was observed that a truth process was important, but not yet appropriate; truth recovery is only one of many processes, the current government proposals for a Victims and Survivors Commissioner were a sign that victims were being taken seriously and that victims are a primary resource in the healing process in Northern Ireland.

There were a number of conclusions and recommendations in the report. In summary, these were:

1. recognition of local inter-community healing in the context of a lack of progress in the peace process
2. continue the inquiry
3. courageous healing work being undertaken, but the extraordinary range of intractable issues need to be grappled with
4. no easy solutions – need to seek all opportunities to heal wounds
5. requires a positive political context
6. responsibility of the political parties to move the process forward
7. healing cannot succeed without those who consider themselves to be victims of the troubles
8. the role of victims and survivors extends throughout society
9. paramilitary violence has not ceased – the PSNI should ensure support to all vulnerable communities
10. police and judicial systems need to work hard to re-establish the trust of the people
11. there is doubt over the relevance of a truth recovery process if a large proportion of the population is opposed
12. the need for an 'official history' of the conflict has to wait until there is a higher likelihood of success
13. a truth recovery process is possible in the future, but proven local ways of truth telling are also part of the process
14. there is a need to be wary of truth processes that do not enjoy cross-community support, but there has to be a balance between caution and imagination
15. if a truth telling process is to be suspended, other processes should continue, e.g. community relations strategies
16. groups are working hard to ensure the problems of the past do not extend to the future
17. the process will take decades, so policies should reflect this timescale
18. it is vital that the work of groups supporting victims and survivors is developed

<sup>18</sup> At the time of the inquiry, the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee consisted of the following:

Michael Mates (Con)	Stephen Pound (Lab)
Adrian Bailey (Lab)	Gregory Campbell (DUP)
Roy Beggs (UUP)	Rev Martin Smyth (UUP)
Tony Clarke (Lab)	Hugo Swire (Con)
Stephen Hepburn (Lab)	Mark Tami (Lab)
Iain Luke (Lab)	Bill Tynan (Lab)
Eddie McGrady (SDLP)	

<sup>19</sup> The interim report is available on the NI Affairs Committee website (<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmniaf/303/30302.htm>) as is the oral and written evidence (<http://www.parliament.the-stationery-office.co.uk/pa/cm200405/cmselect/cmniaf/303/30302.htm#evidence>).

19. the current proposals to co-ordinate funding mechanisms is too modest and a more radical approach is needed
20. groups should not be in doubt about the continuity of funding
21. compensation is to be fair for victims, for example, for those affected in the 1960s and 1970s
22. there should be renewed efforts to recover the 'disappeared'
23. a higher priority needs to be put on the provision of information for families
24. importance of 'acknowledgement' and 'apology'
25. acts of contrition are important, but they should not diminish the impact of deaths and injuries
26. the government is still listening and the proposal for a Victims Commissioner is not the end of it
27. all interested parties are urged to put their views in the OFMDFM consultation and the government should take notice of these views
28. to counter scepticism regarding a Victims Commissioner, the cost should be modest and the remit powerful
29. the responsibilities of the Victims Commissioner and the Minister for Victims should be clearly distinguished
30. the appointment of the Victims Commissioner should have the active involvement of victims and survivors
31. the Victims Commissioner needs to be of the highest quality to avoid disappointment
32. it is surprising that some of the routine recommendations from 1998 have been reiterated on the current consultation, not having been implemented in the meantime
33. an opportunity has been lost in making a 'step change' in provision for victims, such as the creation of a 'victims department'
34. the time has not yet arrived for a 'truth recovery' process, as this may have the effect of exacerbating community tensions
35. it is hoped that the government will do everything to enable and empower those who have been affected by the conflict so they may contribute to the process of building a normal society for Northern Ireland
36. the evidence has been harrowing, but the final impression is one of optimism.

The discussion began with general views about whether there was agreement about the conclusions that the Committee had come to. Comments were made about the implication of the report by the Committee and in particular acknowledgement of point 16, that groups were working hard to ensure the problems of the past do not extend to the future. The point was also raised that there was not the acknowledgement that some groups have difficulty with the concept of forgiveness and that apologies take a long time to come.

The need for apology was expanded upon, for example, that without any form of apology for past wrongs the process of forgiveness can be difficult or in some cases impossible, which may result in the past repeating itself. Apology can come from an individual as well as an organisation, meaning group, community or the state. But the apology should be on an individual level first.

Forgiveness was said to be part of the healing process, but it was also contended that this is not always the case. Forgiveness can have a negative effect if it is enforced, for example by the community or by churches.

The nature of reconciliation was explored. This could be a continuous and never ending process. It is a very personal journey and not everyone has the same experiences. There are also levels at which reconciliation is manifested, for example, one participant noted that the personal journey of reconciliation may be different from the professional level: "My job requires me to show concepts of reconciliation or forgiveness, but these are different from personal feelings".

The concern is that the conflict has produced feelings of deep hurt and pain – one participant referred to Virgil's quote "Tears are due to human misery"<sup>20</sup>. It is not easy to overcome the real depth of feeling of loss, as if forgiveness and reconciliation were simple matters and processes.

The nature of forgiveness and issues connected with it were expanded upon. Ideas drawn out of the conversation included:

- "if I forgive do I need to know who I am forgiving?"
- there is a need for apology
- there is a need for repentance
- there is a need for acknowledgement of the hurt caused
- there is a need to acknowledge wrongdoing

<sup>20</sup> Sunt lacrymae rerum et mentem mortalia tangunt (Tears are due to human misery and human sufferings touch the mind), *The Aeneid*, I 462.

- there is a need for change
- religion should not demand forgiveness, but should lead, teach and educate
- there are emotional pressures from church, family, community, the media, etc
- forgiving develops a relationship between the forgiver and the forgiven
- it may be possible to have a relationship without forgiveness for example, Jo Berry and Pat Magee<sup>21</sup>
- a form of relationship begins once the crime or action has been committed and forgiveness can release people from this relationship
- the end of this relationship can be replaced by new relationships with others
- it is easier to forgive than to accept what has happened
- “forgiveness is a cul-de-sac”
- there is a need for trust: “Without trust I cannot think about forgiveness”
- “in my area it is like a return to the 1960s, with the painting of post boxes to green, local businesses being attacked by fire bombers and pro-IRA slogans in the local area”
- it is a journey. One person making the journey leads to forgiveness; two people making the journey leads to acceptance
- there is a need for personal stories: “I accept that I caused pain”
- there is a need to acknowledge the historical background
- the journalist Martin O’Hagan wanted to tell the truth: he was the only journalist to be killed by paramilitaries and it was after the ceasefires<sup>22</sup>
- there is a need to understand the past, the present and the future “There is government pressure to forgive and forget” – the forced closure of the problem, i.e. the conflict.

Dealing with the past was acknowledged as an important part of the truth-telling process. History has proved that it can take 30 to 50 years to deal

with the past on a political level. The example of post-war France was used, as the divisions within France regarding resistance and collaboration were dealt with differently as time went on, from the widespread execution of collaborators to a few key trials to a drawing of a line beyond which France was deemed to have been purged of the darker side of its war experience, at least at the official level.

There was a concern that the past could not be dealt with on a cross-community level at this time. Also, today’s answers may be different to those of tomorrow or those in 10, 20 or 30 years. It is a dynamic process.

A participant noted that “the past will not go away”, particularly with the number of unsolved murders. There is a need for justice before forgiveness. It was also claimed that those who carried out murders and were involved in terrorism have more protection than victims. Ex-prisoners and prisoner groups were said to be treated better than victims groups: “I don’t get the same rights – because I’m a Protestant”.

The notion of truth was explored further and the conditions under which it can be established. Comments included the following:

- everyone needs to feel safe
- is the conflict at an end?
- have we got an acceptable outcome?
- there is no such thing as ‘one truth’
- the government needs to tell the complete truth
- official secrets need to be made public knowledge
- there was a historical build-up to events and chains of events, such as the British Army corporals killed at Milltown cemetery<sup>23</sup>
- knowing the full story helps to understand
- the truth may bring some relief
- there is still a need for justice, not “terrorists protected by the state”
- tribunals should not be selective
- the church refuses to enter into truth-telling issues

<sup>21</sup> Their story is in the F-Word exhibition, <http://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories/jo-berry-pat-magee>.

<sup>22</sup> The journalist Martin O’Hagan of the *Sunday World* was killed in September 2001, apparently by Loyalists, while investigating allegations of collusion. He was not the first journalist to be killed in the conflict, but he was probably the first to be killed for reasons directly related to his work.

<sup>23</sup> The chain of events in question was the shooting dead by the British Army Special Air Service of three IRA men on a bombing mission in Gibraltar in March 1988, followed by the killing of three people by the Loyalist Michael Stone at their funeral in Milltown Cemetery, including IRA member Kevin Brady. At Brady’s funeral, two British Army corporals, David Howes and Derek Wood, were caught in a car near the funeral cortege in plain clothes, where they were apprehended by the crowd, driven to waste ground and killed. Stone succeeded in gaining access to the cemetery and the corporals could not be rescued due to the policy of security forces keeping a distance from IRA funerals after complaints that previous cases of close policing constituted harassment of mourners.

There were some criticisms of some policies and institutions regarding how those affected by the conflict are treated. It was claimed that “the government can be inhuman”, that churches are not willing to help or recognise victims and there was a question of what could help if there was no justice. Perhaps equality. In the area of policy, it was stated that policy consultations are circular, “they never move on and they don’t listen”.

The question was asked as to what should happen next. This was to draw out suggestions about next steps after the Committee’s inquiry and provide some idea of where future paths lie for Northern Ireland. Responses included the following:

- there is no easy solution
- each person is at a different point and at different levels
- one size does not fit all

- justice may not bring closure or acceptance
- there is a long-term need for continued funding for victims groups, and funders should not just be interested in ‘value for money’.

Participants were divided over the need for some form of ‘truth commission’. While for some the situation was not ready for such a move, others felt that there was space for some kind of process or processes engaging with truth recovery.

While the group was small, the discussions were wide and had depth, with a range of opinions expressed. Conclusions were similar to those found by the Committee, suggesting some agreement with the findings of the interim report. A number of themes that had been evident during the week were also revisited and in some cases expanded upon.

## ↔ Issues and Comments ↔

The overall impression of the week was one of a successful series of events in which a range of individuals engaged with themes associated with the effects of conflict and how to process the physical and psychological impacts of those effects. The coincidence of the staging of the F-Word exhibition and the seminars gave a focus and source of discussion that brought together often conflicting views in a safe, neutral environment.

The Institute of Governance served well as a venue for the exhibition in a foyer with public access and the seminar rooms worked well for the discussions with all the necessary facilities for the needs of the presentations and discussions organised. The lack of parking facilities close to the venue was a concern during the day, but became less problematic for the evening events.

Holding the events in the university provided an important neutral venue and safe space for individuals from diverse backgrounds to tell their stories and engage in difficult discussions<sup>24</sup>. The initiative to bring the community into the university setting also provided an opportunity to de-mystify the image of academic institutions, provide practical support in the form of facilities and engage the expertise of university staff in the process of healing in the post-conflict context. In addition, the bringing of current debates in the process of transition from conflict into the academic setting gave an opportunity for students and staff alike to be exposed to the issues prevalent in communities still experiencing the legacy of conflict in Northern Ireland. In this sense the Institute of Governance was a key component in the project.

Media coverage for the launch of the F-Word exhibition was good, including the major regional television, radio and newspaper outlets and engaging both national and international interest. Public viewing of the exhibition was steady throughout the week, but attendance at the seminars was less than expected. This led to more focussed discussion in more depth at the expense of variety of input.

In line with prevailing views of attendance patterns at cross-community events in Northern Ireland, it was noted that there was a predominance

of one community at the evening sessions, with the exception of the youth session, which had a predominance of the other community. While attempts were made to encourage both communities to attend all events, the pattern appears to have been replicated.

The major concerns for the week were around issues of sensitivity and competing visions of the events being organised. In particular, there are strong views in some areas of the victims' sector in Northern Ireland regarding the nature of victimhood, that is, separating 'victims' from 'perpetrators', which are at odds with those of the Forgiveness Project, which sees those who have carried out acts of violence against others as often being victims in their own right. Setting this balance required careful negotiation and clarity of purpose.

A related issue was that of sensitivity to those who had been affected by the conflict. There are those who have been adversely affected and have responded to those influences with violent acts and there are those who have likewise been affected, yet reject the legitimacy of the use of violence. There are those who have been re-traumatised through attendance at events where they have been unexpectedly (or even expectedly) confronted by individuals who had carried out acts of violence during the conflict, including those who had directly harmed the individuals concerned or their families.

TWN has always attempted to ensure that individuals are treated with the utmost sensitivity, as the information or experiences derived from any event are not worth the re-traumatisation of a single individual<sup>25</sup>. The following recommendation has therefore always been followed for all events organised by TWN for the victims' sector:

*People who have had traumatic experiences can be re-traumatised by the unwitting actions of those running events in the victims sector. It is recommended that the maximum amount of information be made available before an event, with a warning if necessary, to allow individuals to be fully informed before they make a decision about whether to attend.<sup>26</sup>*

<sup>24</sup> The importance of 'safe spaces' is indicated in prevailing literature on working towards reconciliation, for example, Patterson, R (2000), *A Farther Shore*, Dublin: Veritas, p.41.

<sup>25</sup> See *In Their Own Words: A Research Report into the Victims Sector in Northern Ireland*, Belfast: TWN, pp.28, 34.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p.40.

Consequently, the following was included on invitations to attend:

*While every effort has been made to be both inclusive and sensitive to those who have suffered in the conflict, please note that there may be other attendees who may have been involved in acts of violence.*

This statement was both criticised as being insensitive and praised as being sensitive. Despite the seminars themselves being invitation only, precautions taken to ensure sensitivity and numerous discussions around this issue in the working group, the consequences of disregarding such measures were not appreciated by all involved and it was noted that some re-traumatisation took place.

A significant debate around those affected by the conflict in Northern Ireland is regarding a 'hierarchy of victims'. This is where there is an assumed preference or higher status given to people who have not been involved in paramilitary groups than to those who have. The inclusion of armed groups and ex-combatants has been part of current thought in the transition from conflict and measures to mould a post-conflict society<sup>27</sup>. However, the inclusion of ex-combatants at events excludes those who cannot bring themselves to face those who have caused physical harm – nor feel that they should, creating a new hierarchy of victims. It may have been somewhat ambitious to attempt to accommodate the two opposing views at the same series of events. There were individuals who felt they could not attend due to the presence of former members of paramilitary organisations.

Another issue that arose was the preconception of the nature of forgiveness. The image on the invitation (a statue of two figures hugging) was considered to be inappropriate for the subject matter. Suggestions were also made regarding the coordination of those contributing to the events as presenters, so that individuals could match their presentations to those sharing the same session.

The conclusion is that communication is a key aspect of any event, but especially so where there is such sensitivity involved. Despite planning far in

advance and through a working group, there were still some misunderstandings regarding the nature of some of the events. While the working group format is still the most appropriate model for planning such events, representation on the working group should be well balanced, all parties with a stake in the event should ensure attendance at the working group meetings and all key decisions should be made at the working group meetings to avoid misunderstandings or misconceptions. Where possible, those presenting at events should be given the opportunity to meet and discuss what is to be said beforehand.

The seminars themselves worked well and the key issues for those affected by the conflict were covered in some depth. The discussions around the nature of forgiveness were a useful perspective in a sector where there are such strong feelings and sensitivities, many of which were reiterated during the seminars. Views expressed during the Victims Unit consultation were incorporated into a consultation response to the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (see Appendix 2). The international perspectives offered were important to draw the notion of victimhood away from a confined context and show the universality of the effect of conflict on individuals. Views on the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee inquiry were important to bring the findings into discussion in the sector, add to the literature of conflict transition and provide feedback to the Committee. This report will be forwarded to the Committee as evidence for any continuation of the inquiry.

In particular, while there was a distinct community imbalance in the seminar arranged, the young people involved in the youth session were keen to take part in future activities. It is therefore intended to look into future development of this area with the groups and individuals concerned for further cross-community work with young people.

The collaboration between the community and academic spheres (i.e. TWN and the Institute of Governance) worked well and it is intended to continue this partnership for projects in the future. Likewise, it is intended to continue to develop the working group drawn from the victims' sector and remain responsive to the needs of that group in the organisation of future events.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, Montague, M (2001), *Relationship to Reconciliation*, Belfast: Corrymeela, p.1.

## ✧ **Summary of Recommendations** ✧

Following the exhibition and seminars, a number of recommendations can be made with regard to future work in this area. The following are some areas that will be explored in consultation with the project working group:

- Cross community youth initiatives to capture the enthusiasm expressed by young people to participate in further programmes exploring these issues
- Academic seminar/conference to explore key notions of forgiveness and reconciliation and how this impacts on those most affected by the conflict
- Activities supporting international linkages between groups working with those affected by conflict in different areas
- Continued collaboration between TWN, the Institute of Governance and the victims

working group in the development of work relevant to those affected by the conflict

- Continued use of Queen's University as a neutral, 'safe' venue for sensitive and cross-community work to take place
- Continued advocacy and support of those who have been affected by the conflict in published articles, consultation responses and other activities
- Efforts to expand the victims' working group, particularly with more of a community balance
- In the event of the continued convening of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee inquiry into ways forward, to engage with the Committee and encourage others to do so who have not contributed so far.

**⇄ Appendix 1: ⇄**  
**F-Word Exhibition and Seminars,**  
**Institute of Governance, Belfast, 14–17 June 2005 –**  
**Summary of Events**

*Event launch 11.00 14 June 2005*

*Speakers* Dr John Barry, Institute of Governance  
Norma Shearer, TWN  
Marina Cantacuzino, Forgiveness Project  
Jo Berry, Forgiveness Project  
Alistair Little, Forgiveness Project

*Forgiveness Workshop 12.30 14 June 2005*

*Facilitator* Michael Potter, TWN  
*Note Taker* John Rogan, TWN

*Victims Unit Consultation 17.30 14 June 2005*

*Introductions* Michael Potter, TWN  
*Presentation* John Clarke, Victims Unit, OFMDFM  
*Note taker* Michael Potter, TWN

*Forgiveness – A Youth Perspective 17.30 14 June 2005*

*Facilitators* Nev Gallagher, Shankill Alternatives  
Seanna O'Hara, Short Strand Partnership  
*Note Taker* John Rogan, TWN

*International Perspectives 17.30 15 June 2005*

*Introductions* Bronagh Hinds, Institute of Governance  
*Speakers* Mary Blewitt, Rwanda  
Roberta Bacic, Chile  
*Facilitator* Sara Cook, The Junction  
*Note Takers* Michelle Rutherford, TWN  
Karen Sweeney, TWN

*A Truth Process for Northern Ireland? 17.30 16 June 2005*

*Facilitator* Michael Potter, TWN  
*Note Taker* John Rogan, TWN

↔ **Appendix 2:** ↔

## **TWN Consultation Response for Services for Victims and Survivors**

Victims Unit  
Room B3  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont Estate  
Belfast BT4 3SR

Dear Sir/Madam

### **Response to the Consultation on Services for Victims and Survivors**

Thank you for the invitation to comment on the consultation document *Services for Victims and Survivors*. Training for Women Network (TWN) always welcomes the opportunity to contribute to policy development.

TWN has worked with victims' groups since 2003, when the organisation was invited to carry out research in the sector focussing on the role of women, but widening out to general issues for those affected by the conflict. The report *In Their Own Words: A Research Report into the Victims Sector in Northern Ireland* was launched in April 2004.

TWN has continued to work with groups that participated in the research as a development working group to investigate methods of increasing capacity in the sector. This has included giving evidence before the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee inquiry *Reconciliation: Ways of Dealing with Northern Ireland's Past*. More recently, a series of seminars has been arranged in association with the Institute of Governance in Belfast to examine current issues in the victims sector, including specific sessions on the current consultation on services for victims and survivors, experiences from other contexts of conflict and views on the interim report from the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee inquiry. This response is derived from outstanding recommendations from the research, experience of working with victims and survivors and discussions from the recently organised events.

The current consultation is most welcome, as the process of seeking the opinions of those affected by the conflict on their care and support is of paramount importance. In addition, it sends a signal that there are still channels of communication available for victims and survivors to have a say on policies impacting on them.

Some criticism has been raised regarding the publicisation of the consultation, some participants having only heard about it at a time that makes a fully considered response difficult. While it is acknowledged that significant publicity arrangements have been instigated, there are individuals who have missed the opportunity to contribute to development of policy in this area. Bearing in mind the fact that those affected by the conflict are to be found in every area of society, more creative methods for notifying the commencement of future consultations should be considered.

The proposals are very limited in that they focus on services alone. While it is important to indicate the scope of policy development, this produces concern that wider issues that impact upon the services that victims receive are not being considered, such as memorials, justice, truth processes and compensation. Some indication of when and how other issues may be addressed would restore confidence in the response of government departments to the needs of those who have suffered in the conflict.

The reasons given for the need for change are acknowledged, but there has been an opportunity to make more extensive proposals, as indicated in the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee Recommendation No. 33, that has not been taken up. Piecemeal change with few radical imaginative proposals for caring for victims and survivors, bearing in mind the Committee's Recommendations 19 and 32, delays the institution of an effective mechanism for alleviating the problems inherent in the sector and with it the fulfilment of promises made in the Belfast Agreement to adequately care for those who have suffered.

Concerns over the effectiveness of the Trauma Advisory Panels (TAPs) have varied. While some have felt that individuals have been excellent and the work very good, others have contended that they do not extend their reach to many areas, particularly west of the Bann, are wasteful in money and resources and have been described as 'talking shops'. Most consistently, TAPs are criticised for not having enough victims and survivors represented on them. It is therefore recommended

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that greater efforts be made to ensure that there is a significant increase in those who have been affected by the conflict and those who care for them to be represented on the TAPs.

Security is a major concern for those who are suffering from the effects of trauma, particularly in the context of continuing conflict and tension. Services will not be used by those in need if they do not feel that they or their personal details will be secure, requiring a review of how security of information and of those seeking services are handled. As the provision of a sufficiently secure environment cannot always be guaranteed in public service establishments, arrangements may have to be made to provide support and services on a basis agreed with those working with victims and survivors locally. This may include specialised training for individuals working at community level or the provision of additional funding for organisations to employ specialist help. Such arrangements would require a high degree of co-working with those working with victims and survivors in groups and community-based organisations and quality assurance for treatment mechanisms. The importance of peer support cannot be overestimated, provided the need for specialist care can be accurately diagnosed and accessed.

The proposal for a Victims and Survivors Advisor is to be welcomed, which should go some way to de-mystifying the extent of support structures available. Groups supporting victims emphasise the need to refer to community-based help as well as statutory provision. However, sufficiently informed medical personnel at the point of contact, such as GPs, would make referral considerably easier, as recommended in the report,

*Living with the Trauma of the Troubles.*

The proposal for a Victims and Survivors Commissioner is welcomed, although there are concerns regarding the method of appointment. While it is acknowledged that there is an established government appointment procedure for such positions, it is urged that victims and survivors are involved with this process. Recommendations 28 to 31 of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee inquiry are reiterated. The suggestion of a Victims and Survivors Forum is in principle welcomed, but the realities of its composition and the lack of consensus over the definition of 'victim' would make it a controversial body.

Beyond the issues raised in the consultation event and subsequent discussions, there are some outstanding recommendations from the report *In Their Own Words* that are relevant to the current consultation process. Chief among these is the acknowledgement of the role of women, women's centres and women's organisations in the care of those who have been affected by the conflict. The consultation document does not mention women at all, which will probably be indicated in the required Equality Impact Assessment. With funding to women's groups and organisations severely reduced, the capacity of the women's sector to provide for the needs of victims and survivors will be seriously affected. It is recommended that resources be used to support the work of women's centres and organisations and all future policy considerations take into account the fact that support and assistance in communities during the conflict to a considerable degree have taken place in settings provided by the women's sector in Northern Ireland.

✧ **Appendix 3:** ✧  
**Handout for International Perspectives Seminar**

**Roberta Bacic**

**Disappearances are not Silent**

*Institute of Governance, Belfast, 15 June 2005*

**Little Pieces of a Big Story**

*Roberta Bacic, Northern Ireland*

Time and distance allow me the perspective to share this story of common history with special affection. Now the core issues not only come through but become clearer, and, as the superfluous fades, and as time and the flow of the rivers take it away, it leaves only the deepest parts which make us people with history and memory. While I look out at the fields from this side of the world in a country house, remembrance and emotion bring me incredibly closer to the city of Osorno, located at the confluence of the Rahue and Damas rivers 565 miles south of Santiago, the capital of my country, Chile. And not only Osorno makes itself present, but also the little nearby towns of Entre Lagos, Río Negro, San Pablo, Puerto Octay, El Encanto, Puyehue and many others appearing among rivers, lakes, volcanoes, rural roads, clouds, hills, valleys, people walking, birds, oxcarts, tractors, cars, rickety rural buses. And in each one of these things I see the faces of the women and their families emerging, the people with whom at the beginning of the 1980's I went looking for their detained disappeared, searching for a better quality of life and living. The women had already started on the road. I had too, in other lands. By then we all had already carried a load of almost ten years of harsh military dictatorship.

And so, wherever we are, amid song, poetry and tears, our memories become reality. With deep emotion, Peruvian Jose Maria Arguedes emerges with his book "The Deep Rivers", where the strength resides in being indian, being mestizo from the earth itself. He lived and died in this intense and never-ending search. While gathering his writings for new editions, his Chilean wife Sibila was arrested in Lima and ever since lives as a political prisoner in the cells of a jail of that capital. She cannot imagine me thinking about her, but she identifies with us in our search, which is also hers and that of so many many others.

January 1999 brought me to my country, to be with mine and to search for bits of identity. When unable to reach each one of their faces we arrived

at "La Chascona", the Santiago house of our poet Pablo Neruda, then we went to the port of Valparaiso, we climbed its hills and went inside his other house called "La Sebastiana" and from there I communicated with those who are absent, always present, and under the sun the deliberate and deep voice of Neruda reminded me of the relevance of our search, captured in his great work "Heights of Macchu Picchu":

*" . . . I come to speak through your dead  
mouth,  
through the earth gather all  
the silent spilled lips  
and from the deep speak to me  
throughout this long night  
as if I were anchored to you . . . "*

Isabel, Juanita, Sara, Uberlinda, Gloria, Zulema, Blanca, Marianela, Elvecia, Carmen, Sabina, María, Rosa, Dina, Lastenia, Jovita, Margarita, Genoveva, Angélica, Angela and all those whose names I can not recall, I find you again through your words registered in the space that we built together. With what right do I share this? Dr. Fernando Oyarzun, companion of reflection, strolls and ethical questionings with whom long hours were shared since 1975 in the midst of the hasty university life in the Austral University of Valdivia, comes to mind. As a testimony to this path, I have received in the mail his last book, published in June 1998: "The normal and abnormal person and the anthropology of living together." In it he points out: "The face of the other person presents to me with meaning, with a certain way to communicate through which the person expresses in a lively way, through his/her body, the junction between many polar elements like: the psyche and the body (the joy of the smile, the bitterness in the gesture), the singular and the universal (what is unique as a contrast to what is universal), the world and the person (the other and oneself), what has been perceived and what has been imagined, etc."

Meeting in a dark basement on Bilbao Street in Osorno, we shared the search, the daily experiences, the stories, the facts and the feelings. Also the rage, the protests and the ways to confront injustice, impunity and ultimately to confront the dictatorship. Thus in one of the many moments when we socialised, what had been lived surrounding the disappearance of a loved one, things began to describe to us the particular, the unique, what brings experience to the limit of what is understandable, breaks through the limits of reason, overruns your feelings and at the same time characterises the particular relationship you had with the absent person.

Juanita used to say to us: "I can't come to terms with the fact that I scolded him on the morning he was taken. I told him they were looking for him because he was too involved in politics and that that would bring us all problems. And he did not even have time for breakfast before they came for him. I will always have that awful feeling, that he left sad because of the angry words of his mother and without her support and comfort... I don't even want to imagine how his last minutes must have been". And Juanita, always soft and sweet, seeking comfort in the Protestant Church, wandering with the other women of the Association of Relatives of Detained Disappeared in search of her son and of justice, helping her neediest neighbours, cooking for her husband, her children and grandchildren, died in poverty in her house on a marginal street in Osorno. Not even in her final moments did she find complete peace, as uniformed men occupied part of the street where she lived, came close to the site of her wake, and with that they did not allow the full mourning which she deserved and to which her relatives were entitled. The same right that had been totally denied to them with respect to her son. Juanita left with a smile, in spite of her immense sorrow, and with the new pair of black shoes we had just given her to cover her cold and tired feet during her untiring journey.

Carmen, a short, full-figured and gentle farmer who lived in a tiny house in one of the poorest neighbourhoods of Osorno, always came to the meetings with a little basket of home made bread or cookies for us. She would make this with special love and in solidarity shared her scarce means. At the time her son was detained, which she witnessed since he was taken from their own house, she lived in the country with her son Carlos and a young granddaughter. Carlos was a tractor driver at a large farm. She remembers she was told; "We will take him to ask him a few questions and he will be back". She waited for him with an unlocked door for 18 years, his clothes always clean and ironed,

leaving a meal ready for him every day just in case he showed up at night to avoid police patrols and, for the first few years, the state of siege. After five days of his detention the owners of the farm had forced her to leave the little house where they lived, and that's how she came to Osorno. With love she raised her granddaughter, who grew up to become a university student and secretary for the Association of Relatives of Detained Disappeared. In 1992 she came to a group meeting and came up to me to offer me bread as usual. When I thanked her, she told me "I've been such a terrible mother". Her categorical tone surprised me and I could not help pointing out to her the reasons why I thought she was a fine mother. She let me take her to a corner of the room and then she told me her reasons. A few days before the meeting, and very recently after the first democratically elected government took office after the dictatorship; the National TV channel of Chile had shown a program about torture. In that context she pointed out: "I was very selfish, always thinking that my son was being kept alive somewhere and that he would return at any moment. When I heard the testimony on torture I wished that my son would have died immediately, without having to suffer so much, because if he had survived he would have returned home already." Since then she no longer waits for him but she still demands his remains to be found so she can give them proper Christian burial next to her husband. She died some months after this meeting.

The Leveque family, an old Osorno working class family of Mapuche origins, was very committed to the Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende. Don Pedro had been one of the first members of the Communist Party and as such he always participated actively and publicly in the party. He had a great number of children and the oldest, Rodolfo, was 21 at the time of the military coup, was married and had a baby boy who today has almost finished his degree in Anthropology. They came looking for both, took them, but also took Wladimir, who was disabled and younger than Rodolfo. Don Pedro survived three hard months of torture and detention, but Rodolfo and Wladimir did not; both are still Detained Disappeared. Uberlinda, wife of Pedro and mother of both disappeared was for years the president of the Association of Relatives of Detained Disappeared. She would make innumerable trips to Santiago representing her Osorno group, looking for her sons and seeking medical assistance since the search was, in her own words, "driving her mad". In our meetings she would always repeat to us: "I am so hurt by the taking of my children. It was clear to Rodolfo that they were looking for him because he

was president of the Osorno Communist Youth. But Wladi, what wrong could he have done? He was handicapped, they did not let me get him his crutches and I despair when I think of him having to go to the bathroom if he could not move without them". Doña Ube, as we affectionately call her, stood by Don Pedro until his death a couple of years ago, she turned over the presidency of the association to her daughter in law Angelica, and she has not relented in the search for her sons, especially for her disabled son because: "He needs me more, he only has me; Rodolfo has his wife and his son, who is a grown man already".

In that same context I met Zulema, already elderly at the beginning of the 1980's. She always said that in the Association she was representing Jose, a disappeared nephew. She did it with great fervour when his own parents, two elderly Mapuche farmers, could not come. She always had the gift of leadership in spite of being illiterate, but in her own words: "With a memory envied by social workers and the ability to know when to speak and when to be silent according to the circumstances". Several years later, the group was discussing a book by Patricia Politzer entitled "Fear In Chile", which told the story of 10 people filled with fear who had either survived repression under extreme circumstances or had feared the Popular Unity government. Zulema said nothing but asked me to come over to her house. There, after her children were asleep, she told me this; "I want nothing to do with that journalist, she takes advantage of people, she tells my daughter's story and gets rich at our expense, and without knowing, she puts us at risk and does not even give us a copy of the book." I could not believe what I was hearing because I thought her own reason for being there was Jose. Zulema's daughter Blanca was the mayor of Entre Lagos who had been brought before a firing squad together with her husband and who survived that experience by falling into the Pilmaiquen river, swimming out, asking farmers from the area to help her by telling them she was escaping persecution from a husband that was after her with a knife, and managing to live clandestinely for years, protected by the *Vicaria de la Solidaridad* so no one would ever look for her again. Her children gave her up for dead together with their father. Zulema kept the secret tightly, was her link to everything and would bring her bits of history. A few days later I photocopied the chapter from the book that told the story of Blanca and brought it to Zulema's house. We sat next to the fire drinking *mate*, I read her the story and left her the photocopy. We did not make any comments, but simply gave each other a hug and a kiss. I only saw her one more time before her death, two years later.

In 1992 I came to Temuco to live. Blanca, Zulema's daughter, lives there. We have become close, we've shared enjoyable social moments at her home, I have helped her reclaim her rights as the wife of a detained disappeared. I have learned from her own lips the pride that she feels for having been named mayor by Salvador Allende after beginning as a leader in a poor neighbourhood. I have also heard of some of her misadventures, of her lack of trust in human justice, of the fear she still feels, of the impotence and anger that fill her after having testified before Chilean and international tribunals about those responsible for her execution of her comrades and attempted execution of herself and to know that the guilty are still free and walk around the streets of our country like ordinary people. She is now, after years of militancy in the Communist Party, an active member of a Christian Church.

In the poor neighbourhoods of the small town of Entre Lagos live Jovita and her family, as well as Lastenia. Maria also lived there. Doña Blanca knew them all during her term as Mayor. Jovita was the sister of a detained disappeared who was executed next to her and her husband. Maria also lost her husband. Two summers ago I arranged a visit from Blanca to the place where the earlier events took place. She shared with her friends, enjoyed the friendship, was overcome by the memories and was enraged by the degree of poverty in which they live, much greater than when she was a public official. She visited the new Pilmaiquen bridge, walked on the old suspension one where she was shot together with other farmers, all still disappeared. She visited the monument we built in 1990 to remember the group, and in the words of Cuban singer Pablo Milanés, she "stepped once again on the bloodied streets".

Lastenia is Mapuche, a poor farmer, a born social fighter, mother of four children. I met her in Osorno, generous with her sad smile, warm with her embrace, direct in her look and sharp in her truth. She always told the same story; "It is not fair that the guilty are on the loose and no competent tribunal makes them tell us where they are." Every day she was angrier, she was incapable of talking about anything else. Her friends, in spite of respecting her, began getting impatient. One day we asked her why she repeated the story we already knew so many times and she replied that she knew who had taken part in the execution in Entre Lagos and she was supposed to be one of their victims. But there had been no more room in the vehicle, and when the policemen had returned drunk, one of them told her "Your mayor should save you now that she has been eaten by the crabs." There were no more executions, so Lastenia was saved. She

thought no one would believe her version because of her poor background. We did a role-play of the events and the fact that we recognised her truth gave her later the courage to come before the appropriate the competent tribunal that she hoped for. She felt very relieved and later presented her testimony to one of the courts in Osorno. She feels she has done right by the missing, but she feels frustrated when she sees that the murderers are still walking freely through the streets of her town, knowing that her truth, no matter how true, has not affected them at all, that they enjoy total impunity.

On the road heading south from Osorno we find the small town of Río Negro. Isabel lives there, the wife of Mario, an outstanding regional athlete who was Regent for the Communist Party of his town. He was detained a few days after the coup and, unlike many detained disappeared, he was seen by his wife on several occasions while being held at the local stadium. She witnessed his health deteriorating and the last time she was able to see him he asked her not to hug him because his ribs were broken. The next time she came to the place they told her that he had been released and that surely he would be home any day. That did not happen. She waited and searched with her two children. She made numerous trips following clues as they were given to her. She even went to Santiago and every time she saw a vagrant she would think it could be Mario because she thought that as a result of the torture he might have been in bad shape and disoriented when they released him, and now could not find his way home. She raised her children in this context and with them she participated in the Association of Relatives of Detained Disappeared. Her children began to participate in politics as soon as the dictatorship was over. But the oldest, who is today a prominent professional in Puerto Montt, distanced himself from any involvement in public activity disillusioned that the neoliberal model continued and its practices were tied to the military regime. The younger son still participates. Years later, guided by her spirit of solidarity and understanding the meaning of being abandoned by society, she adopted a baby girl who could not be raised by her mother. Viviana is 12 years old today and she is great company to Isabel. In this process of getting closer to the families and the commitment to their situations, I was asked to be the godmother of the little girl. It has been a beautiful experience to maintain a permanent closeness with them. For a few years now Isabel has been receiving a Reparations Pension granted by the state. The quality of life has improved for her as well as for other recipients, but Isabel has said: "They only

give me what I have a right to. With Mario we never lacked anything, but after these events we lived in misery and despised by all. Besides, there has been no justice. That would be real reparation! I would not wish my fate on anyone. We have not even got a handful of bones. With just a few little bones we would feel at peace, the soul would return to our body. The way things are now we will forever live in doubt."

A little bit further in from Río Negro, following a narrow dirt road in the middle of a beautiful countryside is Riachuelo, a small town of farm and forest laborers. The Barría-Bassay family lived there until three years ago when they moved to Osorno for health reasons and to be closer to their surviving children. A few days after the 1973 military coup, two of their sons aged 19 and 21 years old were arrested. The two young men were active members of the Socialist Party. They have been disappeared since then. The Barria Bassays took charge of two children of the detainees and raised them as their own. A maternal grandmother raised another one of the children. They lived very hard times. Fear and the social stigma were greater in small towns. Elvecia Bassay has maintained her affection and warmth in spite of all her hardships. I remember travelling to the Netherlands with big jars of homemade jam to bring to one of her brothers exiled there. I was surprised by her capacity to share in spite of her poverty and I was filled with happiness to see how her present was received. She has participated for years in the search for her children, contributing information and supporting each legal action. I was very moved by her words at the death of another of her sons in a car accident. "This is terrible, to lose a child is the worse thing that can happen to a mother. It is against our nature. We are here to raise them and make men or women out of them. But to have a disappeared son is the worst, and we lost two. It cannot be understood, there can be no peace. I say that it would have been terrible to lose my husband, but somehow I would have managed. I am never going to rest, sometimes I think not even after death'.

These small stories are not meant to be the pieces of a puzzle. I simply share them with the hope to subtly unveil a window to worlds, life experiences and realities that are impossible to imagine without the living testimony of their protagonists. If the gift of the trust and friendship of these women, together with my pen begin to achieve that objective, I feel that the distances between us will have been narrowed and we will be closer to understanding.

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## **Training for Women Network Limited**

Unit 10b Weavers Court, Linfield Road, BELFAST BT12 5GH

Tel: 028 9031 9888 • Fax: 028 9031 1166

E-mail: [info@twnonline.com](mailto:info@twnonline.com) • Web: [www.twnonline.com](http://www.twnonline.com)

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