

PRESS RELEASE

First Report of Independent Reporting Commission

The Independent Reporting Commission (the IRC), established by an International Agreement between the UK and Irish Governments under the terms of the Fresh Start Agreement of November 2015, publishes its First Report today.

Reporting on progress towards ending paramilitary activity connected with Northern Ireland and on the relevant measures of the two Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive in that regard, the Commission said:

“Paramilitarism is a residual legacy of the long conflict and remains a stark reality of life in Northern Ireland.

In the Fresh Start Agreement of 2015, from which our mandate flows, the two Governments and the Northern Ireland Executive recommitted themselves to bringing it to an end once and for all. Our mandate is to report on progress towards reaching that goal and to make recommendations on what more could be done.

In this First Report, we provide our analysis of what we have seen and heard, and the potential that the Fresh Start measures have for transformation. We make clear that it is unacceptable that paramilitarism continues to exist in Northern Ireland.

The continuation of paramilitary-style attacks and assaults, while declining in general terms, is reprehensible and must stop. We refer in our Report to the importance we attach to the situation of victims of paramilitary violence. But we also make clear the complex reasons why paramilitarism still exists and describe the wide spectrum of views involved.

We believe that what makes Fresh Start unique is the focus on a comprehensive, holistic approach to tackling paramilitarism, in effect involving two tracks – a policing/Criminal Justice response, side by side with addressing the societal and structural issues facing communities where paramilitary organisations operate. This twin-track approach will, we believe, be critical to the achievement of sustainable success in terms of tackling paramilitarism.

In relation to the implementation of the 43 recommendations of the Three-Person Panel Report included in the Executive Action Plan on tackling paramilitary activity, we welcome the good start that has been made overall. However, there continues to be a number of areas where in our view not enough is being done, or not being done quickly enough.

The major and obvious impediment to the task of full implementation of the Fresh Start provisions on ending paramilitarism is the continued absence of political decision making in Northern Ireland for close to two years. This has had an adverse impact on the implementation process. Nonetheless, that work of implementation goes on and we detail in our Report the wide range of activities underway.

We are under no illusion about the scale of what is involved in achieving the goal of ending paramilitarism but we believe that in this Fresh Start process, there is a credible pathway towards it. The task for everybody – Government and society – now is to ensure that the opportunity involved is grasped to the full.”

END

Notes for Editor

Report is available at 12.30 pm Tuesday 23rd October at

<https://www.ircommission.org/publications>

The creation of the Independent Reporting Commission was one of the commitments set out in the Fresh Start Agreement to tackle paramilitary activity. The Commission was established in August 2017 by an International Treaty between the UK and Irish Governments.

The Fresh Start Agreement proposed the appointment of a three-person Panel to report to the Executive on recommendations for a strategy to disband paramilitary groups. All of the Panel's 43 recommendations were accepted and were incorporated into an Action Plan, published in July 2016, which set out the Executive's commitments and how the recommendations would be implemented. An implementation structure, comprising a Tackling Paramilitarism Programme Board and a Tackling Paramilitarism Programme Team, has been established to drive delivery across NI Departments. The role of the IRC is to report on the implementation of the Executive's commitments.

The Commission does not have an operational role or make security assessments about the various paramilitary organisations. Its task is to consult with key stakeholders and to report on progress towards ending paramilitary activity and on implementation of measures to address the issue.

The four Commissioners are John McBurney and Monica McWilliams, who were nominated by the Northern Ireland Executive, Tim O'Connor, nominated by the Irish Government, and Mitchell Reiss, nominated by the UK Government.

The Commission is required to consult with a broad range of stakeholders, including the Irish Government and law enforcement agencies, the UK government and relevant law enforcement agencies and, in Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Executive, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, other statutory agencies, local councils, communities and civic society organisations.

The Commission is required to report annually to the UK and Irish Governments and to the Northern Ireland Executive.