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Public want an Assembly which respects rights and diversity for all

4-5 minutes

1 January, 2018 - by [Michelle O'Neill](#)

The past 12 months has been an extraordinary time politically. We have witnessed incredible political developments, suffered the loss of a political giant but also the reawakening of the demand for fairness and equality at the heart of our political process.

And as we look forward to 2018, Sinn Féin is determined and optimistic that we will realise that demand. That we will restore power-sharing institutions based on the principles of the Good Friday Agreement.

There is no alternative, the status quo is not an option.

I am optimistic because I see the transformation that has taken place in this society since the people voted for the Good Friday Agreement 20 years ago. I see the young people who will not tolerate their peers being treated as second-class citizens because of their sexuality.

I see civic society standing up to be counted and demanding their rights and entitlements are protected and enshrined on the same basis as they are elsewhere on these islands. They will not accept the denial of language rights, of marriage equality and the right to

coroner's inquests because the DUP dictate it.

People across Ireland have been shaken by the recklessness of the DUP-Tory Brexit agenda and the immense harm it will cause to communities and the economy throughout the island.

That is not the future they want for their children and grandchildren.

Most people want a positive future, an inclusive and welcoming future where everyone is treated fairly and cherished.

That is what Martin McGuinness wanted and that is the challenge he set for us in his resignation letter almost a year ago which set out in very clear terms what needs to happen to put the proper foundations in place.

We have lost Martin, and it is an incalculable loss for us all, but we remain determined to realise the vision he set out.

It is a vision that has already been endorsed by a majority of the people in both the Assembly and Westminster elections. The momentum for change is with us and the demand for a better society is a demand from a majority of voting citizens.

A majority of people in the North voted for parties who support a rights based society and the principles of mutual respect and parity of esteem.

And for the first time in the history of the northern state, designed to perpetuate an unfair and unequal status quo, unionism lost its majority.

Fifty years on from the Civil Rights campaign in 1968, the North is a very different place. A place where the denial of rights, equality and respect will no longer be accepted.

A majority want the restoration of genuine power sharing.

A majority want rights and equality.

A majority reject the frustration of their achievement; the erection of a barrier to this by a minority who have a different political opinion or religious belief.

A majority want an Assembly which accepts the diversity in our society and delivers for all.

I want to lead Sinn Féin back into a new Executive because locally elected ministers are best placed to run local public services and fight back against the threats of Brexit and austerity.

I want to develop the widest possible consensus in political, civic and popular opinion to achieve this.

I believe that can happen early in the New Year but only if the institutions represent genuine and equal partnership Government for all our people.

That will require the British government and the DUP accepting the political and democratic reality which has already been made abundantly clear by the electorate.

If they continue to set their face against the people and against progressive politics, then there is an onus on the two Governments to spell out how they intend to ensure the implementation of previous agreements and pave a pathway to restore the institutions on the basis of equal partnership and respect in the terms set out almost 20 years ago.