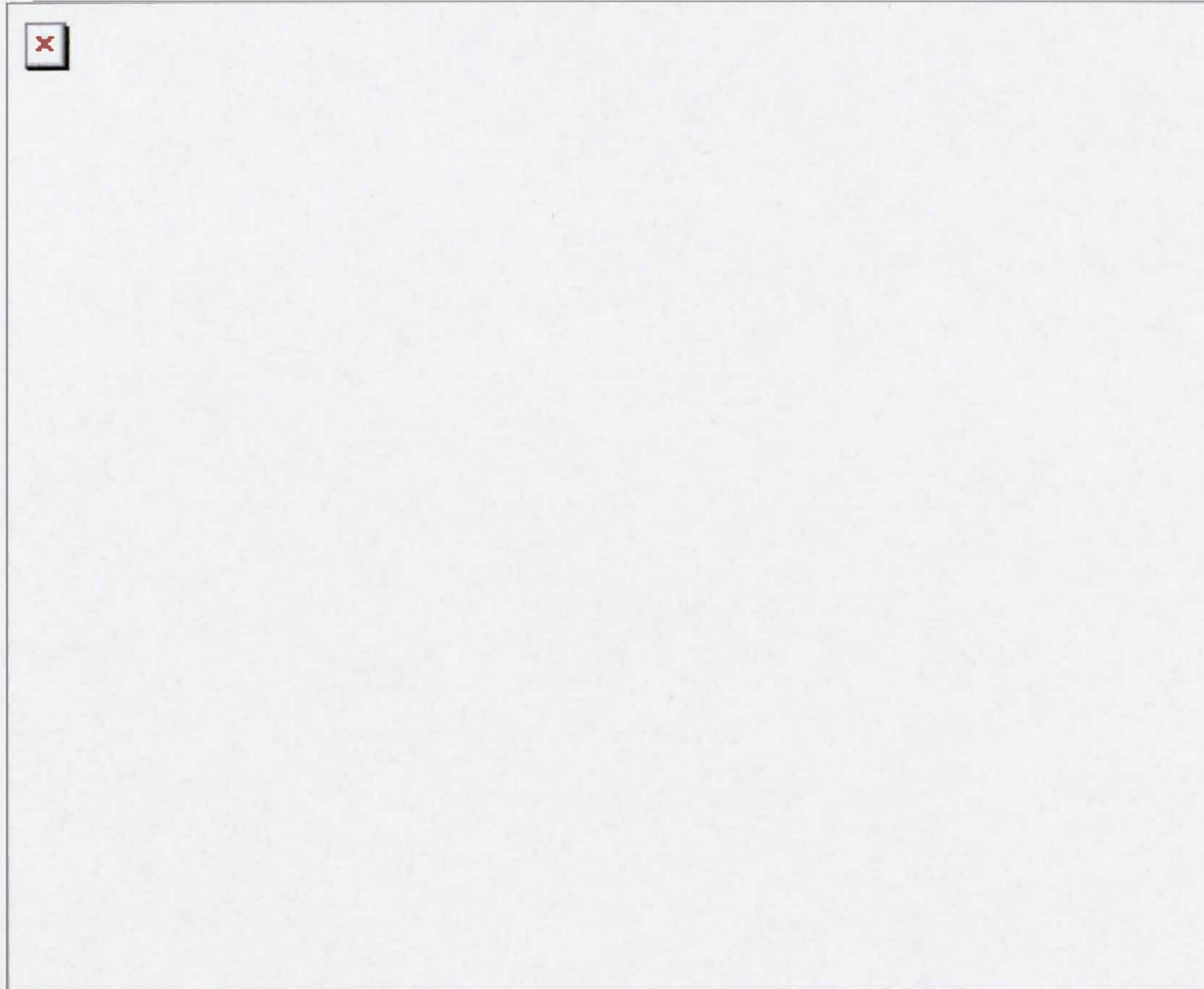

[About NDI](#)
[Worldwide Activities](#)
[Programs](#)
[Support NDI](#)
[Resources](#)
[Employment](#)
[SEARCH](#)
[CONTACT](#)

Worldwide Activities

NDI ACTIVITIES IN EUROPE NORTHERN IRELAND



- [Program Overview](#)
- [Northern Ireland Documents](#)
- [Contact Information](#)

The historic "Good Friday" Agreement reached on April 10, 1998 between the British and Irish governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland lays the foundation for peace after nearly 30 years of bitter sectarian conflict. Its centerpiece is the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly, elected in June following ratification of the Agreement by commanding majorities on both sides of the border. The Assembly will provide the primary forum for cross-community cooperation and consensus-building. In addition, the Agreement creates new institutional links within Northern Ireland; between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; and between Northern Ireland and other regions of the United Kingdom. It also contains measures on human rights, decommissioning of arms, release of prisoners, policing and other issues that have been sources of tension and conflict in Northern Ireland.

If the peace is to hold, the Assembly and its political parties must play a leading role in bringing effective governance to the people of Northern Ireland. Concurrent with the establishment of the Assembly, NDI began a program to assist the political parties in the legislature in their capacity as implementors of the Agreement with funding from the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

NDI has contributed to facilitating dialogue between political parties and strengthening a nonviolent and democratic political process in Northern Ireland since 1985 by providing party-building assistance to a widening circle of parties. In June 1994, NDI began a program to strengthen political parties and the practice of politics in Northern Ireland while examining issues of politics in a divided society.

"Politics is about problems, but we need to go from abnormal problems and abnormal politics to normal problems and normal politics. NDI can help with this."

- Northern Ireland Assembly Leader

X

In June 1997, in cooperation with the McCormack Institute at the University of Massachusetts, NDI brought together 27 leaders from nine Northern Irish political parties with more than two dozen of the South Africans who actually negotiated the historic transition to all-race elections and democratic rule. The program, which was conducted before the Belfast talks that led to the Agreement, took place at a secluded military air base in the Western Cape where participants were isolated from political distractions. South Africa's Department of Constitutional Development sponsored the program and dubbed it an indaba – Zulu for a "gathering of the minds."

INDABA

The South Africans described the challenges they faced in order to reach a "workable" negotiating model. They examined "real life" situations where deliberations broke down, and the actions taken to reconcile differences and resume the negotiation process. The participants developed a common understanding of the concepts and skills of negotiation necessary to identify common ground for peace.

On recent visits to Northern Ireland by NDI, political party leaders continued to describe their exposure to the South African experience as a vital component in reaching consensus during the talks.

X

In the spring and summer of 1998, NDI brought several groups of political party and civic leaders to Belfast to learn from the Northern Ireland experience. A delegation of political and civic leaders from Guyana and Lebanon, who are addressing issues of peace-making and constitutional accommodation in divided societies, met with the primary players involved in the peace process in London, Dublin and Belfast to gain ideas on how to move forward in their own countries. NDI also brought two groups of political party activists from Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to Belfast during the Assembly election period to learn how parties conduct democratic campaigns in a polarized environment. Upon their return, party members trained other members; and, in a recent election campaign in Macedonia, the party activists directly applied practical lessons learned in Northern Ireland about door-to-door canvassing and campaign literature.

The other Way Round

"Not a day goes by in the talks that a reference is not made to the South Africa experience. It was a turning point in our lives," said one Northern Ireland political party leader during the Belfast talks.

X

In addition to the impact on the international visitors, the fact that decision-makers from divided societies are visiting Northern Ireland provides encouragement, confidence and support to those responsible for implementing the Agreement.

In September, NDI sent an assessment team to Belfast to consult with political leaders on ways in which NDI could assist political parties in the new Assembly. Across the board, leaders welcomed NDI assistance, and as a result, NDI is continuing to assist political

parties in the new Northern Ireland Assembly in the specific context of the evolving peace and reconciliation process. Given the historic opportunity presented by the Agreement, the Assembly will provide the primary forum for cross-community cooperation and consensus-building while also providing to the people of Northern Ireland a regional legislature and government for the first time in a quarter century.

The initial three-part program began with a two-day seminar for Assembly members in November titled, "The Politics of Governing: Political Parties and the Northern Ireland Assembly," that brought together legislators from North America and Europe to share their experiences on the effective functioning of political party groups in a legislature. A third of the Assembly members participated, and as a typical comment, one said the "range of information—expertise and experience of individual contributors—and their flexibility and helpfulness, were outstanding." Besides the skills learned, important results occurred on the fringes of the workshop as well. For example, one prominent Unionist remarked that during a reception hosted by NDI and the US Consul General, he had for the first time "exchanged pleasantries" with a member of Sinn Fein.

The second component was a consultative visit for Northern Ireland party leaders to South Africa in December to investigate party relationships in the executive and the Assembly in the context of power-sharing arrangements. Assembly members looked at how South Africans are strengthening political trust at a time when new political institutions are being built and tested, and the patience of a war-weary public willing to try peace grows short. The Northern Irish especially appreciated the discussions about inter-party relations in the context of a power-sharing arrangement, the importance of seeking consensus within a shared executive, the need for coalition-building and the idea of the executive formulating a code of conduct for political parties. The multiparty make-up of the delegation helped towards building working relationships between parties. One party leader commented, "Maybe those who have spoken to each other here for the first time will now speak to each other in Belfast. The importance of this should not be underestimated."

The third component brought three legislators to Newcastle in April 1999 for a multiparty workshop to provide Assembly members with comparative examples of committee structure and operations and to strengthen the capacity of committees to play an effective role in the lawmaking process, oversee the executive and provide opportunity for citizen input. One Assembly member commented, "the involvement of NDI is vital both in the expertise it brings but also in the opportunities it creates for encouraging former "enemies" to sit down and work together."

On December 8 1998, at a dinner in Washington, NDI presented its annual Averell Harriman Democracy Award to the leaders of the eight parties in Northern Ireland that negotiated the "Good Friday" Agreement.

Northern Ireland Documents

Building Strong Committees: Legislation, Oversight and Public Participation in the Northern Ireland Assembly, April 29 - May 1, 1999 (in PDF format)

Contact Information

For more information about NDI's Northern Ireland program, please contact:

<http://www.ndi.org/ndi/worldwide/europe/northernireland/northernireland.htm>

22/01/01

NDI
Papers
to date

1

2

3

Washington, DC
Cathy Westley, Program Officer
(202) 797-4986
cathy@ndi.org

Updated September 2000

[Back to Top](#)

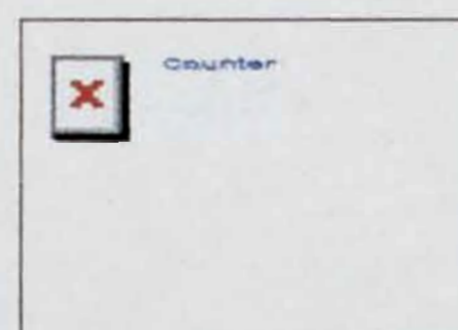
[\[About NDI \]](#) [\[Worldwide Activities \]](#) [\[Programs \]](#)
[\[Support NDI \]](#) [\[Resources \]](#) [\[Employment \]](#) [\[Search \]](#)
[\[Contact \]](#) [\[NDI Home \]](#)

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
1717 Massachusetts Avenue, NW Fifth Floor
Washington, DC 20036
Phone (202) 328-3136
Fax (202) 939-3166
webmaster@ndi.org

Copyright © 2000 National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). All rights reserved. Portions of this work may be reproduced and/or translated for non-commercial purposes provided that NDI is acknowledged as the source of the material and is sent copies of any translation.

Last updated 11/08/2000 22:18:40

The Icon Below is a statistical counter.



NDI ACTIVITIES IN EUROPE NORTHERN IRELAND

[Program Overview](#) [Northern Ireland Documents](#) [Contact Information](#)

The historic "Good Friday" Agreement reached on April 10, 1998 between the British and Irish governments and the political parties in Northern Ireland lays the foundation for peace after nearly 30 years of bitter sectarian conflict. Its centerpiece is the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly, elected in June following ratification of the Agreement by commanding majorities on both sides of the border. The Assembly will provide the primary forum for cross-community cooperation and consensus-building. In addition, the Agreement creates new institutional links within Northern Ireland; between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; and between Northern Ireland and other regions of the United Kingdom. It also contains measures on human rights, decommissioning of arms, release of prisoners, policing and other issues that have been sources of tension and conflict in Northern Ireland.

If the peace is to hold, the Assembly and its political parties must play a leading role in bringing effective governance to the people of Northern Ireland. Concurrent with the establishment of the Assembly, NDI began a program to assist the political parties in the legislature in their capacity as implementors of the Agreement with funding from the [National Endowment for Democracy \(NED\)](#).

NDI has contributed to facilitating dialogue between political parties and strengthening a nonviolent and democratic political process in Northern Ireland since 1985 by providing party-building assistance to a widening circle of parties. In June 1994, NDI began a program to strengthen political parties and the practice of politics in Northern Ireland while examining issues of politics in a divided society.

"Politics is about problems, but we need to go from abnormal problems and abnormal politics to normal problems and normal politics. NDI can help with this."

- Northern Ireland Assembly Leader

In June 1997, in cooperation with the McCormack Institute at the University of Massachusetts, NDI brought together 27 leaders from nine Northern Irish political parties with more than two dozen of the South Africans who actually negotiated the historic transition to all-race elections and democratic rule. The program, which was conducted before the Belfast talks that led to the Agreement, took place at a secluded military air base in the Western Cape where participants were isolated from political distractions. South Africa's Department of Constitutional Development sponsored the program and dubbed it an indaba – Zulu for a "gathering of the minds."

The South Africans described the challenges they faced in order to reach a "workable" negotiating model. They examined "real life" situations where deliberations broke down, and the actions taken to reconcile differences and resume the negotiation process. The participants developed a common understanding of the concepts and skills of negotiation necessary to identify common ground for peace.

On recent visits to Northern Ireland by NDI, political party leaders continued to describe their exposure to the South African experience as a vital component in reaching consensus during the talks.

In the spring and summer of 1998, NDI brought several groups of political party and civic leaders to Belfast to learn from the Northern Ireland experience. A delegation of political and civic leaders from Guyana and Lebanon, who are addressing issues of peace-making and constitutional accommodation in divided societies, met with the primary players involved in the peace process in London, Dublin and Belfast to gain ideas on how to move forward in their own countries. NDI also brought two groups of political party activists from Croatia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of

Macedonia to Belfast during the Assembly election period to learn how parties conduct democratic campaigns in a polarized environment. Upon their return, party members trained other members; and, in a recent election campaign in Macedonia, the party activists directly applied practical lessons learned in Northern Ireland about door-to-door canvassing and campaign literature.

"Not a day goes by in the talks that a reference is not made to the South Africa experience. It was a turning point in our lives," said one Northern Ireland political party leader during the Belfast talks.

In addition to the impact on the international visitors, the fact that decision-makers from divided societies are visiting Northern Ireland provides encouragement, confidence and support to those responsible for implementing the Agreement.

In September, NDI sent an assessment team to Belfast to consult with political leaders on ways in which NDI could assist political parties in the new Assembly. Across the board, leaders welcomed NDI assistance, and as a result, NDI is continuing to assist political parties in the new Northern Ireland Assembly in the specific context of the evolving peace and reconciliation process. Given the historic opportunity presented by the Agreement, the Assembly will provide the primary forum for cross-community cooperation and consensus-building while also providing to the people of Northern Ireland a regional legislature and government for the first time in a quarter century.

The initial three-part program began with a two-day seminar for Assembly members in November titled, "The Politics of Governing: Political Parties and the Northern Ireland Assembly," that brought together legislators from North America and Europe to share their experiences on the effective functioning of political party groups in a legislature. A third of the Assembly members participated, and as a typical comment, one said the "range of information—expertise and experience of individual contributors—and their flexibility and helpfulness, were outstanding." Besides the skills learned, important results occurred on the fringes of the workshop as well. For example, one prominent Unionist remarked that during a reception hosted by NDI and the US Consul General, he had for the first time "exchanged pleasantries" with a member of Sinn Féin.

The second component was a consultative visit for Northern Ireland party leaders to South Africa in December to investigate party relationships in the executive and the Assembly in the context of power-sharing arrangements. Assembly members looked at how South Africans are strengthening political trust at a time when new political institutions are being built and tested, and the patience of a war-weary public willing to try peace grows short. The Northern Irish especially appreciated the discussions about inter-party relations in the context of a power-sharing arrangement, the importance of seeking consensus within a shared executive, the need for coalition-building and the idea of the executive formulating a code of conduct for political parties. The multiparty make-up of the delegation helped towards building working relationships between parties. One party leader commented, "Maybe those who have spoken to each other here for the first time will now speak to each other in Belfast. The importance of this should not be underestimated."

The third component brought three legislators to Newcastle in April 1999 for a multiparty workshop to provide Assembly members with comparative examples of committee structure and operations and to strengthen the capacity of committees to play an effective role in the lawmaking process, oversee the executive and provide opportunity for citizen input. One Assembly member commented, "the involvement of NDI is vital both in the expertise it brings but also in the opportunities it creates for encouraging former "enemies" to sit down and work together."

On December 8 1998, at a dinner in Washington, NDI presented its annual Averell Harriman Democracy Award to the leaders of the eight parties in Northern Ireland that negotiated the "Good Friday" Agreement.

Northern Ireland Documents

[Building Strong Committees: Legislation, Oversight and Public Participation in the Northern Ireland Assembly, April 29 - May 1, 1999 \(in PDF format\)](#)

Contact Information

For more information about NDI's Northern Ireland program, please contact:

Washington, DC

Cathy Westley, Program Officer

(202) 797-4986

cathy@ndi.org

Updated September 2000

[Back to Top](#)

[[About NDI](#)] [[Worldwide Activities](#)] [[Programs](#)]
[[Support NDI](#)] [[Resources](#)] [[Employment](#)] [[Search](#)]
[[Contact](#)] [[NDI Home](#)]

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

1717 Massachusetts Avenue, NW Fifth Floor

Washington, DC 20036

Phone (202) 328-3136

Fax (202) 939-3166

webmaster@ndi.org