

PA- Consultation -  
meetings with political  
parties

2003/118.

**FROM: CHRIS STEWART**  
**COMMUNITY RELATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND VICTIMS DIVISION**  
**OFMDFM**  
**11<sup>TH</sup> JULY 2003**

**JOHN SPELLAR (B&L)**

*Copy distribution below*

**'A SHARED FUTURE' - LETTER FROM SINN FEIN**

**Summary**

**Issue:** Bairbre de Brun has written to you, criticising  
'A Shared Future'.

**Timescale:** Routine.

**Presentational issues:** None at present.

**Recommendation:** To invite representatives of Sinn Fein to a  
meeting to discuss the way forward on good  
relations policy.

**Background**

1. Bairbre de Brun wrote to you on 26 June about the consultation document on good relations, 'A Shared Future'. The letter is critical of the document, and is clearly intended to 'mark your card' in advance of a more substantive response later in the summer.
2. The main points of Sinn Fein's analysis appear to be:
  - the Government has ignored the structural causes of poor community relations, which Sinn Fein see as the main issue;
  - structural inequality is the principal cause of, as well as a manifestation of, poor community relations; and
  - the promotion of equality is the key to improving community relations.
3. Sinn Fein is clearly seeking to position or align the issue of community relations within its equality and human rights agenda.



This is a typical response – almost any issue of social policy that arises is appraised in terms of the contribution that it might make to this agenda and treated accordingly. Equally, any social policy that is not presented by Government as stemming directly from equality and human rights commitments is presented as a weakening of those commitments.

4. This general Sinn Fein position has resulted in a simplistic analysis of community relations, which is flawed in its description of the causes and necessary policy response. There is of course, no doubt that a lack of equality has been a contributing factor to poor community relations. However, Sinn Fein ignores the many other factors, not least the violent conflict that resulted in over 3000 deaths. Sinn Fein also portrays poor community relations (for nationalists) as being a purely rational response to the political situation. This ignores the more visceral component of sectarianism, which is all too prevalent in both communities.
5. In terms of a policy response, it is clearly accepted that progress in promoting equality of opportunity can contribute to improving good relations. However, to suggest, as Sinn Fein does, that the promotion of equality should be the key component of good relations policy is to ignore the key message in A Shared Future, that indirect approaches alone are insufficient to deal with sectarianism and the abnormal relationship between sections of the Northern Ireland Community.

### **Recommendation**

6. A key aim of A Shared Future is to promote debate on the way forward. I recommend a brief reply to Ms de Brun, inviting representatives of Sinn Fein to a meeting to discuss the issues.



Des Browne had planned similar meetings with Assembly parties, and you may wish to reinstate these.

*C F Stewart*

**C F STEWART**

**☎ 28351**



## Copy Distribution

Nigel Hamilton, HOCS  
Will Haire  
Mary Bunting  
Rosalie Flanagan  
Edgar Jardine  
Denis McCartney  
John McKervill  
Stephen Grimason  
Chris Maccabe, NIO  
Denis Ritchie

I thank you for your letter of 26 June about 'A Shared Future'. The Government is keen to ensure a comprehensive debate on the way forward for policy on good relations, and I welcome the fact that Sinn Féin intends to submit a substantive response in due course.

I would also welcome the opportunity to meet representatives of your party to discuss the issues raised. If you agree, perhaps you would contact my office to make the necessary arrangements.

BY HON JOHN SPELLAR MP  
Minister of State for Northern Ireland



**DRAFT LETTER FOR THE SIGNATURE OF JOHN SPELLAR**

Ms Bairbre de Brun  
Sinn Fein  
51-55 Bóthar na bhFál  
BÉAL FEIRSTE  
BT12 4PD

July 2003

Thank you for your letter of 26 June about 'A Shared Future. The Government is keen to ensure a comprehensive debate on the way forward for policy on good relations, and I welcome the fact that Sinn Fein intends to submit a substantive response in due course.

I would also welcome the opportunity to meet representatives of your party to discuss the issues raised. If you agree, perhaps you would contact my office to make the necessary arrangements.

**RT HON JOHN SPELLAR MP**  
**Minister of State for Northern Ireland**