

5th October 2001



Dear friend

Re: Healing Through Remembering Consultation Process

I am writing on behalf of the Board of the *Healing through Remembering Project* to inform you of a wide consultation process we are undertaking on dealing with the events connected with the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. I hope that your organisation will make a response and that you will also draw the attention of any other interested organisations or individuals to this piece of work.

The Project

The *Healing through Remembering Project* seeks to identify and document possible mechanisms and realisable options for healing through remembering for those people affected by the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. The Project was set up in December 2000, arising from several years work with Dr Alex Boraine (Deputy Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa) including the publication of the report *All Truth is Bitter*. The Project has received independent funding to carry out a wide consultation about the possible options for healing through remembering for those people affected by the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. We are now beginning this consultation process, which will result in the production of a report outlining different options for how Northern Ireland can deal with the past. The final report, to be produced in March 2002, will be received by the British, Irish and local Governments.

Process

The Project aims to build on a range of previous and current local, national and international initiatives. We hope to get the views and opinions of a wide group of organisations and individuals in order that our final report may best reflect the wishes of all concerned.

Enclosures

The following information is attached:

- Project Questions
- Options for Making Submissions

Further Information

If you would like more information on this Project, including other questions and publications which may help your debate, please contact the office at the numbers below.

Yours sincerely

Professor Roy McClelland
Chairman

Encs

Healing through Remembering

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Invitation for Submissions



The *Healing Through Remembering Project* is undertaking a consultation process on how people should remember the events connected with the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. This is no small task but it is important that all communities and groups views are reflected. The purpose of the consultation is to produce a document outlining a range of options for dealing with the past and truth recovery, to be submitted to the various governments by March 2002.

Principal Question:

How should people remember the events connected with the conflict in and about Northern Ireland and in so doing, individually and collectively contribute to the healing of the wounds of society?

Sub questions:

What should be remembered?

What form could the remembering take? For example, individual processes, community processes (e.g. storytelling, art exhibitions, etc.) and/or national strategies such as truth commissions and/or inquiries and/or trials in the courts, etc.

What could be the hurdles to such processes?

What could be the implications and consequences of such processes?

For a submission form and further information (including questions for consideration, relevant publications and addresses) please contact:

Healing through Remembering
Unit 4 River's Edge
15 Ravenhill Road
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BT6 8DN

Tel: 028-9073-9601

Fax: 028-9073-9602

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Options for making submissions

1. Send written responses to questions as listed opposite.
2. Contact office requesting further information. Formulate reply upon receipt and send.
3. Visit the project website, www.healingthroughremembering.org and reply using the on-line submission form.
4. Attend one of public events to be held in the near future at a variety of locations. These events will look at particular issues in more depth. People are encouraged to attend these events and then make submissions.
5. The project will be offering a limited opportunity for facilitating group meetings to discuss the issues concerned.



INFORMATION PACK

Contents:

Submission Form

Questions for Consideration from *All Truth is Bitter*

Questions for Consideration from *Past Imperfect*

Background to the Project

List of Board Members

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For Office Use Only		
Date received:		



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How should people remember the events connected with the conflict in Northern Ireland and in so doing, individually and collectively contribute to the healing of the wounds of society?

Submission Form

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Your Details:

Name:	
Organisation (if appropriate)	
Address:	
Tel:	
E-mail:	

Do you want your name OMITTED from the list of contributors in the project report?	Yes/No
If YES then how do you wish to be identified? eg "Shopkeeper during the 1970s" eg "Wife shot dead in 19...."	
I wish to be identified as:	

Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

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Date received:

Sub questions: *What are the hurdles to such processes?*

What should be remembered?

What could be the implications and consequences of such processes?

What form could the remembering take? For example, individual processes, community processes (e.g. storytelling, art exhibitions, etc.) and/or national strategies such as truth commissions and/or inquiries and/or trials in the courts, etc.

Have you attached further sheets? Yes/No

If yes how many? _____

END

Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

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Date received:		

What could be the hurdles to such processes?

What could be the implications and consequences of such processes?

Have you attached further sheets? Yes/No

if yes how many? _____

END

Please continue on a separate sheet if necessary.

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AN EXTRACT FROM: **ALL TRUTH IS BITTER**

QUESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

All sides will have to agree that the process of truth telling is necessary. Perhaps the current process of demands for inquiries and the responses that are received provide some scope for an identification of the role and limits of such inquiries in the truth telling process. The alternative is interminable contested judicial hearings. Nevertheless any Truth and Reconciliation Commission process will require the endorsement of all political groupings. Some thought needs to be given to how this might be achieved and what factors will be required to establish a truth finding process. The following identifies the questions that have merged from this report and some possible recommendations that emerge from those questions.

Questions For The Future

The questions, drawn from the week's discussion are listed under four general areas; Shared Understanding, Truth Telling, The Role of the Churches and NGO's and Achieving Change. The very first question must be answered before the other, more particular and detailed questions are addressed.

1. **Are we convinced that a process of denial, of collective amnesia, will not work?**

SHARED UNDERSTANDING

2. How do we ensure that we can establish a truth that is shared by all?
3. How do we achieve the acceptance of the greatest majority of the community and all sections of society to a truth process?
4. How can we transcend the idea of the 'legitimate victim'?
5. Can a shared understanding of the events that occurred in Northern Ireland between 1921 and 1969 be achieved? Will this help the healing process?
6. Can there be a shared understanding of the benefits that have accrued to both communities because of anti-discrimination legislation and practices introduced since 1970?
7. What mechanisms can be put in place to achieve a shared understanding about the nature of the past in Northern Ireland?

TRUTH TELLING

8. Can a series of inquiries into particular incidents play a role in establishing a shared truth?
9. Would it be possible to have a process that included some inquiries for particularly controversial incidents whilst having a parallel Truth and Reconciliation Commission type process for other incidents?
10. In the absence of a political settlement and the associated lack of trust can a series of inquiries produce a shared truth similar to that sought by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission?
11. Where there has been no radical change in government how can the State be persuaded to tell the truth?
12. What kind of rules should govern a truth finding process in respect of amnesty, reparation for victims and the relationship with the prosecution process?
13. What kind of process is required to ensure that both main communities and the State are committed to a truth telling process?
14. How can we ensure the independence of a truth finding process? What is the role of independent and international figures in such a process?
15. How can we ensure that victims can tell their own stories, be heard and then move on?
16. What role should the media play in supporting a truth telling process?
17. How can we ensure that the stories of perpetrators are truthful?
18. How can the wishes of victims and victim organisations be taken into account when designing a truth finding process?
19. How can we ensure that all those involved in violence, on behalf of the State and paramilitary organisations, participate and tell the truth?
20. Will our community be prepared to tolerate an amnesty provision? Should this be a blanket provision or relate to specific incidents?

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCHES AND NGO'S

21. How can the church be encouraged to reflect a position on our conflict based on universal theological truths rather than narrow community mores?
22. What is the role of the church in transforming our own community? What relationship should the church have to politicians and political change?
23. How can the church be persuaded to be a reasoned but critical voice, of it's own community first before they look to the faults of the other community?
24. Does the NGO sector have a special role to play in establishing a truth finding process?

25. Will the Civic Forum have a particular function? Could the Civic Forum be seen as the body that gives a truth finding process its authority or its independence?

ACHIEVING CHANGE

26. Are there special needs we have to recognise of young people who have been raised in conflict and know no other way of life?
27. Are the special needs of ex-combatants addressed; are their special criteria required for a truth process that enables ex-combatants to leave the struggle behind them?
28. What special measures are required to deal with our intensely localised conflict?
29. Is one touchstone of success the ability of many people to return to the communities that they left because of fear of violence and death?
30. How can we achieve a change that removes the sense of the need to defeat the other side?
31. How can we all learn to challenge our own allegiances, to manage without the comfort of our own reference group?
32. How can we begin a process of healing in the absence of a political settlement? What are the steps we must take; what is our goal? Is this completely independent of the political process or are they intertwined?
33. How can we avoid the dangers of those who want to identify the 'true' victims, to establish a hierarchy of victims with the worthy and unworthy?

NB Copies of the *All Truth is Bitter* report of Dr Alex Boraine's visit to Northern Ireland are available from the *Healing Through Remembering* offices, [tel: 028-9073-9601].

AN EXTRACT FROM: **PAST IMPERFECT**

Questions: Appendix One

Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland

Questions and Issues to Consider

On 8 and 9 of June 1998, INCORE hosted the Dealing with the Past: Reconciliation Processes and Peace Building Conference in Belfast. At the conference the chapters in this book were first presented and a range of discussions held with the participants. This chapter draws on the conference discussions, as well as the questions asked to the authors of the chapters in this book. In addition, at the conference, a range of group discussions were held focusing on various issues. Some of the opinions of the conference group discussions are expressed in this chapter as they raise pertinent issues for discussion.

This chapter is not meant to be an exhaustive or complete reflection of the discussion held at the Dealing with the Past: Reconciliation Processes and Peace Building Conference. Rather, it highlights questions that community groups and politicians should be considering when thinking about how Northern Ireland can deal with the past.

The Role of the Truth

'There have been debates within the South African TRC with regard to versions of the truth. The least that we can hope for is that we no longer perpetrate the lie. The full account of events is probably not obtainable. We do hope, however, that the Commission will lay the way open for new research. At least the Commission is a real challenge to the old version of events, even if we do not come to the full truth. For many people the hearing of the stories has been the most important part in seeking the truth' (Mary Burton).

Is there such a thing as the truth? If not, can we ever consider a truth recovery process in Northern Ireland? Is the truth needed to adequately deal with the past in Northern Ireland?

The Role of Acknowledgement

'I am struck by the way in which two worlds can easily exist on one geographical area. This was very true for us in South Africa. I am astonished by the number of people, including some of my own friends who I have known for many years in South Africa who come to me now and say how terrible it must be for me to have to work on this Commission and have to face the horrific stories which are emerging, which we did not know about. I would love to say to them why then, twenty years ago when I was standing on a street corner with a placard, did you look the other way. There were, at that time, people who were trying to make these events and atrocities known and it is only now, when it is safer, that people are hearing and acknowledging the events of the past. Part of the question of taking responsibility is being forced to look at that acknowledgement straight in the eye' (Mary Burton).

What do we mean when we say that all people in Northern Ireland must acknowledge their past? In order for Northern Ireland to move on do all its people need to acknowledge their role in the past? How can we facilitate this process? What structures can be set up to facilitate acknowledgement of those hurt in the past? Does acknowledgement help anyway?

The Role of Trauma and Individual Healing

'Resources are already in place within the communities, but they needed to be utilised and built upon in order to be effective. There were also questions raised about the accessibility, applicability and acceptability of services to the community. Although the group did recognise that there is a talent within the community, people must also recognise their own limitations. Other skills may need to be taught' (The working group that focused on trauma and individual healing).

What is the role of trauma counselling, and other forms of support, in dealing with the wounds of the past? What services are available locally and how can these be built? Can mental health and medical services in Northern Ireland be reformed to become accessible, applicable and acceptable, or does an alternative route need to be sought?

The Role of Support for those Suffering

'One of the things which we did in our study was to take statements from 65 people across Northern Ireland from various walks of life. The two things that people mentioned most in those testimonies were fear and anger. It seems to me that people who are in a situation where fear and anger are uppermost in their minds are not in a good position to change. In order to change the emotional process of dealing with what has happened has to be engaged. The fear has to be reduced by the absence of violence and the anger has to be recognised and honoured. Beyond that, the hurt has to emerge, be recognised and worked through. The enormous grief that has been felt in this community has not even been touched yet' (Marie Smyth).

How do we deal with the pain and grief of the violence of the Troubles? Is trauma counselling enough? What do we mean when we say the hurt has to be 'worked through'? Can any government structures help in this regard? Would public testimony of victims like that seen in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission be useful?

The Role of Perpetrators

'There are levels of victimisation and levels of perpetration, both direct and indirect. At no time in the last four years that I have been involved in Victim Support Groups in South Africa has anyone said to me we are all victims. The people who do say it are generally people in higher positions of power. I do believe, however, that when you have been through a conflict situation you become victimised in terms of the way you think and your attitude - at that level of the mind I would call it victimisation. I would also say that we are not all innocent. We have all done something in a situation which has perpetuated that situation' (Brandon Hamber).

Is there a spectrum of acts that perpetuate conflict situations? Are we all completely innocent? Are we all victims? Can a person be both perpetrator and victim? Did people perpetuate the conflict by doing nothing? How do we all take responsibility for the Troubles? Should we all take responsibility, or do different people have to take different types of responsibility?

The Role of Grass-roots Truth Recovery

'In my work in Guatemala we have engaged in an alternative Truth Commission for a very simple reason. People felt betrayed. People have come to us with their horrific stories and we must take all their stories seriously. We must show people that we believe their truth. By documenting the experiences of those who come to us, we begin to secure the process in which reconciliation can take place' (Roberto Cabrera).

Can communities get involved in truth recovery work at a local level? Should truth recovery only be the role of governments? Does an official governmental acknowledgement of past hurts, like those given through truth commissions, help?

The Role of Story-telling.

'The importance of churches and church groups in providing the context in which people can share their stories and their experiences within "mixed settings" was also raised. These kind of meetings, it was felt, can be profoundly transformative when stories are told in the present of the 'other'. It was felt that when stories are merely recounted within separate communities, there is a tendency to merely reinforce the experiences that people have had. A challenge to the churches is to provide contacts where people have the chance to hear stories from other communities' (The working group focused on the role of the church).

What is the role, through church structures or others, of story-telling in healing the wounds of the past? What can we do to facilitate, and listen to, the stories of the other side? Should we listen to the stories of the other side anyway?

The Role of Reparation and Compensation

'The government, the community, local businesses and individuals had all inclusive roles to play. If it is just left to the government then it would be very easy to see failure and then to scapegoat them. If everyone in the community has a piece of the responsibility then it would be more helpful. But, can you actually make amends? You really cannot give back time, emotions, limbs, peoples lives' (The working group focused on making amends).

Is the idea of making amends for past hurts necessary and beneficial? Who needs to make amends in Northern Ireland? How can amends be made for past hurts in Northern Ireland? How can this be facilitated?

The Role of Forgiveness

'How can you forgive someone who says they did not do it? There is a twin here between forgiveness and repentance - both of them are things that we strive towards,

and they are gifts. They arrive on you as a result of work you have been doing - they are not come as something that you purchase easily. We, as a community have to create the climate in which people can stand up and say I did this. It is incredibly important that it is done on behalf of the people who have been hurt most' (Marie Smyth).

Can there be forgiveness without those who have wronged you taking responsibility for their actions? Do communities in Northern Ireland make enough space for those who have committed wrong to take responsibility for their actions? Are reconciliation and forgiveness the same thing?

The Role of Social Transformation and Reconciliation

'If you look at most Truth Commission processes you will see that truth, for truths sake is a pretty pointless exercise and counselling for counselling sake is equally a waste of time unless it is coupled with some form of social transformation. The TRC is going to be remembered in history as a bad exercise if the government continues in the way it is presently going - in terms of its economic line and that the gaps between the rich and poor do not narrow. If peoples lives do not change then reconciliation is simply a waste of time' (Brandon Hamber).

Is there a relationship between reconciliation, social transformation and equality in Northern Ireland? Is reconciliation dependent on economic and social equality, or can there be some reconciliation before broad social change takes place?

The Role of History

'It is too soon to talk of history. There is little consensus on the past. More agreement exists on how to co-operate for the future than on history. If we are going through a period of change it seems important to solidify the past. Only when we reach a period of relative stability can we return to re-examine history. However, critical self-reflection, within groups, is important, but a moment of definitive transformation has not taken place yet' (The working group focused on the role of history).

What is the role of history in Northern Ireland? Is its role only destructive? Are there ways of reconciling the competing versions of the past held by different communities? Are there any uniting symbols in Northern Ireland, or do these need to be created afresh?

The Role of Justice

'In terms of rebuilding the social fabric we need to set in place mechanisms so that we don't repeat the last thirty years. This does not suggest that one would like to return to where Northern Ireland was thirty years ago either. As a consequence, the question should be changed from focusing on "rebuilding the social fabric" to building a just society, because rebuilding sounds like we are looking to the past, not the future' (The working group focused on rebuilding the social fabric).

How do we build a just society in Northern Ireland? What is the relationship between truth and justice? Can communities contribute to processes that promote

reconciliation rather than division? How can we prevent the violence of the past from ever happening again?

The Role of the Past and Present

'We need to be thinking about both the past and present contexts. One of the difficulties and challenges which we have faced in South Africa...is that we now see the violence of the past as political and the violence of the present as criminal, and both as completely different. There appears to be no sense of continuity about what seemed to be occurring in the past and what is happening in the present. I can almost guarantee you that within four years in Northern Ireland, if relative peace is achieved here, you will be talking about rising crime rates in that same way that we are in South Africa. It is important that we find some way to make the shift so that we recognise the link between so-called political and ordinary crime (Brandon Hamber).

Is there a relationship between past and present violence in Northern Ireland? If so, how do we deal with this? Can governmental bodies or truth commissions address these sorts of problems?

NB *Past Imperfect: Dealing with the Past in Northern Ireland and Societies in Transition* Edited by Brandon Hamber, first published in 1998 by INCORE is available in hard copy from:

INCORE, Aberfoyle House, Northland Road, Londonderry, BT48 7JA.
Telephone 028-7137-5500



The Background to the Project

In February 1999 Victim Support Northern Ireland (VSNI) and the Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO) jointly decided to invite Dr Alex Boraine to visit Northern Ireland. Dr Boraine, Deputy Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) in South Africa, met a number of groups and individuals to discuss the experience of, and the lessons learnt from, the TRC and to consider any bearing they may have on the conflict in Northern Ireland.

VSNI and NIACRO produced a report of the discussions which had taken place, entitled *All Truth is Bitter*. Dr Boraine returned to Northern Ireland in March 2000 for further discussions based on this report.

It was clear from these meetings that there was a surprising amount of consensus amongst those whom he met. It was agreed that it would be a useful exercise to explore and debate ways of examining the possible parameters within which we might establish a mechanism to identify our own truth.

Believing that these issues may be important for a healing process, and that they can form some of the basic building blocks on which to construct the eventual answers to the transformation of our conflict, NIACRO and VSNI, along with the Community Relations Council, prepared a proposal for the next stage of debate and discussion. This proposal involved more in-depth conversations with individuals and representatives, some previously contacted and some new to the debate, in order to distil the specific ideas/suggestions that arise. Central to the project is the idea that the people who have been damaged have to be included in designing and endorsing the processes we use to arrive at eventual solutions. The people who have been hurt must be given space to allow them to make decisions as to what attitude — and action — to take in order to be reconciled with their hurt. The rest of us can only facilitate or hinder such developments. Any process must ensure that victims will not be exploited.

A number of funders have confirmed their support for the proposal. The next stage of the work, based on the proposal, is entitled the *Healing through Remembering Project*.

Healing through Remembering

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Public Talk
PRISCILLA HAYNER

Author of 'Unspeakable Truths'

A study of truth commissions in twenty-one countries

The Tara Centre, Holmview Terrace, Omagh
at 7:30pm on Wednesday 21st November 2001

The Junction, Bishop Street, Derry
at 8:00pm on Thursday 22nd November 2001

Grosvenor House, Glengall Street, Belfast
at 1:00pm on Friday 23rd November 2001

Priscilla Hayner is the Programme Director
at the International Center for
Transitional Justice, New York.



Event hosted by Healing
Through Remembering

www.healingthroughremembering.org