

An Crann



The Tree

Helping people to tell and to hear the stories of the 'Troubles'

15th October 2001

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Civic Forum

24 OCT 2001

Secretariat

Dear Alan and Patricia,

We have received and made a response to the Victim's Strategy Consultation Document. I enclose copies of our responses to various other consultations which are close to victims issues and I believe will have bearing on a Victims Strategy. I also enclose a proposal of my own for consideration. In general, they represent the current thinking in An Crann - The Tree and whilst I am the primary author of these responses, these considerations are tempered by engagement with victims, some of whom work for us voluntarily and whose opinion I sought.

Additional observations we have made are as follows:

First, many victims simply wish to get on with and rebuild their lives. They don't wear their scars like victims of punishment beatings.

Second, some victims seek revenge and retribution on the perpetrators but do nothing and become apathetic about their condition. They shrug their shoulders, complain and thank god that's all.

Third, some victims do actively seek and take revenge: there have been killings which could be ascribed to this condition. We cannot legislate or socially engineer against this possibility.

Fourth, there are victims inside certain communities who are disempowered by the fact that it was members of their own community who were the perpetrators. For many if not most of these people they are economically incapable of escaping the continuing stress of victimhood within their communities.

Fifth, some victims simply succumb and develop related problems such as comfort drinking or drug taking which often leads to dependency.

Sixth, some victims take their own lives.

Seven, some victims actually forgive, perhaps informed by a religious faith, perhaps by generosity and magnanimity of humane spirit. There is no real accounting for forgiveness.

Eight, some survivors become involved in peer activities perhaps motivated by noble intentions, some, it seems, from a political agenda, perhaps too as a means of seeking a vengeful form of justice.

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I think there is a problem with the definition of 'victim'. It is contextualised to mean those who have suffered directly from an act of politically motivated violence. This tends to exclude those who suffer indirectly such as a prisoner's wife in grave peril at the hands of a maladjusted husband after his release. Nor does it include members of the security services, bus drivers, police, ambulance, hospital staff and fire-crews who have had to deal with the most horrendous circumstances. In fact the narrow definition excludes a large portion of our long suffering community.

Whilst it is appreciated that a start should be made somewhere, what ever policies do emerge and practical help offered to victims, we need, I believe, to bear in mind the real possibility of extending a 'Survivor Salvage Service' to a wider range of citizens. (I use the term Survivor Salvage Service in contrast to the lack of service that exists even in the present.)

Whilst the treatment of physical injuries in Northern Ireland is probably second to none, I'm afraid the treatment of mental illness and associated trauma is inadequate. Much seems to be left to voluntary organisations which are not clinical therapy practices. It is my opinion that there are too many peddlers of smelly candles and buttermilk massages who offer the vulnerable so-called help when in fact they are merely pickpockets looting the already hurt. I would not trust my dog to some of these well intentioned lifestyle gurus.

This leads me to the belief that every victim of every degree of violence should not only get a first visit or leaflet through the door, but become engaged in an ongoing service via police, hospitals, doctors and social services to enable them to rebuild and move on.

There is nothing worse for someone trying to overcome the traumas of violence than to have live in the very conditions from which the violence emerged. People do move away. People leave this province. People such as the 800 on the Shankill had to move house recently. People call for the building of 'peace-walls' on sectarian interfaces.

It is one thing to be a victim of violence perpetrated by 'the other side'. In this circumstance there can be communal comfort which may range from joining a paramilitary organisation to involvement in church or other spiritual comforts. But when the violence is within, there are not so many people with the courage to prosecute or be witnesses to a neighbour's actions, especially if that person is 'connected'. These are the people who suffer constantly, these are the people who need help, perhaps as much as the bereaved

The responsibility for much of this victimhood rests with the paramilitaries of whatever colour. There must be a public campaign, television etc., to drive home the message that there must be no more victims, that antisocial behaviour as well as guns and bombs is not acceptable or tolerable. I think it is a responsibility we all bear to try and alter the future so that there are no more victims of sectarian violence and would be a fitting memorial to those who have suffered in extremis..

Yours sincerely,

Dennis Greig (Honorary Secretary)

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In giving consideration to the 'Paper' I personally felt it was best to begin any feedback starting at the end of the document, Annex F, and work from that point towards the beginning.

The reason is relatively simple: The NIO and OFMDFM represent the highest authority for the matters under discussion and both offices jointly and separately are the highest level of management and supervision of related policies, funding allocations and disbursement at local level. These duties and responsibilities are outlined in Annex F.

Whilst both Offices and their relevant Victims' Units may need to work separately, (for the time being) for several reasons, *a single, public and easily accessed interface unit* may need to be created. (a Commission for Victims). This could be based on the current IDWG.

A further complication and added set of responsibilities may come into play if and when the *Human Rights Commission* make determinations which will have policy implications and obligations.

It is worth considering *a single entity for implementing, managing, administering and funding the several areas of policy* as implied by both Offices' stated responsibilities and aspirations indicated in this Paper.

Three key areas of joint activity and responsibility are already stated in Annex F and it may be an appropriate course of action to devise a single entity as suggested above.

This leads back to Annex E.

The list of Potential Funding Sources is of course a representative sample. However, a number of issues affect both applicants and funders which in turn, create *serious inefficiencies in the application, project implementation, management and reporting processes*. One is the different criteria which each 'funder' apply not only in terms of areas of activity, (what they will or will not fund) but also the reporting procedures each require to be followed and to which recipients must give satisfactory responses.

My own experience has been one of disappointment, especially when 'goal-posts' are moved by funders after a project is up and running. I have been informed by various other parties, both funders and recipients of funds that mid-activity policy changes and other demands have had negative effects on projects and the funding partnership arrangement. Many community groups are reluctant to engage again with intermediary funders after bad experiences.

The changes themselves came, I believe, from some notion of 'transparency and accountability', probably at the behest of Westminster's Public Accounts Committees and European concerns.

Third party fund managers the 'Peace 1' allocation, have been quite traumatised by their own experiences of implementing policy changes, at least those employees who are at the 'coal-face', working with groups.

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There is an intrinsic conflict of interest for many of these people - get the funds to the people who need them, get results on the ground, or satisfy some accounting policy.

The cost of supervising funds could well be greater than the value of funds disbursed - such procedures are already a heavy burden on state services, i.e. five area health boards each with its multiple management and administration costs, yet providing a single service.

Decentralisation gone a bit mad.

Small groups may not always have the resources to cope with the demands of funders, especially in terms of reportage, not of project activity, but the 'bean-counting' which adds hidden costs and stress to projects.

I am of the opinion that *a single unit* as suggested above *should administer all funds* rather than a plethora of sources to which groups may apply. This should ensure *a single standard applied across the board* with sufficient in-built leeway to take into consideration the context in which applicants and projects operate. Further, each project, whether community, voluntary or professional, should have a '*Field Officer*' of the VLU and/or VU (or a *Commission*) on board their management committees or at least liaise in a permanent contact basis so that groups can operate in the best manner possible and that practical help with good guidance and practice is available, especially in areas of fund management and reportage.

It has been my own experience that contact between community groups and some third party funders has not been good and in some instances has led to severe inefficiencies in the sector as well as failure of projects.

It is especially important to have quick access to professional help or contact given the demands placed on groups — is it really reasonable for a small locally based project to operate to 'Green Book' standards?

It is my further experience that many of these 'management' issues detract from the projects' core activity and group initiative. Furthermore, many people in NCI and community groups in particular are 'burnt out' in the sense that they have had enough of committees and meetings, regulations and procedures. Consequently, many groups have difficulty replacing members or attracting new members willing to engage in committee work.

Whilst the various funding agencies have been well intentioned, as are the initiators of projects at community level, the past few years have soured and damaged many people who aspired to be of service to the community in general and their own 'constituencies' in particular. I'm sure that within the local civil service there are many shattered careers and lives as a consequence of 'policy changes' and for 'carrying the can' when things go wrong.

Whilst I advocate a single funding source for all activity on behalf of Victims beyond the services provided by the State (medical etc.) I have digressed to add my concerns for those civil servants and other employees in third party funding agencies who have in some ways suffered from managing a 'peace process' and its shifting policies.

It is out of concern for making service and or any or provision accessible that I have perhaps overly laboured the above points.

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Annex C appears to me to be the next area on which to report back. There is however, for me, one key issue which has not been defined or addressed and perhaps an outworking of the derived policy/ies will in time answer that question.

Simply put: what are victims' needs?

From the definition of victim given at the beginning of the document, it follows that some areas of support and or action are already an integral part of State provision, particularly medical services. However, any critique or criticism of service will impact on the general provision of services. Unfortunately, the 'Health Service' is already the subject of ridicule and criticism so it is hard to see any specific improvement in those services given the current state of provision or at least expect a reversal of the criticisms of the service until such times as health services of all kinds return to being 'people-centred' facilities rather than experiments in accountancy or other 'modern fiscal management' theories.

It is stated in the Paper that victims will not be given 'preferential treatment', yet any and all of the matters under discussion in the Paper are cases of preferential treatment.

There is nothing wrong with showing such concern and seeking to remedy any deficiencies in our society at every level. It is right to include victims issues in any policy of reconstruction for our society. We all 'live in the shadow of the gunman' and there are areas of Northern Ireland where whole communities exist under a grey pall of communal intimidation and the threat of violence. There are places where liberty and freedom only exist in the context of conforming to prevailing and predominating threat. The honest fact is that there is no peace process and at the time of writing this response (August 01) we may expect a worsening situation.

Of great importance to me is the mounting suicide rate across every level of society. It has been stated that 5,000 people committed suicide in the first few years following the 1994 'Cease-fires' and is rising at an alarming rate. Whilst no suicide is simple in its cause and always a multiplicity of factors combine to produce such tragic outcomes. These facts indicate to me that there is a more insidious kind of victimisation which is not necessarily the subject of investigation or reportage nor in a manner which would link these tragedies to the 'Troubles' or acts of verifiable violence.

Another matter of importance is the breakdown of family life following tragedy. Has this been measured? Also, the high failure of marital breakdowns among ex-prisoners. I have observed at first hand families breaking down and the frequent violence associated with such breakdowns. Isn't the ex-prisoner's wife who suffers at the hands of a violent, ex-prisoner husband as much a victim as any other? Aren't the children? I ask these questions because I have called police and ambulances to such situations or rendered first aid to a battered woman, because I or my wife have talked a mother out of suicide. I have known women almost butchered by violent 'partners'. Then too, those who wish to express their culture and traditions, the communities disrupted by violent troublemakers such as those 'contentious' areas since 1994, are all victims of violence instigated by those who apparently do not want peace. Peace is never the domination of one side over the other but an acceptance of each other, anything else is victory or defeat, depending on sides winning or losing. The term may be 'communal victimhood'.

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To answer specific questions in **Annex C**:

Q1. This is a qualitative question beginning 'How best ...'. The single agency as suggested above may be a partial answer *in regards to secondary contact* with victims especially if as further suggested a '**Field Officer**' is appointed to each group as they newly emerge and to those already in existence. (*Primary contacts* outside the family with victims are police officers, ambulance, hospital staff, undertakers and the clergy, etc.).

An assumption seems to be implicit in the Paper that many if not most victims are members of particular interest groups. However, again, in part answer, there are organisations such as those for ex-service personnel, police officers and other employees such as medical staff, fire service, trade unions and many others, I'm sure, which have members who are 'victims' in the sense of the definition given in the Paper. *These organisations could be the basis for a series of first contact which could lead to future interaction.*

There are of course those victims who belong to no organisation whatever. My own family have on occasion been visited by representatives of a victims' support agency, on the foot of, I assume, police reportage of violence done to us.

Would it therefore be possible to identify victims from police reports and further, would it be possible for medical personnel, doctors, psychiatrists, health visitors and other service providers, to identify from their records, without prejudice to the principle of professional confidentiality, individuals who are or could be victims of violence and could those individuals be approached through existing services. These service providers may be Health Visitors, community nurses, doctors, organisation representatives, including the churches?

Would it be possible also to link premature death among witnesses or affected family members to the related secondary stress and trauma of violent experiences? Would it also be possible to tactfully screen these identification processes and activities so that abuse of provision would be reduced as far as possible?

Again the question arises, *what are the victims' needs and which specifically does the VLU VU and therefore Government intend to meet? It may well be that a new / niche department may need to be established to cope with the business of identifying, contacting and supporting the isolated individuals* rather than relying on outside groups to poll and or attract members into their organisation.

In short, does anyone know what is best for each context will have its own 'best'?

It must also be borne in mind that victims cannot participate in local affairs due to they themselves being victims of violence perpetrated from those within their own communities. To address this specific problem Rene Greig, current chairperson and voluntary Director of An Crann The Tree has established a subgroup to assist some victims (Victims in Mixed Marriages). Mrs. Greig in the course of her work for An Crann The Tree discovered the difficulties facing victims of violence especially if they have suffered as a consequence of violence perpetrated on themselves and family by members of their own community. These people tend to be plurally disenfranchised from full participation in community support initiatives or measures to alleviate suffering at a local level due to the 'closed' nature of some communities and antipathy towards those who have or may 'step out of line'.

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Q4 The actions suggested above may partially answer this question i.e. a single victims' unit and single funding source with appointed Field Officers to assist groups. Although I have mentioned ease of access as a desirable condition of support, services or funds, the definition of a 'funding process' needs to be addressed in itself. If we can define the who, what, where and how of a 'funding process' then we can also clarify applicants' understanding of that process. At the present time, grave uncertainty exists among potential applicants as to whether any new funding regime will actually come about, just as there is uncertainty among the Peace 1 third party distributors of funds in regards to their participation in the Peace 2 if there is going to be a Peace 2. Therefore I advocate a single funding source for all victims' programmes. *The Gap Funding process is a first class example of how to get funds to groups, it has been a superb example of efficiency and ease of access, drawdown and reportage. Brilliant compared to the drudgery involved in dealing with NIVT, Cooperation Ireland etc.*

Q5 Firstly, *victims' issues need definition*. For instance, in the Ardoyne area of North Belfast there are whole communities of victims. Each with their own different slant and definitions on relevant 'issues'. However, I assume that 'issues' will be those policy matters which may result from this consultation and other considerations. If it is a matter of raising awareness generally, then a sustained and wide ranging publicity campaign is probably the best way in tandem with the *supply of information to every household and place of business* in Northern Ireland. It may be worth considering delivering to local interest groups a series of seminars or workshop sessions or other methods of sharing information on a face-to-face one-to-one basis to target groups.

Q6 Partnerships within the statutory sector would necessarily be those having first contact with victims i.e. the police service, emergency services, health services, social services (welfare and benefits), housing, employment and rehabilitation projects, such as NIACRO and the Probation service. It may well be that the judicial and legal system will have to become an integral partner in any new arrangement.

Q7 *Introduction*. I think it may be of importance, for the purpose of this paper, to separate the voluntary from the community sector in order to identify potential links between the statutory sector and the potential voluntary/community partnerships. Both areas of activity probably have similar motivations, *raison d'être*, but the structures and organisational strengths are radically different, even their methods of working. For instance, a large voluntary agency may hold a seminar to discuss street violence in the Duncairn area of North Belfast, whereas representatives of community organisations actually meet on the ground, quite frequently in the middle of the night when trouble is brewing or has erupted, in order to help restore calm.

Therefore, the two sectors are different on the basis of practice, their status within the funding framework (community groups apply to voluntary groups for funds i.e. NIVT) and community affiliations. Some groups are more republican or loyalist in tenor, some have no contentious links or have interests that give no cause for concern in terms of 'perceived respectability'.

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When I think of the description 'voluntary' I think of fairly large organisations which have developed over the years i.e. VSB, NIVT, NICVA, Co-Operation Ireland etc., all of which have full time professional staff. By a strange irony the wage costs of many of these organisations and the levels of remuneration are the stuff of dreams for community organisations.

What I mean by this is, a community organisation targeting as much as £5,000 or £10,000 per annum would be able to do so much more if able to access such sums, yet frequently, are denied such relatively small amounts which would have a big impact on their capacities to develop and serve. Yet voluntary organisations as indicated above, seem to have no problem funding themselves at quite high levels of remuneration.

The Community sector to my mind is locally and/or neighbourhood based and in the context of N.I. mostly of a single identity nature, yet frequently, with a willingness, to engage in cross-community activities. The levels of support from funders, have been, in my experience, quite small. At the same time, the demands and workload involved in servicing the 'strings attached' to a small grant are as great as those for a million or so pounds. It must also be remembered that most community groups are 'voluntary' and probably don't have the expertise of 'voluntary sector' organisations.

It may be appropriate to engage in a definition exercise in order to establish some clarity of identification between the two sectors and therefore any subsequent partnership arrangements.

It is against this background that partnerships will need to be considered. Already, through the process of devolving Peace 1 funding disbursement to voluntary sector intermediaries, an implicit partnership arrangement already exists between Government and the voluntary sector. That such partnerships exist, unofficially at least, comes from my own personal experience of matters that have been reported to me and the organisations in which I participate, of interference and influence being exercised at high levels, to the detriment of projects in which I have an interest.

On the other hand, there is an evolving 'open' partnership between the community sector and statutory bodies. Prime examples are the police liaison work with community groups and these range from community or locally based officers of all ranks visiting or meeting with community groups and activists. The interagency forums in which the Housing Executive subscribe and have been key partners, is another good example of partnership work on the ground. A third and most salutary example has been the practice of the N.I. Assembly and its departments which have engaged in consultative processes on a huge range of issues, an example would be 'Unlocking Creativity'. The practice of the Assembly itself in these matters may be a good model of *participative democracy in action* which could be emulated by other statutory bodies.

It may be of greater importance to *develop a system of community liaison officers between the statutory bodies and the community sector* rather than the larger scaled 'voluntary' agencies. By a strange quirk, community organisations tend to be severely under funded, whereas 'voluntary' organisations are well provided for.

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Community organisations tend to be 'voluntary' whereas Voluntary organisations tend to be 'professionally' managed with paid employees and have a host of in-house services outside the reach of the typical community group.

Here too loyalty and commitment factors come into play. Community groups with a largely voluntary membership and agenda, tend to keep going despite experiencing a range of difficulties. Some simply collapse and fold. Voluntary organisations simply dismiss personnel and advertise for a new worker, buy a new computer or otherwise acquire the means of continuity.

It may be worth taking notice of existing and possible forthcoming Human Rights. Freedom to participate in the cultural and social life of society, linked to the Freedom of Association could have implications for funders who deny organisations the means, i.e. funds, to realise such rights, especially if peer group comparators can be found to support an organisation's case in law.

What is, perhaps, worthy of further consideration, is the ramifications of Human Rights for Government in situations where groups and individuals are denied funds from public sources such as the EC Peace-money or other Government sources. This is one of the reasons why a single agency to handle victim's issues and funds, with a consistent, universal set of standards, is, in my opinion, much more preferable than a leaky raft of voluntary sector intermediaries. Get rid of favouritism and funding bandwagons by the application of single standards of application criteria, selection procedures, support mechanisms, reportage (accounting, project, etc.)

Q8 This is a strange question. Firstly, there is a difference between those who commission research and those who do the research. There is a difference also between those two discrete functions and the organisation which is charged with implementing the results of such research.

Again, the answer comes back to the question and the question is, *'What are the questions that any piece of research seeks to answer or what kinds of information needs to be discovered and gathered in order to formulate further questions or devise policies and strategies?'*

If it is a case of defining and discovering 'victims needs', which is a key term of reference in this Paper, there are a whole range of judgmental questions to be answered. If, for instance, a victim has a 'drink' problem which developed from 'comfort' drinking, who frames the questions concerning that person? What kind of specialist can frame appropriate questions and suggest remedial action? Do we just give a flippant answer, 'ah, just a drunk, a dropout, a dysfunctional wino, should pull themselves together'? Or do we seek cause or effect and offer remedy other the phone number for Alcoholics Anonymous?

The question posed can only be addressed and answered at the highest level of authority. In this case the two leading Offices of Government. There are numerous independent research organisations and individuals as well as the Universities, all of which should, between them, service the needs for research into the 'issues' surrounding the context of this Paper.

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It may well be that a Research partnership between the Assembly, Human Rights Commission, Universities, the Audit Office, private sector, voluntary and community sectors, will need to be established in order to define relevancy, follow-up and implementation of discovered deficiency in policy matters, improvements where identified as well as new areas of activity or policy that need to be addressed.

Q9 As already suggested, *establish a single agency to handle all victims issues, plus a mass publicity campaign* - universal mail-out nation-wide, posters and leaflets everywhere, included in every shopping basket, every letter franked, every telephone service to issue a daily call to every subscriber on every telecom network including satellite and cable, every Internet server/provider to carry a banner advert on log-on or home pages - use all broadcasting media.

Q10 The answer to this question can only be made by defining 'victims needs or issues' and this again may be determined by answers to question 8 i.e. the results of good research. Having said that, any meetings at local level are bound to throw up items not included in a research exercise, or presented in different language to that which researchers may use to formulate their questions. Any process of discovery is better than no process.

It may be worth considering a series of primary 'open' sessions that would allow people to articulate their needs and concerns, say their piece which could then be analysed and interpreted into definitions.

Q11 Without knowing the constituents of the Touchstone Group, it would be difficult to properly answer this question.

Certainly, in whatever forum that replaces Touchstone, every service whose members have been directly affected in the course of their duties and employment should be represented. i.e. HM Forces, ex-service, prison officers, transport services, police service, emergency services, health service, care agencies, community and voluntary groups. In addition, each political party should be directly engaged, each have lost members or have had members suffer violence. I believe that this representation can be made without 'party politics' spoiling the process. Certainly trades and professional, commercial bodies should have representation, after all, business people of all kinds kept us going when everything else seemed to stop.

It is probable that such a forum will have a limited life-span, dependent entirely on the satisfaction of needs, issues and the achievement of real peace.

Perhaps this could be a 'victims representative forum' with its membership drawn from interest groups/organisations nominating their representatives, probably with the addition of nominees from Government - State bodies.

It all depends how big or small, sectorised or defined by demographic, economic or other status considerations, that those who may implement the findings of this paper which to set.

I am suggesting a fairly holistic approach to the matter.

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Q12 A Victims Commissioner may not be a bad idea. However, it seems that most of these offices, committees etc., tend to be filled by the chairperson's or commissioner's social, educational and economic peers.

The role would be that of supervisor of the commission, which could well be that single entity I've already suggested. This role would be in effect the equivalent of a Chief Executive Officer.

However, I suggest that it would not be a paid post, expenses and allowances yes, but the commissioner would be someone concerned with victims issues and not a well-pensioned post and an office remote from the blood and tearstained realities of victims.

A number of existing groupings could be pulled together into a single entity i.e. Touchstone, IDWG, CRC, CCRU, etc.

The commissioner and the commission would have parity with the highest offices of Government, being, in effect, the body putting into practice all the policies implied in this paper and any others that may evolve.

In addition to the ameliorative measures suggested in the Paper, I add a contentious proposal which on the surface may seem unacceptable, yet is and has been a first and last course of action for thousands of our people.

For years, there has been a net outflow of people from Northern Ireland, a trend which may have been reversed somewhat since the 1994 Cease-fires.

It may be that for many victims and their families, relocation could be the best medicine, either permanently or for short to medium term periods. In general, those who are socially mobile and have some economic power, can choose their options. I am thinking more of those with limited resources who are stuck in situations.

Could a plan or policy be devised that would enable trapped families and/or individuals to relocate? In particular, those countries who have shown their concern for the situation here via their commitment to the Ireland Funds.

Could those countries which already support the Ireland Funds act as hosts to affected families? Could the locally based organisation Springboard, act as an intermediary or as an agency to undertake such a relocation program? (Springboard already has years of experience placing young people in temporary situations abroad.)

Would it be possible to reinvent an assisted passage scheme to Commonwealth or other host nations? Would it be possible to provide support to relocated families/individuals via the existing ambassadorial system?

This is not intended to be a matter of passing the 'buck' or moving the problem onto others, it is a process of rehabilitating people outside the war zone, a case of giving people and peace a chance in a new environment. Responsibility for victims would continue through support to people in new locations.

cont. ...

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Summary:

The Paper is a good example of the participative process and the new democracy in Northern Ireland with which our more Neanderthal members of the Assembly are learning to cope, in tandem with the skill of walking upright. The Strategy itself is a very valuable step in reconstructing our society and may become a model to be emulated in and by, other war-torn communities. My opinion for what it is worth is simple, go for it. Change what needs to be changed in the light of experience and what proves workable leave alone or develop.

As stated in the Paper, changes will come about in due course, presumably on the basis of practice, observation, evaluation and revision.

It is my hope that there will be no more victims of our sectarian violence. However, we still have victims and survivors of the First World War and other wars, so we can expect victims and their particular problems to be with us for another hundred years or more. In 'Irish - Ulster' terms, there are those still fighting in the 1916 uprising, the Irish Civil War, still signing Covenants at city halls and other local wars. Too many in our society still wear the shrouds of martyrdom as a flag of convenience for their murderous deeds.

Whilst few, if any, answers have been given in simple sentences, the whole issue exercises my concerns for victims and issues relevant to their present circumstances.

These matters are now an intrinsic part of An Crann - The Tree's ethos. Many of our closest volunteers working on the ground and committee members have experienced violence in various ways and degrees in the context of this Paper's definition of victim. We have committee members who have been assaulted, beaten up, threatened, intimidated, shot at, bombed, had a gun placed against the temple - which didn't go off - as well as those who have lost family members. Many of us live in the grey fringes of intimidated communities. We know what its like.

The Draft Action Plan moves beyond the field of victims in some elements of its proposals, none- the- less it is a good start.

The Equality Impact Assessment is an excellent tool which should identify 'blue eyed favourites' in the field of working with victims and destigmatise certain groups less favoured.

An Crann - The Tree congratulates all those who have generated this consultative Paper, the elected personnel and the civil servants who have contributed so much to the process.

Whilst we can never empty the hopeless past, let us fill our future with a bright hope.

Dennis Greig
Secretary An Crann - The Tree
13th August 2001