



## The Unfinished business of Peace and Reconciliation: A Call to Action

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# Peace Summit

## 2023

*The Unfinished Business of  
Peace and Reconciliation*

**A Call to Action 24 May 2023**



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha  
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Peace Summit 2023: The Unfinished Business of Peace and Reconciliation. A Call to Action

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# CONTENTS

<b>CONTEXT.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>THE PROCESS.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>THEMATIC CONCERNS: 25 YEARS ON .....</b>	<b>3</b>
Political Progress .....	4
Political leadership and institutional fragility .....	4
Unequal economic and social peace dividend .....	7
Participation and civic engagement .....	8
Voice and participation.....	8
Investing in peacebuilding leadership .....	10
Cohesion and sharing .....	12
Respect, tolerance and community engagement.....	12
Social and residential segregation .....	13
Addressing paramilitarism .....	14
Integrating education and learning about the past.....	15
Issues not addressed in the Agreement.....	16
The legacy of the past.....	17
Brexit and constitutional matters .....	18
Mental health and the conflict .....	20
New communities.....	21
Addressing the Past, Building the Future .....	22

**A CALL TO ACTION ..... 24**

Re-establish Political Institutions and Address Deficits..... 24

Ensure Constructive Leadership ..... 25

Formulate an Inclusive Peace Plan ..... 25

Adapt the Agreement..... 26

Tackle Paramilitarism ..... 27

Good Relations Proofing and Address Segregation..... 27

Integrate Education..... 27

Enhance Youth Participation ..... 28

Create a Vehicle for Civic Engagement..... 28

Invest in Peacebuilding..... 29

Enhance Societal Well-Being..... 29

Undertake Civic Education on the Past and Future..... 30

**NEXT STEPS ..... 30**

**APPENDIX: CONSULTATION PROCESS..... 33**

Consultation Strands ..... 34

    Youth Engagement workshops ..... 34

    Peace Practitioner Workshops..... 35

    Community Dialogues..... 35

    Citizen Assemblies ..... 35

    Peace Summit Conference..... 36

## CONTEXT

April 2023 marked 25 years since the Belfast Good Friday Agreement. The Agreement was the centrepiece of efforts to bring peace to a society that had been in open conflict for three decades, where politics, segregation and violence shaped every aspect of life from education, housing and policing to culture, sport and friendship. The legacy of violence left scars on individuals, communities and society. Divisions over nationality and identity remain. Lack of political agreement hinders the completion of the peace process.

It was always clear that reconciliation was not an event. The Agreement was welcomed as the end of the political conflict and the beginning of a new opportunity. Society has changed in important ways, enabling new people to live and work here and opening new possibilities for communities.

However, 25 years after the Agreement, we are reminded that peace and reconciliation require ongoing action and change, and a dynamic vision of what peace should look like today. Social and economic challenges, including the impact of the pandemic, Brexit, cuts to public services and the steep rise in the cost of living, make this even more challenging.

The Peace Summit provides a chance to consider both the progress that has been made and the steps still to be taken in relation to the peace process.

The Peace Summit is an initiative by the John and Pat Hume Foundation and Community Dialogue, in partnership with YouthAction NI, Holywell Trust, Ulster University, Integrated Education Fund, and the Glenree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation.

We greatly appreciate the support of the International Fund for Ireland, as the main funder of Peace Summit 2023. We also wish to acknowledge the support of the Department of Foreign Affairs Peace and Reconciliation Fund and in-kind support from Ulster University.

The Summit follows months of consultation with peacebuilders, local communities, and young people from across Northern Ireland and the Border region in the Republic

of Ireland, asking what remains to be done, how we achieve this, and who is responsible for implementing the next steps.

Society, now more than ever, needs visionary leadership for peaceful change. The Peace Summit, which is a process rather than a one-off event, aims to listen to voices of hope and refocus attention on the peace process to ensure we honour and build upon:

- a robust peacebuilding infrastructure that was created through commitment, courage, skills and risk-taking that people here have campaigned for over decades
- the massive investment of funding and political support from funders and governments across the globe
- the opportunity to create an inclusive, multicultural, modern society that our young people demand and deserve.

The Peace Summit process draws together some of the best ideas and distils them to create an agenda for the future that speaks to issues from the past yet creates sustainable peace and reconciliation for the next 25 years. This document is the beginning of that process. It summarises what the various consultations have revealed and outlines a call to action.

We see our call to action as a roadmap of the key issues that still need to be addressed and require a renewed commitment. The next step is to see our call to action translated into a realisable programme of delivery with actionable steps to ensure sustainable peace. We seek your views and support, and those in government, to turn the hopes and aspirations expressed in this document into reality.

## **THE PROCESS**

This report summarises the key issues and common themes emerging from a series of engagement events with young people, peacebuilding practitioners, community groups and ordinary citizens from across Northern Ireland/the North of Ireland and the border counties between October 2022-May 2023.

The consultation took some 8 months and engaged at least 700 individuals in 30 events (see Appendix for more detail on the process and participants).

Consultation events endeavoured to include people from different religious and political beliefs, sexual orientations, class backgrounds, racial groups, gender and disability. During the consultation, participants were asked to reflect on peace and reconciliation over the past 25 years and consider their aspirations for the future.

## **THEMATIC CONCERNS: 25 YEARS ON**

The consultation, and this document, are not a summary of what has been achieved thus far in terms of the peace process as a whole, nor a statistical analysis of what has changed since 1998.<sup>1</sup>

Rather this report is based on a consultation with those engaged in peace process matters or who have a stake in the peace through five sets of events (see Appendix for more detail):

- Youth engagement workshops
- Peace practitioner workshops
- Community dialogues
- Citizen assemblies
- A Peace Summit conference

It outlines the most pressing issues 25 years since the signing of the Agreement. The themes extracted have been grouped under five key dimensions:

1. Political progress
2. Participation and civic engagement
3. Cohesion and sharing
4. Issues not addressed in the Agreement
5. Addressing the past, building the future

The themes raised can be summarised as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> For a monitor of the peace process and measurement of the delivery on various aspects of the peace process see the Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Reports. These are available at: <https://www.community-relations.org.uk/publications/northern-ireland-peace-monitoring-report>



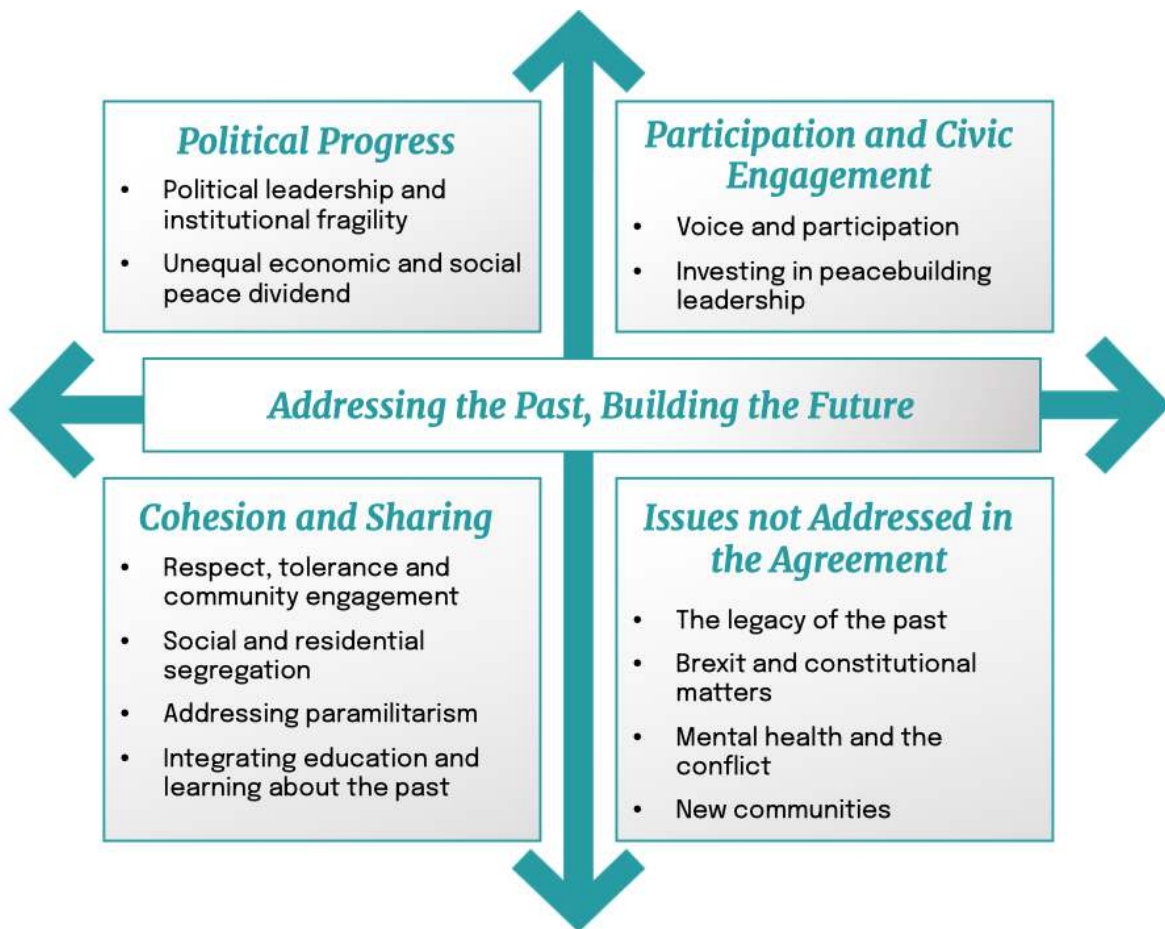


Figure 1: The unfinished business of the 1998 Agreement raised through the Peace Summit consultation

## Political Progress

***"They're not changing their future. They are changing ours" (Youth Engagement participant).***

### **Political leadership and institutional fragility**

Political progress since the darkest days of the conflict was acknowledged in terms of the establishment of the Agreement, including the development of a range of new institutions such as the reform of the police service; increased sense of safety; decommissioning; the enshrinement of the right to be British or Irish or both; a gradual breakdown of traditional identity blocks; normalisation of movement across the border and a significant decline in politically-related killings. A consequent range of positive impacts from the Agreement, such as economic improvement, tourism, and employment, were also noted. As such, a general view was that the Agreement needs

to be cherished and protected going forward. All those consulted were concerned with maintaining the hard-won peace and extending the peace dividend to those worst affected by the conflict.

***"Where would we be if it wasn't for the Agreement?" (Community Dialogue participant).***

***"I feel safe visiting the Shankill now, whereas I didn't feel safe in the past" (Community Dialogue participant).***

***"Back in the Troubles days you would go, you would join the UVF, you wouldn't trust the police. But now, if you see some random act of violence, you would go tell the police, the police are trusted now in the community. I think that's about it, the conflict, it hasn't stopped but it's definitely went down, and you feel safer, you can feel safe – anyone can go into Portadown... there's more of a community now" (Youth Engagement participant).***

However, it is equally fair to say there was real frustration with political leaders from all the consultations - often anger. Many felt the principles of the Agreement and its reconciliatory spirit are being ignored and needed to be upheld and implemented. The peace process was described routinely as being in crisis, and the Assembly was characterised as a revolving door with regular suspensions and constant elections.

The political system was described as a representative "spectator" democracy. Others spoke of the political system as stagnant and being "pale, male and stale" calling for "new blood" and "radical" alternatives. The blame was laid squarely at the door of politicians seen as manipulating the system for political ends, only paying lip service to cross-community peacebuilding efforts and undermining their own good relations strategy. The anger was evidenced by comments at the Peace Summit conference such as politicians need "a kick up the backside" to get on with governing and building sustainable peace.

***"We're taught to be divided by leadership" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

***"[Political] parties are still focused on religion rather than actual policies and a lot of communities have suffered because of this" (Youth Engagement participant).***

Some feared that the ongoing political instability has given paramilitary groups more power. The governmental dysfunction has exacerbated distrust and apathy in social and political institutions, particularly for young people. It was concerning, for example,

that in one of the community dialogues, only two out of the 18 people present said they intended to exercise their vote at the next election.

***"I'm conflicted about voting, aware that women have died for the right to vote but toying with the idea of not voting this time. I'm just disillusioned" (Community Dialogue participant).***

The political governance issues that remain unaddressed, according to the consultees, are numerous, including the failure to maintain a working Assembly, misuse of vetoing powers and the Petition of Concern in particular, lack of progress to prioritise and deliver on key issues such as health and infrastructure, and limited scrutiny over legislation resulting in poor policy. The limited outcomes of the so-called peace dividend or economic benefit and funding, particularly for the most socially and economically deprived communities in Northern Ireland, was also stressed.

Even those areas deemed relatively successful required new energy and focus, and reconciliation must be prioritised. Policing was singled out as a successful process. The reforms that followed the Patten report were challenging but were seen to have yielded a measure of success where trust was built in the police after 1998. However, the general feeling now is that in both urban and rural areas, trust has decreased in the police in recent years. Some raised concerns about the "harassment" of young people. The ongoing negative role of paramilitaries was also raised as a common concern in urban and rural areas.

***"There is a complete absence of political will to progress with reconciliation. Why? Because the parties in power maintain their electoral mandates through maintaining sectarian tension" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

There was also the observation that people feel caught in a cycle of negative voting (i.e. continuing to vote for parties even though people do not believe they deliver). These patterns exacerbate socio-economic issues (or what others called bread and butter concerns), increasing inequality and suffering in working-class communities. At the Peace Summit conference, frustration was expressed that there is little focus on the "common good" in politics and participants wanted to see a reduction of the politicisation of "everyday" issues.

***"We still vote for the same parties come the next election to keep the other parties out" (Community Dialogue participant).***

***"We need to encourage people to vote on shared social issues, not identity issues. People are voting to keep the other side out, through fear. That's not democracy. The politics of identity means that we continue to stagnate socially" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

***"Take religion out of politics, out of schools. Political parties should be open to everyone. Anyone should be able to join a political party based on that party's policies and on what suits an individual's mindset. Moving away from voting patterns linked to religion and offering a more inclusive approach may help build a better future. End result would be voting for policies not religion" (Padlet comment, Peace Summit Conference participant).***

***"You don't just vote because the party is unionist or nationalist, you should vote because of what they stand for and their morals and what they can do for you and your community" (Youth Engagement participant).***

## **Unequal economic and social peace dividend**

The cost-of-living crisis was frequently raised with a feeling that politicians are not tackling issues in local communities, and that economic inequality exacerbates social and political divisions. The economic peace dividend has been patchy and unequal, with some benefitting economically from peace and others feeling their lives have not changed, and in some cases, worsened. Consequently, the limited impact of the peace process on socio-economic issues has made the Agreement feel remote from everyday concerns.

***"In 25 years we want to see a functioning government for all, parties are still focused on religion rather than actual policies and a lot of communities have suffered because of this. As part of this we want to see unsegregated parts of towns and communities as there is a lot of socio-economic divide between them" (Youth Engagement participant).***

Some proposed the need for the Agreement to be understood as a starting point rather than an endpoint that has been reached. Many – especially at the youth events, community dialogues and Peace Summit conference – feel “fed up” with “orange and green” politics. At these events, adults talked about how the politicisation of “orange and green” keeps the political parties in power and young people feel their future is being undermined. The politicisation of “everyday issues” also means socio-economic questions and the cost-of-living crisis is ignored in favour of wider political party ambitions. This disproportionately impacts young people seeking employment and training opportunities, potentially negatively impacting their long-term prospects.

***"Class and poverty and trauma are not about orange and green" (Community Dialogue participant).***

***"A lot of politicians now, those in power, they're only concerned with the old tribal politics of green and orange, but now there's so much more going on, especially the cost of living, more people are worried about that there than a border in the Irish Sea. People are worried about putting food on the table, they don't really care about stupid stuff like that" (Youth Engagement participant).***

***"Economics second place to divide and rule" (Written comment, Peace Summit Conference).***

***"We want to see more investment in young people because right now it's mostly just about the adults and what they think, but we think we could add some things to the community" (Youth Engagement participant).***

In short, the strong political leadership in creating the Agreement was recognised. Its early implementation was also viewed with some success. However, the political focus to sustain this work was thought to have waned with time. There is a need to capitalise on what has already been achieved. Deep frustrations with the lack of political progress and limited economic dividend for some, was palpable in all consultations

***"Politicians worked well initially but again failed to progress with needs/wants of society" (Group feedback on flipchart, Practitioner event).***

***"I was 10 when the GFA and the referendum were agreed but I remember the time vividly. I was allowed to stay up late to see the results. I was sitting with my dad and was politically aware given the context of where we live. My dad said 'remember this moment as it is important'. But it feels like I am part of the last generation to remember it. It sparked my interest in the political process and a love-hate relationship with it. I am now 35" (Citizen Assembly participant).***

## **Participation and civic engagement**

### **Voice and participation**

There was a perception of a general lack of voice and participation in public institutions. All consultations overwhelmingly expressed the view that as individuals they feel they had limited voice in society.

***"The quest to participate as a citizen is not possible within the party-political system which is dedicated to party politics. I feel that that structure of government does not represent me" (Citizen Assembly participant).***

***"To have your voice heard depends on whether or not you have a mechanism to feed views through. But most people don't have that route" (Citizen Assembly participant).***

***"I get that young people don't have a lot of power and they can't actually be part of a government and stuff like that but I think that politicians are now realising the importance of young people and are listening to them more or seeing that young people are actually the future...opinions should be listened to and are actually valid, they're not just saying stuff to be difficult and to disagree with people but are actually saying stuff because they care about their future and they want a good future...they are genuinely worried that these older politicians who are in government are thinking about themselves and their own generation and not really, as well as the future" (Youth Engagement participant).***

Women, young people, older citizens and ethnic minorities felt particularly marginalised from political processes. There was a common view that women's contribution to the peace process and peace more generally is underappreciated. Some participants highlighted how women feel inhibited from getting involved in politics, and that "bully tactics" are still used to intimidate female voters and women in political life.

Young people are particularly keen to be involved in political and social processes but feel powerless and their voice is not listened to, creating a sense of frustration. To this end, young people want to push society forward and contribute constructively and creatively but feel trapped by the past. While welcoming indications of shifts in traditional voting patterns, some at the community dialogues spoke of a need to explore motivations for voting, particularly where there is fear about "going against the grain", confusion about the voting system, or disillusionment in exercising the vote. The limited political progress and lack of participation undermines trust in government.

Ideas about how to increase participation were discussed. Some endorsed the original concept of a Civic Forum as outlined in the Agreement, yet others were sceptical about its potential impact and whether adequate representation could be achieved. If a Civic Forum was established, it was noted, that it would need to represent all aspects of society, including new communities. The citizen assemblies felt the original idea of the Civic Forum was no longer possible and something new is needed. Some felt Citizens Assemblies could be used to explore how a shared peaceful future might look. Others called for the establishment of a Bill of Rights. The citizen assemblies endorsed ideas such as a Speaker's Corner, People's Parliaments and building a movement to enhance the civic voice. Other suggestions at the Peace Summit conference included using



quotas (women and young people, for example), alternative systems of democracy and using online tools to enhance participation.

***"Remove barriers to voting, e.g. 'Home to vote' campaign – example of active campaigning and active support to vote" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

***"Need deliberative space away from political parties...very few are genuinely community-led, all have strong political influence" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

That said, although approaches varied and different views were expressed, a vehicle for enhanced political participation was endorsed across the board and the desire for civic engagement was strong. As it was put in one of the citizen assemblies, whatever is put in place, "there is a need to get as much of the community involved as possible". Representation must be transparent, fair, and not tokenistic, and include "ordinary citizens".

***"Create a vehicle for civic engagement that is recognised by government. Give people the tools, confidence and skills to become involved, to know how to behave/act responsibly and respectfully. Educate everyone from very young that they have rights, they are part of democracy i.e. don't put all on politicians" (Padlet comment, Peace Summit conference).***

## **Investing in peacebuilding leadership**

Leadership, capacity building and a desire to make positive change exist within youth groups, but the narrow avenues for participation and the constant politicisation of the past in the present hampers the engagement of young people. Likewise, those who see themselves as practitioners were concerned with the reduced investment in peacebuilding, leading to declining resources. There was a view that the community sector had to do the "heavy lifting" whilst the politicians failed to maintain functioning institutions. The decades of skills and leadership built up by peacebuilding practitioners, some of whom are now retiring or passing on, are not being built upon. This was a strong view expressed at the Peace Summit conference.

***"I would love to see more information on what will be done to amplify marginalised voices throughout this consultation process. There are people from a range of communities who are extremely engaged but still left out. Ideals of leadership seem too connected to electoral system. Good work happens elsewhere too!" (Padlet comment, Peace Summit conference).***

***"We need to regroup and be strategic about investing in peacebuilding leadership - landscape is disparate, doesn't link well to policy and there is 'too much stuff'" (Padlet comment, Peace Summit conference).***

The civic assemblies and the Peace Summit Conference participants felt that more leveraging of the community and voluntary sector skills was needed to amplify the civic voice and respond to local needs. Practitioners want funding to be more strategic regarding objectives for peace, particularly in government policy approaches, often seen as disjointed, lacking vision and time-limited. Younger people stressed the need for facilities such as youth centres and that young people in rural areas feel particularly socially isolated and need connectivity. A wish was expressed for wider civic engagement and structures to offset the politicisation of the peace process and the lack of progress. Young people were also adamant that they had a lot to offer in terms of addressing societal needs and peacebuilding but were not given the opportunity.

***"I wouldn't say that we don't care – I would say that we don't care in the same way that our parents care" (Youth Engagement participant).***

***"Growing a movement of young leaders to take over the role of previous courageous activists and peace builders" (Padlet comment, Peace Summit conference).***

***"There's no respect, we feel like we've been told to respect other people but the politicians want our respect instead...so our opinions are dismissed just because we're young, so we really do have no power to change that, and it will be too late by the time we're their age to change it" (Youth Engagement participant).***

***"There's so much influence in this room...like of what Northern Ireland is going to be like in the future, so we need to shape it in a positive way" (Youth Engagement participant).***

There was an ongoing concern about whether enough has been done to create a new generation of peacebuilders and new political leadership that is more participative, inclusive, and collaborative and can address a wide range of local and global issues such as climate change, mental health and minority rights.

***"The young people speak up about different issues like climate change, older people stick to what they know, they're not willing to look at things and understand the different aspects that the youth can look into. So, young people are the future and young people should have their say" (Youth Engagement participant).***

***"People in power today are too old and don't understand the youth. They don't understand that it's our future and we should be able to decide how to shape it. They're not changing their own future, they're changing ours and they don't have***



***the experiences that the youth have today so youths should have their say in what should be done about it” (Youth Engagement participant).***

***“Young people have grown up not seeing government in action” (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

## **Cohesion and sharing**

### **Respect, tolerance and community engagement**

Across the board, a strong commitment to respect, tolerance for others, appreciation of diversity, the need for equality, human rights and reconciliation was expressed. Dialogue and relationship-building were flagged as key to sustainable peace, although this takes time and requires skills, practice and resources.

***“Invest in radical peace education that’s workshop and dialogue based, in power-with relationships, part of a culture of justice and human rights. Then those engaged get a sense of the difference a peace-based education can imbibe and are opened to possibility of being that change, power-with: others, other species, and earth, in a power-over system that is ravaging community spirit and our earth” (Padlet comment, Peace Summit conference).***

***“You should be respectful to everyone. You have to treat others the way you want to be treated. While everyone has different identities, we’re all human, just treat each other the way you want to be treated” (Youth Engagement workshop).***

For many practitioners consulted, and those attending the Peace Summit conference, ongoing and sustained contact between those who are divided and learning more about one another is vital to making relationships last between communities and building peace. Hearing each other’s stories and experiences was also important in breaking down negative perceptions between communities.

Practitioners expressed the view that strategies for peacebuilding and the role of community development in sustaining and delivering the promise of the Agreement are undervalued. A frequently heard view was that peacebuilding work has recently lost momentum due to inadequate resourcing and support. This needs to be reversed and peacebuilding prioritised. Calls were made for a new peace strategy or plan that must be co-designed, grassroots-led, politically supported by joined-up government, inclusive, long-term, and properly resourced. Respect for and celebrating diversity were the cornerstones of such an inclusive community engagement.

***"We would like to see everyone in unity, the government working together. Nobody disrespecting or discriminating each other about their identities. Looking past people's race and culture and focusing on their personality. Letting people celebrate their cultures with respect from everyone in the community" (Group feedback on flipchart, Youth Engagement workshop).***

***"Get comfortable being uncomfortable" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

## **Social and residential segregation**

Despite progress and broad public support for integration, segregation remains a key challenge at a structural level, particularly in terms of housing and education. This impacts interpersonal and inter-community relationships. Twenty-five years after the Agreement, it was noted that it is still possible to live a separate life from those perceived as "other", leading to a lack of understanding of different cultures and traditions. The fact that peace walls and interface barriers have not been removed and have increased in number was raised as problematic. The problem of contested spaces was also highlighted, such as a bridge or railway line dividing a town or different bus stops in a village for separate schools. The point was made that barriers were not only physical but there were also "invisible walls in people's minds".

***"Housing. We have to normalise shared living. That means tackling paramilitary presence in communities so everyone feels safe" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

***"We were talking about people not feeling safe going places because of their backgrounds, but people should not be scared. They should be able to go anywhere without thinking something bad will happen because of their background" (Youth Engagement participant).***

***"Conflict is bad for moving forward. It can cause separation with people. Simple conflict can cause bigger conflict" (Youth Engagement participant).***

Practitioners tended to speak about segregation in policy terms (e.g. the need to integrate housing or education) and the need for joined-up government to address the issues of segregation and reconciliation as a holistic approach across all government departments. It was also noted how entrenched division remains, leaving some participants at the Peace Summit conference asking: "how do we undo it?". The importance of paying attention to the deeper structural issues that maintain segregation was noted. It was suggested that all policies and investments should be "good relations-proofed". These structural issues also have an impact on how people live their lives. Some young people expressed the day-to-day challenges of living in a

divided society, e.g. fear of walking into the wrong area, and it was noted that tensions can become particularly acute at certain times of the year.

***"We want to see the sharing of traditions and people welcomed to everywhere so you can celebrate your own culture and background from wherever you're from. We also agree that we want to see more integrated and mixed schools and mixed housing" (Youth Engagement participant).***

***"If you're just surrounded by the same people with the same opinions as you, you're going to feel persuaded to say what they say rather than what you actually want to say" (Youth Engagement participant).***

## **Addressing paramilitarism**

There was a general view that it is deeply unacceptable that 25 years after the Peace Agreement, some communities are still controlled by paramilitaries. It was noted that paramilitaries still have a "sinister hold" in some areas. This means, as someone put it in one of the citizen assemblies, some local people did not have "ownership of their area". Another person referred to paramilitaries as "silently silencing" the communities they control through intimidation and fear. Paramilitary control inhibits community work and negatively influences well-being, exacerbated by some paramilitaries' role in drug dealing.

Views were expressed at the Peace Summit conference that the governments continue to "fund" and tolerate "armed criminals". The failure to tackle the issue of paramilitarism was seen as a failure of the political institutions. A common view expressed across the events was how the lack of political progress has created a vacuum that paramilitaries have filled.

***"Parties/political structures that hold back progress is contributing to power and influence of paramilitarism" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

***"Politicians need to be called out on their affiliation with paramilitaries - on both sides - can't be the people representing us" (Padlet comment, Peace Summit conference).***

Practitioners and those in the community dialogues were frustrated by the existence and influence of paramilitaries and the lack of accountability attached to their actions. Young people also wanted to see an end to paramilitaries.

***"We want to see the end of paramilitary violence as this is a big issue in today's society" (Group feedback on flipchart, Youth Engagement workshop).***

***"Stop funding paramilitaries and anyone else not committed to peace – millions of funds spent on areas where they exist with little to show for it apart from their continued existence" (Group feedback on flipchart, Practitioner event).***

Young people, however, tended to focus not only on direct paramilitary control but also on the social and political division influencing their daily lives. Paramilitaries were evidence of and maintained this division. Paramilitaries in an area meant social divisions were less likely to change. When it came to visioning the future, it was noted that the future should be free from paramilitaries and the way their presence has been normalised 25 years since the Agreement was alarming.

***"What is normal to us? Bathe in ripples of conflict...our normal is different" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

***"Paramilitarism is the fabric of our community – difficult to challenge but most definitely needs to be" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

## **Integrating education and learning about the past**

There was broad support for integrated education at all the events. Although it was not seen as a miraculous cure to the conflict, across the age ranges, it was generally seen as necessary to normalise society and decrease sectarianism. The cost of duplicating services, or what some called the cost of division, was raised at the Peace Summit conference, particularly in terms of education.

***"Integrated schools, promote inclusivity in multiple areas such as the workplace or friendships or even wider in places like housing...in Northern Ireland we have a very tribal view on life, where you're from one side or you're from the other side but with inclusivity, it means there's no more of that and we can live together in harmony and promote peace" (Youth Engagement participant).***

***"Integrated education will eventually lead to the removal of peace walls which plague our communities in Northern Ireland. Whenever the peace walls fall it will signify that Northern Ireland's finally moved on and we can achieve this through integrated education" (Youth Engagement participant).***

However, some were also concerned about integrating the education system, e.g. some schools might close, or history teaching of a certain type might dominate, diluting different understandings of the past. Some thought the term "integration" could put people off the concept. At the Peace Summit conference, it was also noted

that activating parents in the discussion on integrated education was important if it was to be a reality.

***"History education in schools needs to include all perspectives on Irish history but also colonialism internationally - history of racism" (Padlet comment, Peace Summit conference).***

There was a view that the education system was letting down the youth in terms of dealing with the social issues that confront young people. Although the history of the conflict was taught in schools, the feeling was that this did not get to grips with the deeper conflict-related issues that persist. A concern was expressed that educators are still struggling to facilitate difficult conversations. Furthermore, not all young people take history or have formal education beyond sixteen. At the Peace Summit conference, it was also noted that schools are not the only place to learn about the past. Community groups, churches, the media, youth groups and parents all have a role.

Young people expressed a strong desire to learn about the past at all events. The citizen assemblies endorsed the idea of increased education in schools and informal settings on the past to develop a greater understanding of the conflict. The need to learn and share between the generations also came up routinely. This, with an integrated education system, could increase empathy, foster new connections, and offer old and new leaders a space to learn from each other.

***"We need to ensure teachers and educators are skilled and comfortable talking about difficult issues...training them separately is hardly conducive" (Padlet comment, Peace Summit conference).***

***"Need educators willing to get involved in difficult conversations" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

***"I think it's important to talk about them [sensitive topics], if you don't talk about them nothing's going to be done about them. If we didn't have the Good Friday Agreement, what would Northern Ireland be like now? It wouldn't be as it is, because they talked about the issues, this is why we are where we are now" (Youth Engagement participant).***

## **Issues not addressed in the Agreement**

There was some discussion about what could be considered more recent challenges to society – issues not envisaged or discussed during the peace process in 1998.

## **The legacy of the past**

Peace practitioners and participants at the Peace Summit conference noted numerous issues about the past that require attention, including flags and emblems, parading and the impact of the past on victims and communities. There was discussion about the challenges of ongoing paramilitarism and how to appropriately address the past in terms of truth and justice. There was also an acknowledgment of the challenges facing victims and survivors of the conflict and the importance of focusing on victims' perspectives. The intergenerational impacts of the conflict was raised time and time again. Others, particularly at the Peace Summit conference, were critical of how many people still "romanticise" and "glamourise" the violence of the past and are "peddling in nostalgia". They worried about how this would continue to impact current generations.

***"Responsibility...conflict of the past are not young people's problem to solve! (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

***"'Peddling in nostalgia' – songs, parades, murals – focus more on past than future" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

Some expressed concern about the latest British government legacy proposals. When this was mentioned, particularly in community dialogues, there was a view that the British government was using the current Legacy Bill to shut down all future truth-recovery processes. The citizen assemblies endorsed the idea of "pausing" the current legislative process on legacy.

***"People entitled to truth and justice – legacy laws?" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

Young people did not focus on the specifics of the legacy debates (e.g. legislation, truth or justice questions) and had a more generalised view of the past (e.g. community separation, different versions of history). This reflected their reality. Day-to-day segregation and safety concerns about going into the "wrong" area seem to impact them more directly than larger political debates, such as who was responsible for past violence or what mechanisms need to be implemented to deal with the past. As such, there were concerns with flags, emblems and territory marking. However, young people showed a nuanced view of this issue, recognising how flags have different

meanings in different places – some can create a sense of antagonism or hostility for outsiders to that community, while others can create a sense of pressure to be patriotic.

Overall, young people believed that the Troubles were a “bad time” and they were grateful not to be experiencing them as their parents did. Older people also said they did not want young people to go through what “we went through” during the conflict. At the Peace Summit conference, however, others expressed the view that although many wanted to believe the past “doesn’t affect us” the young people were living with its consequences every day and “carry the weight” of the Troubles.

***“Ignorance from parents can lead to an increase in sectarianism as they don’t understand how bad the troubles was” (Youth Engagement participant).***

***“We are encouraged to be sectarian through ignorance from our parents. Young people are influenced by others to be sectarian because of the community they were brought up in and think it is right to treat people different because of their religion/identity. Everyone is equal and should be allowed to join and be together no matter their religion” (Youth Engagement participant).***

Positively, some felt the discussions at the youth events were a sign of progress. A tension exists for young people between wanting to speak about the future and learning more about the past as it continues to shape their lives. Importantly the interest here was not directly in personal histories of the conflict, but in learning more about the cultural and community perspectives on the past. For the past to be addressed, however, it needs to be relevant to personal experiences such as division and identity rather than only discussing wider questions of legacy, policy or legislation. At the political level, the citizen assemblies, however, felt the two governments had a specific responsibility for addressing legacy issues.

***“Great opportunity for future generations around open and honesty – hearing everyone’s voices” (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

## **Brexit and constitutional matters**

Although the issue of Brexit, and questions concerning the Protocol and the Windsor Framework, came up in some meetings, they were absent in others. Overall, participants did not seem exercised by the intricacies of such matters (e.g. how trade might work). Some felt there was no user-friendly and accessible information about



Brexit (and the various proposal and frameworks that have followed it), the Agreement and constitutional issues to guide discussions or develop informed opinions.

At the same time, it was clear in some community dialogues and at the Peace Summit conference, that Brexit and border issues were becoming increasingly destabilising and polarising for local communities and the peace process. Some politicians and local representatives were seen as politicising the issue. At the Peace Summit conference the view was expressed that the Brexit discussions and subsequent processes like the Protocol have been hijacked by the “orange-green” divide. The media were also seen as exacerbating tensions through negative reporting.

At the youth events, there was little mention of the constitutional question, and the young people’s reflections indicate that the conflict is primarily interpreted through the lens of a religious divide. Young people focused significantly more on every day and broader social issues such as equality, climate change and poverty. However, some young people were concerned that Brexit would impact on programmes that widened young people’s views and access to opportunities such as the Erasmus programme. The importance of getting “young people out of their bubbles at an early age” was emphasised at the Peace Summit conference and concern was expressed that Brexit limited horizons rather than expanded them.

***“GFA had rendered the border invisible in many ways, Brexit has brought it back” (Written comment, Peace Summit conference).***

***“Brexit magnified polarisation within Northern Ireland, we are kind of stuck, unsettled. We had unfinished business and we were not ready for such a jolt!” (Community Dialogue participant).***

***“It’s [Brexit] been an opportunity to back-pedal on some of the Good Friday Agreement. A way to add another layer to cement their position” (Community Dialogue participant).***

There was some discussion, particularly in community dialogues, about the constitutional question more broadly. Although the specifics were not discussed (e.g. the benefits or problems with a new constitutional arrangement), concern was raised about how the discussion about the border should be held in the future. Dialogue was understood as essential to help dispel misplaced fears, enable understanding of different views, and to explore what it might mean for day-to-day life. For practitioners



and in the community dialogues, it was claimed that because of the changes Brexit has brought, it has further polarised society, as noted. This made it hard to discuss constitutional questions for fear of exacerbating differences. At the Peace Summit conference, participants also felt information on Brexit and related matters needed to be provided in a clear way for people to discuss it constructively.

***"Politicians in England don't understand the difference between north and south, and don't care, and therefore cannot be trusted to treat any referendum on unity with the care that it needs" (Community Dialogue participant).***

***"Right now...please a layperson's version of the Windsor framework. We didn't have it ahead of Brexit ref, or Protocol and hence we have had no basis for conversation about the present or future" (Padlet comment, Peace Summit conference).***

## **Mental health and the conflict**

Through all the engagement events, there was a focus on the consequences of the conflict. There was discussion about the "collective trauma" and "intergenerational trauma" that persists in society. Trauma has been normalised was a view many endorsed at the engagement events. Others talked about the fact that society is still grieving and the need for healing spaces. The impact of the conflict on well-being was noted, e.g. disinvestment in certain areas or people moving countries or regions, and young people had some awareness that their parents still seem to "suffer" the effects of the conflict.

***"It's the older generation pushing it down on us, with our generation coming up no one really cares about it anymore" (Youth Engagement participant).***

Mental health featured in young people's visions for the future. They believed that "mental health matters" and young people want it to be taken seriously, better understood and included in the education curriculum with issues such as suicide discussed more openly. The citizen assemblies endorsed the importance of adequate and well-resourced mental health supports to be widely available to deal with the trauma and impact of the conflict. There was a view expressed by a number of people in the consultations that some young people who suffer from low self-esteem and poor mental health experience additional barriers to peacebuilding and accessing new opportunities.

***"Mental health is integral to peacebuilding. We need opportunities to explore our core beliefs and patterns of relating to others. This is the crux of how we resolve or perpetuate conflict. Health and well-being is not separate. Systems not silos!" (Padlet comment, Peace Summit conference).***

***"We want to see an improvement in mental health for young people in Northern Ireland because we think this isn't as important as it should be" (Group feedback on flipchart, Youth Peace Summit).***

Practitioners felt there is evidence of a degree of "normalisation" of issues that occupy young people's energies such as body image, relationships with peers, mental health, drugs, and conflict arising from the fallout of incidents shared and spread via social media. Young people tended to focus on the future, the need to be consulted and participate, and for society not to be hindered by the past. The normalisation of society, such as decreasing separation and safety in public spaces, was not seen as separate from fostering well-being.

***"Normalise so that mental health and self-esteem is not seen as separate to conflict/peacebuilding. Increase capacity then – helps us to resolve our conflicts" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

## **New communities**

A change in demographics in society was noted with more migrants, asylum seekers and refugees arriving and a recognition of growing diversity and new communities. Several issues were raised by participants, of whom the majority could be described as white, including that our consultation process could have been more diverse regarding "new" communities.

It was often noted that the society is no longer "two tribes" but rather a "region of minorities". This was seen by many as progress in the peace process and it presents an opportunity to bring people together beyond the traditional divides and harness newcomers' leadership potential. In the citizen assemblies and Peace Summit conference, the point was made that minority ethnic groups have life experiences that are often ignored. Minority ethnic citizens expressed the view that they felt undervalued in their contribution to the economy and social fabric. Many come from war-torn countries and have much to contribute in helping reshape a region emerging from conflict.

Consultees saw the growing diversity and multiculturalism as a positive sign and an opportunity to encourage greater openness. This was also a strong theme at the Peace Summit conference.

***"People have multiple identities. The concept of plurality is much more facilitative concept" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

***"Speaking to each other and not judging someone for the way they speak, finding they come from another country, not judging them straight away, you get to speak to them and see where they're from and what their experience is in life, they might have some of the same experiences to you. You never know, you might make a new friend or a best friend" (Youth Engagement participant).***

***"Reframing othering to appreciation of difference" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

It was noted that although those new to our society were generally welcomed, racism and concern for people moving to communities controlled by paramilitaries were highlighted. It was noted that even the term "new" communities had a pejorative feel, i.e. those who were "new" might be seen as having fewer rights or were second-class citizens. It was also noted that people from minority ethnic groups have lived in Northern Ireland for centuries but are still underrepresented in many areas. Young people also mentioned racism but tended to be more concerned with local political divisions. They tended to link questions of race with more global phenomena such as Black Lives Matter and felt young people were generally open to diversity.

***"We are a racist society...systems, structures, colonialism at play" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

***"The older people in power are stuck in the past, and they only teach the kids what they believe, like if you're from a Protestant background you only really hear about the issues, you only hear bad things about the other side and vice versa, whereas whenever you're younger you mix with anyone and you don't really care about where they're from so you get to learn more about different, diverse communities" (Youth Engagement participant).***

## **Addressing the Past, Building the Future**

A key part of the consultation process was identifying problems linked to the past. This led to discussions about what might be needed in the future. Overall, all the events could be described as expressing hopes and fears in this regard. There was also the desire to be backward-looking (e.g. acknowledging the past and difference, dealing with trauma, dismantling segregation) and forward-looking (e.g. building the economy

and creating opportunities) simultaneously. As one of the facilitators summed at the Peace Summit conference, their group discussed:

***"...the idea of having a lens on the past and a gaze to the future" (Peace Summit Conference participant).***

A general theme that came across is that contrary to what some think, young people are positive about the future. They expressed a strong desire to make positive change, but as noted, often felt constrained by the past, a lack of voice and older people deciding the parameters of what was important or how issues should be addressed (much of this involved the conflicted past). The older generations were "pushing it down on us" as was noted above. At the same time, there was a tendency among young people to see the world in an intersectional way, i.e. political exclusion, economic marginalisation, equality issues, educational limitations, migration, gender, identity, future climate threats and so on, as interlinked.

***"I don't really want Ireland, north and south, to be underwater...need more investment in things like solar panels and hydroelectricity, stuff like that there to decrease our chances of dying" (Youth Engagement participant).***

***"Young people are actively involved in creating a better world because it's our world and we're responsible for what happens to it and us. Children are the world's future and should have a part in deciding what will happen. People are involved like Greta Thunberg who is an inspiration to those who don't have as big a voice as her. Young people are actively involved in creating a better world because they will be the ones who are most affected and older people can't get over the fact that their way is not always the right way" (Youth Engagement participant).***

Practitioners, in contrast, tended to see challenges specifically in line with conflict segregation, peace walls, sectarianism, and paramilitarism. However, issues such as the cost-of-living crisis and the need for economic development were raised as cross-cutting concerns. There was a strong desire to see the political system tackling everyday issues and moving away from "orange-green" dynamics and towards greater pluralism, and a focus on consensus-building. At the same time, there was a fear that it was taking time to move beyond the past and that politicians, particularly, were holding back progress. The spirit of the Agreement, as was noted earlier, needed to be re-energised and communities put at the heart of the process from now on.

***"It's the people's Agreement; we must take it back" (Community Dialogue participant).***

***"My story and perspective is important because we are the future of this country. Our say is important as it can shape our future" (Youth Engagement participant).***

***"We would like to see everyone in unity, the government working together. Nobody disrespecting or discriminating each other about their identities. Looking past people's race and culture and focusing on their personality. Letting people celebrate their cultures with respect from everyone in the community. And we would like to see homelessness ended in the society of Ireland" (Youth Engagement participant).***

## **A CALL TO ACTION**

In the next section, based on the consultations and subsequent discussions with the Peace Summit partners, we outline a call to action on a range of issues 25 years since the Agreement. We propose 12 actions:

### **A Call to Action**

1. Re-establish Political Institutions and Address Deficits
2. Ensure Positive Constructive Leadership
3. Formulate an Inclusive Peace Plan
4. Adapt the Agreement
5. Tackle Paramilitarism
6. Good Relations Proofing and Address Segregation
7. Integrate Education
8. Enhance Youth Participation
9. Create a Vehicle for Civic Engagement
10. Invest in Peacebuilding
11. Enhance Societal Well-Being
12. Civic Education on the Past for the Future

### **Re-establish Political Institutions and Address Deficits**

1. Re-establish the institutions at local level, north/south and east/west and make them work more effectively. Build on what has been achieved and refresh and reinvigorate the institutions. Adapt them to the current context and be aware that many in the society need help understanding the core purpose or function of the political institutions, and how they relate to the

Agreement. Moving beyond crisis to stable political systems is essential to rebuild trust, develop a sustainable approach to peace and reconciliation, and urgently address the lack of economic and social peace dividends in some communities.

## **Ensure Constructive Leadership**

2. Political leadership is failing. The demand is strong for functional leaders who will build on the spirit of the Agreement, moving society forward constructively. This should include a process for civic engagement to help address the issues government cannot (see 8. and 9. below) and give voice to the so-called silent majority and marginalised groups. The peace process is also the responsibility of everyone. Political leaders should show young people that democracy and participation can work through ethical and courageous politics. The fragile institutions, constant crisis and failed leadership create disinterest and distrust in formal politics, feeding apathy. To create trust, leaders need to move to address issues (e.g. health, cost of living, mental health, and education) rather than politicising such issues. This will create trust.

## **Formulate an Inclusive Peace Plan**

3. The Executive needs to formulate a coherent and effective peace plan with a strong vision and collective approach for its delivery across departments, policies and funding streams. The two governments should be part of and support this process. This requires political buy-in and support for a united visionary peace process fit for today's society. We need to strengthen our commitment to peace and reconciliation at all levels of society, while we rethink how we see peace 25 years on. We need to address ongoing concerns such as segregation, paramilitarism, poverty, the legacy of the past, lack of participation, political apathy, distrust in institutions, and support for peacebuilding initiatives (see actions below), while we recognise new priorities. The latter include the inter-related nature of the peace challenges today, such as the economy, new communities, the environment, LGBTQi support, and human rights. Culture and identity now go beyond the two main communities and must be considered in relation to the integration and

inclusion of a diverse society and identities. We must update our 1998 thinking to include these issues. More visioning work is needed on peace that stretches the boundaries of “peace”, which sometimes has a connotation of the past rather than the present. Peace is also a holistic concept, although at a policy level it is not treated as such. To provide a holistic approach to peace a new peace plan is needed and the government must join up its myriad of strategies, policies, Commissions and funding such as the Racial Equality Strategy; Children and Young Peoples Strategy; Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC); Commission on Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition, Independent Reporting Commission; Commissioner for Victims and Survivors (CVSNI); Tackling Paramilitarism, Criminality and Organised Crime Programme; District Council Good Relations Fund; Central Good Relations Fund, among others, recognising their interrelated contribution to peace. This will require rethinking how sustainable peace is understood, a fresh commitment at the government level for a new inclusive peace plan, along with interdepartmental collaboration and delivery with strong influence and engagement of independent voices and civil society.

## **Adapt the Agreement**

4. Revisit some issues from the Agreement and adapt the Agreement for the current context. For many, 1998 is now distant history rather than of current relevance. Many no longer know what the Agreement even contains or its significance. Develop and share accessible materials about government, the Agreement and related processes (e.g. Brexit). Even those issues arising from the Agreement that were seen as successful need updating, e.g. reviewing of policing and trust, addressing outstanding issues such as legacy, rights and equality, removing components such as the ability to collapse the institutions and designation, and opening the discussion without prejudice on other issues such as Brexit and the Constitution. Adapt the Agreement to a changed context.

## **Tackle Paramilitarism**

5. It is unacceptable that 25 years after the Agreement, paramilitaries still have control of some communities, remain armed and carry out murders and violent assaults. This impacts on well-being, prevents political progress and negatively impacts the economy. Paramilitary groups are illegal. Political leaders have an important role in addressing the major issue of paramilitarism by ensuring the rule of law is upheld and paramilitary groups are demilitarised. Dysfunctional institutions and collapsed political structures create a vacuum and void that others fill particularly paramilitaries. Communities must be supported to reclaim their local areas and build resilience against paramilitary control. Such support and participation are also crucial in addressing poverty, inequalities, deprivation and segregation. Offering more sustainable economic pathways for younger people is a route away from paramilitarism.

## **Good Relations Proofing and Address Segregation**

6. Segregation is embedded in everyday life, including housing selection, education, recreational activities, sport, religion and shopping. Good relations proofing should be applied to all policies at central and local government level, including job creation, investment, housing and development to challenge the current societal and policy norms which foster community separation. Good relations proofing examines any negative good relations impacts on policies and investment. It also explores the potential for promoting good relations, e.g. a clear and public commitment to end segregation in education and teacher training, and the promotion of shared housing in all areas with a zero-tolerance policy to intimidatory and/or threatening behaviour or displays. Such an approach should also tackle visible and hidden interface barriers by building good relations, integration, safe spaces, investment and regeneration in partnership with the communities living in interface areas.

## **Integrate Education**

7. Integrate education in a thoughtful and systematic way taking all views into account. This should be applied to all aspects of education, including preschool and teacher training. Separate schooling and teacher training creates division



and does little to change social and political perspectives. There were different views on how to do this, for example, concerns about the impact on smaller schools. But greater educational integration, done in a considered way, is important to break down barriers. How we learn about the past is also critical. The amalgamation of all teacher training is central to integration within the education system. Training educators to have difficult and constructive conversations about the legacy of the past and transgenerational trauma is also critical.

## **Enhance Youth Participation**

8. Young people must be included in official processes to enhance the voice and participation of all. Young people are particularly keen to be involved in political and social processes but feel powerless as their voice is not listened to, creating a sense of frustration. The Agreement means little without the participation of young people in public life now and into the future. Participation, however, is also dependent on addressing community relations and segregation. Community relations programmes with young people are often limited because relations built within and between communities are constantly undermined by continued living in single-identity areas or those dominated by paramilitaries. Regeneration in these areas and work with families and communities is required to ensure young people are supported to participate fully and do not feel trapped by the parameters of the past that still impact on their lives in the present.

## **Create a Vehicle for Civic Engagement**

9. Civic engagement is critical to a functioning polity. Create a vehicle for civic engagement in politics, including excluded constituencies, and those not part of the 1998 Agreement, such as new communities. Also, pay attention to excluded and marginalised groups in terms of age, gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, class, religion or political opinion.

## **Invest in Peacebuilding**

10. Grassroots peacebuilding and its contribution to society is undervalued. Invest in peacebuilding in the long term and invest in young people as the next generation of peacebuilders. Invest in people as the backbone of peace, not institutions alone. The Executive, and the two governments, must commit to greater recognition and support of peace and reconciliation. The draft Programme for Government (PfG) provides an opportunity to do this through the key priority: “an equal and inclusive society where everyone is valued and treated with respect”. The PfG lists 15 government strategies that could help deliver this key priority, including the Together: Building a United Community (T:BUC). T:BUC is currently under review and has the potential for creating a new peace plan to reflect society 25 years after the signing of the Agreement (see 3. above). The new plan should address the issues raised through our extensive consultations and this document. It should be a comprehensive plan with costed actions, targets, timeframes, a robust monitoring and evaluation structure, and connectivity across all other relevant strategies. Civic participation and genuine investment in peacebuilding is key to delivery and monitoring from the bottom up.

## **Enhance Societal Well-Being**

11. Mental health matters. Invest in the well-being of society. The needs of victims and survivors of the conflict still require attention and investment. The intergenerational impact of the conflict needs to be urgently tackled. This consultation, however, also highlighted how the legacy of the conflict and its mental health impact cannot be divorced from other interrelated pressures (such as the cost of living, poverty, lack of hope, poor infrastructure and connectivity, and access to health and social care), which are most prevalent in areas worst impacted by the conflict. These and other issues have created a range of interrelated mental health needs that must be addressed. This is not only an individual process but a social one that recognises how social issues create mental health challenges.

## **Undertake Civic Education on the Past and Future**

12. Through transgenerational sharing and learning, engage in an accessible civic education process about the Agreement, the past and the conflict. Break the silence about the past and learn positively. Young people want this – not to come to terms with the past individually or psychologically as such – but to help create a new future free from the past. It is important to link understanding the past with a constant process of future visioning.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The participants discussed the above calls to action during the Peace Summit conference. Their views are highlighted throughout this document. Participants were also asked to rank the actions. This was an impossible task as they each relate to one another. For example, you cannot integrate education without a functioning government, and enhancing societal well-being depends on ending paramilitarism and improving the economy.

That said, although there was no absolute consensus, most discussions stressed the importance of the governmental and societal dimensions necessary for sustainable peace. The political institutions needed to be functioning cooperatively and socio-economic issues tackled urgently. This is dependent, however, on genuine societal wide-reaching participation in government. The institutions only work if all feel they have a voice, which they currently do not.

After decades of weak institutions, vehicles for enhancing civic engagement have become a pressing concern. Young people want to be part of this process and the future but are currently alienated from it. At the same time, wider social issues loom large, including mental health, paramilitarism, poverty, conflict legacies such as justice and truth, and residential and educational segregation. The future depends on acknowledging and addressing the ongoing legacy of the past but always with an eye to a better future. New challenges such as Brexit and renewed discussions about the constitutional question, are also evident.

In other words, the process needs to be top-down (a functioning political system) and bottom-up, i.e. realising the actions called for in this document depend upon genuine

participation. As noted above, many also saw sustainable peace as backward-looking (e.g., acknowledging the past and differences, dealing with trauma, social division, constructively learning about history) and forward-looking (e.g., simultaneously building the economy, creating opportunities, enhancing social and mental well-being).

No one in the consultation process saw the challenges outlined in this document as easily overcome. Still, they want, first and foremost, to see a renewed commitment to tackle these challenges jointly, constructively and sustainably. There also remains a deep knowledge and experience within communities, organisations, and our young people, that can be harnessed in this task.

The Peace Summit process marks a moment to recognise the distance travelled and delineate the work yet to be done. The consultations demonstrate there is both hope and disillusionment 25 years on since the Good Friday Agreement. The positive energy of the past needs to be rekindled and new thinking developed so that hope does not completely fade. The status quo should not be an option; rather, the quest for a shared, integrated, multicultural and dynamic society is a priority.

The partnership which organised this Peace Summit will continue to gather views and ideas through further community dialogue and engagement to renew hope and offer credible ways forward. The deep frustration about the lack of progress on some key issues in terms of peacebuilding punctuated the entire consultation.

The call for action outlined in this document is a roadmap of issues that must be addressed. No government or civil society group can address them on their own. As this consultation has shown, those consulted want an active, engaged and visionary government collectively committed to sustainable peace, supported by a robust, vocal and independent civil society. Communities, and particularly young people, need to participate and their voices must be heard.

The next step, therefore, requires a recommitment, especially by political parties and leaders, to deepening and widening peace, and addressing the points of action outlined in this document. A programme for delivery, steered by government with the support of wider communities and civil society, should follow.

The organisations that began the Peace Summit process are willing to support the development a programme for delivery, and the Peace Summit consultations and further events will follow. At the same time, however, if we are to be true to the wishes of the over 700 people who shared their views with us, now is also time for political leaders to step up and collectively lead the way forward.

## **APPENDIX: CONSULTATION PROCESS**

This report summarises the key issues and common themes emerging from a series of engagement events with young people, peacebuilding practitioners, community groups and ordinary citizens from across Northern Ireland/the North of Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland between October 2022-May 2023.

Several host partners organised the events – Community Dialogue, YouthAction NI, the Holywell Trust and Ulster University in collaboration with the John and Pat Hume Foundation, as well as the Integrated Education Fund, and the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation with funding and support from the International Fund for Ireland.

Over an 8-month period at least 700 people were engaged in discussions and asked to share their views, at 30 events. At these different events, participants were asked to reflect on peace and reconciliation over the past 25 years and consider their aspirations for the future.

The initial consultations involved 4 key strands:

- Youth engagement workshops
- Peace practitioner workshops
- Community dialogues
- Citizen assemblies

Following all the events reports were written capturing the main issues shared. These reports were summarised in sectoral reports linking the strands outlined below (e.g. youth strand, practitioner strand). From these reports, the main themes that were the most consistent and prominent were extracted and cross-checked by researchers.<sup>2</sup>

A Consultation Document was then drafted and presented at a Peace Summit conference in Derry/Londonderry on 3 March 2023, the fifth and final consultation strand. This provided a further opportunity to hear and gather views on the collected

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<sup>2</sup> The research and drafting team included Brandon Hamber, Debs Erwin and Eliz McArdle.

data from the consultations. The final Call to Action document presented here was then enhanced with the additional information and ideas received from workshops at this event resulting in the current document.

<b>Process</b>	<b>Nos</b>	<b>Where</b>	<b>Participants</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>Youth Engagement workshops</b>	6	Belfast, Crossmaglen, Armagh, Derry/ Londonderry, Lurgan	341	185 F 156 M
<b>Peace Practitioner Workshops</b>	3	Belfast, Dungannon, Derry/ Londonderry	75	44 F 31 M
<b>Community Dialogues</b>	16	Online and in-person events in Derry/ Londonderry, Armagh, Armoy, Belfast (various locations), Lurgan, Co. Donegal, Dundalk	174	122F 52M
<b>Citizen Assemblies</b>	4	Buncrana and Belfast	81	58F 23M
<b>Peace Summit</b>	1	Ulster University, Derry/Londonderry (3 March 2023)	126	73F 53M
	<b>30</b>		<b>797</b>	482F 315M

This means that overall, we estimate the total number of people participating in the process to be 700-800. Some of those who attended the Peace Summit conference may have been part of the other consultation strands and, therefore, may have been counted twice. Equally, some who participated in the various events may not have completed a registration form, and often partner organisations, facilitators and staff (which were numerous) were not always counted in registration numbers. Overall, it is safe to assume that no less than 700 unique individuals participated in this process.

## **Consultation Strands**

The consultation process had five strands:

### **Youth Engagement workshops**

The format of each of the six events centred on a full-day programme called ‘Hunger for Peace’ Games with 341 young people in 6 events. Participants (aged 13-24) were

split into smaller teams and guided through various interactive teambuilding, competitive games and visioning exercises designed to enable young people to reflect on life in a divided society, identify ways to overcome conflict, and contribute to peacebuilding. The young people explored topics such as sectarianism, flags, education, religion, identity and difference, conflict and shared their ideas for life in 20-25 years' time.

## **Peace Practitioner Workshops**

At each of the three events, 2-4 speakers from Ulster University, YouthAction NI, Community Dialogue and the Rural Community Network were invited to present their reflections on the peace process in the past, present, and future and pose key questions for group discussion among participants. Topic areas included the Peace Process 25 years after the Good Friday Agreement; Building an Inclusive Peace with reference to the voices of young people; Safety and Politics – Community Policing; Paramilitarism and Political Structures, and People and Place – Reconciliation; Sectarianism, Equality and Human Rights for Marginalised Groups.

## **Community Dialogues**

Community Dialogue brought together a range of different constituencies and community groups. At each of the 16 events, some 174 participants were invited to share what they felt has been achieved, implemented or changed because of the peace process and the Good Friday Agreement and identify their hopes and fears for the future and recommendations for key actions.

## **Citizen Assemblies**

The Thirty Project run by the Holywell Trust, is modelled on the concept of a Citizens' Assembly and sought to engage at least thirty people, who responded to an open call, over a series of focused weekend residential. Four workshops took place with 81 participants in total. The project is, at its core, about trusting people to arrive at solutions for some of our most difficult problems. The residential weekends were held in January, February, and March 2023, examining the themes of 'Good Friday/Belfast Agreement: Civic voice 25 years on', 'Education: Towards a system that works for



everyone’, and ‘Legacy: Reconciling the past with a future focus’. These sessions included facilitated discussions where participants heard input from guest speakers before deliberating on possible solutions to challenges raised and led to several recommendations on each theme developed and voted on by the participants.

## **Peace Summit Conference**

The Peace Summit conference was held on 3 March 2023 on the Derry/Londonderry Campus of Ulster University. It provided a chance to consider both the progress that has been made and the steps still to be taken in relation to the peace process. The Peace Summit was attended by 126 individuals from various backgrounds, including community workers, educators, youth workers and government officials from across the island. At the Peace Summit a draft Consultation Document was presented that represented the views of those involved in all the consultation strands. A range of interactive workshops also took place on the themes and actions from the draft Consultation Document. In addition, a Padlet (a digital tool for recording ideas) was also made available throughout the day where participants were asked to comment on the themes, gaps and actions identified within the draft Consultation Document. The response was strong with 160 posts added from 52 individual contributors.