

Part A:
Conference Speeches
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‘The new common sense? Implementing policy for sharing over separation’

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During the consultation on *A Shared Future*, the absence of any question mark in the title was a useful way to force attention on the importance of interdependence and social cohesion to a political version of reconciliation. If the problem is that we share this space, but we do so in polarisation, hostility and antagonism which leads directly to (and is then deepened by) violence, then peace-building is finding new democratic ways to share the space into the future.

The difficulty is that there are alternatives to a shared future, and we have lived in the foothills of them for decades. But be in no doubt about what they involve: killing, expulsion from homes and property, massive economic destruction, random violence- particularly to the most vulnerable – the old, the young and the unarmed (often women), and (overwhelmingly) the poor – and no certainty about outcome. Did Serb nationalists in Kosovo really understand that the outcome would be the destruction of centuries of settlement and civilisation, their restriction to Nato guarded ‘reservations’ and the death of their economy? Did Greek Cypriots who took over Cyprus in 1974 expect to be expelled from their homes and communities for thirty years? And did the Turks who invaded understand that it would exclude Northern Cyprus from integration into the western economy as a result? Did the Germans of Czechoslovakia in 1938 understand that by rallying to Hitler they were laying the seeds of their own destruction within a decade?

The point is not to be unnecessarily alarmist or to pretend that Northern Ireland in 2006 is absolutely like any of these places. But any belief that an alternative to sharing here is consequence-free is not only naïve but

dangerous. Because be in no doubt, we have been protected, or at least many of us have been protected, from the consequences of our antagonism by the intervention of massive social engineering – possibly the greatest social engineering project in Europe since World War II. So when anyone tells you that *A Shared Future* is social engineering, laugh and offer a few observations. At a physical level, communities which were ready to drive or burn or shoot each other out have been ‘stabilised’ by the building of peace walls, CCTV and clear notions of territory – ask the residents of Clonard Street in 1969 or Upper and Lower Ardoyne for thirty years or Cluan and Clandeboye Place in 2002. The best we can do, is establish projects for local discussion, mediation and negotiation and arrangements for agreeing to de-escalate tension. CRC has been privileged to support some of the best examples of these over the years. We have supported youth diversionary schemes, inter-community projects, mobile phone networks, single identity projects, work with and without people with paramilitary links. The enormous efforts which individuals and communities put into these should be saluted and recognised, but it cannot be a blueprint for what we do in the future. We have ensured a minimum degree of public services through duplication, at huge cost to the public purse, or a service that is measurably worse if you find yourself in the wrong community and the swimming pool has a paramilitary grim reaper painted at the gate.

At a more subtle level, those of us with economic wherewithal have subtly withdrawn ourselves and our children from the line of fire, retreating into televised ‘curtain-twitching’ where we watch, are fascinated by and judge events through the TV but spare ourselves the consequences or change. We collude in the notion that ruthless segregation of the poor is choice, that we have no role in the problem while living in an economy that remains wealthy if you have public sector employment.

And when I said that we have lived in the foothills of polarisation, the social engineering never really got to resolving anything. So side by side with a liveable life, most of the time, for many, others paid a quite appalling price. If you were poor or lived on an interface in Belfast, lived in a disputed rural area, often in Armagh, Fermanagh or Tyrone or were a member of the security forces the chances of being killed, injured or intimidated were exponentially higher. If you lived as a minority in an area in which most of the others were of ‘the other sort’ you kept your head down, changed your behaviour and hoped against hope. Some of the most poignant stories I have read in recent

years have been in Marie Crawley's work on minorities in rural areas; people scared to hang out the washing in case it drew attention to the fact that their children played the wrong sport or people who never went in to the village for 25 years for fear of the consequences. It is has not been a picnic being a Protestant in parts of border Fermanagh or South Armagh or a Catholic in parts of north or east Antrim.

The security answers may have dampened down the problem, but they did so by putting whole areas under de facto occupation, destroying the notion of proper policing for many and throwing whole communities and families into complex and compromised relationships with paramilitaries – who were, by turns, defenders and destroyers, community advocates and community controllers. The old Cultural Diversity question of what Britishness or Irishness means to me, may depend in some places on which side of a rifle you were looking at it from.

None of this is to say that things have not got better in the last decade. Nor that we should not be grateful for social engineering in maintaining possibilities in Northern Ireland that would not be possible elsewhere. But it is to say that the issue is not just stopping the violence, it is actually changing the fundamental relationships which produce violence and that requires a choice, or choices, for a future with the others not against them.

The work after stopping is all about sharing. And it is hard work. But, given that the Agreement was struck without one of the major parties being present, no real agreement about policing, parades, paramilitaries, prisoners, decommissioning and demilitarisation being made and members of two other parties not having spoken personally during negotiations, it is perhaps unsurprising that we were unprepared for the real work.

Secondly, it is to say that *A Shared Future* is not about unwanted and heavy-handed social engineering, but getting to a place where all of the social engineering of the past is unnecessary and what social engineering remains is openly directed at supporting the emergence of a peaceful, inclusive and shared community where disputes are resolved through dialogue and political means. Success looks like people able to live where a house becomes free without thought that they are at risk of their house being burned, their children attacked or their lives prematurely ended. It looks like Protestant people in Torrens not feeling that they have to move out because Catholic 'others' move in, and Catholics or anyone who needs a house feeling free to safely consider

any offer. It looks like no discussions about territorial markers, because we all share the space. It looks like schools, whether internally integrated or not, who work naturally and normally together to provide education for a diverse and shared society. It looks like people arriving in Northern Ireland without fear that their background makes them ‘legitimate targets’ for attack or bullying. And finally, it looks like community development which does not try to protect and project an old single identity, but supports communities as they grow and change, able to integrate the diverse people who live in their area into unique expressions of human variety. That is the capacity which we should be supporting, not spurious competitive measures of “you got more than me”.

The rhetoric around *A Shared Future* talks about putting it into the DNA of Northern Ireland, or of it becoming the new common sense. We in CRC agree with this, which is why we have championed this policy so vigorously. But a vision is words without a pathway to implement it, and cynicism is deepened rather than change generated.

The first requirement is leadership. It is imperative that we end the ambivalence that is hanging around, that *A Shared Future* is just rhetoric, cucumber sandwiches for the twenty first century. This means some real decisions by political leaders to embrace the notion that sharing is not a short term tactic but a practical and moral necessity. That will mean a willingness to take on vested interests who define progress only in terms of relative benefits for one part of the community. One of the fears around the restoration of devolution is that local politicians are not yet willing to make these challenges, as the flak they will take will be from their own voters and interests. But, until we are able to meet these challenges, *A Shared Future* will be hobbled by being seen as a top-down policy. On the other hand, it is imperative that the British and Irish governments, and all of the international supporters who have invested so much in peace-building here emphasise that the long-term sustainability of peace depends on just such a commitment, whether devolution is established in the short run or not.

A commitment to a shared future will demand a lot from leaders. First, it demands an end to all ambivalence about the use of violence for political or social ends from whatever quarter. Secondly, it will involve an acknowledgement that ‘their’ view of ‘our side’ as a threat are not the result of fantasy but often of lived experience. Alec Reid and Willie Frazer speak from more widely held starting points than we may wish to acknowledge. Things

have been done here in the past which make trust in partnership with us into the future very difficult to sell in their community. Thirdly, there is still work to be done about nationality and statehood which is often sublimated in peace talk. Is peace still secretly sought on ‘Brits Out’ – which cannot be translated to Unionists as anything other than an existential threat – or on ‘No fenians about the place’ – which cannot be translated to Nationalists as a ruthless commitment to segregation, subordination, anti-Irishness and keeping Catholics out of power. Or can we make peace with the complexity of the Six Counties, whatever the constitutional settlement? Fourthly, we have hard work to do in acknowledging the antagonistic edge of our cultural traditions. For those inside them, they have often appeared healthy, nourishing and warm. But they have often ruthlessly promoted internal bonding and set it against all bridging, in the jargon of social capital, and it is surely unsurprising that those who need to be bridged to have got the message of enmity. This will be the work of a generation, but it cannot be dodged. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we need to plan and act our way into a shared future.

Which takes me to the next requirement: resources. *A Shared Future* will not be plausible without clear and measurable policy commitments and the resources to back them. There remains a strong suspicion that this is where mainstreaming fails. Because it means saying overtly that the priority in Titanic quarter or the Crumlin Road is a shared and open space. That educational reform must be driven by the imperative of ending antagonism and that success in housing policy means evolving a clear working model of what safe and integrated housing is. DCAL needs a clear policy on cultural diversity for a shared future and a plan to enact it. And when policies are directed to one community or another, such as the recent policies on Protestant areas, we need to see far greater transparency about how this contributes to a shared future. DFP has a critical role in the plausibility of *A Shared Future*. All of this means standing up to vested interests in segregation or antagonism, or finding ways to bring them along. Of course it is turning a tanker in the north of Ireland, but turning needs a decision and a direction, and energy.

The third requirement is a clear implantation plan. This conference will consider ideas and recommendations about areas of action, and we will hear from OFMDFM later about their ideas for the Triennial Action Plan. But in education it should be a stated purpose of education to prepare children for a future in a diverse and changing society. The RPA should encompass clear rules for governance, emblems and community planning to ensure an open

civic culture. Planning should specifically ensure that developments are proofed against open access. And progress in housing should include measures of safety together.

Finally, we need to bury the idea that *A Shared Future* or good relations is an alternative to or threat to equality or human rights. A society which acknowledges the full membership of every person is the definition and measure of good relations. CRC's slogan of equity, diversity and interdependence is not a watering down of equality, but an attempt to reach for a deeper and more profound notion of fairness and justice, which allows for permanent engagement rather than mathematical measurement, and possibly, for short term inequalities where there is an argument of redress or agreed specific difficulties. Community relations was never about avoidance or measured in harmony, but should be measured by the degree to which hard questions are now addressed and properly resolved through dialogue. What it means is that some of our discussions will become tougher and more contentious, as we finally meet and talk about policing and flags and victims. But what it also means is that we do so with far fewer people dead and injured.

What is the role of the CRC in all of this? On Monday, I was introduced as 'responsible for implementing *A Shared Future* in Northern Ireland. Not quite. We have specific jobs to do, as set down in the document and a more generic purpose of championing dialogue and sharing wherever it emerges across Northern Ireland. There are of course difficulties in straddling the task of championing a direction and monitoring policy progress. We are and remain an independent body with public tasks to undertake. What we will be is an active partner, through funding, partnership and development, to those groups and bodies wishing to take steps towards sharing over separation, a permanent irritant to those who would rather push the issue of interdependence off the table of public discourse and an active generator of ideas and information on all matters pertaining to better relationships. And we will stick around for the long haul until there really is no question mark in a shared future.

‘Reflections of Diversity and Integration’

Keynote Address

Kenan Malik

We’re All Multiculturalists Now observed American sociologist, and former critic of pluralism, Nathan Glazer in the title of a recent book. And indeed we are. Few things define our age more than the belief in the benefits of cultural diversity. Words such as ‘respect’, ‘tolerance’ and ‘diversity’ trip off virtually every politician’s tongue. The celebration of difference, the promotion of a pluralist society, tolerance for a variety of cultural identities - these are seen as the hallmarks of a decent, liberal, democratic, non-racist society.

The starting point for any multicultural policy is the belief that for a diverse society to function and to be fair, both individually and collectively we need to show respect for other peoples, cultures, and viewpoints. It is therefore incumbent on people to act responsibly by refraining from giving offence to other groups and cultures. And should it be incumbent on governments to legislate not just to guarantee equal treatment for all people, but also to ensure that all cultures are allowed to flourish and that everyone behaves in a tolerant and respectful manner to people of differing cultures. Hence the promotion over the past few decades of race relations laws, legislation against hate speech, and public funding for social and artistic diversity.

Such laws and regulations have been introduced with the best of intentions. Their consequences, however, have often been to create the very problems they were meant to solve. Rather than establishing an open, democratic, diverse society, multicultural policies have in many cases helped fragment society, create new divisions and conflicts, and box people in into narrow identities. *A Shared Future* points out, ‘Multi-ethnic societies that work well... recognise that the complex make-up of each individual is what gives us our identity’. This identity ‘is something that... evolves over time... not something that is unchanging that seals us off from those who are different’.

In ‘Multi-ethnic societies that don’t work’, on the other hand, ‘individuals are reduced to simple group stereotypes, which easily turn into enemy images.’ The impact of much multicultural policy, unfortunately, has precisely been to create such stereotypes and enemy images. I am going to be talking not about Northern Ireland but largely about the British experience. The lessons, however, are, I think, universal.

Part of the problem is that discussions of multiculturalism confuse *descriptions* and *prescriptions*. The term ‘multicultural’ has come to define a society that is perceived as particularly diverse, usually as a result of immigration. It has also come to define the policies necessary to manage such diversity. The concept of multiculturalism, in other words, has come to embody both a *description* of a society and a *prescription* for managing that society. Multiculturalism is both the problem and the answer, and this, as we shall see, is highly problematic when it comes to policy-making.

There is a second and equally troubling confusion: between the concept of multiculturalism as lived experience and multiculturalism as a political process or ideology. When most people say that multiculturalism is a good thing what they mean is the experience of living in a society that is less insular, less homogenous, more vibrant and cosmopolitan than before. And in that sense Britain is a much richer place for the impact of mass immigration.

Those who advocate multiculturalism as a political process are, however, talking about something different. Multiculturalism, they argue, requires the public recognition and affirmation of cultural differences. An individual’s cultural background frames their identity and helps define who they are. If we want to treat individuals with dignity and respect we must also treat with dignity and respect the groups that furnish them with their sense of personal being. ‘The liberal is in theory committed to equal respect for persons’, the political philosopher Bhikhu Parekh argues. ‘Since human beings are culturally embedded, respect for them entails respect for their cultures and ways of life.’

Social justice requires not just that individuals are treated as political equals, but that their cultural beliefs are also treated as equally valid, and indeed are institutionalised in the public sphere. The influential sociologist Tariq Madood draws a distinction between what he calls the ‘equality of individualism’ and the ‘equality encompassing public ethnicity: equality as not having to hide or apologise for one’s origins, family or community, but

requiring others to show respect for them, and adapt public attitudes and arrangements so that the heritage they represent is encouraged rather than contemptuously expect them to wither away.’

I want to suggest that this vision of multiculturalism as a political process actually undermines much of what is valuable about multiculturalism as lived experience. We can see this if we look historically at how multicultural policies developed in Britain. One of the enduring myths is that multicultural policies were introduced because minority groups demanded that their cultural differences be recognised and be afforded respect. In fact, far from being a response to demands from local communities, multiculturalism was imposed from the top, the product of government and local authority policies aimed at diffusing the anger created by racism.

First and second generation postwar immigrants to Britain were concerned less about preserving cultural differences than about fighting for political equality. They recognised that at the heart of the fight for political equality was a commonality of values, hopes and aspirations between blacks and whites, not an articulation of unbridgeable differences.

In the sixties and seventies four main issues dominated the struggle for racial equality: opposition to discriminatory immigration controls; the fight against racist attacks; the struggle for equality in the workplace; and, most explosively, the issue of police brutality. These struggles politicised a new generation of activists and came to an explosive climax in the inner city riots of the late seventies and early eighties.

It was against this background that the policies of multiculturalism emerged. Led by the then Greater London Council, local authorities organised consultation with black and Asian communities, drew up equal opportunities policies, established race relations units and dispensed millions of pounds in grants to community organisations.

At the heart of the strategy was a redefinition of racism. Racism now meant not simply the denial of equal rights but the denial of the right to be different. Equality no longer meant treating everybody equally despite their racial, cultural, ethnic or religious differences but treating people differently because of them.

These policies transformed the character of antiracism in two major ways. First, because political power was channelled through ethnically-based

organisations, so people began to organise themselves around ethnic issues. In other words, identity became linked primarily to ethnicity or faith because asserting such identity gave people greater political power.

A good illustration of this is the changing relationships between ethnic groups in Birmingham. In 1985 the city was rocked by the Handsworth riots, when blacks, whites and Asians took to the streets together in violent protest against poverty, unemployment and, in particular, oppressive policing. Last year the Lozells area of the city, next door to Handsworth, was again torn apart by riots. But this time the violence pitted not the community against the police but blacks against Asians. Communities that had fought side by side in 1985 fought against each other 20 years later.

The root of the 2005 riots was a rumour that a group of Asian men had gang-raped a young Jamaican girl. No evidence has been found to substantiate the claim – and no victim has ever turned up – but so deep has become the distrust between the two communities that most African Caribbeans in the area believed the rumour to be true. Why the shift in attitudes over the past 20 years? Largely as a result of multicultural policies introduced after 1985.

In response to the original riots, the council set up nine so-called ‘Umbrella Groups’ to speak for different ethnic communities in the city – such as African Caribbean, Chinese, Irish, Pakistani – as well as specific faith groups – Black-led churches, the Bangladeshi Islamic Project, the Hindu Council and the Sikh Council of Gurdwaras. The aim was to draw minorities into the political process, to give them a voice and a degree of political power. The reality, though, was to create conflict where none had existed before. As one academic study of Birmingham’s race relations model put it, rather than developing ‘cross-community equality agendas and responses to policy problems... the structure led to competition between Umbrella Groups for scarce resources.’ The city’s policies ‘promoted ‘competition between black and different ethnic minority communities as each ‘attempted to maximise their own interests’.

Once policy makers started to think of the local community in ethnic and faith terms, and to allocate resources according to ethnicity and faith, then inevitably people began to view themselves in those categories. Far from responding to ethnic differences, in other words, multicultural policies often create them. The tensions between Birmingham’s black and Asian population have not always been there but have been sparked in large part through the implementation of multicultural policies.

The second major impact of multicultural policies in the 1980s was to shift the focus of anti-racist struggles from political issues, such as policing and immigration, to religious and cultural issues. Take Bradford. In the late seventies, young Asians took to the streets in protest at racist attacks, deportations, and police harassment. In response, the council unrolled a series of multicultural policies largely on the GLC and Birmingham model. A 12-point race relations plan declared that every section of the 'multiracial, multicultural city' had 'an equal right to maintain its own identity, culture, language, religion and customs.' By the mid-eighties the focus of anti-racist protest in Bradford had shifted from political to religious and cultural issues: a demand for Muslim schools and for separate education for girls, a campaign for halal meat to be served at school, and, most explosively, the confrontation over the publication of *The Satanic Verses*.

Political struggles unite across ethnic or cultural divisions; cultural struggles inevitably fragment. As different groups began asserting their particular identities ever more fiercely, so the shift from the political to the cultural arena helped create a more tribal city. At the same time, since every group was now defined by its culture, militancy came to be seen as the demand for greater cultural authenticity.

When I was growing in the 1980s, there existed a strong secular movement within British Muslim communities which challenged both racism and traditional Muslim values. The Asian Youth Movement, founded in 1977, gave voice to a radical secular tradition. AYM activists did not distinguish themselves as Muslim, Hindu or Sikh; indeed many did not even see themselves as specifically Asian, preferring to call themselves 'black' which they viewed as an all-inclusive term for non-white immigrants. They challenged not just racism but also many traditional values too, particularly within the Muslim community, helping establish an alternative leadership that confronted traditionalists on issues such as the role of women and the dominance of the mosque.

But as the focus shifted in the 80s from political rights to cultural authenticity, so secular Muslims came increasingly to be seen as betraying their culture while radical Islam became not just more acceptable but, to many, more authentic. This process was strengthened by a new relationship between the local council and the mosques. In 1981 Bradford council helped set up and fund the Bradford Council of Mosques and looked to it as a voice of the

community. This helped marginalise secular radicals - the Asian Youth Movement eventually broke up - and allowed religious leaders to reassert their power. As the secular tradition became squeezed out, so the only place offering shelter for disaffected youth was militant Islam. Hence the rise in the late 80s of fundamentalist Islamic organisations, such as Hiz-ut-Tahrir.

Cultures are not homogenous, but if policy makers treat them as such, then they can come to be perceived as so, from both within and without, and with dangerous consequences. In Britain, the economist Amartya Sen suggests in his new book *Identity and Violence*, multicultural policy has created not diversity but what he calls 'plural monoculturalism'. Much discussion about multiculturalism warns against the view of social groups as sealed boxes. Yet in practice, multicultural policies assume that society is made up of a series of distinct, largely homogenous cultures that dance around each other; indeed not just assume this but help create such a society.

In cities like Bradford and Birmingham multicultural policies have helped segregate communities far more effectively than racism. Racism certainly created deep divisions in these cities. But it also helped generate political struggles against discrimination, the impact of which was to create bridges across ethnic, racial and cultural divisions. Multiculturalism, on the other hand, has not simply entrenched the divisions created by racism, but made cross-cultural interaction more difficult by encouraging people to assert their cultural differences.

The real question we need to ask ourselves is why we should value diversity. Diversity is important, not in and of itself, but because it allows us to compare and contrast different values, beliefs and lifestyles, make judgements upon them, and decide which are better and which worse. It is important, in other words, because it allows us to engage in political dialogue and debate, a process whereby different values are put to the test, and a collective language of citizenship emerges.

But it is precisely such dialogue and debate, and the making of such judgements, that the political process of multiculturalism attempts to suppress in the name of 'tolerance' and 'respect'. The very thing that is valuable about diversity – the clashes and conflicts that it brings about – is what many policy makers most fear.

Over the past few months there has been considerable debate about the limits of free speech in a plural society, particularly against the background of the Danish cartoons controversy and the introduction of a new law in Britain against incitement to religious hatred. Much of the discussion has assumed that free speech must necessarily be less free in a plural society. ‘If people are to occupy the same political space without conflict’, the Tariq Modood points out, ‘they mutually have to limit the extent to which they subject each others’ fundamental beliefs to criticism.’

I believe that the opposite is true. In a truly homogenous society in which everyone thought in exactly the same way then giving offence would be nothing more than gratuitous. But in the real world where societies are plural, then it is both inevitable and important that people offend the sensibilities of others. Inevitable, because where different beliefs are deeply held, clashes are unavoidable. And we should deal with those clashes rather than suppress them. Important because any kind of social change or social progress means offending some deeply held sensibilities. The right to ‘subject each others’ fundamental beliefs to criticism’ is the bedrock of an open, diverse society.

The consequence of restricting offensive speech is to make social groups appear more homogenous than they are and to create and exacerbate divisions between communities. Take the Danish cartoons. Most people – including most policy makers - assume that all Muslims want them banned. They do not. Bünyamin Simsek is a councillor in the Danish city of Aarhus who helped organize a counter-demonstration to the cartoon protests. ‘There is’, he says, ‘a large group of Muslims in this city who want to live in a secular society and adhere to the principle that religion is an issue between them and God and not something that should involve society’. He is not alone. But his is the kind of voice that gets silenced in the rush to censor that which is deemed to cause offence. In the name of pluralism, the censors are helping to strengthen the hand of the most conservative elements within Muslim communities.

At the same time, restrictions on free speech in the name of tolerance leads us to a pick ‘n’ mix attitude to what is tolerable that exacerbates tensions between groups. When British Muslim leader Iqbal Sacranie’s comments on homosexuality led last year to a police investigation, 22 Muslim leaders wrote to the *Times* demanding the right to be able to ‘freely express their views in an atmosphere free of intimidation or bullying’. Those same leaders deny such a

right to newspapers publishing cartoons about Mohammed. British National Party leader Nick Griffin wants to be free to promote racist hatred, but wants to lock up Islamic clerics who do the same. Many of those happy to see cartoons lampooning Mohammed draw the line at anything mocking the Holocaust. And so on. It is fast becoming a case of ‘My speech should be free, but yours is too costly’. Censorship laws create conflict as each group demands that it should have freedom of expression but also the right not to be offended by others.

A truly plural society would be one in which citizens have full freedom to pursue their different values or practices in private, while in the public sphere all citizens would be treated as political equals whatever the differences in their private lives. Today, however, pluralism is coming to mean the very opposite. The right to practice a particular religion, speak a particular language, follow a particular cultural practice is seen as a public good rather than a private freedom. While our rights to do, write or even think as private citizens are increasingly curtailed in the name of ‘tolerance’.

Diversity as lived experience is valuable and enriching. But multiculturalism as public policy often undermines what is valuable about such diversity. That is a lesson that all policy makers should take to heart.

Launch of Government's Triennial Action Plans on A Shared Future

Lord Rooker

Thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to be here. This is a very important week in the community relations calendar. Peter Hain sends his best wishes to you all. On Tuesday in Newry, Peter set out in very clear terms this Government's commitment to *A Shared Future*.

I am delighted to be here in this marvellous building, which through the darkest years of civil unrest in Northern Ireland was an oasis for so many. Many great individuals (like Rev Eric Gallagher former Moderator of Methodist Church) whose name resonates with peace building graced these halls. Many of you will know of his involvement in the Feakle Talks over 30 years ago. A forgotten episode in Irish history - talks that inspired the longest ceasefire in the Northern Ireland conflict until the current peace process came into being.

It is fitting that you are holding your conference here. I am delighted to be able to address you. I should like to offer my congratulations to Community Relations Council (CRC) and all the organisations who are participating in nearly 200 community relations events this week. They are showcasing the major contributions community relations makes to the everyday life of everyone.

I would like to also pay tribute to the work carried out by the CRC and other organisations represented here today (and those who could not be here) for their ongoing and sustained work to bring about real opportunities for peace-building and reconciliation.

I hope you got a chance to hear (or read the coverage) of the Secretary of State's speech made at the NICICTU conference on Tuesday. Peter has

robustly reaffirmed the government’s **full** and **total** commitment to *A Shared Future* and let me reiterate:

“there is no alternative to A Shared Future. Segregation and division is not an option”.

My purpose today in coming here is threefold:

- **to launch** the Shared Future **first** Triennial Action Plan (TAP) – **along** with its sister document the Racial Equality First Implementation Action Plan;
- I want, in my speech, to give a flavour of what we are going to do. Not merely to restate the objectives or make aspirational commitments but, to say what will be done, by whom and for what purpose.
- I want also to ratchet-up the collective public consciousness of A Shared Future. It is in my view an important public policy (if not the most important). Separate but equal may be the reality or desire at present for some people, but it can’t be our future.
- And finally, to make clear that government has a special responsibility not only to provide leadership in tackling the “twin evils” of sectarianism and racism **but** in setting out the framework to tackle both. I plan to map out for you over the course of the next 15 minutes or so what we intend to do.

LAUNCHING THE ACTION PLAN

So what is this action plan going to do to help build this new modern society? I can of course only give you some of the important headlines of what is within this substantial document within this speech.

In Education

We will promote and prioritise sharing in all levels of education. When the decisions are made by the Department on new schools, on reorganisation or rationalisation of existing schools, proposals will have to demonstrate that

options for collaboration or sharing on a cross-community basis have been fully explored. It will also be our position that such proposals are likely to justify financial support if they are shared or operate across the community divide. These specific commitments will be taken on in the context of the current review of education being led by Sir George Bain.

In Social Development and Housing

We have set several strategic plans in place to deliver on shared living, dialogue and relationship-building at community level:

- Within social and economic renewal projects – the promotion of good relations, particularly at interface areas and in divided communities will be a requirement. This will also be a requirement in relation to rural estates.
- The Housing Executive will be developing two pilot “Shared Future” housing schemes this year and laying the groundwork for potential host sites for future schemes. As part of this work I have asked OFMDFM to review the current provisions of the Fair Employment and Treatment Order to ensure and to bring forward proposals to facilitate mixed housing schemes.
- A consortium of Departments along with the Arts Council will be implementing the “Re-Imaging Communities Programme” this year to work with communities to replace aggressively sectarian and racist images. This is about putting confidence back into communities and sending out positivity rather than negativity.

I would want to emphasise that all of the actions in the plan are contributions to the Shared Future vision. Some actions, such as the examples I've just given will be “more headline grabbing”. However, it's the sum of all the parts that will be the overarching outcome. Again to illustrate these other parts:

- The commitment by the Department of Finance and Personnel not to consider any public expenditure proposal that does not include a good relations assessment is very significant. Particularly as we enter the work on the Comprehensive Spending Review for 2007.

- Making sure that Shared Future objectives are embedded in the outworking of the Regional Development Strategy is crucially important. That document is key to future land use management and balanced regional development. It is imperative that *A Shared Future* is central to it.
- The detailed set of commitments and actions for the Police Service are essential to build a safe environment for all. This is not just about tackling hate crime, but also about making further progress in the new era of policing in Northern Ireland.

I suspect some of you will think that the action plans do not go far enough. That perhaps some of the issues are not addressed or challenged in a robust and proactive fashion. That these are “paper commitments” which you will believe when you see them.

There is nothing wrong with healthy scepticism. However, I say to you we are taking the first steps into new and challenging territories. It is a steep change for everyone.

Northern Ireland is changing and changing rapidly. This increasing culturally diverse society should not be defined by the challenges it brings, but by the opportunities it presents. So this action plan is an opportunity agenda that I, the Secretary of State, and my ministerial colleagues with the commitment of our Departments are resolved to achieve.

The issue of our time

Division is costly to everybody in Northern Ireland – economically, politically and socially and that division is the consequence of antagonistic sectarian and racist attitudes.

As the issue of our time, if the delivery of public services is not set-up to counter these sectarian attitudes and racial inequalities, then, inevitably, it will continue to reinforce those divisions and inequalities.

The negative economic impact of parallel service delivery is one that is already widely recognised and the need to reduce these “costs of division” equally agreed.

In order to quantify the extent of the cost, we have commissioned research to obtain data that will help direct planning of services in the future. A competitive economy may be regarded as the terminology of the economist but it means a lot to the people of Northern Ireland when jobs are lost to other, more competitive parts of the world.

Sectarianism, racism, division all cost jobs and damage prosperity. In addition, to being socially unjustifiable it is economically unsustainable.

Government will continue to drive forward actions to promote good relations and good race relations **but** in the long run sustained progress requires leadership at local, civic and community level. **But perhaps most importantly it requires political leadership.**

Part of my objective today is to **challenge** local political parties to take up this mantle and make the policy a reality - a new common sense for all who live on this island.

We have engaged in a series of presentations to elected members at council level and with parties. "A Shared Future" is certainly becoming a part of Northern Ireland's vocabulary today. But, let's remember what we mean by A Shared Future:

- all individuals are considered equal;
- differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere;
- people are treated impartially; and
- equity, respect for diversity and recognition of our interdependence.

As we move towards a new construct of local government these are the Shared Future values that we will see built into the RPA arrangements.

We are not unique: cohesion, sharing, diversity, building good relations and reconnecting with state institutions those who feel – for whatever reason – most alienated or marginalized are challenges in Britain and across Europe.

The leadership that Northern Ireland needs is to build good relations which benefit everyone and threaten no-one. At all levels we can judge ourselves if the attitudes we hold (or see displayed by others) are rooted in mutual recognition and trust.

I am reminded by a quote from Sir Jonathan Sacks when he said:

“Individuals who make moral choices and act upon them can and do make a difference. They demonstrate that those who actively oppose prejudice, racism, persecution and murder can make a difference.”

I use this to say something to everyone in this room today – me included. I am using this speech to ensure we understand the impact that sectarianism and racism have on society in Northern Ireland. I’m also saying, knowing this isn’t enough – that knowledge brings a moral choice for each of us – are we willing to do something to make a difference? Are we?

Today’s launch of the first Shared Future action plan - is an important milestone – it clearly signposts the direction of travel on many different fronts – on education, housing, on tackling sectarianism and racism, and on reclaiming shared space in the public realm.

This is a **rolling 3-year** action plan and specific actions focus, in the main, on the first year.

The focus is – commitment, delivery, review and renew – a sound policy process on which we seek your active engagement.

Future action plans will mature and grow in line with delivery, outcomes and measurement - along with the benefit of your practical experiences.

About the conference recommendations

This conference has produced important outputs and recommendations to help the outworking of the triennial action plan.

I very much welcome these and I look forward to them being taken forward by the Community Relations Council in collaboration with the Good Relations Panel, which will be established to oversee how we implement A Shared Future.

The role of the Community Relations Council will be crucial to the planning mechanism and I commend the Council for this conference today and for being the conduit for *A Shared Future* whereby these research papers have been produced. This is an example of the support / challenge function which CRC has with Government.

Good Relations Panel

I plan to establish the Good Relations Panel (chaired by Nigel Hamilton, Head of the Civil Service) to champion and oversee the good relations agenda and the implementation / development of Shared Future plans across Government departments. The good relations indicators' framework which we are also developing will be a vital tool in aiding that delivery and challenge function.

As I said earlier, one of the first actions of the Good Relations Panel will be the establishment of a mechanism to underscore through 'civic' partnership working how collectively we can shape and evolve this policy through the outworking of the action plans.

We will announce details of both the panel and the supporting mechanism by the end of June.

Concluding remarks

In closing, can I say that we have a golden opportunity here in Northern Ireland. It is a changing society which offers us the opportunity to examine the way in which we - not only view those who have come to live and work among us – but, also how we have traditionally viewed each other within Northern Ireland. **It is in my view about shifting the paradigm of relationships.**

Growing diversity can have a genuinely leavening effect on a divided society and has the power to alter the attitudes that have maintained the divide.

I commend the first Shared Future Triennial Action Plan and the Racial Equality Implementation Action Plan to you. As I said in the foreword to the Shared Future Triennial Action Plan – “This is doable!” so let's begin today and turn the risks of not beginning to do something into the opportunities of tomorrow.

Finally, I'd like to share a personal view with you. I am personally humbled to be associated with something: a “movement”, which will deliver a range of good things for all of us, for the people of Northern Ireland as we together help shape tomorrow's shared future today.

Let's us – you, I and all of us give the commitment to work together to change hearts and minds. Let me finish with two quotes. First, it was John F Kennedy who said:

“One person can make a difference and every person must try.”

The second quote is from Václav Havel. He said:

“Work for something because it is good, not because it stands a chance to succeed”

Ladies and gentlemen not only is A Shared Future something good, but it will succeed. **It is the new common sense.**