

A SHARED FUTURE

A Consultation Paper on Improving Relations in Northern Ireland January 2003 Response from The Rt Reverend Alan Harper, Bishop of Connor.

Page 4

- 1.7 **a pluralist society**, with respect and tolerance for cultural diversity, where people are free to assert their identity.

Comment: *celebrate – assertion has adversarial overtones.*

No one is arguing for an artificially homogeneous Northern Ireland, and no one will be asked to give up or suppress their chosen identity. We recognise the views of those who do not wish to have closer integration of communities. However, we believe that a shared and pluralist society should be encouraged, and people who want to live in such a society should have that choice – a choice that is currently limited.

Comment: *Do those who do not wish for closer integration have rights in this matter? Can their rights and actions be allowed to stand in the way of a shared and pluralist future?*

Page 5

1.10

Comment: *Based upon what underlying principles – objectives?*

- 1.12 This consultation paper aims to do two things. First and foremost, we want to stimulate the widest possible debate on what the fundamental aims and objectives for our policy should be, and the principles that should underpin that policy. These issues are addressed in chapters 2 and 3. Most importantly, we need to hear the views of the people of Northern Ireland about the type of society that people wish to live in.

- 1.13 Secondly, we are also seeking views on our proposals for measures and actions that we should take to achieve these aims and objectives. This is covered in chapter 4. Clearly, this will depend on the conclusions reached about policy aims, objectives and principles.

Page 6

- 1.16 This consultation process will be broadly based and inclusive, involving key stakeholders such as political parties, elected representatives, public authorities, and local community groups. Churches and other faith-based organisations will have a particularly important role to play.

A SHARED FUTURE

A Consultation Paper on Improving Relations in Northern Ireland January 2003 Response from The Rt Reverend Alan Harper, Bishop of Connor.

Page 4

- 1.7 a pluralist society, with respect and tolerance for cultural diversity, where people are free to assert their identity.

Comment: *celebrate – assertion has adversarial overtones.*

No one is arguing for an artificially homogeneous Northern Ireland, and no one will be asked to give up or suppress their chosen identity. We recognise the views of those who do not wish to have closer integration of communities. However, we believe that a shared and pluralist society should be encouraged, and people who want to live in such a society should have that choice – a choice that is currently limited.

Comment: *Do those who do not wish for closer integration have rights in this matter? Can their rights and actions be allowed to stand in the way of a shared and pluralist future?*

Page 5

1.10

Comment: *Based upon what underlying principles – objectives?*

- 1.12 This consultation paper aims to do two things. First and foremost, we want to stimulate the widest possible debate on what the fundamental aims and objectives for our policy should be, and the principles that should underpin that policy. These issues are addressed in chapters 2 and 3. Most importantly, we need to hear the views of the people of Northern Ireland about the type of society that people wish to live in.

- 1.13 Secondly, we are also seeking views on our proposals for measures and actions that we should take to achieve these aims and objectives. This is covered in chapter 4. Clearly, this will depend on the conclusions reached about policy aims, objectives and principles.

Page 6

- 1.16 This consultation process will be broadly based and inclusive, involving key stakeholders such as political parties, elected representatives, public authorities, and local community groups. Churches and other faith-based organisations will have a particularly important role to play.

A SHARED FUTURE

Page 7

Do you agree that the overall aim for policy must be for a more shared but pluralist society?

The Church of Ireland affirms the aspiration to develop/construct a society which is inclusive and respectful of personal and group identities and freedoms and protective of the right in conscience to dissent. A definition is required of the term “a more shared and pluralist society”. Society should not be compelled to be more “pluralist” than it is: individualism and atomization are not necessarily virtues. On the contrary there should be positive incentive to find common identity and express healthy belonging. Encouragement should be given for a shift from the mere assertion of individual right to the acceptance of co-responsibility for the enjoyment of the opportunities, rights and responsibilities of the other. Institutions should be invited to sign up to a binding contract to respect and promote the interest of others.

Page 8

What do you think should be the main policy aims and outcomes, which should drive the new approach to promoting good relations in society?

The “Specific Policy Aims” are remarkably unspecific. By bullet point they imply:

- affirmative action to develop integrated/shared communities – this means presumably preferential targeting of resources. It will require permanent monitoring
- practical work in communities geographically close to each other but who will do this and what incentives, financial and other, are on offer?
- care will be required to ensure absolute impartiality of efforts and finance if relations are not to suffer. Who will monitor? What about those who specifically expose separatism?
- the OFMDFM knows how to do this. At the least a mission programme to engender attitudinal change sustained over several generations will be required.
- the removal of the causes of tension and conflict. Who decides and by what means?
- on specific and uncompromising policy to refashion the mindset and the utterances of the leaders of political opinion together with the outlawing of “double-speak”.

A SHARED FUTURE

Page 9

3.2 Acknowledgement of the Problem. There must be an acceptance that the issue of the division between and within communities, whilst not unique to Northern Ireland, is a major and continuing problem. These divisions are the manifestations of deeply rooted mistrust and suspicion that extends into almost every facet of our daily lives.

3.3 Leadership

Comment: *Are we to use the coercive and manipulative powers of the state to undermine and discredit leaders who are resistant to change?*

3.5

Comment: *They should be made publicly and in terms to sign and be identified if they refuse, but can this be done within the law?*

3.6

Comment: *Yes, but it must empower local communities and local leaders so that they enjoy respect and self respect and are not left stranded, high and dry and without support*

3.7

Comment:

- Focus on areas with high incidence or history of poor relations and conflict and deprivation, especially at interfaces between communities; *alternatively take attention away from specific interface to rebuild community from within developing a sense of commitment, self-respect and a positive good identity.*

In consideration of first and last bullet points of 3.7:

These two together represent almost the whole of Northern Ireland community. The implications seem altogether too loosely considered but imply massive investment in both empowerment and infrastructure.

3.8 However, this must be balanced by a recognition that division exists throughout Northern Ireland. Targeted action should be complemented by action to promote good relations in society as a whole. (see 3.7 above)

What do you think ought to be the principles upon which a new approach to promoting good relations in Northern Ireland should be based?

Comments: See line reflection above.

The implications of what is laid out here involve a major re-allocation of finance, perhaps freed up by the smaller costs of security.

A SHARED FUTURE

It may be particularly effective to incentivize jointly developed and delivered programmes involving adversarial rivals across the whole of society – political, ecclesiastical, sporting, social, civic etc. but withhold funding or incentives unless partnerships and a joint approach are inherent. Sticks are required as well as carrots. Equality legislation will need to reflect and respect the implications of such affirmative action.

Page 12

What action needs to be taken at local Government and community level to underpin the development of good relations between and within communities?

Comment: There is continual play in this document on the term “community” and “local communities” what does this mean? Who defines what is and what is not a “community” Can other segments and interest groups within society be embraced by this term? Is there, in fact, a need to directly create or define “communes”? Are these reflected in local courts or parliamentary electoral divisions? Does there not require to be an obligation placed upon society to embellish community entities and promote or develop from within community good relations initiatives? Who will do this? How does this relate to elected local government representation?

Page 13

Action at regional level – presumably the “region” is the whole of Northern Ireland, if not what are the regional entities?

4.12

- Providing a challenge function to Government, and district councils; *what entity exercises the “challenge” function and with what powers?*
- Monitoring the implementation of community relations policies and strategies; *whose policies and whose strategies?*

4.13

Comment: It will have to be a body independent of devolved government reporting to the N.I.O. with powers of enforcement and the ability to hold public representatives and officials to account and ready access to a form of Tribunal or Judicial Review.

Page 14

4.14

Comment: Since local politicians are a large part of the problem they have to be part of the solution but nothing suggests they can be trusted not to resort to whitewash!

4.15

A SHARED FUTURE

Comment: *Centralization in Government is a poor option: the poacher turn gamekeeper will have a difficult role in establishing credibility.*

What functions do you think should be carried out at regional level? Should these functions be delivered within Government or by an independent body, such as the Community Relations Council or a new statutory authority?

Independent status is infinitely preferable but properly resourced and with access to both high level of resources and appropriate powers. Why not create a "STAR CHAMBER"? – see 4.13 above.

Page 16
4.26

- Encouraging and facilitating integrated education, and promoting a culture of tolerance and reconciliation across the whole education system;

Comment: *.....but not at the expense of the controlled sector. Since the controlled sector is technically integrated it should receive equally advantageous consideration.*

Suggested bullet point

- *in harmony with the policy of supporting cultural diversity the school curriculum should include a balanced, accurate and full account of denominational characteristics and identity based on modules developed by the various denominations involved. This should be a central curriculum requirement for all schools – controlled, maintained and integrated.*

4.27

- increasing support for communities living in integrated housing;

Comment: *Does this mean all housing that is not disintegrated?*

- Prioritising the development of shared spaces and facilities in town centres.

Comment: *With the absolute requirement that measures and personnel are in place to ensure that such facilities are safe places and do not become "no-go" areas!*

Page 17

4.29

Comment: *Gobbledegook!*

4.30

Comment: *Someone must know what this entails. It might be better to say that better community relations, the recognition of cultural diversity and the reduction of socio-*

A SHARED FUTURE

economic differentials shall in future become central consideration for the development and implementation of the Regional Development Strategy.

4.31

Comment: It will also invest heavily in a complete renewal of the public transportation infrastructure in the context of an integrated transport policy, which prioritises the affordable availability of access to effective public transport systems.

4.32

Comment: The Department should also develop rigorous and transparent enforcement procedures as well as ensuring for the first time in history the planning policies and guidelines are impartially and fully implemented.

Page 18

5.2

Note addition: Evaluation and monitoring and accountability should form the background to regular public review.

Page 19

Conclusion

The proposals, as well as impacting the discharge of administration and government, imply and require the development of partnerships between and among government and major social entities. The Church of Ireland stands ready to enter into such partnerships both with government, with other partner entities and with both. It is committed to freedom and equality under the law for both individuals and groups so long as the exercise of such freedoms does not impact deleteriously or disadvantageously upon others. It stands ready to co-operate fully in building a peaceful and harmonious society in our shared future. However, the Church of Ireland also believes that along with action to protect the rights, freedom and equality of others there should be an understanding that responsibilities and obligations are also placed upon persons and groups. Then the Church of Ireland urges the development of policy and proposals leading to the promulgation of a Code of Obligations, not necessarily enforceable at law but available as an education tool and reference document in the task of promoting good citizenship and positive ways of relating.

Comments by the Rt Rev Alan Harper

A SHARED FUTURE