



**27th October 2010**

**RESPONSE TO THE CONSULTATION ON COHESION, SHARING AND INTEGRATION**

This response has been developed by the Church & Society Committee of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland which is made up of representatives from all over the island of Ireland. In this instance the bulk of the input comes from Northern members of the committee who are drawn from different geographical locations and represent the broad gambit of perspectives and approaches which are found within Irish Presbyterianism. When the response was finalised by the committee it was then transmitted to the General Board of the denomination. The General Board is the most representative body of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland outside of the General Assembly which meets annually. The Board meets throughout the year and in giving its support to the committee's response lends the broad weight of the denomination to the response.

As co-convenor of the Church & Society Committee I am transmitting our response to you.

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## **THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN IRELAND** **RESPONSE TO CSI CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

### **A. KEY GOALS**

The question is whether or not the key goals will achieve the vision for the new era in which a shared and better future will be built for all and where the benefits of a peaceful society are experienced by everyone as that is the stated intention of the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration. While largely agreeing with these key goals we would note:

1. There is no recognition of key, existing community processes and the need to consolidate them specifically through existing trusted organisations and umbrella groups which have supported and built up these processes enabling both local cross cultural and cross community engagement and engagement upwards into the political process through local councils and the Stormont Assembly.
2. 'Zero tolerance' language is unhelpful and may be construed as subverting the process it seeks to support as it engages the very dynamics that support racism and sectarianism. This kind of language, and language matters as it communicates both with the head and the heart, suggests intolerance rather than tolerance which is a cornerstone in a policy reaching for cohesion, sharing and integration.
3. There is no key goal in terms of how political leaders themselves will engage rather than oversee the goals i.e. how do these goals impact on form and style of governance? This part of the document may not be where this should be spelled out but for the sake of those 'on the ground' or even at the middle levels of society there needs to be some reassurance and building of trust that this policy will go all the way to the top.

### **B. THEMES FOR ACTION**

Missing from the picture altogether are those who are not perceived to 'still live in communities where we accept division and segregation as normal.' As a medium and long term goal it is crucial in our view that everyone across society is engaged with the strategy which cannot be about making a few difficult communities better but must be about developing a whole community which values all that underpins building a shared and better future. If the strategy allows some to feel 'it isn't my problem' then it is doomed from the outset. We recognise how difficult this task of engagement is and would make two suggestions:

1. That a formal vision of what CSI can achieve needs to be put out into the public domain to stimulate discussion. By that we mean that there needs to be some spelling out of what government believes such a programme can achieve and an attempt made for society to sign up to that vision, or at least negotiate it, as a means of assisting society to cohere around the vision.
2. That the structured organisations of this society be used as vehicles for discussion, challenge and implementation i.e. churches, schools/the education structures, the business community etc. In this way difficulties in accessing groups which represent wider cross sections of community can be addressed.

### **C. GOOD RELATIONS AND THE RACIAL EQUALITY STRATEGY**

The joining together of racism and sectarianism is helpful insofar as it brings to our attention the commonalities, the things in human behaviour and relationships which enable both these 'isms' to exist. However, the lack of recognition of these commonalities is concerning. By these commonalities we mean the beliefs and behaviours which support a system that tends to exclusion and separation rather than to cohesion, sharing and integration e.g. intolerance, the dynamic to

exclude, feelings of superiority and behaviour which evidences those feelings and dehumanises others. It is these things that need to be addressed in order for racism and sectarianism to be undermined. New values need to be espoused and they too should be spelt out clearly - sharing, tolerance, building for peace, respect for difference, mutuality. The relationship between the two can be strengthened and responses deemed more effective by recognising and addressing those things which are common to both behaviours and by drawing on the depth of experience that exists within society among groups who already try to do this and have been gaining trust in the field already.

#### **D. PEOPLE AND PLACES**

Again what is missing is a goal for government both at local council and assembly level. While agreeing with the goals here stated there is some concern about government's commitment to deliver these goals in a streamlined and effective way in which there is no unnecessary duplication of services. We would want to ask further if there is too much duplication of administrative structure. It is the view of the PCI that the number of local councils should be reduced, not least because of an unnecessary duplication of services or of too many administrators for the number of deliverers. This reduction in local councils should streamline services, focus targets and release funds for delivery of what will make long term change to society i.e. commitments to that which builds for a shared, better and reconciled future rather than tying funds up in maintaining a 'top heavy' structure. Unless government sets such goals for itself to be more integrated it cannot expect communities to do so.

#### **E. EMPOWERING THE NEXT GENERATION**

The next generation are an important aspect in building a shared and better future not only because of the contribution they will make in the future but because of the contribution they make now. These laudable aims make no recognition of the young people who are trapped by the history of the conflict. Many are living in communities, families, and experiences which pass on the conflict, both its hurt and its divisions. There should be some recognition of this and an attempt to address the inter-generational effects of the years of the conflict. If we do not address this as a society with the next generation then our shared and better future, which is at stake, will be doomed.

#### **F. RESPECTING CULTURES**

The cultural climate in which we live is important and how we manage its diversity impacts heavily on our future, not least in making Northern Ireland an attractive place to live, work and visit. We would like to see discussion about respecting cultures moving beyond the type of discussions in which everyone feels the need to defend themselves and their culture and traditions. This will require building confidence and trust. Without confidence and trust meeting with those who are 'different' has the tendency to embed separation rather than to encourage integration. We recommend that work be done in pulling together existing assessments of what has been done in the area of building trust and confidence over the past 10 years. A considerable amount of funding has been delivered with this in mind. Targets need to be set out of these assessments to move beyond where we now sit as a society. We believe this to be possible with the co-operation of funding bodies and we believe it is essential if old steps are not to be retraced and if new ground is to be broken.

#### **G. A SECURE COMMUNITY**

When sharing and integration are on the agenda security and a sense of security is always at stake. Ultimately cohesion depends on addressing security which is built on trust and confidence in one another as well as confidence in self. The delivery of these goals are, therefore, essential in building for the future.

Considerable work has been done in this area under the auspices of 'single identity' work. This cannot continue forever and needs to be examined for its successes, failures and excuses and key goals need to be set to build on existing securities. We recognise that in this area there is a significant balancing act to hold together concern about insecurity while challenging communities to build on securities. If the work does not challenge towards something new then rebuilding has stalled.

## **H. A COHESIVE COMMUNITY**

In this area there have been a number of successful community programmes which have worked alongside the PSNI. While not every programme, often called a restorative justice project, delivers what it desires the experience and success of such projects should be taken into consideration and asked to make a contribution. One of the greatest dangers of a policy such as CSI is that there are people who have experience and who have worked hard over many years and they have no avenue for formal acknowledgement. This strategy which intends to be empowering could ultimately become fundamentally disempowering if there is not formal acknowledgement of work done and engagement with those involved in such work. Disempowering people must be resisted.

## **I. SUPPORTING LOCAL COMMUNITIES**

Is it enough to engage local councils? Should other overarching bodies, such as the Community Relations Council, not be recognised and formally named and engaged? We believe it is important to join thinking up in a way which engages both horizontal and vertical societal relationships. Organisations with credibility 'on the ground' as well as relationships through the political system are therefore essential in developing local communities and empowering them to build towards a shared and better future, a future that is more defined by reconciled and reconciling relationships than by division.

## **J. LOOKING OUTWARD**

It is important that the people of Northern Ireland identify similar situations in GB and the Republic of Ireland. There is considerable learning to be done in a community which is small and familiar. Broadening the base is necessary for learning but it is also necessary for building confidence, empowering people and assisting co-operation as the people of Northern Ireland have a considerable amount of learning to share with the people of these Islands and further afield. Confidence and trust are key to sharing the learning.

## **K. MECHANISM TO OVERSEE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CSI**

The mechanism must:

1. include the clear involvement of experienced practitioners so that old ground does not have to be worked unnecessarily
2. identify skilled organisations as members of the advisory panel e.g. Community Relations Council, Co-operation Ireland
3. Commit to delivery within existing systems where that will be effective rather than looking for something completely new and unnecessary

4. make an effort to ensure that debate continues as society rebuilds itself. Strong leadership needs to be given to carry the debate forward and sustain it across society. There may be the possibility of an existing organisation being given additional funding to reshape part of its work to lead and sustain the debate.

#### **L. OPTIONS FOR THE DELIVERY OF FUNDING AND POLICY ADVICE**

The decision regarding funding needs to take into account a number of important learnings from the many years of funding delivery. Others will be better informed than us as to what that mechanism should be but we believe the following to be important:

1. That the body making the decisions should be the funding body
2. That the decisions have to be measured against CSI policy in a way which challenges local communities to face up to the standards of a new and shared society and to build on stated successes and work done
3. That there will inevitably be those who feel disenfranchised and mechanisms need to be in place to engage with them
4. That as far as possible funding should be streamlined into one body
5. That funding cannot always be focussed on targets that are easily measurable when a society's heart has to change as well as its behaviour. There should, therefore, be room for targets which deliver discussion and engagement with others.
6. The funding body should be advised by those who have experience in funding and by those who have been working to build a better society
7. Involve as few administrative processes as possible
8. Acceptance of parallel working, usually called single identity work, has to be addressed in a way which takes account of real concerns but does not allow excuse for non-engagement or sharing

#### **M. OFMDFM FUNDING FOR GOOD RELATIONS WORK**

OFMDFM Good Relations funding will be allocated across three strands as follows:

- Local District Council Programme;
- Thematic; and
- Targeted and Emergency

The three strand approach allows for different types of work to be funded. But without a clear definition of the vision, of what a society building CSI will look like, it is hard to decide if this framework is adequate.

It would be helpful to have that vision defined or at least acknowledged as something we may not be able to agree at present but which we are working towards as society, through debate and discussion, in the hope of agreeing a shared vision.

#### **N. FURTHER COMMENTS ?**

As a church we are concerned that there is a lack of interest in good relations as a key strategy in building our society. There may be a number of reasons for a lack of interest and we believe it is important that they not only be noted but discussed and addressed:

1. The confusion around equality and human rights and the feeling that there are too many bodies doing overlapping things with no will to work together or to integrate their work.
2. The feeling that all of this is about giving others something but not giving us all something.

3. A lack of ability in government to articulate a common vision never mind to inspire others with that vision.
4. The lack of engagement of other 'institutions' in society who are behaving with the same disinterest
5. An inability to articulate what binds us together, the commonalities, as well as the differences
6. An inability to read responsibilities when we read rights. Discussion about human rights often debases the notion equating it with individual rights and no energy for responsibilities which are central to the whole notion. This debasing has a tendency to reduce human rights to a legal arrangement rather than elevate it to a relational reality. It is to the area of relationships that we should seek to raise the notion of human rights.

We believe there is a desperate need for a clear emphasis on mutual respect and civility which will change relationships across the board. This needs to be at every level of society. In order for this to work government needs to be clear about to whom they are addressing this report in its final form. There are no key players mentioned but if the programme is to go forward then key players need to be identified and a shared vision developed and agreed.

We have suggested that it is not only useful but essential that government articulate its own vision for a shared future. We might rightly then be asked:

What is our vision of a shared future?

#### **In our vision:**

- there will opportunities available to everyone equally within society and that steps will be taken to create a context in which those offered opportunities may be accepted and developed e.g through education and its delivery into a context in which it can be received and effective
- building relationships will be more important than emphasising divisions or defining identity by difference alone e.g. people being able to articulate another's point of view as clearly as their own and to work to address the concerns of others with the same vigour as addressing their own.
- trust matters both locally within and between communities and in government at all its levels. Building this trust is in our view absolutely essential to building a cohesive, shared and integrated society.
- society will be more defined by how it is reconciling than by how it has been separated. In other words, the future will come to be more important than the past.

#### **This is achievable if:**

1. Visions for a shared, better and reconciled future are articulated, discussed, agreed and then owned by society
2. There is a focus on what new and existing communities have in common
3. There is a growing desire to define our society by how it is reconciling and reconciled rather than by how it is divided
4. There are strong and positive relationships, built on trust, between people of different cultures, backgrounds and experiences

### **O. EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY ISSUES**

There is a question behind the question that needs to be addressed and it is about the very notion of equality itself. What does equality mean? In our context equality too often seems to be about making up for the past rather than living by true standards of equality. The claim that is laid on the

equality agenda is at present unbalanced and so a new understanding needs to be sought before assessments of equality of opportunity can be addressed.

There needs to be a clear linkage made between social justice and good relations. Mutual respect and civility are impossible if one group is getting more than another or one group does not have all the existing opportunities that another has.

***Response of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland***