

PEACE SUMMIT PARTNERSHIP – OPENING STATEMENT TO JOINT COMMITTEE OF THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT

1. The Peace Summit Partnership is an initiative by the John and Pat Hume Foundation, Community Dialogue, YouthAction NI, Holywell Trust, Ulster University, Integrated Education Fund, NI Youth Forum and the Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation.
2. The deep engagement and consultation process would not have been possible without the significant support of IFI.
3. Over the last 18 months the Peace Summit Partnership has engaged in a conversation about the unfinished business of reconciliation with peacebuilders, local communities, and young people from across Northern Ireland and the Border region in the Republic of Ireland.
4. Over this period over 900 people from across all section 75 categories have participated in events including Youth Peace Summits, Peace practitioners' workshops, Community Dialogues and Citizens Juries.
5. At these different events, participants were asked to reflect on peace and reconciliation over the past 26 years and consider their aspirations for the future. The key questions related was asked about what remains to be done in relations to peace and reconciliation, how do we achieve this, and who is responsible for implementing the next steps?
6. Society, now more than ever, needs visionary leadership for peaceful change. However, we assert that peace is more than the absence of conflict; it requires active engagement in reconciliation, addressing socio-economic disparities, and dismantling sectarian structures.
7. In May 2023, we launched a report which identified 12 Calls to Action, based on extensive consultation with communities, youth, academics and civic society leaders and contained within the Peace Summit Report 2023, *'The Unfinished Business of Peace and Reconciliation.'*¹ which must be integrated into the Programme for Government or sustainable peace. As Northern Ireland approaches the 30th anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement—matching the duration of the conflict—the Executive in the North, the Irish and British Governments have an opportunity to consolidate peace.

¹ <https://humefoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Peace-Summit-A-Call-to-Action-24-May-2023.pdf>

8. Advocates for an Inclusive Peace Plan

In 2024, the Peace Summit Partnership has continued our engagement with peacebuilders, local communities, and young people and developed an advocacy plan to lobby for an Inclusive Peace Plan.

We have met political parties, Ministers, the Department of Foreign Affairs and British Government to advocate for an Inclusive Peace Plan.

The Peace Summit Partnership want to assist in the design and delivery of our strategic objectives to ensure the recommendations are translated into actionable, measurable outcomes, drawing on our collective expertise in peacebuilding, community engagement, and policy development.

9. The Issues and Challenges

Despite progress, Northern Ireland remains deeply divided. Segregated housing, education, and over 80 peace walls still stand as physical and psychological barriers between communities. Moreover, the lingering influence of paramilitarism and identity-based politics continues to exacerbate tensions.

“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,” one Youth Engagement participant voiced,

This reflects the growing frustration among young people who feel alienated from decision-making processes that will determine their future.

The peace process must now shift its focus from maintaining the status quo to addressing the underlying causes of division and instability. In NI the Programme for Government must serve as a roadmap to a more inclusive, integrated society, and the Peace Summit Partnership is prepared to support the Executive in shaping and implementing these necessary reforms.

10. Conclusion

The peace process is now at a critical juncture. As the 30th anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement approaches, all of us must act decisively to consolidate the gains of peace. The 12 Calls to Action outlined in this submission offer a clear pathway forward, but their successful implementation

will require the NI Executive's commitment, alongside active collaboration with the Irish Government and civil society actors like the Peace Summit Partnership and others.

11. The Peace Summit Partnership remains committed to working with the NI Executive and Governments to ensure meaningful and measurable progress in journey towards a shared, sustainable and prosperous peace.

We will continue to highlight the positive and potential of peace and reconciliation as a policy approach and not just a tick box – we can do much more to support peace and prosperity.

12. At the end of the NI Executive mandate, we will be celebrating 30 years of “Peace” – this peace has been passive rather than active, and we now need to be very deliberate in what we mean by peace – it doesn't just happen and needs active investment through an Inclusive Peace plan. Now time to finish the job and deliver reconciliation.
13. Peace doesn't stop at the border, and neither do the dividends of peace; IBEC report on 'Peace and Prosperity' highlighted the potential and transformation of the economy because of peace – but NI hasn't fully drawn down the rewards because of political instability.
14. Through the Reconciliation Fund and Shared Island, the Irish Government has played a critical and active role in supporting peace and reconciliation.
15. There is a need to embed principles of peace across policy making – by providing the framework to be active and deliberate about peace – that's why Peace Summit partners are calling for inclusive peace plan – which needs a forward looking approach, deliverables, cross-departmental approach and transparent.
16. There should be a deep discussion on the cost of division at a time of sparse public monies in NI – how can cross-departmental and cross-jurisdictional working advance peace and reconciliation?