
Submission to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs Trade and Defence on behalf of Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation

We are very grateful to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence for meeting with us today www.glencree.ie

BACKGROUND

For almost 50 years, the Glencree Centre for Peace & Reconciliation has worked tirelessly behind the scenes, facilitating difficult conversations and building improbable relationships across divides. We played an integral role not only in the Irish peace process, but also in using what we have learned from the Irish experience to support peacebuilding efforts in other conflict and post-conflicts societies (e.g. Israel / Palestine, Afghanistan, Haiti, etc.). Over the years the scope of our work has evolved and continues to play a vital role. With the looming threat of Brexit and the political impasse in Stormont, we continue to facilitate meetings with political leaders in the north at the request of the Irish government; engage with political, religious and community leaders, paramilitary groups, victims and survivors of the Troubles; and partner with individuals and groups working in peacebuilding in the north.

At the same time, in recognition of how modern Ireland is changing, we have broadened our reach to include intercultural and refugee integration. Internationally, we continue to share the lessons from the peace process; promote dialogue in Haiti and Papua New Guinea; and expand our peace education to schools and universities.

GLENCREE AND THE 'GLOBAL IRELAND STRATEGY'

The Global Ireland strategy, launched in 2018, recognises the need to increase Ireland's influence and footprint in a globalised world in the areas of diplomacy, peace, tourism, culture, business, overseas aid and trade, through greater investment and by leveraging relationships with a scattered but influential diaspora. Through its foreign policy, the Global Ireland strategy also supports the global goals of United Nations particularly in the areas of international development, peace, education, climate change, disarmament and security through programmes such as Irish Aid (A Better World), UN Resolution 1325 (Women Peace and Security) and the National Development Plan (2018-2027). Glencree strongly supports Ireland's quest for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 2021 and the work world-wide which is undertaken by our UN Peacekeepers as part of the Irish Defence Forces.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres' [Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace](#) (2018) stated that sustaining peace in the current climate was a shared task, a responsibility of government with national and regional stakeholders, civil society (including women's and youth groups) and the private sector. He also stated that there was a need for a 'more predictable and sustained financing' of peace actors and emphasised the need to grow a cohort of skilled peacebuilders and facilitators that can respond when needed at different levels when conflict arises throughout the world.

Glencree currently support these goals and programmes through:

- **Supporting the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement**
- **Community & Political Dialogue (tracks 1-3)**
- **Facilitated Negotiation / Mediation**
- **Women's Leadership (focussed on UN Resolution 1325)**
- **Future Young Leaders**
- **Bespoke Peace Education**

Glencree is proud to act as a **resource for the Irish government and the people of this island**, not only in terms of our decades of experience in mediation, negotiation, facilitation and relationship building, but also as a physical place for peace nestled in the beautiful Wicklow mountains. **As the Republic of Ireland's only peace centre, we are committed to protecting and developing Glencree's role in Ireland and internationally into the future.**

PUTTING IRELAND IN THE LEAD IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

In the context of an increasingly fractious world, and as we attempt to imagine how relationships will develop over the coming years, the weight of history, changing demographics and the outworking of the Brexit debate will have a profound impact. The Irish Government, supported by the work of Glencree, has a unique opportunity to share the experience of reconstructing relationships in a post conflict society.

Among the areas that can benefit from the established relationships and trust built by the Glencree Centre and our influence in enabling confidential dialogue, discussion and back channel engagement are:

1. Engagement with the young in marginalised communities being primed for violent activity in the perceived interests of their community
2. A Border poll given as a binary choice (Yes or no)
3. Understanding and hearing 'the attachment to the Union'
4. Briefing the EU diplomatic community on the complexities of Brexit/the border
5. Engaging religious leaders at grassroots levels in the work of reconciliation
6. Building relationships with a generation of young aspiring political and civil society leaders across the island
7. Intergenerational dialogue which can challenge the view of reconciliation as betrayal
8. Supporting quiet, confidential conversations to enable different traditions to build trust and bridges in the interest of a sustainable peace
9. Supporting intercultural understand between new and indigenous communities
10. Need for innovative social platforms for positive structured engagement

OUR VISION

Our vision is to be **Ireland's Peace Centre of Excellence**, promoting non-adversarial methods of dealing with conflict through mediation, negotiation and dialogue at local, national and international level.

GLENCREE'S PROGRAMME FOR DEVELOPMENT

We have recently embarked on a programme of redevelopment for Glencree in two parts:

1. Site Facilities – PEACE CAMPUS

With the support of our Patron, President Michael D. Higgins and the OPW we will develop state-of-the-art peace campus facilities over the next 1-3 years to include:

- **mediation / negotiation suites**
- **meetings rooms**
- **lecture theatres**
- **training rooms**

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- **state of the art catering facilities**
- **peace library and resource centre**
- **on-site accommodation options**
- **peace gardens and reflective spaces**

2. Operational and Programmatic Development

We urgently need a similar commitment from the Irish government to help fund the development of our core operational and programmatic work. To date, we operate through core funding from the DFA Reconciliation Fund, ad hoc project funding and our own fundraising efforts in the community. However, these amounts fall considerably short of what we need to keep our core function adequately resourced and we have been severely restrained from publicly raising additional funding due to the sensitive 'under the radar' nature of our work.

Much work has been done to redefine our strategy and embed a long-term business plan within the organisation. We have recently entered an exciting period of redevelopment and are fostering new streams of sustainable income to support our work. As we move towards becoming more self-sufficient, we need greater financial support from the Irish government, particularly over the next three years.

THE CHALLENGE

The single biggest challenge in doing our work is employing skilled human resources with excellent facilitation, negotiation and communication skills and the additional administrative / support resources to support these staff and the operation of our facilities in Glencree.

OUR ASK

There is a considerable demand for more of Glencree's work. With core investment from the Irish government, we will upscale our programmes and their impact in a very meaningful way. This will enable us to accelerate our development towards greater self-sustainability, while assisting the Irish government with the achievement of its Global Ireland Strategy and other policy commitments.

APPENDIX

ABOUT THE GLENCREE CENTRE

Glencree believes that the need for relationship building and dialogue between human beings and respecting their identities has never been more needed. We also believe that there is a need to build stronger collaborative international structures to support the resolutions of conflict globally. Recent fact-finding visits by representatives of Glencree to our counterparts working in the peace arena in Geneva, Normandy, France and Helsinki emphasise the need for further collaboration.

Ireland's commitment to peace and security on the island of Ireland has been evidenced by ongoing government diplomacy and funding to encourage the deepening of relationships and supporting cross community engagement. However, the decision of the UK to leave the European Union in 2016 has undoubtedly opened old wounds. The threat of border polls along with the concept of a united Ireland being used as a weapon by some, and a justification for a return to violence by others, has reignited old fears and tensions as people retreat towards their own tribe.

For almost 50 years, Glencree has been at the forefront of facilitating difficult, contentious, sensitive conversations and providing a safe, neutral and private space, away from cameras, press, social media, etc.

History

The Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation was founded in 1974 as a response to violent conflict on the island of Ireland which mainly affected Northern Ireland. One of its founders, Una O Higgins O Malley, whose father was the Minister for Justice in the first government after Partition was assassinated by anti-Treaty forces in 1927, the outcome of a very bitter civil war. She, with others who came from both secular and faith traditions, dedicated her life to rebuilding fractured relationships and encouraging forgiveness and reconciliation between the north and south of the island.

Why Glencree?

For almost fifty years, the Glencree Centre has facilitated conversations and dialogues, often quietly, away from the public gaze and under the radar in the public interest. People and communities in conflict describe Glencree as providing a safe space where they feel supported, with skilled facilitation to find their own answers and solutions to complex problems and in the process often built relationships of trust with 'the other'.

Glencree built trust and brokered dialogue among different constituencies and kept those channels of communication in tense security situations throughout the eighties and nineties. When the ceasefires came in 1994, the Glencree Political Team intensified its efforts to hold together all the relationships it had garnered in the previous twenty years and drove a new process of imagining a future free from conflict in the lead up to the Good Friday Agreement. Following the breakdown of the ceasefires in 1996, relationships became difficult to manage again as mainstream political parties grappled with the concept of sitting down with representatives of organisations who only a short time before has been engaged in violence. Over forty political workshops were initiated by Glencree for protagonists from North/South/East/West enabling them to drill down into specific problems like decommissioning, parades and prisoner releases. We also had an early indication of how difficult it would be to deal with the legacy of the past. Due to the sensitive, discreet and confidential nature of our role, none of our work carried out behind the scenes was ever publicised, written about or acknowledged publicly.

In today's political climate our work is more important than ever. The absence of dealing with the legacy of the conflict has brought people and communities that were deeply hurt by the 'troubles' from across Ireland and the UK to Glencree as they grapple with their losses and need for answers. At the same time, new challenges continue to emerge not least with Unionists feeling that Dublin is taking a predatory approach to Irish unity, with Brexit perceived as the first fall in a set of dominoes towards a United Ireland.

The past few years has seen our role expand into that of explaining some of the dynamic changes that are playing out against the background of Brexit. Many EU Foreign Ministers, European Ministers and Diplomats have come to Glencree for briefings on the current political landscape. We have also travelled to the Border with them to further explain the careful arrangements that were reached that ensured we wouldn't have a border following the Good Friday Agreement.

Glencree's Current Work

For nearly five decades, Glencree has worked to bring warring sides together, it has worked with groups and individuals who have been traumatised by the violence of the Northern Ireland 'Troubles', losing family members and other loved ones. It is estimated that there were around 50,000 violent incidents in the North during the period 1968-1998 which has left a lasting legacy from a bitter conflict on a relatively small piece of ground. Our work has included:

- Our role in community and political dialogue spans from the legacy of conflict in the North to inter-cultural, women's and young leaders' programmes. Central to our work in these areas is providing a **safe confidential space for dialogue and skilled facilitators** to support the process. We continue to work hard behind the scenes to initiate and maintain dialogue between the two Northern communities and their political representatives, and to build North-South relationships.
- Peace IV Addressing the **Legacy of Violence** through Facilitated Dialogue Programme
- It has recently engaged in Politics in Action Project which enables young people (under 18) across the island to meet and discuss issues that are of concern to them
- Glencree is currently working to develop a **programme to empower young aspiring political and civil society leaders** to build relationships of trust, recognising the fracturing of those relationships after Brexit.
- Glencree works with **women negotiators and peacebuilders**, as promoted by UN Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and recognises that conflict and violence have a disproportionate negative impact on women and girls.
- Glencree provides **peace education courses** to school and university students, teaching them about working to overcome conflict, exploring identities and diversity, and developing leadership skills.
- Glencree through its **intercultural programme** of dialogue promotes the integration into Irish society of refugees and other vulnerable migrants. It listens to their largely unheard voices and works to combat racism and xenophobia.
- **Internationally**, Glencree has also worked in Israel/Palestine, Haiti, Columbia and Afghanistan and is currently engaged in in Papua New Guinea and Haiti. It shared the lessons from the peace process widely and engages on a regular basis with the EU diplomatic community to explain the potential impact of Brexit on the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement

Location

Based in the Wicklow Mountains in a beautiful, remote and peaceful location only 22 km from Dublin City Centre.