

## **Committee on the Implementation of The Good Friday Agreement**

### **Remarks by Denise Charlton, Chief Executive, The Community Foundation for Ireland**

Chair – Committee Members

The Community Foundation for Ireland – on behalf of the 30 new cross-border civil society partnerships it has formed through a pilot All-Island Fund – warmly welcomes the opportunity to brief you on our work.

As a Community Foundation we are connected to with every part of this country as we work with and support more than 5,000 voluntary, community and charitable organisations.

Those links put us in a unique position whereby we can identify issues as they emerge on the ground and with the support of our donors provide responses which are not just immediate fire-fighting – but which can identify and move towards solutions.

#### **Our Work**

This connectivity to communities, our ability to listen and of our donors to respond has seen The Community Foundation at the forefront of meeting challenges such as youth mental health and wellbeing, the needs of older people, inequality in all its forms whether driven by gender, sexual persuasion, race or poverty as well as climate change, the biodiversity challenge, domestic and gender based violence and so much more.

When civil society is there seeking, demanding or implementing change so are we.

The Foundation has been a strong partner of communities for 21-years and in the first half of next year we are expected to pass the significant milestone of having granted more than €100 million euros to communities during that time.

#### **Philanthropy**

The 100-million euro landmark and our 21<sup>st</sup>-year has brought us to a point of reflection. To look not just at the contribution of our donors, our partnerships on the ground in communities but also the wider role of philanthropy – and is it being leveraged appropriately in this country.

The response when you look at the facts has to be no. There is lots of research which we can provide and I won't burden you with figures today – but the fact is that in this country less than 1% of donations to volunteers, communities and charities is over €5,000 – in a very similar country in terms of population, make up and size – namely New Zealand that figure is over 30%.

In that regard we welcome the planned new National Policy on Philanthropy – and hope it will lead to measures which nurture and grow gift giving on a larger scale.

One area where we would like to see action is for all of Government and its agencies open up to consider match-funding arrangements – whereby public money can be used to leverage matching private support to deliver community projects which otherwise would not happen.

#### **The All-Island Fund**

We listen to communities, to volunteers and to groups. That is how 1,800 Community Foundations across the globe work. That is our model, it is what makes us unique.

That listening has made us aware for some-time that there is a huge gap in terms of Civil Society operating and working together on an All-Island basis to deliver benefits for all the people.

It has been on our radar for a long time – and was brought more widely into focus with Brexit and the fall-out which it has produced.

Late last year we partnered with The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland, with some donors and community activists to look at this shortfall and see does it merit a response. The response was hugely positive and last Easter we were able to take action. Groups operating as cross border partners were invited to apply for support from a pilot All-Island Fund.

Demand was strong – very strong. We went through all the applications and together with help from an independent panel we assessed each one. In August we were in the great position to announce 30-new partnerships.

Clean air initiatives, sanctuaries for refugees and migrants, women’s rights and a ban on LGBTI+ conversion therapy are among a wide range of cross-border civil society partnerships being supported by grants totalling over €410,000.

Those partnerships are now real – experiences, research, campaigns are being shared and positive change is beginning to happen.

Success of course creates its own challenges - and the challenge now is to meet demand which is clearly there. We are contacting donors to see if more support is out there.

Awareness is key. And I want to acknowledge the support of members of this Committee who have helped increase that awareness in communities, encouraged applications and who got the information on this fund out.

Today – together with my colleagues, Frances Haworth our Head of Grants, Donor Care and Impact as well as XXXXXX would be delighted to take listen and consider any observations you may have and to answer any questions.