

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA AGUS TRÁDÁIL, AGUS COSAIN

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE, AND DEFENCE

Dé Máirt, 17 Nollaig 2019

Tuesday, 17 December 2019

The Joint Committee met at 2.10 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Seán Barrett,	
Niall Collins,	
Seán Crowe,	
Maureen O'Sullivan.	

I láthair / In attendance: Deputy Declan Breathnach and Senator Victor Boyhan.

Teachta / Deputy Brendan Smith sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

Business of Joint Committee

Chairman: As we have a quorum, the meeting will now commence in public session. Apologies have been received from Deputy Grealish and Senators Ned O’Sullivan and Lawless. We will now go into private session. Is that agreed? Agreed.

The joint committee went into private session at 2.22 p.m. and resumed in public session at 2.28 p.m.

Scrutiny of EU Legislative Proposals

Chairman: The EU legislative proposals are Schedule B: COM(2019)269 and COM(2019)462. It is proposed that these proposals do not warrant further scrutiny. Is that agreed? Agreed.

Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation: Discussion

Chairman: We are now meeting with Ms Barbara Walshe and Mr. Pat Hynes to discuss with the committee the role of the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, not only in the Irish peace process, but also in support of building peace in other conflict and post-conflict regions. I welcome Ms Walshe and Mr. Hynes. The format of the meeting is that we will hear opening statements before going into a question and answer session with the members of the committee.

Before proceeding with the business of the meeting, I remind members and people in the Public Gallery that their mobile telephones should be switched off or put on airplane mode for the duration of the meeting as they cause interference, even if on silent mode, with the recording equipment in committee rooms.

By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the joint committee. However, if they are directed by it to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or body outside the Houses or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. I invite Ms Walshe to make her opening statement.

Ms Barbara Walshe: We are grateful to the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence for meeting with us today and for giving us an opportunity to detail the work of the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland as well as some of the international work we are engaged in.

The Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation is almost 50 years old and was set up in 1974 as a response to the Northern Ireland conflict. However, it was born out of the Civil War. One of the people who set up the Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation was Una O'Higgins O'Malley, whose father was Kevin O'Higgins, the Minister for Justice in the first Government after partition. She described the assassination of her father as being difficult, even though she was a small child at that time. Her entire life was devoted to bringing North and South together in a sense of reconciliation. Her life was devoted to bringing people from different traditions in Northern Ireland together and to engaging them in the work of the Republic of Ireland. When the Northern Ireland conflict started in the early 1970s, she responded to that and that is how the Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation came about in the first place. As I said, it has been nearly 50 years and for most of its life the Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation has brought warring sides together and has created a safe space that enabled people to work out complex ideas. There were often heated discussions and there are heated discussions on different matters but we encourage people to listen to each other respectfully, something that is difficult in a world that is dominated by social media and the immediacy of communication challenges but we continue to do that.

Over the years, the scope of our work has evolved and continues to play a vital role. I mention the threat of Brexit and the political impasse in Stormont and the hope that the talks that are ongoing will come to fruition. We continue to facilitate meetings with political leaders in the North at the request of the Irish Government. We engage with political, religious and community leaders; paramilitary groups; victims and survivors of the Troubles. We partner with individuals and groups working in peace building. At the same time, we recognise Ireland is changing and that 17% of our population is born outside of the country now. In recent years, we have opened an integration and intercultural programme, which brings people from different cultures together and engages them in conversations with Irish people in the Republic of Ireland in the interests of developing relationships between people. That was always core to the work of the Glenree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation.

The other interesting matter from a foreign affairs perspective is we see that women who come from conflict-laden areas and who have suffered greatly as a result of what has happened in their countries arrive in our country still suffering from the legacy of that conflict. Increasingly, we see that people coming from abroad who are suffering from the legacy of such conflicts and women who have been disproportionately affected by the conflict in Northern Ireland find they have a great deal in common.

The global Ireland strategy, which was 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 the 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, recognising women as important actors in the negotiation and mediation of conflict; and the national development plan. Glenree strongly supports Ireland's quest for a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council in 2021 and the work that is undertaken by our UN peacekeepers as part of the Defence Forces. The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres's, report on peacebuilding and sustaining peace of 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. The secretary-general 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 peace-builders and facilitators who can respond when needed at different levels when conflict arises throughout the world. Glencree’s current work to feed in to the Global Ireland strategy includes supporting the Good Friday Agreement; community and political dialogue, tracks 1 to 3; facilitated negotiation and mediation; women’s leadership; future young leadership and peace education, and also sharing the lessons of the peace process. Mr. Hynes will talk a bit to the international work we have been engaged with so far.

Mr. Pat Hynes: It is a great pleasure to be back in the Oireachtas again. I thank the Chairman and the committee for having us. Ms Walshe has outlined broadly the work we have been engaged in. In terms of our own national efforts in respect of the island and the islands of Ireland and Britain, clearly the past three or four years have proved to be unique as regards the pressures that have come on the relationships as a consequence of Brexit. Despite our own particular stresses at the moment in terms of where we might ultimately end up, we remain committed to the three-stranded process whereby we want to strengthen and develop the relationships between North and South, within Northern Ireland and between Britain and Ireland, with all of the uncertainty that rests around it at the moment.

We have to be cautious in our international work. No two conflicts are the same. Our conflict is not identical to any other in the world. However, we have found in recent years that there is quite a large appetite around the world for the kind of processes that we put in place throughout our conflict. In a sense, the experience we have and the lessons we have shared are being sought out around the world. I have just returned from Bougainville where I was working with the former Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, last week. Many of the experiences and skills that he had garnered as a consequence of our process in Ireland were deployed as he sought to facilitate a referendum that would consolidate the peace agreement that was made 18 years ago in that part of the world. Experiences and lessons can be shared as regards the process of taking a particularly violent conflict and creating structures and processes to encourage once violent, perhaps paramilitary organisations to transition into a political atmosphere and political process; issues of trust; issues of weapons; and the big challenge in front of us at the moment, the issue of legacy and how we deal with all of the pain and suffering that is left as a consequence of any conflict involving armed action. There is an opportunity for Ireland. What we have done on this island in the past 20 years or so has been quite dramatic. I am old enough to remember the 1970s and the transformation of life across the island as a consequence of the peace process is nothing short of profound. There are possibilities for us through our role in the UN Security Council, should we secure a seat, and those lessons and experiences can be shared around the world.

I am happy to take questions.

Chairman: I welcome the contributions of Ms Walshe and Mr. Hynes. All of us in this room and other Oireachtas Members have had good engagement with the organisation over the years in Glencree and at other meeting places. As Ms Walshe pointed out, it was always important that those meetings were private and confidential to ensure the people who participated regarded them as a safe space. I compliment them on their work over the years. I know from speaking to some members of the board that our guests operate a tight ship. Funding is not always easy to come by and all Oireachtas Members will appeal to Departments or statutory agencies to support the work of our guests.

Mr. Hynes pointed out clearly that there are significant legacy issues to be dealt with and Ms Walshe rightly noted how the conflict affected women in particular, that there was violence

against women and that there are legacy issues in this regard. It is unfortunate that we have not gotten away from the polarisation of politics although, I hope we will. I wish both governments and all the political parties in Northern Ireland well in their talks, which commenced yesterday. We sincerely hope that early 2020 will bring about the resumption of the Assembly and Executive because people need decisions made at local level. Confidence would come from the restoration of the Assembly and Executive.

We need to deal with the legacy issues. All of us have met families who have been bereaved and never secured justice. That is true in our cities, my constituency of Cavan-Monaghan and the adjoining county of Louth where there were murders and bombings in which people lost their lives and for which nobody has been brought to justice. Those issues need to be dealt with.

I have made the point at this committee previously that everybody is getting older and families are worried that they will go to their eternal reward without seeing justice for their sibling, parent, son or daughter. People say to me that they will be gone without hearing the truth about who murdered their brother or sister. An urgency needs to be attached to this particular work at Government level and within the NGO sector.

I met a member of An Garda Síochána in the course of my constituency work yesterday. He asked me what I thought were the chances of progress in the Northern Ireland talks and I told him that I sincerely hoped there would be progress because we need it. He remarked to me that he was a young Garda recruit on 16 December 1983, the day of the murders of Garda recruit Gary Sheehan and Private Patrick Kelly during a kidnapping incident in County Leitrim. He said that we would want to ensure that we never go back to that era in our country. We do not want a vacuum in politics either.

I commend our guests on the work they do not only in our country but abroad as well. I am sure that myself and others are not as aware as we should be of the international dimension to our their work but we welcome the opportunity to listen to them today, compliment them and wish them well in the work they undertake.

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan: It is important to acknowledge the work that our guests do in facilitating difficult and challenging conversations, away from the public eye and the speculative nature of the media, which is less than positive when it comes to those difficult situations.

The Chairman mentioned funding. I read from the briefing that there are particular physical needs at the centre. What is the extent of the funding that is needed and what will happen if it is not provided? How many staff has the organisation?

We know there is a demand for the centre’s work. Is the centre turning away a number of demands because of constraints? I would like to get a sense of what the centre is unable to do but which it would like to do if it had more resources.

I said this on Leaders’ Questions when I was questioning the Taoiseach. I am a bit dubious about Ireland looking for a seat on the Security Council and what Ireland can bring to that because I see our role on the Human Rights Council as being more in keeping with the kind of work we do, our principles and so on. The centre is supporting Ireland’s campaign for a seat. Why?

I know that business is part of the Global Ireland strategy. This committee has been involved in this regard and we have had presentations on business and human rights. Has the centre had any input into our national plan, which some of us feel is very weak? There is a need

for mandatory due diligence on this.

In our Good Friday Agreement committee we had a very interesting presentation on legacy from Dr. Thomas Leahy of Cardiff University. I was just recently reading work that Irish historian Pádraig Yeates has done on a different way of approaching legacy. Legacy is the real unfinished business from the Good Friday Agreement. The witnesses might outline what the centre is doing on that.

Ms Barbara Walshe: One of the reasons we are here today is to highlight the centre's work and to say we could do more if we had more. I have chaired the centre's board for the past five years and have been six years on it. It is a voluntary board comprising 12 really good people. We have worked really hard within the constraints that exist. We are funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through the reconciliation fund, which funds four core posts within the centre. While we are grateful for this funding, it really just keeps the lights on. There is a big demand for our work, particularly over recent years, with Brexit and the need to facilitate back-channel conversations between people who are not speaking to one another. It is also a matter of speaking to paramilitaries about a range of things within all that. Mr. Hynes can speak to that a lot better than I can.

It is also about the vision for the place, which is nearly 50 years old. The site is owned by the OPW. It has buildings that are derelict and buildings we use. In some way we have developed a vision for the place that could be a centre of excellence for peace. It could be the type of place that would enable a conflict to be engaged with at not just a national level but also a local level and an international level, a place that would bring people together and be able to facilitate learning about negotiation, mediation and alternative ways of dealing with conflict.

For the first couple of years when I joined the board we were nearly wiped out by the recession - there is no point in saying we were not. The board was in recovery during that time. The place is moving again, and the work that has been done over recent years has been high-quality. A lot of that work has been silent and behind-the-scenes, and the thing about being behind the scenes is that nobody sees what is done so it is difficult to get it funded. That is the situation at present. We are very confident, however, and looking at other sustainable sources of income that will enable us to support the growth of the centre ourselves. We need an investment from the Government, though. I am looking for that investment that will support the growth of the organisation and enable us in the long run to be sustainable. I do not know if PEACE tenders can ever be fully sustainable, but it is a matter of being more sustainable than we currently are.

Looking at the current Security Council and the power blocs on it, the reason we support the Security Council seat for Ireland is that we think a small country that has had conflict, suffering and trouble may have something to bring to the Security Council. I have not given it much thought other than that.

Did Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan ask me other questions?

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: I asked a question on business and human rights.

Ms Barbara Walshe: We have the Global Ireland strategy at the moment. I was looking at the global goals. The UN and other countries have made commitments to meet global goals on the eradication of poverty worldwide and on education, women's issues, peace security, climate action and so on by 2030. I noticed recently that businesses around the world have also rode in behind this in an effort to mobilise business towards meeting those global goals. There

is always a tension between the protection of human rights and the goals of business. I wish I could give the Deputy a better answer than that.

Deputy Seán Barrett: I am delighted to welcome the witnesses. The work they are doing fits in well with the image of Ireland and our emphasis on peacekeeping. I am ashamed to say I did not know as much as I should have known about the work the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation is doing. Now that we have the witnesses here, we should not let them go because, having read through the documentation provided to us, it would be worthwhile for the committee to ask the Glencree centre for its assistance in part of our work. The concept of a global peace centre and the fact that the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation is recognised as a UNESCO world heritage site are not well known. Maybe it is my ignorance but-----

Ms Barbara Walshe: It is not a UNESCO world heritage site. We wish it was but it is not.

Deputy Seán Barrett: The ambition of the witnesses is to develop it into a UNESCO world heritage site.

Ms Barbara Walshe: Yes.

Deputy Seán Barrett: We better start by talking about it. It will not get the status of a UNESCO world heritage site unless we start talking about it.

Ms Barbara Walshe: That is true.

Deputy Seán Barrett: I strongly recommend that we start talking about that and that this ambition is put up in lights as one of centre's goals. Organisations such as the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation often quietly do valuable work and the public, including me, do not know enough about that work. Now that the witnesses are here, I hope the work of the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation will be a project for us to work on into the future. It is an exceptionally worthwhile goal to develop a global peace centre. This is what the world needs. We can then marry that with the tremendous work done by the Defence Forces over the years as peacekeepers. When I was Minister for Defence, I had the pleasure of visiting our peacekeepers in various parts of the world. The respect that Irish troops are held in is fantastic. We are renowned for our ability in peacekeeping. We do not go in with all guns blazing and force peace on people. We have built up tremendous goodwill through the methods we use to build peace. This is probably one of the most important issues we can get involved in, as is the development of a global peace centre. The world is bad enough and it needs people like the witnesses to be pushed out to the front. We need to show the world we can play a leading role in peacekeeping because our troops have done a tremendous amount of good work through their peacekeeping methods in various parts of the world. The Chairman has probably visited our troops on peacekeeping missions. It is tremendous to see the respect that exists for Ireland due to that work. There is no aggression involved. It is a skill that has been built up over the years and it is something that cannot be bought.

I fully support the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation and its development. We cannot do or say enough to encourage greater publicity for the work it does. The image of Ireland as peacekeepers is tremendous but much of the work being done is unknown. We need to push it out front and let the public know. We will get public support because people have tremendous respect for our peacekeepers. Those of us who were fortunate enough to serve as a Minister saw that at first hand. It has been extremely worthwhile to meet the witnesses. I support the ambition of the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation to develop a global

peace centre. It is a tremendous goal to have and we should push forward with it. It is entirely in keeping with our peacekeeping missions.

Chairman: Does Ms Walshe want to say anything in response to the strong words of support from Deputy Barrett for the Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation and its work?

Ms Barbara Walshe: I thank the Deputy and all the members for their strong words of support for us. We are appreciative of that.

Mr. Pat Hynes: I thank Deputy Barrett for his encouragement. As a former Minister for Defence, he is correct that the way in which members of the Defence Forces have conducted themselves in difficult and intractable conflicts in many parts of the world has done a huge amount for the image of the country.

We have experience of building and sustaining a peace process. At the time, many people considered the conflict here to be unsolvable, yet we did it. In very complicated circumstances against the backdrop of violence in the 1990s, people changed and took a different path. Through the encouragement of political leaders of all persuasions on this part of the island, experience has been built up, whether in the period of John Bruton's leadership of the country when he was Taoiseach in the mid-1990s or during Bertie Ahern's leadership of the country as the Taoiseach in office when the Belfast Agreement was signed. There is a bank of talent available to us at leadership level. We see the former Tánaiste, Eamon Gilmore, in his role at European Union level and we have seen him in his former role in Colombia. All of this serves to illustrate that there is a role for the country and former leaders in this part of the island to bring to bear the experience they acquired in what were politically difficult and testing times. Many of them took risks in encouraging the peace process. Deputy Barrett is right to identify that in a world that is not becoming more secure or peaceful, there is something to be said for offering our experience as a small island in a passive way. In that sense, I would revert to Deputy O'Sullivan's point. It is important that we secure a seat on the Security Council and bring the kind of experiences and values that we have to the world. They are described in many ways as soft power values. They are not muscular values that go into an area in a dictatorial sense. They are based on facilitating dialogue and discussion over longer and more sustained periods during which trust is built between parties that have either been in conflict or continue to distrust one another. In many cases, poor development and poverty in regions around the world are a consequence of conflict. The destruction that conflict wreaks in various parts of the world has real impacts on ordinary people's lives. Through a seat on the Security Council or a place like Glencree, Ireland can illustrate that, through long periods of sustained dialogue, one can see the development of trust and the breaking down of enmity between once violent traditions.

Deputy O'Sullivan also referred to the legacy of the past. This is perhaps one of the most difficult issues with which we have had to grapple. If we never had Brexit, this issue might be the most dominant facing us in the context of our peace process and the relationships that we have been attempting to cement and sustain over the past number of years. We acknowledge the role that the Minister for Justice and Equality, Deputy Flanagan, played as the then Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade during the creation of the Stormont House architecture when we believed we had something that was going to provide a basis for getting people into processes where, even if they did not get justice in all cases, they could as a minimum get the answers they had been seeking for decades. We remain hopeful that the Stormont House architecture can be activated and that agreements between the governments and political parties can see the activation of those processes. As the Chairman pointed out, people are getting older and time is running out for many of them to get the answers they have been seeking.

Regarding the initial point that was made, one of the successes of the centre has been the ability to attract down to our walls or our building very fearful communities and people, people who would be nothing short of terrified at the idea of coming south for repeated dialogues. Engaging in these conversations represented a major fear on their part, given their particular constituencies or communities. Unfortunately, we have to keep these conversations confidential. In many cases, successes are not available to be heralded by virtue of the fact that we are dealing with fearful communities. As we look forward from today and see the results of last week's British general election, nothing is brought into starker relief than the changing nature of all of the relationships across the two islands, be they between Scotland and the UK, us and the UK, us and Northern Ireland or so on. We will require an ever more focused, sensitive and careful conversation around what relationships are going to look like over the next number of years. Nothing brings that issue into sharper relief than the results of last week's election in Northern Ireland. We will require conversations that are inclusive and continue to manage the concerns, hopes and aspirations of the two communities based on the fundamental principle of the agreement, that being, parity of esteem. Both communities are equal, the aspirations of both are equal, and both cultures and traditions are equal. This will require careful management in terms of how one gives the concept of parity of esteem practical application. That is important. In the years since the Brexit referendum, and recognising as we did what a profound impact it would have, we have continued to believe that these conversations are as vital as any public debate. While public debate is important, it is in quiet and carefully managed environments where people can relax and move into a sense of ease around their concerns about what the future might look like. In that sense, those conversations will continue. They will not necessarily get publicity, because they cannot, but it is important that they continue, given the challenges that we will face following Brexit and the ongoing shifts and trends emerging from last week's elections.

Deputy Seán Barrett took the Chair.

Deputy Niall Collins: I welcome our guests and join the Chairman and other members in acknowledging the good work that the centre does. I wish them well in their future endeavours.

I appreciate that our guests have to respect the confidentiality and privacy involved in much of their work, but speaking in the broadest sense, has the centre had any role in working and speaking with the various parties in Northern Ireland since the Assembly crashed almost three years ago? Talks are under way at the moment to try to restore a functioning Assembly. We are broadly aware of the issues that divide the main parties in the North, for example, the approach to the Irish language. Could our guests give us an overview?

Reference was made to the importance of integrating refugees and ending direct provision. Those are goals or aspirations to which we would all aspire if we want to bring the situation to a better place. In the Dáil last week, I raised the issue of people who found themselves undocumented. They came to Ireland on some type of visa or permit and overstayed it. They represent a significant cohort of people - we are told that there are approximately 26,000, including their families. The majority are working in our communities and contributing very positively to society, but they have found themselves in this lacuna and needing to work in the shadows. The committee and its individual members advocate for the undocumented Irish in the United States. There is a parallel here, but our country has been found wanting. We are lagging behind in addressing this issue. Do our guests have relevant experiences that they could relate to us?

On the matter of a centre of excellence, it was mentioned that our guests were hoping to enhance their facility over the next one to three years. Have they drawn up detailed plans? I

presume this issue links to what the Acting Chairman has been saying about the UNESCO world heritage site. I agree with him, and it was news to me. It is something about which our guests need to make people more aware. How far advanced is the work? Will the facility be on the existing site? Will it be a new build or will the old building be refurbished? Have our guests been speaking to the Office of Public Works or Departments about it? Does the OPW have a plan for how this will be rolled out? In its submission, the centre spoke of fostering new streams of sustainable income. Will our guests provide further details on that? Will they provide an overview of one's existing fundraising models and the type of fundraising events they do with support from some corporate bodies? What are the limitations the centre is experiencing with its potential and capacity because of the constraints on its funding?

Mr. Pat Hynes: We meet the political parties in the North every month. I meet representatives from various parties, several times a month in some cases. In addition, I meet with particular communities, drawing from the loyalist community as well, to encourage discussion around the issues which have bedevilled us over the past two years.

As stated previously, Brexit has caused a profound disturbance with regard to everything in terms of where we are going. I do not think we can discount the impact of Brexit on the politics of relationships over the past several years. We also had the opportunity to meet many of the European Union's Foreign Ministers and Ministers with responsibility for and European affairs. I would have brought them either to the Border or met them here. We would have included political representatives, North and South, in discussions with them, as well as the 27 ambassadors resident in Dublin as part of the EU missions. This is an effort to explain and broaden the discussion around where we think the issue will go in the future. For many of these ambassadors, this is a complicated issue. For many of them trying to understand the sensitivity of the Border and so on, this has proved worthwhile as an exchange. We were able to introduce people to concepts and challenges at European level, as well as to engage with political people north of the Border with a view to getting their fears and concerns around where Brexit might ultimately leave the island, not just in political but economic and social terms.

For the past several years - I am somewhat constrained by confidentiality in terms of names and details - there have continued to be conversations which touched on all of the issues affecting the resuscitation of the institutions, as well as the wider impact of Brexit, the issues which will fall out of that and wherever we may end up in the years ahead. These conversations touch on legacy, as well as economic and social issues. For example, they touch on education issues in Northern Ireland, particularly where communities are disadvantaged as a consequence of poor educational attainment and poor employment opportunities that follow. All of these issues are important to these communities. We continue to host discussions and dialogue on them in an effort to make people both in the South and the North aware of the importance of addressing these issues.

Ms Barbara Walshe: Relationships across the island among political leaders were much better in the past. As a result of Brexit, they have become fractured. We are looking to develop a piece of work across the island that would engage young aspiring political leaders and civil society leaders to develop relationships and get to know each other. The past couple of years has made people return to their own tribe or particular perspective. There is also a sense of disengagement in the South around that.

The other issue which comes up in those conversations is the binary nature of a border poll, namely, "Yes" or "No". There is a limited engagement with the complexity of a border poll. When one looks at the referendum on Brexit, which has taken three years and, God alone

knows, how it will work out in the coming years for them, we need to be cautious around this binary point of “Yes” or “No”.

What do people from the South understand about unionists’ and loyalists’ attachment to the British Crown and being part of the union? There needs to be conversations among unionists themselves around this issue. Those of us in the South need to engage a bit more with that.

Around the intergenerational issues, there is a lot of emphasis on the legacy of the past. There is a younger generation who are caught by the past, by what has happened to their people and their neighbours, and who see reconciliation as a betrayal.

That shows some of the complexities involved. As most members know, 21 years in a post-conflict situation is a short period. There needs to be attention to the legacy but also the capacity of and space for young people to make their own decisions.

The Glencree site has a complex ownership arrangement. It is owned by the OPW. We will complete a feasibility study soon, which is looking at what can be done on the site which will enable us to look for sustainable sources of income. The site itself is owned by the OPW. We own some of the buildings on the site. We own 16 acres at the back of the centre itself. We have a plan for that. We are engaging with a range of agencies, such as Wicklow County Council, the LEADER programme, as well as private finance, in the development of that. We have engaged with the OPW which has given a commitment to refurbish a particularly important building on the site.

In terms of our fundraising, for the past five years I have been there, it has not been particularly successful. In a sense, the public profile of the place is poor. We have not had the resources to develop and document public profile or what work has been done. This is the reason we are looking for investment, not just from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade but from the Government itself as a confidence measure in building the momentum to develop Glencree, that has 50 years of all this experience that we could share not only with the world but with ourselves and develop it as a peace centre. We are probably a bit further than the beginning of that. We seek support across the Government for the investment we need in human resources so that we can respond to the work we are being asked to do as well as the capital investment that will be needed in the centre itself, while also recognising that we have one fairly developed idea for a sustainable source of income. That is something I can speak to the committee on if it wishes.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Seán Barrett): I invite Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan to take the chair as she is Vice-Chairman of the committee.

Deputy Maureen O’Sullivan: That is okay, Deputy Barrett can continue.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Deputy Barrett is doing a great job. Mr. Hynes and Ms Walshe are very welcome. I am sure they will get the sense from members that we want to be supportive of Glencree’s work. I wish to record my thanks for the work the centre has done over the past 45 years, it is ground-breaking. Glencree’s geographic isolation helps with its work. It is not that easy for people to drift off or go out but it also brings people together on the one site which helps in discussions. People can meet and interact over a cup of tea or sandwich, which is one of its positive things.

The representatives spoke of funding and so on. We need to get a sense of what percentage of that they seek from the Government, from private sector and so on. Can they give a ballpark figure? They do not have to give us that today, but it would be helpful if we are making a rec-

ommendation to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Ms Walshe said that the centre would do more if it had more. I am trying to tease out what more it would do. We are all struck with the idea of the global champion for peace and reconciliation. That would involve the Irish Government being more vocal, taking the lead and new approaches on many issues. Is the international peace centre of excellence modelled on anything in other countries? Can the representatives expand on where it has worked elsewhere and how it could be tweaked?

I note what Ms Walshe said on Brexit. It brought fear, uncertainty and the potential for greater division on the island. The long shadow is still there and there is still potential. I read the appendix to the opening statement with which we were provided. Language is important. According to the appendix: “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.” To whom does this refer? I do not like the language referring to the tribal conflict. I am proud of the tradition that I come from which is very much a republican tradition. There are different traditions within republicanism. One of the successes of the current Sinn Féin leadership was that it convinced those who believed in the tradition of armed struggle that there was a peaceful way forward and part of that was a border poll. We told people that if they believed in a united Ireland, there was a peaceful way to work towards that goal. A very important concept in the Good Friday Agreement was that there is a way forward towards unity and peace in Ireland. I am interested to hear what the witnesses have to say on that.

The work Glencree does is significant, not only for Ireland but also in creating a space for people from abroad to travel here and have these conversations. During the Irish peace process, it was felt necessary at one point for republicans or members of Sinn Féin to travel to South Africa when Nelson Mandela was the country’s President. Unionists and others also travelled in those early days, which meant people could interact for the first time. Having people in the same room and having conversations was important.

We need to put our heads together collectively and see how we can move this project forward. It would enhance the view of Ireland held by people around the world. We have been through a troubled past. I like to think that conflict is behind us and we are moving into a new era. I am conscious that the political parties are sitting down in Stormont. I have every confidence that we can find an agreement to move on. We tend to look back. There is agreement among the parties on legacy issues. Many of the big issues on which there has been tension have been agreed in other meetings. It is about people putting their heads together and tweaking existing agreements.

I did not want to bring a negative note to the discussion but I would like the witnesses to expand on where they see the threat coming from with regard to a Border poll.

Mr. Pat Hynes: The impact of Brexit is yet to be seen or realised. The remarks on the Brexit poll reflect what we have heard in many loyalist and unionist communities. It is the absence of a conversation about what a new Ireland would look like in the event of a Border poll switching sovereignty from London to Dublin. Article 1(5) of the Good Friday Agreement asserts that whoever holds the sovereignty over the territory of Northern Ireland shall exercise it with rigorous impartiality in regard to the hopes, traditions, aspirations, cultural identities and so on of the two traditions based on the concept of parity of esteem. Many loyalist communities are not feeling parity of esteem. We in this part of the island must acknowledge that we may have

to do more by way of engagement around the concept of a united Ireland, an agreed Ireland or whatever we want to call it. Loyalists see Border polls and the concept of a united Ireland as an age-old republican demand. From my discussions with republicans, I am confident that is not what is intended, but it illustrates that in the absence of an appropriate conversation and a real level of engagement with loyalists on an inclusive basis, we will see an increased sense of fear. It is the potentiality of their minority status in Northern Ireland which is creating a huge level of disturbance. As I said in earlier remarks, the results of the recent elections will only serve to deepen their sense of estrangement from the direction that things are going, which is away from where they feel most comfortable. Whatever happens in the future, from their perspective, and I do not want to get into the detail of what they felt is wrong with the arrangements on Brexit Boris Johnson made prior to the general election, clearly many of them have a deep sense that this was a betrayal of what they thought they had got before.

In the context of the general movement towards a new set of relationships, whatever they will be post Brexit, we have to endeavour as best we can to include them in these conversations. We have to recognise that the starting point will be, “I do not want to be Irish”, “I do not want a united Ireland”, “I do not feel Irish” and “I am British and I want to stay part of the Union”. If we accept that, and in that very first section of the Good Friday Agreement we all acknowledge that as a legitimate aspiration, the challenge for us is to frame a conversation in that context so they do not feel threatened and so we can have reasonable conversations around the nature of the relationship we will have to have with them, as a community, and, in essence, with the United Kingdom. In the future, they will be a community who will have a British identity and, I suspect, they will in all probability seek, as nationalists have done in Northern Ireland, the involvement of the United Kingdom in some role or way in an effort to give expression to that identity in the future. Again, what is that conversation and what does that new architecture or structure look like?

It is important that we start those conversations in order to assuage the fears they have that, in some way, they are going to be trampled upon or there will be a small corner somewhere that we will find for them. The conversation has to be that they will be equal. Everybody on the island is equal. It is a matter of equality, and they are as equal as me or anybody else in that conversation. That will be the best start. Their fear will be that the long sought-after victory of a united Ireland will be their defeat but we cannot embark on that road. That is the challenge for all of us on this island, namely, how we frame that conversation and how we develop those structures and that architecture, so they do not go into a room feeling that the outcome is front-loaded to their detriment.

Deputy Declan Breathnach: As a non-member of this committee, when I saw the agenda, I was delighted to come along. At the weekend, I attended a funeral in Dundalk of a former German refugee from the Second World War. There were three of his original comrades there who spoke about how they came to Glencree, which was the original refugee centre during a portion of the Second World War. I could not help but think of the importance of the iconic Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation.

More importantly, I came here today to support, acknowledge and thank Mr. Hynes, Ms Walshe and their staff, and Mr. Hynes mentioned the voluntary board of 12 people, who have impressed me greatly. I am delighted to be part of what they are trying to achieve. People talk about the heroes of conflict but I see them as the unsung heroes of conflict resolution. It has been a privilege to be involved since I was elected to the Dáil. I acknowledge the work our guests do tirelessly, to use their choice of word, and behind the scenes. More importantly, as

someone who - as I often say - lives the Border, I understand, like most people, where they are coming from and the importance of discretion. They are not on the radar in the way they should be to get the centre up and running and in that regard, I support them and wish them well.

Our guests spoke about the need for people to engage. There are initiatives such as Comhairle na nÓg, youth parliaments and so on. It has struck me, as a public representative of 25 years, that often we do not know our own local public representatives on the far side of a little drain or what they are doing and *vice versa*. There are great opportunities for Glencree with schools, youth leaders of various persuasions and local public representatives. Since I was elected to the House, I have been struck by the need for further engagement, such as is done through the Good Friday Agreement and the British-Irish Parliamentary Association, to get to know our public representatives of different faiths, hues and opinions. Perhaps we would have a better understanding of one another if we did more of that.

I hope our guests will keep up the good work because they are making strides. Without divulging any sensitive information, given that I am conscious of the discretion of the centre's work, it is important to mention one aspect of their work of which they may not even be aware. An elderly father of one of the first disappeared victims, when people did not talk about the disappeared, eventually visited the scene of where his son was murdered, shortly before he died. That, in itself, is a testament to the centre's work. It was a simple gesture, not through Glencree but through other organisations with which it has worked, that linked the father with the site. I am also aware of many similar cases.

I commend our guests on their work. That was my purpose for attending the meeting and I thank the committee for allowing me to say a few words.

Ms Barbara Walshe: On the word "weapon", referred to by Deputy Crowe, it is about the language we use. Sometimes the language used could be softer or more mindful of people coming from different perspectives and world views, and sometimes language is used as a weapon. We need to mind our language in respect of what we want or what is needed.

We seek an investment of €2 million over the next three years, which would be invested in human resources at Glencree to enable us to do more. We do not expect it to be an ongoing drain on Government resources but we are operating at a thin level. In order for us to be able to do what we need to do, we need the investment over the next three years. We are looking for approximately €700,000 per year for three years to help us to resource the organisation. The resource the organisation needs is a human one, that is, skilled people, as well as the need for IT equipment for the centre. We need to be able to employ people who can do the work and develop sustainable streams of income. Other capital spending will be needed through the Office of Public Works and other sources but we have not tied that down. The most immediate requirement is an investment in the work of Glencree. That is aside from the reconciliation fund. We get approximately €270,000 a year from the fund, which pays for some activity and a few core positions. The organisation needs that to develop. We are not looking for that money from the fund; we are looking for it from the Government itself, as a confidence measure in our work going forward.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Seán Barrett): I thank the witnesses for their presentation. I fully support their aims and ambitions and this committee would be only too pleased to help them in whatever way we can. They should feel free to call on this committee at any stage if they feel we can be of help or assistance in the work they are doing.

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Ms Barbara Walshe: I thank the Acting Chairman.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Seán Barrett): It is a great pleasure. I wish everyone a very happy and peaceful Christmas and a healthy and happy new year. I thank the witnesses and members for being here today.

The joint committee adjourned at 3.42 p.m. *sine die*.