

Statement by

H.E. Mr. David Donoghue

Permanent Representative

at the

UN Security Council open debate:

“Maintenance of International Peace and Security:

War, its lessons, and the search for a permanent peace”

New York, 29 January 2014

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Mr. President,

I would like to warmly commend the Jordanian Presidency of the Council for its initiative in proposing that issues relating to reconciliation should be the focus of today's open debate.

I align myself at the outset with the statement delivered on behalf of the European Union.

Over the century which we are marking today, the scourge of war has been all too visible, in many parts of the world and in many forms. How to eliminate this scourge and to build lasting peace is one of the great challenges facing this Organisation. The UN has a vital role to play in helping societies damaged by conflict to rebuild and regenerate themselves. Through its peacebuilding interventions, it can help to transform a fragile peace into something more deep-rooted and lasting. It can lay the foundations, as few other organisations can, for "permanent peace".

At the heart of this endeavour is the support the UN can provide for reconciliation between the communities of a divided society in the aftermath of conflict. It can help communities to bind up the wounds of conflict and to move, however slowly and hesitantly, towards peaceful co-existence. The damage done to relationships at all levels by years of war and suffering is, of course, immense. It can take generations to overcome. There are legacies of profound mistrust. There are issues between communities in conflict which touch on deep sensitivities of identity and allegiance. Even if violence has ended, a lengthy healing process is needed before the rival communities can reach the level of confidence in each other required for a shared future.

On the island of Ireland we have seen this at first hand. Fifteen years ago, a comprehensive political framework for the settlement of the Northern Ireland problem was agreed in a negotiation process which involved the Irish and British Governments and the political representatives of Northern Ireland's communities. This achievement, the so-called Good Friday Agreement, transformed relations within Northern Ireland, between North and South and between Ireland and the UK. It has brought lasting political stability to Northern Ireland and an unprecedented level of cooperation and interaction between the two parts of Ireland. At the grassroots level, however, a significant challenge remains in terms of achieving lasting reconciliation between the two main traditions in Northern Ireland. Much painstaking effort has been devoted on all sides to this process. But, while significant progress has been made, a number of divisive issues remain. These include issues such as the flying of flags linked to the respective communities or how contentious parades should be handled. Intensive efforts were made recently by a respected US third party to broker an agreement between the communities on how these issues should be addressed.

Over the years, the Irish and British Governments have worked closely on practical steps which might help the different traditions in Northern Ireland to deal with the past and to transcend the legacy of bitterness and misunderstanding. Much valuable work is also

underway at community level to foster reconciliation and to increase mutual respect and acceptance of diversity.

At the international level, the UN is promoting similar objectives through a wide range of instruments available to it in dealing with the aftermath of conflict. These include support for transitional justice and the rule of law; for political dialogue and mediation; for “truth-telling” processes; for reparations; for institutional reform; and for the role of women in the renewal and rebuilding of societies emerging from conflict. In such situations the UN has the potential to deliver profound benefits, defusing tensions between communities at local level through concrete actions which it supports and easing and accelerating, therefore, the essential work of national reconciliation.

Reconciliation work assumes different forms in different contexts, whether at the national or community levels. There can be multiple benefits, furthermore, from individual steps taken: for example, the creation of a post-conflict system of justice can, on the one hand, serve accountability purposes in relation to egregious crimes committed during the conflict phase but, on the other, help to restore the trust of individual citizens and to reconcile them, therefore, to the new state. Peacebuilding, with reconciliation at its core, is probably most effective if it is double-facing: “a process through which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future”.

And, while reconciliation needs to be context-specific and to respond to the particular nature or dynamic of each transition or conflict, a more concerted effort is required to capture and share lessons and best practice from different conflict settings. Work also needs to be done on drawing together the various dimensions of reconciliation – these would include development, peacebuilding, human rights, security, the rule of law, governance – into a more integrated approach in which these various pillars would complement and reinforce each other.

To conclude, Mr President:

My delegation believes that this area of the UN’s activity has not always received the attention it deserves. The actions being taken by the UN under various headings to promote reconciliation in post-conflict societies deserve our full support. The Organisation is making a vital contribution to the creation of “a truer, irreversible peace”, as the note circulated by the Jordanian Presidency puts it. There is much potential to develop this contribution and Ireland looks forward to further reflection on this with other interested delegations. We wish to share in this context the lessons we have learned from the Northern Ireland peace process, with the continuing challenge of achieving lasting reconciliation between the differing traditions there, and also to draw on other examples of “best practice” from around the globe.

Thank you, Mr President.