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16 OCT 1997
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Internal Memo

From: R B Spence
Permanent Secretary

Your ref:
Our ref: PSE 652/97

Tel: (5)41175/6

Date: 15 October 1997

To: Mr Watkins
Central Secretariat

yo
16.10

cc: PS/PUS (B&L)
PS/Mr Semple
Mr Thomas
Mr Sweeney

A FORUM FOR PEOPLE AFFLICTED BY VIOLENCE

1. I attach a copy of a thoughtful minute from Paul Sweeney about a possible way of responding to the victims of the violence of the last quarter of a century.
2. I believe that this sort of approach merits serious consideration. Others will be better placed to advise on whether consideration can be taken forward outside the political talks process or whether it has to be explored in that context.
3. Paul and I would be happy to join in any discussion at official level.

RM

R B SPENCE

In Forward 17/10

*This may indeed be timely.
DoE should be involved in any
discussion - both Paul Sweeney +
R. McNamee.*

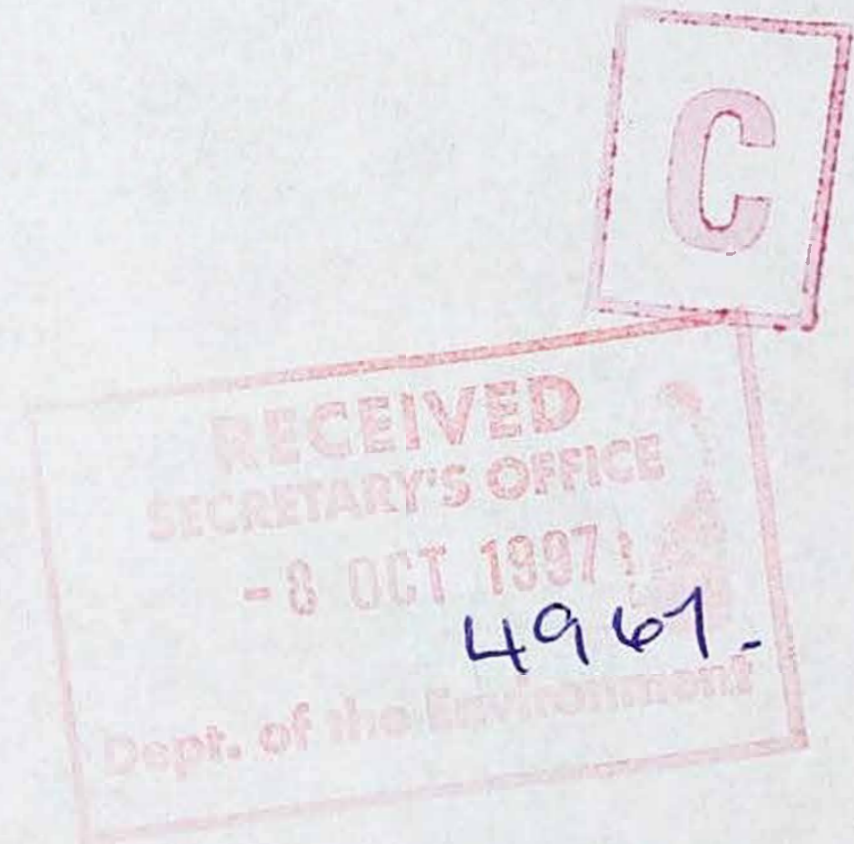
*In the meantime I am
acknowledging.*

*by
16.10*



Internal Memo

To: Secretary
From: Paul Sweeney
Date: 7 October 1997



VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

1. As part of his Confidence-Building Measures Mr Trimble has suggested that greater recognition be given to the "victims of violence" (recently refined to "victims of terrorism").
2. I anticipate that the issue of those who have been afflicted by violence will increasingly feature in the strive towards a more peaceful society. Furthermore I believe that there is considerable benefit to be gained by finding an appropriate medium to acknowledge the suffering within our community as a direct result of the past 26 years of violence.
3. The issue of victims of violence will be heightened by;
 - the talks process itself;
 - the 10th anniversary of the Enniskillen bombing;
 - the possible Governmental commitment to a review of Bloody Sunday;
 - the precedent of Belfast City Council's recent decision (17 votes to 16) to commission a stainglass window to the victims of Bloody Friday.

4. Personally I was emotionally drained by the BBC interview (Friday 3 October) with the mother of Constable John Graham - speaking of the wickedness of the Lurgan killings - she manifested her utter sense of irreconcilable loss.
5. David Bolton is a senior social worker in Enniskillen. He has had direct professional involvement in supporting the victims of violence. He is currently the chairman of the Fermanagh District Partnership, and considers himself a liberal unionist. In November 1995 he made a personal submission to the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation in Dublin. He strongly advocated the need to establish a Forum for people afflicted through violence ... "to allow victims to tell the story of their suffering, to have that story accepted, understood and taken account of by the Forum, on behalf of the total community. Through this process, the total community and its institutions would be enabled to recognise the consequences of violence". Supporting Bolton's approach, the Rev John Dunlop, in his book "A Precarious Belonging" stressed that "an essential part of the process of reconciliation is for stories to be told and to be heard".
6. I believe that if such a process was properly undertaken it could not only assist the current strive towards peace, but importantly help to moderate the psyche of violence in our community. A concocted political deal that simply buries the guns for 20-30 years, without a communal commitment towards sincere reconciliation and an acknowledgement of the futility of violence, is a precarious basis for lasting peace.
7. Importantly it should be stressed from the outset that a Forum for People Afflicted by Violence should not be viewed as a "South African Truth Commission". Nor should it function as a medium to be used by political interests for political gain.

8. Over a period of 12-18 months the Forum could facilitate submissions and at the completion of the task issue a final report - a testimony to the futility of violence and a covenant that we will never again revert to the use of violence in settling our cultural/political differences in the future. Conceivably the Forum could have a target audience of the immediate relatives of those who lost loved ones over the past 26 years (say 3,200 x 10) and a cross section of the most traumatised survivors afflicted by serious injury (37,000). The Forum would work primarily in Northern Ireland, but could hold sessions in the Republic of Ireland, Great Britain and continental Europe.
9. Such a body should have equal status to the "Decommissioning Body". Agreement on the terms of reference and appointment of Panel members would be critical. Success could be best achieved if the genesis of this could be brokered among the main churches and then endorsed by the political parties and civil society.
10. The costs of this endeavour could be funded under the second tranche of the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (perhaps via the Northern Ireland Partnership Board). The costs would be in the region of £1.5 million over 2 years. However, the benefits could be considerable if the venture achieved even modest success.

11. Would you see merit in wider discussion on this matter?

Paul

PAUL SWEENEY

NB: The poet Damian Gorman has established the Cran Project, which aims to provide an opportunity for stories of the troubles to be told. A Forum for those Afflicted by Violence would be much more high profile and focused. Nevertheless, Gorman would be one of a range of people to be consulted.