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Time now for others to move

2005 was yet another historic year in the unfolding peace process in Ireland. In July the Irish Republican Army announced a formal end to its armed struggle and then in September conclusively and in a verifiable manner put all its arms beyond use. Our hopes are that soon the political institutions will be put back in place and that we can all move into a more peaceful, egalitarian and prosperous future.

In light of those hugely significant developments it is worth reflecting on what has been attained in relation to removing the barriers of discrimination and achieving full citizenship for political ex-prisoners. Unfortunately at the moment there is little positive to say in that regard.

For the last seven years we have projected a positive image of the ex-prisoner community in order to address their routine demonisation by the media and unionism in general. We have also taken every opportunity to speak of the need for government policy across the island to address the legal barriers facing ex-prisoners in accessing employment and a range of other services.

One of these opportunities was in input to the West Belfast Task Force. As a result, the need for specific measures to address our concerns was included by Pdraig White in the Task Force report. The Employment Services Board was then established to oversee the implementation of the report's recommendations. I was invited to sit on the Board to represent the interests of ex-prisoners. The Board in 2003 established a sub-group to concentrate on this area of its work; chaired by Sir George Quigley, we invited representatives of all other political ex-prisoner organisations to join the sub-group.

We began to lobby government and this led to the establishment - in January 2005 - of a Working Group involving members of the sub-group plus civil servants. This Working Group has been chaired by Nigel Hamilton, head of the Civil Service in the 6 counties (ref, p22, ESB Progress Report 04-05) and it is hoped that we will see the outcomes of this work early in 2006.

The torturous process of building peace in Ireland, as elsewhere in the world, requires leadership and imagination. We feel that republican ex-prisoners have not been found wanting when it came to providing both. We will await the outcomes of the Working Group on Political ex-Prisoners and will measure its effectiveness by how comprehensively it deals with the core issues.

Mike Ritchie
Director



Politically Motivated Former Prisoner Groups:

Community Activism and Conflict Transformation

A research report funded by the Community Relations Council under the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland



Pictured outside the Linenhall Library are (l to r) Paul O'Neil, Chairperson of Tar Isteach Management Committee; Tom Roberts, Director of Epic; Kieran McEvoy, Queen's University; Duncan Morrow, CEO, the Community Relations Council; and Peter Shirlow, University of Ulster

THE recent publication of the report 'Politically Motivated Former Prisoner Groups: Community Activism and Conflict Transformation' received a great deal of media interest. The report is an investigation into the impact of imprisonment on ex-prisoners and their families and on the role of ex-prisoners in developing the peace process.

Press coverage on the launch of the report was mixed. Some of it was relatively balanced. Some even welcomed the report and its findings but others focused on the fact that it was about political ex-prisoners and not on its content. In one press report the journalist interpreted the research findings that many ex-prison-

"The positive work carried out by former political prisoners, both for themselves and for their community, is regularly ignored."

ers found it difficult to cope with life on the outside as, "over 50% of ex-prisoners would rather they had not been released". This type of reporting is unfortunately too common a response from certain sections of the media and a number of politicians. The positive work carried out by former political prisoners, both for themselves and for their community, is regularly ignored. The initial impetus for this report was as a result of a series of negative press reports in 2004 attacking the funding of ex-prisoner

groups in general and Tar Isteach in particular. The press stories were vitriolic attacks on specific ex-prisoners and what they had been convicted for, in one case completely getting it wrong, and ignored the work being carried out by the group for young people. Much of the attack was directed against Joe Doherty the youth worker for Tar Isteach. No mention was made of the many activities the youth were involved in, which included numerous cross-community projects working with youth from the Shankill Road and Tigers Bay

areas. In this instance Tar Isteach lost funding for its youth worker because of the controversial coverage. This current piece of research was unique in that it involved both Republicans and Loyalists in the academic creation of the report and in those being investigated. Some of the press coverage focused on this aspect of the research. Much of the findings support earlier research pointing to the obstacles and barriers that ex-prisoners and their families face due to criminalisation and dis-



ABOVE: (l to r) Brian Graham, University of Ulster; Keran McEvoy; Peter Shirlow; Mike Ritchie, Director of Coiste na nIarchimí; and Dawn Purvis, University of Ulster

BELOW: Tommy Quigley, Coordinator of Tar Isteach

crimination. However, the report also highlights the very positive roles ex-prisoners play in community development and in peace building. Another significant finding concerns the contrast between how negatively Loyalists are regarded in their own community and the high regard and positive image Republican ex-prisoners have in their community.

So whilst Republicans face discrimination and hostility from outside their community, Loyalists face it both from outside and within their community.

This report will add to and enhance the body of work already carried out investigating the ex-prisoner experience and the work they are doing. It confirms that criminalisation and demonisation



remain as facts of life for ex-prisoners. However, it also demonstrates how ex-prisoners are successfully challenging those who through sectarian and political bigotry would deny full and equal citizenship to them and their families.

The report is a well-researched and highly significant piece of work. Its authors are to be congratulated, in particular Félim Ó hAdhmaill and Dawn Purvis, for their commitment, hard work and very professional approach to the research. Thanks also to Peter Shirlow, Brian Graham and Kieran McEvoy.

Tommy Quigley
Project Co-ordinator
Tar Isteach

Copies of the report can be obtained from Tar Isteach; Tel. 02890 746664 or by contacting Coiste na nIarchimí on info@coiste.com

Fostering the positive attitude of youth

A MULTI CULTURAL CARNIVAL PARADE

ITS not every day you see a 20ft lion driving down the New Lodge Road with a version of Elvis's, "A Little Less Conversation" blasting from it, or a team of miniature Vikings marching. It's not every day you see young people from the area dressed up in colourful outfits with their faces painted. Well that's exactly what happened in the New Lodge on Saturday 6th August.

To kick-start the annual Tar Isteach family fun day the Tar Isteach youth group decided to organise a carnival. The young people wanted it to be as bright and colourful as possible. They also wanted to invite people from different ethnic backgrounds to come along and share in the fun with the New Lodge Community. As a result, members of the Chinese Welfare Association and the Indian Community Centre came along and participated in the carnival, adding their own unique colour and sound.

Tar Isteach contacted East Belfast based carnival group The BEAT Initiative to come out and do carnival workshops with community groups in the area. The workshops entailed mask making, costume design, drumming and flag workshops. BEAT Initiative Organiser, Eileen said, "We have really enjoyed ourselves working with the young people of the New Lodge and they have been a pleasure."

The carnival was an excellent vehicle to showcase everything that is positive about the New Lodge. It highlighted the colour and diversity of a proud community. A special thanks to all the community groups that took part in this year's event.



LEFT: Ambulance and fire crew have often come under attack when answering emergency calls. Young people from the area decided it would be good to paint a mural in support of the public services and to raise awareness

RIGHT: Children of the New Lodge pictured with Tierna Cunningham (left) and Cárál Ní Chuilín, Coordinator of Tar Anall Ex-prisoners Project when they helped remove graffiti from the area.

END OF SUMMER YOUTH RESIDENTIAL

Tar Isteach's youth residential held in Tí Chulainn Cultural Activity Centre in South Armagh was a great success. The young people took part in horse riding, GAA skills training session, health and beauty workshop, a walking tour of the area and much, much more.

During the GAA session the young people were treated to a visit from Armagh's own Benny Tierney who took time out from his busy training schedule to come down and meet the youth group.

One of the main reasons for the residential was to reward a very hard working group of young people. The



Tar Isteach youth group have been at the forefront of positive community initiatives such as The Emergency Services Mural, The Multi-Cultural Carnival Parade, The New Lodge Festival and the Graffiti Clean Up Events. They are in the process of starting a new project; designing a booklet that aims to highlight the dangers of smoking amongst young people. The booklet will be distributed around local schools and community and youth groups and will feature at all CEP community inclusion events.

*Tierna Cunningham
Co-ordinator
Youth Project*



"Blocks to the Future"

On Wednesday 26th October the results of research conducted by Dr Brandon Hamber into the long-term effects of the Blanket protest on former Republican prisoners in Long Kesh was launched. The report was commissioned by Cúnamh, an organisation based in Derry City that deals with the issue of mental health. Cathy Neilis, Cúnamh Project Co-ordinator, described the origins and rationale behind the research. "For Cúnamh, our interest in doing the research was

A Pilot Study of the Long-term Psychological Impact of the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest

"... we wanted to challenge the policy and political discourses which seek to exclude political prisoners and their families from many spheres of daily life.."

twofold. Firstly, we wanted to explore the psychological impact of imprisonment and the coping strategies employed. Our sense from working on previous projects was that political prisoners had offset the potential for mental ill health or trauma because they had developed some form of resilience within the gaol and through their identity as 'soldiers'. Secondly, we wanted to chal-

lenge the policy and political discourses which seek to exclude political prisoners and their families from many spheres of daily life and treat them only as perpetrators, whilst ignoring their experiences. The decision to focus upon the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest was taken because we felt it a particularly difficult period for those involved and as a result might have a unique set of



Cathy Neilis, (centre, front) Coordinator of Cúnamh with a section of the crowd who attended the launch of the report



Ronnie Kasrils (left) with Dr Brandon Hamber who conducted the research

"... it became apparent that there was an overwhelming desire amongst many former participants on the protest to become involved in the project"

impacts. We agreed, at least for this pilot, to focus only on male ex-prisoners as we felt we could not adequately incorporate women's experience in this pilot project. We are keen though to explore this in the future. When Cúnamh staff members were discussing the idea of doing this research we co-incidentally and unexpectedly received a visit from a former prisoner. He requested that we carry out some work in relation to this issue. His request was motivated by his concern for former comrades, who he felt were not coping too well.

The result of this was the development of a self-help group of nine ex-prisoners who were on the 'No Wash/Blanket' Protest. Initially we envisaged doing 12 in-depth interviews and writing up the findings. However, once the research started, and the self-help group began to develop, it became apparent that there was an overwhelming desire amongst many former participants on the protest to become involved in the project. Within the time frame we managed to do 21 interviews and although we could have done many more, we

feel what is presented in the report gives a broad representative picture of many experiences.

It is Cúnamh's hope that the report will help alleviate the ongoing struggle which many former political prisoners and their families face. It is interesting that the self-help group has been keen to include their partners in this project and this is currently being organised by Cúnamh. Of course, this is not the first piece of work on ex-prisoners and organisations like Cúnamh and others have for years been doing work aimed at highlighting the

experience of political prisoners. We do feel, however, especially given recent announcements by the IRA, that the timing of the research is apt. It is time to take stock of the past, deal with the suffering that has taken place and build a new future.

We hope that the report will serve to promote a better and more empathetic understanding from policy makers, politicians and the wider community of the needs of ex-prisoners. We have been inspired by the courage, commitment and honesty shown by all those who participated and are immensely grateful to have been given the opportunity to share this experience with them. They are the ordinary people who have had extraordinary lives.”

Raymond McCartney, MLA, former prisoner on the Blanket Protest and current Chairperson of Coiste na nIarchimí praised Cúnamh for their work in groundbreaking projects dealing with people’s experience of the conflict.

“Its work with the families of Bloody Sunday and others killed by the British state and its agents, and with the families of former political prisoners will become the future benchmarks of models of good practice in this field. The strength of these projects is that they were constructed with the direct input by those directly affected by conflict.

Too often in the past there was a tendency to record history as a collective or consensual experience and memory. Whereas that approach leaves us with a valuable reflection of the past, this project allows individual participants to speak of the period not for historical analysis but for its impact on them.

It gives a voice for things deeply felt but never spoken. Importantly it highlights



trauma, which requires attention. It points to and offers ways in which this trauma can be addressed. It asks of us all to not only accept the findings but to do our utmost to create the services that this report demands.”

Ronnie Kasrils, Minister for Intelligence in the South African Government and former guerrilla fighter for

(l to r) Michael Culbert, Ronnie Kasrils and Raymond McCartney

over 20 years against the Apartheid Government of South Africa was present at the launch of the report. Ronnie spoke of the importance of recognising the sacrifice of political prisoners in his country and here in Ireland and outlined the many parallels between both countries where so many former prisoners are now acknowledged as major



political leaders within their communities.

Michael Culbert, Organisational Development Officer with Coiste and himself a former prisoner on the Blanket Protest, attended the launch.

“Research findings can often disguise the true effects of what they are examining but in this case I found that Cúnamh have truly captured

the horrors of what these men suffered.

Imprisonment has never been a stranger to Republicans but what differentiated this era of imprisonment from all others was the personalised ferocity with which prison staff confronted the non co-operation with the system by captured Republicans. Participants in the research

have told very factually and honestly all of the horrors to which they were exposed over a five year period – horrors which consisted of; permanent nakedness because of rulings that they wear criminal prison uniforms; prolonged hunger due to pettiness and vindictiveness which prison staff subjected them to; beatings and constant anal searches for ‘dangerous’ contraband such as tobacco and writing equipment; loss of visits and contact with families and friends.

Coincidentally the research comes out at a time when former RUC members are claiming the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder from carrying out their duties. The irony is that the latter knowingly joined a paramilitary organisation knowing the duties that would be expected of them and were paid vast salaries and bonuses for their services. All the prisoners wanted was recognition of their status as political prisoners.

It was the view of many at the launch that this forthright piece of research could be the first stage in the process of former political prisoners opening up their case for a possible class action against the NIO for the long term effects of prison policies which resulted in many former political prisoners suffering from the effects of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Roll on the day.

Copies of the report can be obtained by contacting Cathy Neilis at Cúnamh, 171 Sunbeam Terrace, Bishop Street, Derry, BT48 6UJ. Tel. (028) 71288868; Email cathy@cunamh.org

The research report “Blocks to the Future” A Pilot Study of the Long-term Psychological Impact of the ‘No Wash/Blanket’ Protest was funded by the Community Relations Council.

“Imprisonment has never been a stranger to Republicans but what differentiated this era of imprisonment from all others was the personalised ferocity with which prison staff confronted the non co-operation with the system by captured Republicans”



Pat McGinn, Mayor of Newry and Mourne Council pictured with Coiste staff Rosena Brown (left) and Rosie McCorley and back row (l to r) Martin Ferris, TD; Seán McManus, Tús Nua, Sligo; Laurence McKeown, Coiste; Conor Murphy, MP Newry and South Armagh; and Martin Kenny, Lá Nua, Leitrim

Coiste na nIarchimí Summer School 2005

BY MICK BEYERS
Research Affiliate,
Coiste na nIarchimí

On Thursday and Friday 25 – 26 August Coiste na nIarchimí, the national network for republican ex-prisoners, hosted its third annual Scoil Samhraidh at Ti Chulainn Heritage & Cultural Centre in South Armagh. Organized under Coiste's Processes of Nation Building programme the theme of the school was, "Irish Republicanism: Can it be militant without being militaristic?" The premise could not have been more

timely and lively discussion, focused on the republican project and the next phase of the struggle, ensued over the course of the two days. Pat McGinn, Sinn Féin councillor and Mayor of Newry and Mourne Council, formally opened the summer school and set the tone for the evening's discussion by stating, "I am a learner, I like to listen to debates and to be challenged." Reflecting on his political activism Pat said, "I have always felt so proud to be a member of the republican family, I am very conscious of that tradition,



CLOCKWISE: • Mary Lou McDonald, MEP for Dublin; Laurence McKeown, Coiste; Tommy McKearney, Expac; and Conor Murphy, MP for Newry and South Armagh • Rosie McCorley of Coiste •Margaret Ward, Women's Support Network; Agnès Maillot, Dublin City University; and Denis O'Hearn, Queen's University, Belfast

of that integrity and of that courage” and added that he is always mindful of following, “in the footsteps of many great Irish men and women, living and dead.” The history of the land was also to the fore, the rich cultural environment of the Ring of Gullion designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (ANOB). For the visitor this provides an ironic contrast to a region also known as the most heavily militarized area in Western Europe. Martin Ferris, Sinn Féin TD, was the keynote speaker for the opening session of the school. A senior republican, Sinn Féin Árd Comhairle member and former political prisoner, Martin emphasized the adaptive and resilient nature of republicanism and considering the historic developments of recent weeks affirmed, “We

have no fear that the IRA’s decision to end its military campaign will result in the republican movement losing its militancy. We understand the opportunities the historic IRA decision gives to advance our goals and our political objectives. We are republicans. We are revolutionaries. We are committed to effecting social, political and economic change. We are viewed, rightly so, as a threat to the political establishment and the status quo. We are a thorn in their side. We are unrepentant, committed to equality for all the people of this island. We are not nationalists only, we are internationalists. We militantly hold these beliefs, whether engaged in campaigns of armed struggle, as we were in the past, mass mobilizations or electoral politics. We refuse to be cat-

“We understand the opportunities the historic IRA decision gives to advance our goals and our political objectives. We are republicans. We are revolutionaries. We are committed to effecting social, political and economic change.”

egorized or limited by other definitions of militancy or militarism. Make no mistake comrades, our collective past allows us to build and develop into a potent force for the future. That is why we are feared.” The summer school continued the following day with morning and afternoon panels that featured republican activists including Sinn Féin’s Conor Murphy MLA (standing in for Gerry Kelly MLA-on-holiday) and Mary Lou McDonald MEP, as well as Coiste’s director Mike Ritchie. Pointed questions were debated with the insightful political analysis of veteran republican Tommy McKearney contributing to the issue of republican participation in policing and the issue of trade unions. There was also an emphasis in the summer school on

academic speakers. Rounding out the panel participants was Denis O'Hearn lecturer at Queen's University and author of a biography on Bobby Sands due for release early next year. In addition to his academic work Denis is especially interested in action-oriented community research and is particularly active in the West Belfast Economic Forum. Also in attendance political historian Margaret Ward, author of several texts on the theme of Irish women and nationalism including *Unmanned Revolutionaries*, which chronicles the role of women as an independent force in Irish politics. Offering another historical perspective was librarian John Gray from the Linenhall Library which houses the Northern Ireland Political Collection, the richest depository of archival materials on the political conflict. Rounding out the invited speakers was Agnès Maillot of Dublin City University. Maillot's painstakingly researched *New Sinn Féin: Irish Republicanism in the Twenty-First Century* is billed as essential reading for anyone with an interest in Irish politics and the republican movement in particular. Coiste's Scoil Samhraidh had all the hallmarks of a typical Coiste event with members of a vibrant, confident community gathered to discuss and debate openly aspects of their ideology and political culture. What is revealing is the natural model for self conduct evidenced here. The value placed on critical reflection and the concept of conscious debate of differences, limitations and strengths as pivotal to the improvement of the republican project. At times there is a whisper that organization leads to conservatism, that the militancy of republicanism could be consumed by the bureaucra-



"What is revealing is the natural model for self conduct evidenced here. The value placed on critical reflection and the concept of conscious debate of differences, limitations and strengths as pivotal to the improvement of the republican project."



ABOVE: Martin Ferris Sinn Féin TD and BELOW: R-L Mike Ritchie, Coiste, with John Gray, Curator of the Linenhall Library

cy of government. This was something Conor Murphy referred to in his address to the school. So, how will republicans maintain a vibrant movement which challenges political apathy and the acceptance of existing social conditions? This is really a question of consciousness but as Martin Ferris contends, "The very fact that we are here, and debating internally, and

articulating our respective positions is a militant form of struggle in itself." Coiste hopes to continue with the summer school concept as an annual event. Given the attendance and the positive comments made by the participants it appears there is an eagerness for such an event and the opportunity it provides to reflect upon the past and debate the future.

A personal journey

THERE was standing room only in the Roddy McCorley Social Club, Belfast on Saturday 30th July when Coiste na nIarchimí hosted an event under the Processes of Nation Building programme. Billy Leonard, Sinn Féin councillor was there to give an account of his personal journey from being a member of the RUC Reserve to becoming an elected representative for Sinn Féin.

Billy told the packed audience about his youth, growing up in a small unionist family in Portadown, and later joining the RUC. He spoke of the importance to him of history and politics and how this led to his questioning of state violence and his total dissatisfaction with the Unionist perspectives on the whole political situation. Billy left the RUC and later met and married his wife Valerie who came from the predominantly nationalist estate of Killwilkie in Lurgan.

One of the most important periods of Billy's life was between 1976 to 1981 when he moved from a British to Irish identity. This move had its consequences for him particularly within his own family who were naturally afraid for his personal security. Determined to follow through, Billy became involved in politics and in 2001 was elected as an SDLP councillor in North Antrim. After some



Dominic Adams (left) Youth Project Officer with Coiste who chaired the discussion with Billy Leonard



Reverend Dr Ken Newell, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland

time he was disillusioned with the party's post Good Friday Agreement politics, that there was no core message especially on a united Ireland. In January 2004 he joined Sinn Féin which was obviously a big decision for him but to Billy the politics of the next ten to fifteen years were extremely important and he wanted to be part of that. He experienced a lot of suspicion in the beginning on wanting to join Sinn Féin but proved that he is more than capable, winning a seat in the predominantly unionist borough of Coleraine. Billy's story was warmly received and there followed a question and answer session.

As the event was part of the west Belfast festival programme there were many visitors from overseas in the audience. Many wanted to know more about what his parents and family thought of his decision and while he was reluctant to speak about this he did say that there was some opposition from family but more a natural fear for his personal security. He was open and frank in his answers and the audience certainly appreciated this as was evident in the standing ovation he received at the end of the session. Many stayed behind to meet him personally and extend their best wishes to him.

Rosena Brown

Political Tourism Project Takes on New Dimensions

As Coiste's Political Tourism project develops in making international contacts in the academic world for pre-arranged Political Education fieldtrips, the project is now moving to attract different markets by attempting to meet the broad needs of a wide range of visitors to Belfast. We now operate walking tours on a daily basis to capture some of the individual pedestrian tourism traffic and have trained a group of young tour guides who are from ex-prisoners' families. This service has the potential to compete with the other daily tour providers within the city. These tours, if we are given sufficient notice, can also take place for special interest groups and can be delivered in the Irish Language, Basque Language, French and Spanish Languages. We are hopeful through a planned marketing strategy that this unique service will become particularly popular with the vast numbers of Basque and Catalan travellers who specifically come to Belfast because of their interest in our community's political history. The Irish Language services are also crucial as the Falls Road's Gaeltacht Quarter develops.

During the West Belfast festival in August past, Coiste provided their usual daily Political Tours of West Belfast and once again they were a huge success, attracting visitors from all around the world but equally popular with locals too. We had representation from the local Palestinian Solidarity lobby who gave the group a brief overview of the Palestinian situation, while the group looked on and took photographs of the Palestinian wall mural on the Falls Road. At the 'D' Company garden of remembrance, the group listened to the personal experiences of Pat Wilson, who was present the day that the Sinn Féin office on the Falls Road was attacked by an armed RUC man killing two office workers and wounding Pat. This year, as a result of Jim McVeigh's innovative thinking, Coiste provided a tour with a difference on the final day of the festival. Jim had decided to incorporate street drama into the tour and arranged for a



'Ian Paisley' conducts the tour of West Belfast



Jim McVeigh speaking at the republican monument in Milltown cemetery

range of guests, some in costume and some not, to arrive at certain points along the route and give the participants something additional. So the tour began with a brief welcome from the 'Reverend Paisley' who actually was in great spirits as he got on to the bus.

At the Clonard 'C' Company memorial garden, people listened to 'Fr Daniel Jack', in the full priest uniform; give an account of the burning of Bombay Street on 15 August 1969. On this occasion the street was full of other tourists who had arrived in city council black taxis and they joined us to hear the story their own guide could never offer.

As the bus made its way along the Springfield Road a member of the Orange Order, Grandmaster

'Dominic Adams', boarded the bus with his sash and bowler hat wanting to know if this bus was going to Drumcree in Portadown. He informed those on the bus and that this was his traditional route and that he was staying on the bus. The bus passed Ballymurphy and the group was given a full explanation of the murals. At the bottom of the Whiterock Road, Jim McVeigh pointed out the house where James Connolly once lived. Jim spoke of the life and aspirations of this revolutionary Republican and Socialist and his connections with Belfast life and its people.

The tour ended in Milltown Cemetery where Rosena Browne in full costume recited poetry expressing her opposition to Irish men fighting in the First World War. A short distance away Bridie Mc Mahon gave a full oration at the grave of Máire Drumm and at the new Republican Plot the group heard the Irish Proclamation read by 'Patrick Pearse'. This was Coiste's first attempt at such a tour but was so successful that we hope to repeat it on occasions for special sizeable delegations.

Caoimhín MacGiolla Mhín



Aladdin Jaradat (left) and Sahar Francis pictured with Rosena Brown and Laurence McKeown of Coiste when Féile FM hosted an interview with them to tell of the plight of Palestinian prisoners

Solidarity with Palestinian prisoners

COISTE na nIarchimí recently hosted a visit to Ireland by two Palestinian activists.

Sahar Francis is a Palestinian lawyer and human rights advocate in the Occupied Territories who works with Addameer (www.addameer.org) in Ramallah in the Occupied West Bank on political prisoners' rights campaigns. Addameer is a Palestinian non-governmental organisation founded in 1992 by human rights activists in Jerusalem

Addameer run a number of campaigns and conduct various activities. They have an ongoing campaign against torture and follow torture cases. They visit prisoners monthly to track prison conditions and campaign for their release. They represent prisoners in courts, submit peti-



Caral Ní Chuilin took Sahar and Aladdin on a tour of the Tar Anall project and described its history of development

tions to the Israeli Supreme Court, take legal cases to the international level and represent prisoners in Israeli military courts. They also educate the community about rights and prison issues and provide training to lawyers in the field on how to apply international law in their work.

Aladdin Jaradat is a political prisoner and activist with

Addameer where he works with families of political detainees. He is Addameer's point person for establishing relationships with other political prisoners support organisations.

Coiste facilitated informal meetings with Sahar and Aladdin in Dublin, Belfast, Derry and south Armagh when they visited the prisoner centres there.

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WORKING FOR THE REPUBLICAN EX-PRISONER COMMUNITY

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