



A Day of Private Reflection: Discussion Paper and Proposal

Healing Through Remembering
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This discussion paper has been prepared to encourage debate and comment on a proposal for a Day of Private Reflection to be held in June 2007.

It represents the conclusions of a diverse sub group within the Healing Through Remembering (HTR) Project (see *Appendix A* for a list of members) who have been considering the idea of holding a Day of Reflection. This idea emerged as one of six recommendations in a report by HTR in 2002 (Healing Through Remembering 2002).

We are mindful that the issues around the hurts of the past are difficult, complex, and sensitive and that there is no single solution to addressing the suffering brought about by the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. However, our work over almost a two-year period has led us to the view that holding a Day of Private Reflection in June 2007 could make a valuable contribution to enabling society to deal with the legacy of the conflict and to move forward to a better future.

This paper sets out our proposals for a Day of Private Reflection, which would provide an opportunity for people to reflect individually at home or at work and as a family or a group. The Day should be supported by a range of guidance materials together with counselling and other support services. In terms of counselling and support, we will work with providers of such services to ensure that they are available to all those who wish to avail themselves of them.

We propose that the initial Day of Private Reflection take place on 21 June 2007.

While we believe that the initial Day of Reflection should be held privately, there is at least the potential to hold the Day publicly in future years and move towards public, shared events over time. With this in mind, we think it important that the impact of, and public response to, the Day of Private Reflection next year be evaluated to help judge whether it ought to be held in future years and whether more public elements would be appropriate.

While we have taken a lead in developing this specific proposal, we are mindful that taking it forward will need the active involvement and commitment of many stakeholders. We hope that the discussion around this paper will enable a broad range of people, either as individuals or as representatives of organisations, to join with us in working towards the Day of Private Reflection planned for the 21 June 2007.

2 Background

2.1 Introduction

The original proposal for a Day of Reflection was one of six recommendations contained in a report published by the HTR Project in 2002. This Project was formally established in 2001, under the guidance of a diverse Board, to "explore and debate ways of examining the past and remembering so as to build a better future" (Healing Through Remembering 2002). Following an extensive public consultation process, a report was published in 2002 outlining findings based on 108 submissions from individuals and organisations (Healing Through Remembering 2002). The report contained six detailed recommendations which together formed a series of linked strategies to promote healing through remembering. These included the establishment of:

- a network of commemoration and remembering projects;
- a collective storytelling and archiving process;
- a day of reflection;
- a permanent living memorial museum;
- a process of acknowledgement and a truth recovery process; and
- an HTR initiative to take forward the implementation of recommendations contained in the report.

The HTR initiative was set up in 2003. In order to take forward each of the recommendations sub groups were formed which – like the original Board – are made up of a wide range of individuals with different perspectives.

2.2 Original recommendation

The initial HTR Report of 2002 recommended that an annual Day of Reflection be established and that the day would serve as:

... a universal gesture of reconciliation, reflection, acknowledgement and recognition of the suffering of so many arising from the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. (Healing Through Remembering 2002: 44)

It identified the principles that should underpin the day and some of the obstacles that might be encountered in setting it up. It was proposed that the Day of Reflection would be an inclusive and positive event that would emphasise a commitment to a peaceful new society. It would provide an opportunity for people in Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain to remember all those who had been adversely affected by the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. It was suggested that initially the Day of Reflection would be focused on reflection and contemplation and that people would be encouraged to remember and reflect on the causes and effects of conflict in a peaceful, tolerant and respectful way. However, it was envisaged that over time the Day of Reflection could evolve into including more collective and public elements of remembering and commemoration.

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2.3 Day of Reflection Sub Group

In August 2004 we met as a group of interested individuals to consider forming the Day of Reflection Sub Group. In subsequent months, the membership of this Sub Group was expanded and we met under an interim chair from the original HTR Board. In April 2005 a chair of the Day of Reflection Sub Group was appointed.

Over this period we focused on exploring how the recommendation might be taken forward and on key issues around a potential Day of Reflection. We have commissioned and conducted research to inform our work, including research into days of reflection in an international context (Healing Through Remembering 2006), research exploring potential dates on which a Day of Reflection might take place locally, and a scoping study to assess local views on the idea and practical steps that could be taken to make a Day of Reflection a reality (Montgomery 2006).

In coming to our conclusions we have drawn on this research (summarised in the next section), on our analysis of the changing context in which a Day of Reflection might take place, as well as the recommendations and analysis given in the original HTR report of 2002.

2.4 Research

International experiences

This report documented 13 international days of remembrance and reflection including, for example, Chile's National Unity Day, South Africa's Day of Reconciliation, and Guatemala's National Day for Victims' Dignity. The report also focused on more worldwide days, including Human Rights Day and Holocaust Memorial Day. In addition, it highlighted lessons that could be learned and brought to bear in any consideration of a Day of Reflection locally. Such lessons include:

- the need for inclusiveness;
- recognition of the long-term process of healing in societies emerging from conflict; and
- the possible counter-productive effects of a day that is badly planned.

The report concluded with a series of recommendations to inform the debate around a Day of Reflection on the conflict in and about Northern Ireland based on the lessons from international experience. These include recommendations on the importance of an inclusive consultation process, carefully considering an appropriate date, and the role of civil society in establishing a Day of Reflection.

Possible dates for a Day of Reflection

The international research summarised above highlighted the importance of choosing a day carefully. When we began to turn our attention to thinking about a possible date for a local annual Day of Reflection our first response was that we should select a date on which no one had died as a result of the conflict over the years. However, further research based on the book, *Lost Lives*, the Cain website, and several other sources revealed there is no day in the calendar year that is

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not the anniversary of the death of at least one person who died as a direct result of the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. This is a stark expression of the extent of the decades of violence in our society and the many lives lost.

21 June: the longest day

The research went on to explore a number of potential dates on which a Day of Reflection might be held. It concluded that 21 June, the longest day of the year (in the Northern Hemisphere), might be an option. We felt this was a symbolically important day because of the ebbing relationship between the hours of dark and light—a symbol of the pain and hope in our society. It is a day that is forward-looking and backward-looking at the same time. The Day of Reflection Sub Group feels that it represents a pause in the cycle of nature, a moment to reflect. Furthermore, the day's significance is related to a naturally occurring event and nature makes no distinction between races, creeds or political perspectives.

Scoping study on local views

In its initial consultation carried out in 2001 and 2002, HTR found there was considerable support for the idea of a Day of Reflection. As time had elapsed since the initial report, we felt it would be important to commission a scoping study to explore current views on the idea, as well as the practical steps that could be taken to make a Day of Reflection a reality. In summary, the scoping study found that there was broad support for the need for work to address the legacy of the conflict. At the same time, however, it also found that there were different views on the proposal for a Day of Reflection. While many of those who took part in the study were broadly supportive of the idea, they also said that their support was subject to a number of conditions being met, such as political progress. There were also those who were apprehensive of the potential harm of any day and those who felt that the need for such a day was long overdue. It was in trying to address these contradictory views that the Sub Group decided to propose observing the initial day privately. This would allow the day to happen, as some advocated, but would also minimise the potential for the damage others had highlighted. Including an evaluative dimension into the initial day could also ensure that future decisions about the day could be considered from an empirical base.

The need for inclusiveness, careful planning and the role of civil society in establishing a Day of Reflection found in the international research project also emerged from this local research. Other common themes included:

- the importance of political progress to provide the community stability and confidence for people to take part;
- concerns that a Day of Reflection may come under criticism and be blown off course by party politics or differing views on who is and who is not a victim;
- concerns that the day could reopen old wounds in an unhelpful way or create community divisions;
- the challenge of engaging people who do not see the conflict as over;
- the need to ensure that support services are available to provide help for people for whom the day might cause further hurt or reawaken old wounds; and
- the need for a broad and representative group to take a Day of Reflection forward.

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For some, there were also concerns about the use of the word "reconciliation" as an objective or outcome of a Day of Reflection. There were also differing views on the need for public consultation before a Day of Reflection took place. In terms of what should happen on the day, most of those who took part in the scoping study felt that it should include public elements of reflection ranging from broad-based approaches offering a range of events to approaches centring on a commemorative event. However, some felt the focus of the day should or could be one of private reflection and perceived that public events or commemorative activities were still a long way off.

The report made a number of recommendations to the Sub Group. It was proposed that a useful first step would be our consideration of the findings of the research and the preparation of a discussion paper setting out our response. The paper could then form the basis of greater public debate around the idea of a Day of Reflection.

2.5 Context

The social and political context in which a Day of Reflection might take place has changed since the publication of HTR's 2002 recommendations. The period has seen significant demilitarisation and changes in the political environment, including the suspension of the Assembly, and a shift in voter support towards Sinn Féin and the Democratic Unionist Party. At a policy level the publication of *A Shared Future* (Community Relations Unit 2005) by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister setting out a policy and strategic framework for good relations in Northern Ireland, as well as the debate around a Commissioner for Victims, is also relevant. A number of initiatives concerned with reflection and remembering have taken place since the publication of the report. There were a number of reflection events in Sinn Féin-led Councils in 2004 and 2005. Responses to those days have been mixed (see for example Derry Journal 2004, Fermanagh Herald 2004, Mullan 2005, Starrett 2004, Strabane Weekly News 2005). The period has also seen the development of new initiatives and increasing debate within the churches and other sectors of civil society on the general question of dealing with the past and the specific question of the healing potential of reflection and remembering.

2.6 Challenges

Our research and our own analysis have highlighted a range of challenges to establishing an annual Day of Reflection. Key among these challenges is the timing of the first Day of Reflection. We are mindful that the current lack of political stability and a clear road map for the future could result in a Day of Reflection failing to achieve the broad-based support we would wish to achieve if, for example, it were to become caught up in party politics.

We are mindful too that there are different views on the appropriateness of a Day of Reflection as a response to the hurt caused by the conflict and that there are concerns that it may simply reopen old wounds or contribute to further conflict. It certainly seems clear that for some of those still in the process of coming to terms with how the conflict has impacted on their lives it could be too early to participate in a Day of Reflection. For those concerned about the lack of political progress, it may be premature to participate in a Day of Reflection.

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There are also challenges posed by the very differing views in our society as to who is and who is not a victim of the conflict, as well as differing views on what specific contribution a Day of Reflection might make. A further challenge arises from ensuring that a Day of Reflection is not misunderstood as an attempt to replace or overshadow other days on which people reflect and remember, including the personally significant dates when individuals remember their loved ones.

It is in part these factors that have motivated us to advocate for the first Day of Reflection to be observed privately. This gives the option for people to opt into the process or not but, at the same time, allows the process to move forward and the merits of such an approach to be evaluated.

2.7 Benefits and value

Our research and our analysis points to the contribution a Day of Reflection might make to individuals and to wider society. Central to this is our view that remembering is an important part of healing. The hurts of the past will not go away by ignoring them. Indeed, they may resurface in the future at times of political tension. For many of those most affected by the conflict, forgetting the past and the hurts caused by the conflict is not an option. However, the conflict has not only impacted upon individuals but entire communities and has distorted relationships within society at large. Based on the findings of the HTR's 2002 report there is also a need for all individuals and institutions to reflect on their role in the conflict. Consideration should be given to the actions or inactions of individuals and institutions that perpetuated the conflict, as well as actions that helped minimise its impact and bring it to an end.

A Day of Reflection could make a positive contribution both to individuals and to the healing of society as a whole. A Day of Reflection that is both positive and inclusive could provide a source of strength and support to individuals, particularly to those who feel forgotten. It could also provide all of us with a time to think about the events of the past and to begin to recognise and acknowledge all of the suffering caused by the conflict and the need for continued support. Importantly, a Day of Reflection could provide a way of enabling us to begin to both remember the past and to go forward as a society.

2.8 Conclusions

We are in no doubt that the issues around a Day of Reflection are complex and sensitive. In coming to our conclusions we have considered carefully the findings of all of our research projects, the recommendation of the scoping study for a lengthy planning process before holding a Day of Reflection and our analysis of the changing political context. We have paid particular attention to often deeply felt views expressed by those who took part in the scoping study. In particular, we have given careful consideration to the diversity of views expressed on the appropriateness and value of a Day of Reflection at this time, concerns about the possible negative consequences on individuals and society as a whole, the need for careful planning by a broad-based group, and the need to ensure that appropriate support mechanisms are in place for people who wish to avail themselves of these. We have also carried out our own analysis of the changing context and considered whether the benefits of a Day of Private Reflection outweigh the drawbacks.

Considering all factors, we have come to what we feel is a balanced view on the way forward. Despite clear challenges, we believe that a Day of Private Reflection at this time has the potential to make a positive contribution to individuals and to society generally in healing the hurts of the past and offering a vision of a better future for all.

Our vision is of a day that is positive and inclusive, that reaches out to all, and that unites rather than divides. We think this can be aided by starting the process modestly, hence the proposal to initially observe the day privately. We hope that our specific proposals for an initial Day of Private Reflection will go some way in addressing the concerns expressed to us.

While the time may not yet be right for public events, we believe that there is scope for holding a Day of Private Reflection. Although public spaces could be used for reflection, public events would not be a feature of the Day. Instead, the Day would provide an opportunity for people to reflect individually; for example, at home or at work, and within a family or group. The Day should be supported by a range of guidance materials and counselling and other support services for those who wish to avail themselves of them. When selecting a date for the annual Day of Reflection, we have been mindful of research that points to the importance of choosing this with great care. We think it important that the impact of and public response to the Day be evaluated. This could help in any decision as to whether it should be held in future years and whether there is merit in moving towards shared public events over time.

We have considered a range of potential dates on which a Day of Reflection might be held. After much deliberation we feel that the date suggested by our research, 21 June, is a symbolic and appropriate choice. We propose that the initial Day of Private Reflection take place on this date in 2007. The proposal for the Day is outlined in the next section.

3

Proposals for a Day of Private Reflection

3.1 Introduction

Below we set out our vision for a Day of Private Reflection, including the purpose of this initiative; key principles and values; the outcomes we expect to achieve; what will happen on the day and what we see as the next steps.

3.2 Purpose

A Day of Reflection is one small piece of the jigsaw necessary to address fully the legacy of the past. However, a Day of Reflection that seeks to actively reach out to all has the potential to make a positive contribution both to individuals and to the healing of society as a whole. A Day of Reflection that is positive and inclusive could provide a source of strength and support to those most affected by the conflict. It could provide a space for us all to think about the consequences of the conflict, and to begin to recognise and acknowledge the suffering caused, and to consider the role of society during the conflict. Importantly, a Day of Reflection could provide a way of enabling us to begin to both remember the past and go forward as a society.

The Day of Reflection to take place on 21 June 2007 will be held privately. Public events will not be a feature of the Day. Instead the Day will provide an opportunity for people to reflect individually; for example, at home or at work, within a family, group or organisation.

The purpose of the Day of Private Reflection is to provide an opportunity for us all to:

- acknowledge the deep hurt and loss caused by the conflict;
- remember the men, women and children who on a daily basis live with the consequences of the conflict;
- reflect on our attitudes that have the potential for a negative impact on others and society;
- reflect on what more each of us might have done or might still do to uphold and enhance all other people's right to life and quality of life; and
- make a personal commitment that, as we begin to move forward as a society, such loss should never be allowed to happen again.

3.3 Principles and values

Work towards holding the Day of Private Reflection will be underpinned by an inclusive and sensitive approach which:

- respects differing views, political aspirations, and perspectives on the conflict;
- recognises and accepts that there are diverse views on a Day of Reflection and that not everyone can or will feel able to participate;
- encourages a positive and respectful way of reflecting on our past;
- promotes support and is a source of strength to those who have been most adversely affected by the conflict; and
- reaches out to people in Northern Ireland, including those from different ethnic backgrounds, the Republic of Ireland, and Great Britain.

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Proposals for a Day of Private Reflection

3.4 Outcomes

We expect to see clear outcomes from the Day of Private Reflection planned for 2007. Specifically, we expect to see our planning process for the Day including:

- the development of an inclusive and informed public debate around the contribution of a Day of Reflection and the value of reflection generally;
- the support and active involvement of stakeholders; and
- the enabling of a Day of Reflection that is perceived positively by those who take part.

We expect the initial Day of Private Reflection will:

- be a source of strength and support to those most affected by the conflict;
- challenge individuals and society to reflect on the past and its consequences on individuals, communities and society as a whole;
- increase understanding of our collective hurts as a result of the conflict;
- enable the transformation of attitudes that could perpetuate the conflict; and
- make a positive contribution to healing the hurts of our society and moving forward to a better future.

We hope that the Day of Private Reflection to be held in 2007 will be a starting point for an annual day of reflection, and will continue to make a contribution to addressing the hurts of the past and to moving forward as a society.

3.5 Observing the Day

The Day will be observed privately with people encouraged to reflect. It will be supported by a range of resources and materials developed specifically to support reflection on the Day.

Creative information materials to inform people about the Day will be produced and circulated widely. For example, these could include a dedicated website, a wallet-size information card, information leaflets about the Day, and directories of support services. We see the support of the family and friends of those who may be affected adversely by the Day of Reflection as critical. However, we recognise that there is also a need for the availability of professional support services and we will work with providers of counselling and other services to ensure that these are available to support all those who wish to make use of them.

The broadcast and print media will be critical to raising awareness of the Day of Private Reflection and, in particular, to ensuring that the message of the Day is conveyed accurately and is understood widely. We will attempt to get the media to play an active role in supporting the message of the Day through, for example, scheduling relevant programmes, news coverage, and incorporating the message of the Day into regular programmes. We will also explore other creative options to raise awareness of the Day - the arts, for example.

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Proposals for a Day of Private Reflection

A key resource will be guidance materials, perhaps in the form of a booklet setting out the reason for and purpose of the Day, values and principles, and practical examples of how the Day might be used. We believe that it would be helpful to develop a number of versions of this booklet for different audiences; for example, for use in schools, workplaces, community groups, and places of worship.

We hope these materials and resources will lead to a diverse range of organisations and sectors of society embracing the concept of a Day of Private Reflection and working together to ensure that the Day alleviates rather than exacerbates anyone's suffering. Intrinsic to the Day will be a monitoring process followed by a thorough evaluation. The evaluation will be used as the basis for deciding if the Day should be observed annually and if and when its focus should shift from private to public arenas.

4 Next steps

4.1 Introduction

We have developed a detailed strategy for carrying out the steps that need to be taken to plan for and hold a Day of Private Reflection on the 21 June 2007. What we see as our key tasks are summarised below.

4.2 Stakeholders

While we have taken the lead in setting the framework for a debate about a Day of Reflection, taking this forward will need the active involvement and commitment of many stakeholders.

Following on from the publication of this discussion paper, we will actively seek to meet as many key stakeholders as possible to discuss our proposals and to listen to comments and further ideas. We will also seek views from stakeholders on the important issue of how to meet the support needs of those who may be adversely affected by a Day of Reflection.

We would hope to develop on-going relationships with stakeholders and to enlist broad support and active involvement in the development, organisation and promotion of the initial Day of Private Reflection and any subsequent Days. In particular, we wish to broaden further the membership of the Day of Reflection Sub Group. We will actively seek to recruit representatives of key stakeholder groups to join us and help us take this work forward.

4.3 Materials and funding strategy

We see the development of a range of information and guidance materials as critical to the success of the Day of Private Reflection. This will require the careful preparation of such materials and the piloting of them. For this reason we would wish to begin development of these this year, with a view to having the guidance materials produced by early 2007 and a variety of materials produced and disseminated in the run up to the Day of Private Reflection. Work related to planning and materials development will require financial support and we will prioritise accessing support for these materials and other costs associated with planning for a Day of Reflection.

4.4 Conference and launch

We plan to organise a conference in October 2006 as a public launch of our proposals for a Day of Private Reflection. The aim of the conference will be to raise awareness of the Day, to broaden the base of support for the initiative, and to receive reaction and comment on the proposals. The conference will be addressed by keynote speakers and include a workshop format on aspects of the proposals and how to take the process forward.

4

Next steps

4.5 Media strategy

Part of the planning will include a media strategy. The aim will be to ensure participation across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain. Elements of this strategy will include: briefing key journalists from the print and broadcast media on the background to the Day of Private Reflection, its purpose, values and focus; developing appropriate media resources for use on the Day; and working with broadcasters to identify existing resources that could be used on the Day. An example of one of these resources is the BBC's Legacy programmes.

4.6 Evaluation

We believe that evaluation should be central to our work to inform both planning of the Day of Private Reflection and the planning of future Days. We have built on-going assessment into both the process of setting up the Day of Private Reflection through, for example, regular meetings with key stakeholders and a planned on-line consultation on all of our published reports and this discussion paper. We will also put in place arrangements for a formal evaluation of the impact of the Day of Private Reflection to help us judge whether it might be held in future years and whether the inclusion of more public elements might be appropriate.

5 The way forward

5.1 Range of initiatives

A Day of Reflection, whether observed privately or publicly, is one part of a range of initiatives which need to be put in place to address the past relating to the conflict in and about Northern Ireland. We believe that a Day of Reflection has a very specific and valuable contribution to make to the development of peace and stability in society.

5.2 Discussion and debate

We hope that the publication of this discussion paper will launch a broad and informed debate. While we are committed to the goal of holding a Day of Private Reflection in 2007, we do not claim to have all the answers and there is much work still to do in shaping, planning and organising the Day so that it is beneficial to both individuals and society. We hope that this discussion paper and proposal will stimulate comments and ideas about how we do so.

5.3 Involvement

Our hope for this paper is that it will capture the imagination of individuals and groups and that they will become actively involved either in working with us to plan and organise the Day or as participants in the Day of Private Reflection on 21 June 2007.

Seán Coll is Community Victim Support Officer with the Sperrin Lakeland Health and Social Care Trust. He is Chair of the Healing Through Remembering Day of Reflection Sub Group and member of the project Board. Living in County Cavan, he has worked in Fermanagh and Tyrone for over 15 years.

Kevin Cooper has been a press photographer for over 25 years. A trade union activist and Civic Forum member, he is interested in news and current affairs, freedom of expression, equality, human rights, truth, peace and reconciliation. He grew up in East Belfast now living north of the city. Former Vice Chair of the Sub Group.

Rev Harold Good, President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, 2001 – 2002, has served congregations in Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and the USA. Currently, Chair of the Advice Services Alliance and formerly a member of the NI Human Rights Commission, Director of the Corrymeela Centre Ballycastle and Chair of NIACRO. In September 2005, was one of two independent witnesses to the decommissioning of the weapons of the IRA.

Tony Kennedy is Chief Executive of Co-operation Ireland, the leading peace building charity on the island of Ireland.

Maura Kiely is the founder of the Cross Group which has been in existence for 31 years.

Alastair Kilgore worked as a teacher in East Belfast. He is a member of the Corrymeela Community and has helped host families and individuals severely traumatised by the Troubles.

Heather Kilgore is a former general practitioner who worked in East Belfast. She is a member of the Corrymeela Community and has helped host families and individuals severely traumatised by the Troubles.

Michaela Mackin is Director of the Funding Development Programme with the Community Relations Council. The Council has been administering core funding to groups working with victims and survivors of the Troubles since 2002.

Frances McCandless is Director of Policy at NICVA, the umbrella body for the voluntary and community sector. She has worked in the sector in Northern Ireland and elsewhere for 16 years.

Tommy McCay is a retired primary school teacher with over 35 years experience in education. He has been a full time voluntary member of the Columba Community of Prayer and Reconciliation in Derry and Donegal for over 25 years.

Kevin Mullan is a native of Omagh. He has worked in the North West since the 1970s in a community and priestly role.

Andrew Rawding is a former British Army officer who served in Northern Ireland from 1991-94. He currently works for St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace in the City of London. He is the Vice Chair of the Healing Through Remembering Day of Reflection Sub Group.

Trevor Ringland is a solicitor in Belfast. He is chairman of the One Small Step Campaign and a trustee of the RUC George Cross Foundation.



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