



Peace legacy of Gordon Wilson

(Editorial, [Irish News](#))

On Remembrance Sunday 20 years ago Northern Ireland was going through one of its most evil periods.

Republicans launched a sectarian attack on the Poppy Day ceremony in Enniskillen, killing 11 innocent people in a no-warning explosion.

Loyalists were also heavily involved in a murder campaign, targeting equally innocent victims for no other reason than their perceived religion.

It was a time when individuals of goodwill on both sides of the community were close to despair and the slaughter seemed destined to continue indefinitely.

At our darkest hour a simple Christian message of forgiveness from a grieving father, Gordon Wilson, showed the way ahead.

He survived the Enniskillen bombing but his 20-year-old daughter, Marie, who had been standing beside him at the town's cenotaph, did not.

Mr Wilson went on to give a moving series of interviews in which he described Marie's last words to him as they lay holding hands under the rubble.

He said he refused to bear any form of grudge for her loss and would pray for her killers every day.

Mr Wilson was as good as his word and even went on to meet both republican and loyalist paramilitary leaders in an attempt to bring an end to their violence.

The wider process took many years but eventually the love expressed so unforgettably by Gordon and Marie Wilson triumphed over the hatred of others.

Mr Wilson died a matter of months after the introduction of the paramilitary ceasefires of 1994, an achievement towards which he had made a central contribution.

Yesterday's Remembrance Sunday took place within a climate

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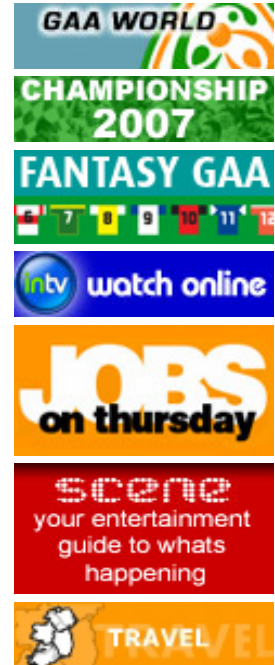
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transformed since the Enniskillen atrocity of two decades ago.

Not only is a partnership administration in place at Stormont but mainstream republicans and loyalists have adopted a completely different agenda.

When a Catholic police officer was shot by a splinter group in Derry last week Sinn Féin representatives not only offered immediate condemnation but demanded that all possible assistance should be given to the PSNI investigation.

Yesterday (Sunday), the UDA belatedly took a number of steps – some of significance and others largely cosmetic – towards joining the IRA in leaving the stage.

No-one would pretend that we live in anything approaching a perfect society, as the shameful security alerts in Enniskillen and Newry yesterday demonstrated, or that there are not a range of key issues which still need to be addressed.

However, with the exception of a tiny handful of extremists there is now a basic and enduring commitment on all sides to resolving our differences through peaceful and democratic means.

Very few people on this island deserve more credit for this heartening state of affairs than the late Gordon Wilson.

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