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## Dublin 'Love Ulster' rally called off

Organisers of last year's controversial Love Ulster rally have withdrawn their request to hold another rally in Dublin after a meeting with the Government.

Families Acting for Innocent Relatives (Fair) held a Love Ulster parade in the capital last year which had to be abandoned after a riot broke out.

Last June they met gardai over the possibility of a second rally, but after a meeting with Minister for Foreign Affairs Dermot Ahern today they have ruled that out.

Fair spokesman Willie Frazer said he believed the meeting went well and that a process of dialogue with the Government had begun about the victims of Republican violence in Border areas.

"The meeting went well and everybody put their points across the table and the Irish government agreed

to set up a point of contact for us to have ongoing negotiations on victims issues.

"That's what we were asking for in the first place so we don't need now to hold a parade," he said.

In February last year eight busloads of Love Ulster members and supporters, including six loyalist bands, travelled to Dublin bearing Union Jack and Ulster flags.

They gathered on Parnell Square in the inner-city to begin their rally, but plans were aborted when a riot broke out on O'Connell Street.

Following a meeting with senior garda officers last June, Fair decided it would instead hold a loyalist cultural event in the Irish capital later this year.

The event was part of a compromise deal between the Irish government and the campaigners that was brokered by Jeffrey Donaldson, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) MP for Lagan Valley, and which led to today's meeting in Dundalk, Co Louth.

Mr Frazer said the cultural event had now been put on hold. "At the end of the day we want to show that we're prepared to try and accommodate as well. "It's not a case of just saying we're entitled to a parade and we're going to have it.

"What we've asked the government for we've now got," he said. Mr Ahern described the meeting as constructive and a welcome opportunity for dialogue. "I had a most constructive meeting with William Frazer and Jeffrey Donaldson MP.

"It provided a welcome opportunity for dialogue on a number of victims-related issues. "We focussed in particular on the practical needs of victims, the role of the Victims Commissioner, and also how to deal with the painful legacy of the conflict in Northern Ireland," he said.

"I welcome the fact that Mr Frazer's group have decided not to proceed with another Love Ulster march in Dublin.

"Let us be clear, however, that the Government respects the rights to free assembly and to demonstrate in our capital city.

"The issue, however, is whether public marches or demonstrations through Dublin's streets are the most effective way of raising concerns about the needs of victims and survivors and ultimately addressing these concerns," he said.

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TOMORROW



10-16 °C

SUNDAY



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