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MEMORANDUM FOR THE GOVERNMENTEstablishment of Reconciliation Trust Fund

1. The Minister for Foreign Affairs proposes that a trust fund be established, by means of a grant-in-aid from the Vote for his Department, which would be used to assist in the development of better community relationships within and between the two communities in Northern Ireland, and between both parts of Ireland. It is envisaged that this assistance be made available through the provision of monies from the fund to groups, in both North and South, involved in community relations or community development work in or related to Northern Ireland, so that the work of such groups may be facilitated and extended with a view to achieving effective progress towards their objectives.
2. The principal purposes for establishing such a fund are the following:
  - (a) the desire to assist in the formation of better and more positive relations between the two communities in Northern Ireland, and between individuals and groups in Northern Ireland and in the Republic;
  - (b) the desire to demonstrate, in a practical way, that there exists in the Republic genuine goodwill, a sense of neighbourliness and a willingness to help which is directed to both Northern communities. It is important at the present time that a public effort be openly made to convert these sentiments into effective non-political action on the part of voluntary groups, backed by public funds, to bring about real progress in the human realities of peace, justice and harmony..

3. The proposed terms of reference of the fund are as follows:

(i) To make financial assistance available to projects designed to contribute to the establishment, maintenance or development of harmonious and fruitful relationships between social and community groups in the Republic and similar groups in Northern Ireland.

(ii) To make financial assistance available to projects designed to contribute to the establishment, maintenance or development of harmonious and friendly relationships between sectors of the community in Northern Ireland.

(iii) To make financial assistance available to help the efforts of social and community groups in Northern Ireland which are seeking to understand and to improve the economic, social, environmental and cultural conditions in which they live.

4. The Minister for Foreign Affairs proposes that the fund should be set up by a Grant-in-Aid of the order of £50,000 and that it should be administered by trustees. These trustees would be selected by the Minister from people who are already active in community affairs, North and South, and whose altruistic concern is beyond question.

5. The principal function of the trustees will be to consider, select or initiate, with special reference to their comparative value and effectiveness, projects proposed by voluntary groups to achieve the objectives of the fund. Such projects as the trustees may deem worthy of support from the fund may be financed in whole or in part.

6. In order to ensure adequate financial control, groups in receipt of monies from the fund will be required to satisfy the trustees that the sums granted have been used in accordance with the conditions laid down by the trustees. The trustees shall keep accounts of the fund in such form as may be approved of by the Minister with the consent of the Minister for Finance.

7. In the course of consultations which he held while formulating ideas on the establishment of a fund, the Minister for Foreign Affairs received a number of varying representations on what should be the nature and work of the proposed body. In general, the Northern participants in these discussions, who represented many different shades of moderate political opinion, welcomed the idea of establishing a fund but advised that, if its objectives were to be realised, it should be developed with particular care to avoid political controversy.

8. The principal advice received from the Northern Ireland people consulted was that it was most important that those charged with the direction of the fund should be seen to be free from Government control and direction and that their individual decisions in relation to the allocation of monies should be such as not to provoke allegations of political interest, particularly in Northern Ireland.

9. It would be unrealistic to overlook the fact that the majority community in Northern Ireland may, at least initially, treat the proposal with great suspicion. It is therefore important that the probable suspicions and fears of Unionists regarding the Reconciliation Trust Fund be met as openly and completely as possible. The Minister envisages allaying these suspicions chiefly in three ways:

- (a) He would select persons to serve as Trustees whose integrity and competence is beyond question and who are generally representative of all shades of moderate political opinion in the North.
- (b) The fund would be organised in the form of an independent charitable trust, with the largest permissible degree of discretion compatible with strict financial accountability. It is proposed to limit slightly the powers of the Minister in relation to the administrative arrangements of the fund as well as appointment to it. In addition it is considered

appropriate that the fund be capable of receiving other non-governmental monies from North and South; and it is likely that in its first year's work, the fund will operate mainly on a North/South basis rather than in respect of inter-community projects in the North.

- (c) By ensuring that the fund will work in harmony with existing official and semi-official bodies in Northern Ireland which are at present operating in the general areas of community development and community relations - e.g. the Community Relations Commission, the Northern Ireland Council of Social Services, the Belfast Committee for Social Welfare, the Churches Central Committee for Community Work, etc.

10. While of course the Minister cannot commit the Trust, in advance of its formation, to the funding of specific projects since this is a matter at the discretion of the Trustees, he believes it would be helpful to give one example of the type of projects which might benefit.

"Working for Peace", an interdenominational non-political movement, has plans for acquiring and utilising the Glencree Reformatory complex buildings for use as a hostel, study and conference centre, etc. which seem well-based and deserving of support. This movement was founded in July 1972 by a number of persons resident in Dublin concerned about the cause of peace in Ireland in the face of increasing violence. Various action groups grew out of this, who engaged in contacting peace groups in the North, holding public meetings, etc. A study group has been researching the problem of violence. Since April 1973 a firm in Newbridge has temporarily placed its hostel at the disposal of the group where both Catholics and Protestants from conflict areas in the North have stayed for "rest periods" of a week or a fortnight's duration. The development and extension of these various activities have however been hampered by the lack of a permanent location with adequate accommodation. The group has now established a Steering Committee to supervise the acquisition, on a

long lease from the Office of Public Works, of the Glencree buildings to be used as a permanent centre for peace work and reconciliation. Besides expanding the residential amenities and restful conditions for people living under tension arising from conflict, it would also provide facilities for seminars, workshops, research, "planning for peace" work and peace education.

Much of the reconstruction involved in making the Glencree complex suitable for these projects will be done by participants in voluntary student work camps. A certain amount of essential basic work must first be undertaken by contract labour, however, in order that the Centre may function on even a minimal basis.

11. It may be thought that the operation of a Trust Fund such as is envisaged might more properly fall within the functions of the Council of Ireland. The Minister accepts that the fund could become a most suitable agency for the Council of Ireland, and therefore believes that it should be established without delay, since an existing body has a greater chance of being incorporated in the Council than a body which has yet to be set up. Furthermore, were it proposed - in the absence of the fund - that the Council should undertake responsibility for the type of projects with which the Fund would be concerned, moves to reject or attenuate the proposal - e.g. through using the existing Northern Ireland Community Relations Committee as a core of the new body - would be difficult to counter. The Minister therefore considers it essential that an organisation with North/South participants should come into existence independently of the Council at once and be seen to be capable of functioning effectively for the betterment of North/South and inter-community relations.

12. A draft Declaration of Trust, prepared at the request of the Minister for Foreign Affairs by the Office of the Chief State Solicitor is attached (Appendix I). If found appropriate, the trustees might apply to the Commissioners for Charitable Donations and Bequests, under Sections 2 and 3 of the Charities Act, 1973, to incorporate them and vest the property of the body in the incorporated body. The trust could alternatively be established by way of a

company limited by guarantee and not having share capital, incorporated and registered under the Companies Act, 1963.

13. Accordingly, the Minister for Foreign Affairs requests the approval of the Government for the establishment of a Reconciliation Trust Fund to assist in the formation of better relations between the communities in Northern Ireland and between North and South. The Minister consequently requests Dáil approval as soon as possible for the introduction of a Supplementary Estimate to the Vote for Foreign Affairs, for the disbursement of the sum of £50,000 for the purposes and under the conditions set out above.

14. The Departments of the Taoiseach, and Finance have been consulted and have supplied the following observations: