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Imagining Reconciliation: Creative Arts and Peacebuilding

Eamon Rafter, Education and Learning

On 25th June Glencree held a one-day event at the centre for invited guests from all over the island of Ireland called *‘Imagining Reconciliation - Creative Arts and Peacebuilding’*

While much of our work is still about the legacy of conflict on this island we are also keen to help shape the discussion about how to build a better future for everyone living here. We, therefore, wanted to create a space to explore the role of culture and the arts in reconciliation and to imagine what that might look like in Ireland north and south. What role can the arts play in this and how can we respond to these creative voices as we build this future. We set out to have a stimulating and enjoyable day of talks, music, theatre and allow time for discussion and audience participation.



The first session featured Richard Kearney from Boston College who delivered a keynote address based on his ‘Twinsome Minds’ lecture/performance exploring alternatives to the received historical narratives that we are accustomed to. This challenged the audience to engage with alternatives to the binary and competitive versions of history we are so often offered and how commemoration relates to the alternative stories. John Peto from the



Nerve Centre, Derry then explored the theme of creativity and reconciliation especially in relation to the digital media work done by young people at the Nerve Centre and the ‘Teaching Divided Histories’ project. He suggested that creative skills can offer young people a way to express their identities and develop new understandings and showed visual examples of this work.



In the session after lunch Linda Ervine and Manchan Magan talked about the role of the Irish language in reconciliation. Could the language work as a unifier rather than be divisive and could it help foster a more inclusive society rather than be seen as a weapon under the ownership of any particular community? Plenty to consider here. We had music from Anna-Mieke Bishop, Colum Sands and our own Val Kiernan & Dylan

Crampton. Kiruu’s songs closed the event and Claudia Crampton also delivered a wonderful spoken word piece.



Theatre of Witness was an important part of the afternoon session. After an introduction by Pauline Ross, Artistic Director of the Playhouse in Derry, Kathleen Gillespie and Anne Walker presented a piece putting their own life stories on stage. James Greer joined them for a Q&A after the performance and there was a real engagement with those present. The audience were able to collectively bear witness and the performance put a face and heart to societal issues of suffering, celebrating the power and resilience of the human spirit to overcome adversity.

Former Co-ordinator of the LIVE (Lets Involve the Victims Experience) programme Jacinta De Paor, was present to hear Kathleen pay tribute to the work of Glencree in helping her to process her grief and heal. The commitment of the group who planned and organised this event helped to make it a success and we plan to continue this exploration of creative arts and reconciliation.

The Signing of the Glencree Declaration *Will Devas and Pat Hynes*

It was a misty start as participants arrived at Glencree last Monday morning the 5th of December to meet and hear the visiting archbishop in Jerusalem, His Grace the Most Revd. Dr. Suheil Dawani, who was in Ireland at the Invitation of our own archbishop of Dublin the Most Revd. Dr. Michael Jackson. Those in attendance included guests from Ireland, Northern Ireland and Britain. The event had been in the planning since early August when Archbishop Michael Jackson invited Will Devas and his team into Church House in Dublin to scope out what a day in Glencree could offer in terms of an experience of dialogue and peace-making over the past two decades. Initial discussion produced a number of ideas around how the day might be structured including the ambitious suggestion of a declaration calling for peace and respect towards the dignity of the human person across the Middle East.



Work began on framing the day around three themes, the first was to honour the presence of Archbishop Dawani and to demonstrate a deep sense of solidarity with him at this time. The second was to share some of the experiences that we have had in our own journey out of violence into a much better yet nonetheless imperfect place in Ireland. The third theme was to create a discussion around some of the language that we need to develop with sensitivity to our own and other communities as we struggle to create the conditions for an end to violence and the start of a reconciliation process between communities who remain in conflict. The final part of the day envisaged the signing of the Declaration by all of the Faith Leaders and Religious that would be presented to Archbishop Dawani with copies kept by Archbishop Jackson and Glencree.

The day itself saw guests and participants including His Excellency the Apostolic Nuncio to Ireland Archbishop Charles Browne, the Israeli Ambassador Ze'ev Boker and Ms Jilan Abdalmogid Chargé d'Affaires for the Mission of the State of Palestine. Also present was Rabbi Zalman Lent along with the leaders of the three main mosques in Dublin representing Sunni and Shia Islamic traditions. Dr Bill Mullally President of the Methodist Church in Ireland as well as Fr. Damien McNeice who is Master of Ceremonies for the Dublin Archdiocese was also present throughout the day. Other participants included Paul Manook from the Armenian Church in Ireland along with his colleague Mrs. Aida Lundon who are the key representatives here in Ireland.

The Glencree Chairperson Barbara Walshe opened the proceedings with a welcome to all of those who travelled and were present, and expressed the hope that the day might be of some value to the guests and would give some inspiration through the experiences that would be shared. She stressed that the success of Glencree had been its unwavering commitment to reaching understanding through dialogue and that the humanising experience of exchanging ideas with those who are opposed to and different from you created bonds that transcended the basis of often-mistrustful relationships.

The key session entitled "exploring parallel journeys out of violence into a brighter future" had a pivotal impact on the participants and brought home to everyone the destructive and corrosive impact that violence has on people, communities and generations who are exposed to it. The pain and impact of the violence expressed by each of the four contributors from Ireland, Northern Ireland and Britain acted, as CS Lewis once wrote, like "a megaphone to rouse a deafened world". Each in turn followed with a description of how they had made their individual journeys forward, from the awful experience(s) that changed their lives forever.

In the afternoon, there was an open discussion that reflected on the experiences of those journeys and the milestones within them from the previous session. There were some very useful and thoughtful contributions around the role of faith leaders today and how they speak and use their voice to reach communities in a way that fosters a curiosity for understanding those who differ from us, and reconciling that which divides us. Archbishop Jackson asked us to be open to the possibility of the prophetic over-gesture in our efforts to reach out and to hear what might be on offer to us by way of a conversation.

The day closed with Glencree Chief Executive Will Devas thanking everyone for creating and participating in what had been a very special day. He said "it was a privilege to bring to Glencree political, religious and community representatives to talk and listen to each other about the challenges of building peace and to facilitate Irish Faith Leaders in making a joint declaration for peace and respect for the dignity of human life in the Middle East". Following his remarks both Faith Leaders and Religious were invited to sign three copies of the declaration one copy of which was given to Archbishop Dawani to take home to Jerusalem. It was signed by 17 Representatives of the Abrahamic Faiths (Judaism, Christian, and Islam) from across the country. A crowning achievement following an extraordinary day.

Those that signed the declaration were:

The Most Revd. Archbishop Michael Jackson – Archbishop of Dublin, Church of Ireland; Fr. Timothy Bartlett - Secretary General for the World Meeting of Families; Dr. Susan Hood - Librarian and Archivist of the RCB Library; Mr Siraj Zaidi - Ablul Bayt Islamic Centre of Ireland and Founder Member of Three Faiths Forum; Revd. Gary Mason – Founder/Director Retbinking Conflict; Revd. Damien McNeice – Master of Ceremonies for Archbishop Diarmuid Martin; Rabbi Zalman Lent – Communal Rabbi for Irish Jewish Community; Revd. John Parkin – Methodist, Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel; Dr. Ali Al-Saleh – Imam, Ablul Bayt Islamic Centre of Ireland; Dr. Paul Manook – Chairman, Parish Council Armenian Church in Ireland; Revd. Ken Rue – Chair, Diocesan Council for Mission – Church of Ireland; Rt. Revd. Dr. Alan Harper – Armagh Educational & Community Village Project; Revd. Desmond Sinnamon - Rt. Priest & Rector and Founder Member of Three Faiths Forum; Monseigneur Dermot Lane – Mater Dei Institute and Balally Parish Priest.

Young Peacebuilders 2016 *Eamon Rafter, Education & Training Co-ordinator*

The Young Peacebuilders 2016 had their first residential in Derry/Londonderry in late September. The group stayed and worked in St Columb's Park House on the Waterside and we had our workshops in the centre also. The focus of the weekend was to develop the sense of a team who will work together on this project for a number of months to develop skills and knowledge that they can put into practice with the support of Glencree. We also had a great session with testimonies from former paramilitaries, a British soldier and a victim from the Northern Ireland conflict. This allowed the participants to hear stories of those affected

and involved in the conflict. They also began to identify some of the themes they want to focus on and there will be opportunities for dialogue as the project develops. We had a tour of the walled city on Saturday morning as many of the group had never been in the city before or did not know it well.

The picture included here shows some of the participants and facilitators during the second residential weekend in Belfast (21-23 October) The weekend was devoted to training at Mediation Northern Ireland offices in University St. The group did the first part of the Handling Life's Conflicts module and we plan to complete this in November and hopefully participants will gain accreditation also. This training help the group to have greater skills and awareness to deal strategically with conflict as it arises in their lives so that they can deal with it more productively. It will also help them to have the harder conversations around the issues they have identified as important.



Our third weekend took place at Glencree in late November and we are looking forward to continuing the journey together.

Annual Report/Audited Accounts/Governance Code

The Annual General Meeting was held on 16th June in Glencree when we were delighted to announce the publication of our **Annual Report 2015**.

To view this report and read about our ground breaking work in 2015 and our strategic priorities for the next ten years go to glencree.ie/news. To view Director's Report and **audited accounts 2014/15** go to pages 29 and 30 of the Annual Report 2015.

Our thanks goes to Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, The Office of Public Works and The Tony Ryan Trust for their financial support.

To our members, friends, our Board and staff on and off the Glencree site who work continuously in the interests of peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland. Thank you!

Glencree has committed to comply with The Governance Code: **A Code of Practice for Good Governance of Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations in Ireland**.

We are continuing on the journey of adopting a code of governance for Glencree in 2017.

Welcome to New members of Staff *Sue Paterson*

Joe Robinson, who started on **1st October**, is part of our programme team on a part time basis for 4 years. Joe is American but has been working on legacy of violence issues for the last 2 years in Northern Ireland. The specific areas he will be involved in are – part of the team advancing legacy dialogue work, contribute to helping us document and disseminate our learning and he will be involved in giving training and workshops on relevant areas, particularly to do with the past and memory.

Louise Keating and Nadette Foley, who start on **18th October**, job share the position of Refugee Integration and Cultural Diversity Programme Coordinator. Louise and Nadette have considerable experience in the area of Refugee Integration and Cultural Diversity.

This position is to effectively make a start on developing and once approved start implementing a programme of work around Glencree's role in helping to create an inclusive and integrated society here in Ireland. The programme will involve storytelling, dialogue, capacity building and training to support integration. Glencree's skills in all of these areas will be valuable in helping to meet the needs of refugees who are not only dealing with significant traumatic experiences from conflict and their journey to Ireland, but face considerable challenges integrating into a new country and culture.

We wish to acknowledge that this programme is supported through further funding from the Tony Ryan Trust.

The Glencree Centre for Peace and Reconciliation

Newsletter

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Glencree is an Irish Peace and Reconciliation Centre dedicated to transforming violent conflict and building peace. Our vision is of a shared world where diversity is cherished; where all can live free from violence and where conflicts are resolved peacefully.

The Newsletter: Please send your feedback and comments to: sue.paterson@glencree.ie

Thank You to all the supporters who make our work possible.

Just a Few That Came to Visit *Val Kiernan, Programme Assistant*

April 11th, Kieran Allen – Learning Programme Officer and myself, hosted a group of 17 Franciscan sisters, for some, a first time visit to our Isle. They came from far and wide, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Sri-Lanka to name but a few, for a cultural experience. Kieran and I did good cop bad cop. I went first covering the history of the site from a British Army facility to the Reconciliation Centre it is today, incorporating a description of our programme work then and now, and I must mention, that this was my maiden voyage and it went swimmingly, if I do say so myself. Kieran delved into the nitty gritty of the ‘troubles’ including explaining the many differences that exist north of the border between communities and various groups etc. and I must say the sisters showed genuine interest asking relevant questions.

May 17th Saw a top German Choir ‘Chor Levantate’ meaning ‘Stand Up... Rise’ come to visit. Founded in 1984, the group, who have travelled the world delighting all who come to hear them, supports humanitarian organisations that strive for equal opportunities, peace and justice for all, making The Glencree Peace and Reconciliation Centre the perfect place for them to visit. Our Sue Paterson – Admin. and yours truly had the privilege of giving these wonderful people a tour of our centre during which the Choir graced us with a couple of their beautifully harmonised tunes which just blew us away.



May 23rd H.E. Ambassador Roald Næss and his lovely wife Venke of Norway came for lunch with CEO Will Devas, Chairperson Barbara Walshe and myself as his term of office began its wind down, they would leave August 17th. We enjoyed a delightful two course lunch prepared by Carol Ganly Manager of our Armoury Café followed by a gentle walkabout. Will presented Ambassador Næss with a token of our gratitude for his relentless support of our work here at Glencree, in the form of a piece of slate art by commissioned Artist Derek Lyons inscribed with the Ogham Irish...‘Cairdeas’ meaning Friendship. The Ambassador has since left our shores and we wish him and Venke the best of everything to come. Slán abhaile.

June 25th Our Summer Event: Imagining Reconciliation – Creative Arts and Peacebuilding. What a stupendous day, an emotional rollercoaster if you will. We had talks, deep thinking, soul searching, music and theatre to enable us to explore the role of culture and the arts in reconciliation and to imagine what that might look like in Ireland North and South. Great learning, melting pot of talent and ideas, amazing sharing of insights, knowledge and experience, inspirational, stimulating, moving and thought provoking, just to mention some of the feedback we received from participants on the day. A great success by all accounts. Oh, and I sang again



July 30th Samuel Beckett’s ‘Waiting For Godot’, was performed to a full house, if you can have a full house outdoors J by the Druid Theatre Company at the back of our admin. building, to rapturous applause. A first I believe, lots of firsts in this article.



September 27th – October 1st A group of Anti-FGM (female genital mutilation) activists, mainly from Africa, came to stay in the accommodation facilities here in Glencree for a few days to share information and work on strategy to end FGM.