

**MANAGING CHANGE IN A DIVERSE SOCIETY**

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*Cover Memo for Facsimile Transmissions*

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**MESSAGE:**

Dear Monica,

It was great to meet you last week. I had a wonderful time and hope you all found it useful. Thought you'd find the attached article interesting--it appeared in the Sunday Boston Globe.

Good luck with all that you have before you. I hope our paths cross again some time soon.

Cheers,

*Kathy*



to put the spirit and words of the Framework Document into practice

# A slim hope for Ulster peace survives

**ELIZABETH SHANNON**

**I**t is preposterous that the fragile peace in Northern Ireland is once again tottering towards extinction. A peace process carefully nurtured over two years by the British and Irish governments, supported and encouraged by the Clinton administration, financially helped by the European Union and American investment and desired by the vast majority of people of the country cannot simply dissolve within a matter of weeks unless the resolve to make it work is not there.

A few months ago, it seemed that there was going to be a brave new world for children growing up in Northern Ireland. The end of the cease-fire in Manchester damaged but did not destroy the process. Once experienced, peace is an addiction hard to break.

There are many positive elements to make the All-Party talks succeed. One is the formation of a new political party, the Women's Coalition. Years of playing supporting roles to leading actors of no talent created among the women of Northern Ireland a desire to make their voices heard on the main stage. They have new things to say and new ways of saying it. The party was able in six weeks to publish 14 policy papers, campaign, raise money and elect two representatives to the talks, Monica McWilliams and Pearl Sagar, Catholic and Protestant.

They bring a new dynamism and a willingness to make political compromise and negotiation in order to accomplish the substantive goals of the talks. They are eager to discuss and act on the issues of the agenda. They do not consider spending a month discussing the seating plan an issue worthy of their time. The core of the Women's Coalition includes three political principles: political inclusiveness, equity and respect for human rights.

Another positive element is the presence of former US Sen. George Mitchell in Belfast, who provides a welcome and strong mediation role. There is even hope that the IRA might call another

cease-fire in the coming weeks. So, despite the odds, there is a ragged sense of hope as the talks get underway.

Now the fallout from the first of the dangerously provocative Orange marches in Northern Ireland has threatened the entire process with an almost predestined doomed failure. This did not have to be so.

The very core of the Downing Street Declaration and the Framework document is to guarantee that, come hell or high water, there would be a fair deal in Northern Ireland for the Catholic minority. The IRA was persuaded to announce their original cease-fire based upon this guarantee.

Then Sir Hugh Annesley, the head of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, reversed his original decision and allowed members of the Protestant Orange Order to march through a Catholic neighborhood at Drumcree (in Portadown), ostensibly because he feared the widespread violence that might ensue otherwise. That decision – and the harsh treatment by the RUC towards the nationalist population affected by the march – will go down in Northern Ireland's history as another moment when fortitude of spirit, courage and resolution to do the right thing, no matter the outcome, would have changed the course of history.

Here are eerie echoes of that moment on May 15, 1974, the Ulster Workers' Council called a general strike all over Northern Ireland to protest the newly formed "Power Sharing Executive," in which members of all political parties in Northern Ireland would have a share in self-governance. The might of the British army, responsible for security in Northern Ireland, was unable to cope with the growing chaos. The "strike" became the overthrow of a legitimate government, and on May 29 the short-lived and courageous experiment was terminated. Northern Ireland has not had self-government since.

The next act of the Northern Ireland tragedy will be played in Derry on Aug. 10, when the Protestant Apprentice Boys march is scheduled. The governments, police leaders and the two communities have one more chance to put the spirit and words of the Framework Document into practice. The threat of violence from one side cannot be used as a scapegoat to leave the nationalist community there at the mercy of uncontrolled gangs and hostile police. If Drumcree is repeated, one must seriously fear for the future of Northern Ireland.

*Elizabeth Shannon is director of the International Visitors Program at Boston University*



BARRIE MAGUIRE (ULSTER)