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INTRODUCTION FROM GERRY ADAMS MP

Sinn Féin is the Irish Republican Party – the united Ireland party. We are the party of radical social and economic change. We are the party of equality. This comprehensive manifesto sets out in detail our policies on defending and advancing the peace process, on protecting public services, on tackling the crisis in rural communities and redressing structural inequality. We also set out our approach to improving our health service and education system and a range of other social, economic and cultural issues.

The crisis in the peace process is, of course, the central focus in this election. For the past four months the process has been in freefall. On April 6th, in a serious effort to halt the backward slide, I made an unprecedented appeal to the IRA to commit itself to purely peaceful and democratic methods. The IRA leadership has now agreed to take this debate forward.

This presents a huge challenge to the British government to face up to its responsibilities on equality, human rights, demilitarisation, justice and policing.

It is a challenge to the Irish government to address the united Ireland agenda and the rights of Irish citizens living in the north..

It is a challenge to unionism to finally accept equality and human rights.

We now have an unprecedented opportunity to make progress, to finally and conclusively deal with outstanding issues and to see the Good Friday Agreement realised in full.

We have to build the alternative to conflict, to make politics work and to deliver radical social and economic change.

Sinn Féin is the strongest pro-Agreement party in this election, we are the strongest nationalist party, we are the only all-Ireland party. Our experienced and determined leadership team will enter the renewed negotiations positively and committed to making progress.

Your vote will strengthen our hand.

On May 5th I am asking you to vote Sinn Féin.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

BUILDING PEACE, BUILDING UNITY

- » Seek support for Gerry Adams's initiative to rebuild the peace process
- » Challenge unionism to reject sectarianism and accept equality and inclusivity
- » Challenge the British and Irish governments to deliver on their responsibilities on demilitarisation, equality, human rights, Irish language, and justice and policing
- » Full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement
- » Transfer of powers on policing and justice
- » A ban on the use of plastic bullets
- » The repeal of oppressive legislation
- » Truth on state violence and collusion
- » An effective truth recovery mechanism

EQUALITY

- » A comprehensive and adequately resourced all-Ireland anti-poverty strategy
- » Putting Targeting Social Need on a mandatory statutory footing to ensure that resources are directed to areas of greatest social need
- » Compliance by employers with affirmative action measures
- » Ensuring that the Single Equality Act is harmonised and provides the fullest anti-discrimination protection for all citizens and sectors in society
- » Enhanced monitoring mechanisms to measure outcomes of policies
- » Effective measures to eradicate the unemployment differential between Catholic and Protestant males within five years
- » More powers and resources for the Equality Commission

IRISH UNITY AND INDEPENDENCE

- » The Taoiseach should commission a Green Paper on Irish unity to be published within one year
- » The 18 Westminster MPs to automatically be accorded membership of the Dáil, with consultative and speaking rights
- » Voting rights in presidential elections should be extended to citizens in the Six Counties, beginning with the next such elections
- » The All-Ireland Ministerial Council to have its remit developed and expanded - new areas of ministerial co-operation including Community Development, Arts and Heritage, Economic Co-operation and Public Investment
- » Integration of systems, infrastructure and services to deliver balanced development for people living within the Border Corridor

EDUCATION

- » Additional funding for small rural primary schools to enable them to remain viable
- » School building programme to move to multi-annual funding based on a five-year plan of targeted investment
- » Increased capitation grants for primary and secondary schools
- » An expansion of the school breakfast programme and after-schools and homework clubs
- » Ending academic selection
- » The extension of student loans and grant programmes and the abolition of student top-up fees



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

- » The appointment of an all-Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People
- » Ensuring development of an action plan to implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) throughout Ireland
- » Ensure all decisions taken which affect children's lives are taken in the best interests of the child
- » Promote the right of the child to be consulted on all matters concerning them
- » Provide awareness training to all elected representatives on children's rights issues
- » A Minister for Children

HEALTH

- » Increased and targeted resources to provide equality of access to a quality health and social service
- » Continue to work for an all-Ireland health service which harmonises existing resources on both sides of the border
- » A total ban on tobacco advertising and smoking in the workplace alongside restrictions on smoking in public areas
- » Continue to oppose the use of Public/Private Partnerships and Private Finance Initiatives within health and social services
- » Elected representation on health boards to ensure public accountability

ENVIRONMENT

- » A properly resourced and effective Waste Management Strategy - based on waste reduction, re-use and re-cycling, at all levels in the waste production stream
- » An all-Ireland campaign of public, political, legal and diplomatic pressure to force the closure of Sellafield
- » The rejection of incineration as a means of disposing of domestic, industrial or agricultural waste
- » An all-Ireland Environmental Protection Agency with strong enforcement powers
- » Plastic bag levy to be extended to the Six Counties

AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

- » Creating a co-ordinated programme that links agriculture, enterprise, environment, culture, health and education and social services strategies into a comprehensive, integrated rural development programme
- » Remove 'UK' status from food exports from the North
- » Seek support to make a case to the European Commission to have the beef export ban lifted
- » Establish an all-Ireland food promotion agency
- » An all-Ireland strategy to promote animal health and consumer confidence
- » Introduce early retirement schemes

WOMEN

- » Anti-discrimination legislation to tackle the growing gender pay gap between women and men
- » A free, prompt and co-ordinated breast-screening programme for all women over 40
- » Government-funded childcare facilities and government subsidies for employers wishing to provide facilities on site
- » Mainstream funding for frontline and community services which support women and children affected by violence
- » Retrospective pension credits for women who spent their working life caring for others

SOCIAL INCLUSION

- » All political parties to sign an anti-racist pledge
- » An all-Ireland policy for asylum seekers and refugees to be developed within the framework of the all-Ireland bodies
- » An end to mass deportations of asylum seekers from the 26 Counties
- » Adoption of an all-Ireland Citizen Traveller Campaign

IRISH LANGUAGE

- » The introduction of an Irish Language Bill for the North which will give Irish speakers at least the same rights as those on the rest of island
- » Strengthening and enactment of the clauses chosen by the British Government in Part III of the European Charter for Regional and Minority languages
- » The rights of Irish language speakers to be recognised, protected and promoted in both the proposed Human Rights Bill and the Single Equality Bill
- » The creation of a Commissioner for the Irish language in the North
- » Adequate and increased resourcing of Foras na Gaeilge

HOUSING

- » Department of Social Development to be stripped of housing power
- » The registration of all private landlords and the establishment of a proper framework on the rights and entitlements of both landlords and tenants
- » Eradicate under-representation of nationalists in the allocation of Housing Executive homes
- » Development of a statutory multi-agency approach to tackle housing poverty and homelessness. This should have preventative, innovative and flexible approaches
- » The extension of the House Sales Scheme

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- » Promoting regional development, North and South, on an all-Ireland basis and, through our MEPs, in the European Union's Regional Development Committee
- » Ensuring that the 'National Development Plan' in the South and the 'Shaping our Future' development plan in the North are integrated and implemented together
- » Opposing water charges and the privatisation agenda being pursued by direct rule ministers
- » Working for the redevelopment of 'brown field' sites, including the Long Kesh regeneration programme, and the proposed redevelopment plans for key strategic sites in Derry and elsewhere
- » Harmonising transport policy across the island, including the co-ordination of roads agencies, roads development strategies, traffic signage and notation

ECONOMY

- » The development of an all-Ireland economy with one tax regime, one currency, and economic strategies that benefit the island as a whole
- » The expansion of the number of areas of co-operation under the All-Ireland Ministerial Council
- » All-Ireland infrastructural development strategies, particularly in roads, rail, energy and telecommunications
- » One all-Ireland agency to deal with all the indigenous businesses in Ireland
- » A genuine peace dividend with resources earmarked for expenditure on military spending to be transferred to special job creation projects and to support the social economy



DELIVERING EQUALITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

- » Meaningful employment targets, including within the public sector, to address unacceptable levels of unemployment amongst people with disabilities
- » Greater investment in Special Needs Education
- » All public buildings should conform to universal design standards with regard to accessibility
- » Right to advocacy for people with mental disabilities
- » Strengthening and full implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)
- » A time-limited programme to make all public transport accessible

SENIOR CITIZENS RIGHTS

- » Commissioner for Senior Citizens
- » Fundamental review of the standard of living of senior citizens, including pension provision, cost of living, fuel poverty and disposable income
- » All new public housing to be designed to meet life-long needs
- » Year on year targets to eliminate unnecessary deaths from cold
- » Design of streets and roads should ensure a safe environment for senior citizens
- » Extension of resources available for home security provided through Health and Social Services.

IRELAND AND EUROPE

- » The creation of a Minister for Europe in any future Assembly
- » The main-streaming of EU scrutiny into all Assembly Committees
- » An expansion of the All-Ireland Ministerial Council to include the respective Ministries for Europe to ensure effective all-Ireland co-ordination on EU policy matters
- » The National Forum on Europe to have a 32-County remit, representation and programme of activity
- » Standing invitations to Six-County MEPs to the Leinster House European Affairs Committee
- » The opening of a European Parliamentary Office in Belfast
- » The creation of an all-party ad-hoc working group on European Affairs in lieu of the restoration of the Assembly

ATHCHOIMRE FEIDHMEANNACH

AR SON NA SIOCHÁNA – AR SON ATH-AONTÚ

- » Tacaíocht a lorg do thosaíocht Gerry Adams chun an Próiseas Siochána a ath-thógáil
- » Dúshlán Rialtas na Breataine agus Rialtas Átha Cliath a thabhairt go dtabharfadh siad aird ar a gcuid dualgáisí maidir le dimhíleatú, comhionannas, an Ghaeilge, cóir agus póilíneach
- » Dúshlán na n-Aondachatch a thabhairt go dtabharfadh siad cul leis an seicteachas agus go nglacfadh said leis an chomhionannas agus an chomhchur chuige
- » Cur i bhfeidhm iomlán Comhaontú Aoine an Chéasta
- » Aistriú cumhachtaí maidir le Cóir agus póilíneacht
- » Cosc ar úsáid na bpiléar plaisteacha
- » Áisghairm na dlíthe éigeandála
- » An Fhírinne maidir le foréigean Stáit agus claonpháirteachas

AONTAS AGUS NEAMHSPLEÁCHAS NA HÉIREANN

- » Ba chóir don Taoiseach Paipeár Glás um Aontas na hÉireann a údarú agus a fhoilsiú taobh istigh de bhliain.
- » Go dtabharfear ballraíocht láithreach san Dáil don 18 Feisire Westminster, le cearta cainte agus comhchomhairleach.
- » Go leathnófar cearta vótála i dtoghadh an Uachtaráin do shaoránaigh sna Sé Chontae le héifeacht ón chéad toghchán eile.
- » Go ndéanfar leathnú agus forbairt ar fhreagrachtaí an Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas (Uile-Éireann) - go gclúdódh na réimsí úra freagrachta: Forbairt Phobail, Na hEalaíona agus Oidhreacht, Comhoibriú Eacnamaíochta agus Infheistiú Phoiblí.
- » Pleanáil a thabhairt chun cinn i gcomhair comhtháthú seirbhísí agus bonneagar ar fud réigiún an teorainn

PÁISTÍ AGUS DAOINE ÓGA

- » Ceapadh Choimisinéir Uile-Éireann do Pháisti agus Daoine Óga
- » Pleán gníomhaíochta a fhorbairt agus a chinntiú chun go bhfeidhmeofar Coinbhinsin na Náisiúin Aontaithe Um Cearta an Pháiste ar fud na hÉireann.
- » Cinntiú go nglactar achan cinneadh a bhaineann le saol an pháiste chun socair an pháiste.
- » Cur chun tosaigh cearta an pháiste go ndéanfar dul i gcomhairle leo maidir le cúrsaí a bhaineann leo
- » Oiliúint feasachta maidir le cúrsaí cearta an pháiste a thabhairt d'ár n-ionadaithe tofá

SLÁINTE

- » Acmhainn breise agus iad dírithe ar seirbhísí sláinte agus sóisialta den scoith atá comhinsroichte ag cách.
- » Oibriú ar aghaidh chun Séirbhís Sláinte Uile-Éireann a thabhairt ar an saol a dhéanann acmhainn ar an dá thaobh den teorainn a thabhairt i gcomhréir lena a chéile.
- » Cosc iomlán ar fógraíocht tobaic agus ar toitíní a chaitheamh san aonad oibre agus teorainnacha a chur ar thoitíní a chaitheamh in áiteacha póiblí
- » Cur i gcoinne úsáid na páirtneireachtaí Póiblí/Príobháideach agus na Tosaíochtaí Príobháideacha sa Chóras Sláinte agus Séirbhís Sóisialta.
- » Ionadaíocht Tofa ar na Boird Sláinte chun freagracht poiblí a chinntiú.



MNÁ

- » Reachtaíocht fríth-idirdhealú a rith chun tabhairt faoin bearna páighe atá ag fás de réir a chéile idir fhir agus mná.
- » Séirbhís saor, láithreach comhordaithe cíochscrudaithe a chur in áit do mhná thar 40.
- » Áiseanna cúram-leanaí maoinithe ag an Rialtais a chur ar fail agus liúntais Rialtais d'fhostaithe atá ag éirí áiseanna a chur ar fail san aonad oibre.
- » Croimhaoiniú do séirbhísí líne-tosaigh phobail a thugann tacaíocht do mhná agus páistí atá ag fulaingt de bharr foréigean.
- » ar-íocaíochtaí creidmheasa phinsin do mhná a chaith a saol ag tabhairt cúram do dhaoine eile.

TIMPEALLACHT

- » Cur chun tosaigh stráitéis bainistiú dramhala éifeachtach le dóthán acmhainn atá bunaithe ar laghdú dramhala, athúsáid agus athchúrsáil ag achán leibheal sa sruth ginithe dramhala.
- » Go mbeadh Feachtas póiblí, polaitiúil, dlísteanach, dioplómaitiúil Uile-Éireann a thioseacht chun brú fá choinne dúnadh Sellafield.
- » Cur in éadan loscadh dramhala mar phróiseas láimseáil dramhala tí, tionsclaíoch nó talmhaíocht.
- » Cur chun tosaigh Áisíneacht Cosaint Timpeallachta Uile-Éireann le cumhachtaí láidre infheidhmithe.
- » An cáin ar mhálaí plaisteacha a thabhairt i bhfeidhm sna Sé Chondae.

TÍTHÍOCHT

- » Go mbeadh cúram títhíochta a bhaint ón Roinn Forbartha Sóisialta
- » Go mbeadh clarú iomlán do thiarnaí talún príobháideacha agus bunú fráma-thagartha cui chun cearta agus teidilíocht tiarnaí talon agus tionóntaithe ar aon a chinntiú.
- » Go mbeadh deireadh le h-idirdhealú i ndáileadh títhíocht póiblí.
- » Go ndéanfar cur chuige il-ásíneacht reachtúil atá nualaíocht, sólbhata, coisctheach a cur chun tosaigh chun dul i ngleic le boichtíneacht títhíocht.
- » Go leathnófar an scéim um díolachán títhíocht.

OIDEACHAS

Geallann Sinn Féin go ndéanfaidh muid:

- » Breis maoiniú a lorg do scoileanna beaga tuaithe chun go mbeadh said inmharthána san fhad-thréimhse.
- » Go mbeadh maoiniú il-bhliantúil ag an Clár Tógála Scoileanna bunaithe ar phleán cúig bliana d'infhiestiú.
- » Go méadófar na nDeontas Ceannsráithe do mheánscoileanna agus bunscoileanna.
- » Go leathnófar an scoil-chlár maidir le clubanna bricfeasta, obair bhaile agus imeachtaí iar-scoile.
- » Go cuirfear deireadh le rogha acadúil.
- » Go cuirfear deireadh le h-uastáillí do mhic-léinn agus go leathnófar an scéim liúntais agus deontais do mhic-léinn.

FORBAIRT RÉGIÚNACH

Tá Sinn Féin i dtús cáidhnaíochta maidir le:

- » Cur chun cinn forbairt réigiúnach ar bhonn Uile-Éireann sna Sé Chondae agus sna Sé Chondae Fichead agus, trinár Feisirí san AE sa Choiste Eorpach Um Forbairt Réigiúnach.
- » Chinntiú go ndéanfar comhnascadh agus chomhchur i bhfiedhm maidir leis an 'Phlean Forbartha Náisiúnta' Sna Sé Chondae Fichead agus leis phleán forbartha 'Ag Múnlú ár dTodhchaí' sna Sé Chondae.
- » Ag cur in éadan iocaíocht uisce agus polasaí an príobháideachais atá a leansteán ag Airí Westminster.
- » Ag obair i dtreo athfhorbairt ar 'suíomheanna páirceanna donna', clár athghiniúna na Ceise Fada agus na pleananna athfhorbartha do suíomheanna stráitéiseacha i nDoire agus áiteacha eile san áireamh.
- » Cinntiú go mbeadh comhpholásai lompair Uile-Éireann ann agus go mbeadh Ásineachtaí Boithre, Stráitéisí Forbartha Boithre, Comharthaíocht Tráchta agus Nodaireacht Tráchta ar aonchéim

TALMHAÍOCHT AGUS FORBAIRT TUAITHE

Creideann Sinn Féin gur chóir go mbeadh na croí-spríocanna do thodhchaí ár bpobail tuaithe bunaithe air:

- » Chomhchlár agus chomhchur chuige a ndéanann nascanna idir talmhaíocht, fiontraíocht, timpeallacht, cultúr, sláinte, oideachas agus séirbhísi sóisialta agus a sníomhann na rudaí seo go léir le chéile in aon chlár forbartha tuaithe amháin.
- » Cosc ar Stadas Ríocht Aontaithe ar easpórtálacha bidh ó na Sé Chondae.
- » Tacaíocht a lorg chun cás a dhéanamh leis an Choimisiúin Eorpach chun deireadh a chur leis an chosc easpórtála mairteola agus go ndéanfadh na Sé Chondae cás dá gcuid féin leis an Choimisiúin más gá.
- » Ásineacht Bidh Uile-Éireann a bhunú.
- » Stráitéis Uile-Éireann chun sláinte ainmhíthe agus muinín caiteoirí a chur chun tosaigh.
- » Scéimeanna luath-phinsean d'fheirmeoirí a bhunú.

COMHIONANNAS

- » Polasaíthe maidir le cothromais fostaíochta a choinneáil agus a neartú agus acmhainn a dhíriú ar bhonn an gá folásach.
- » Monatóireacht feabhasaithe ar chur i bhfeidhm chothromas fostaíochta agus monatóireacht ar chásanna a tugtar os comhair bhinse bréithiúnais le teacht ar ar phatrúin ar bith a d'fhéadfadh a bheith ann.
- » TSN nua a chur ar bhonn reachtúil.
- » Tacaíocht athshocraithe d'iarchimí.
- » Breis cumhachtaí agus acmhainn don Choimisiúin Um Comhionannais.

EACNAMAIÓCHT

- » Córas eacnamaíochta amháin d'Éireann leis an aon réimis cánach amháin, leis an aon chóras airgeadais amháin agus le stráitéisí eacnamaíochta atá ar leas an oileán ina iomláine.
- » Forbairt agus leathnú ar líon na n-achair comhoibrithe ata faoi chúram an Comhairleach Aireachta Thuaidh Theas (Uile-Éireann)



- » Stráitéisí forbartha Uile-Éireann go háirithe i dtaca le bóithre, iarnródanna, fuinneamh agus teileachumarsáid.
- » Áisíneacht Uile-Éireann amháin chun deileáil le gnóanna dúchasacha.
- » Fíor-inroinnt Síochána le h-acmhainn a bhí luaite le caiteachas míleata áisrithe chuig tionscnaimh ghiniúnt fostaíochta agus chuig tuionscnaimh san gheilleagar sóisialta.

IOMLANÚ SÓISIALTA

ILTÍREACHT

- » Go síneoidh gach páirtí polaitiúil cáirt frithchiníoch.
- » Go bhforbrófar polasaí Uile-Éireann taobh istigh de réimse na Forais Uile-Éireann maidir le daoine atá ag lorg tearmainn agus maidir le dídeanaithe trí chéile.
- » Deireadh le olldíbert dídeanaithe ó na Se Chondae Fichead.
- » Cur i bhfeidhm feachtas Uile-Éireann ar Chearta an Lucht Siúil.

COMHIONANNAS DO DHAOINE NEAMHACMHAINNEACHA

- » Tá daoine neamhacmhainneacha faoi míbhuntaiste fostaíochta breise i gcompáraid le daoine nach iad. Bíonn rataí boichtíneachta i measc daoine neamhacmhainneacha i bhfad níos measa dá bharr seo. Tacaíonn Sinn Féin le spriocanna fostaíochta, sa réimse fostaíochta póibli san áireamh, chun tabhairt faoi seo.
- » Tá an bhunthuarastál náisiúnta tuillte ag daoine neamhacmhainneacha, atá fostaithe ar thuarastál.
- » Go ndéanfar infheistiú breise in Oideachais do dhaoine le riachtanais spésialta.
- » Go mbeadh cearta abhcóideacht ag daoine le galair meoir.
- » Tacaíonn Sinn Féin le maireachtáil neamhspleách le liúntas neamhacmhainneach san áireamh.
- » Cur i bhfeidhm iomlan agus neartú an Acht Um Idirdealú in Éadan Daoine Neamhacmhainneacha.
- » Go dtabharfar reachtaíocht chun cinn le cinntiú go mbíonn stiúir agus cigireacht ceart déanta ar institiúidí ioncónaithe.
- » Go ndéanfar fiosriú ar an fhéidirtheacht atá ann chun Ombudsman um chearta do dhaoine neamhacmhainneacha a cheapadh.

CEARTA DO DHAOINE AOSTA

- » Go gceapfar Choimisinéir do Dhaoine Aosta.
- » Go ndéanfar athscrudú ar chághean maireachtála daoine aosta, soláthar phinsin, costas maireachtála, boichtíneacht fuinnimh agus uas-ioncam san áireamh.
- » Go ndéanfar tithíocht póibli a bheartú go mbeadh sé inchurtha le riachtanais fad-saol.
- » Go mbeidh spriocanna bliain ar bhliain ann le deireadh a chur le básanna ón fhuacht.
- » Go ndéanfar leagan amach boithre agus sráideanna le cinntiú go mbíonn timpeallacht sabháilteach ann do dhaoine aosta.
- » Go mbeadh leibhéal cuí cúram banaltrachta ann i dtithíocht inchónaithe.
- » Go ndéanfar leathnú ar na hacmhainn atá ar fáil do soláthar sabháilteachta sa bhaile fríd an Córas Um Sláinte agus Séirbhísí Sóisialta.

AN GHAELIGE

- » Go ndéanfar Acht Ghaeilge a thabhairt i bhfeidhm sna Sé Chiondae a thugann na cearta céanna do Ghaeilgeoiri áitiúla agus atá ag Gaeilgeoiri san chuid eile den Oileán
- » Go ndéanfar buanú agus cur i bhfeidhm ceart ar na forálacha de Phárt a iii den Cháirt Eorpach Um Mionteangacha agus Teangacha Régiúnacha, atá roghnaithe ag Rialtas Breataine maidir leis an Ghaeilge
- » Go dtabharfar cosaint agus aitheantas do Chearta Ghaeilgeoiri sna h-achtanna molta an 'Bille Um Cearta Daonna' agus an 'Bille Comhionannais Singil'
- » Go ndéanfar Coimisinéir Teangan a cheapadh don Ghaeilge sna Sé Chiondae.
- » Go ndéanfar acmhainn cuí agus breise a chur ar fáil d'Fhoras na Gaeilge.

ÉIREANN AGUS AN EORAP

- » Go gceapfar Aire don Eoraip in sa Chomhthionól sa todhchaí
- » Go ndéanfar príomhsruthú ar mhionscrudú an AE in achán choiste de chuid an Chomhthionóil.
- » Go ndéanfar leathnú ar réimse an Chomhairle Aireachta Thuaidh/Theas (Uile-Éireann) leis na hAireachtaí Eorpacha faoi seach a thabhairt san áireamh chun go gcinnteofar comhordnú ceart Uile-Éireann ar chúrsaí pholasai an AE
- » Go mbeadh freagrachtaí 32 Chiondae, Ballraiocht Uile-Oileánda agus clár oibre gníomhaíochta Uile-Éireann ag an Fóram Náisiúnta um Eoraip
- » Go mbeadh cuireadh seasta ag Fiesirí Eorpacha ó na Sé Chiondae chuig an Cóiste um Cúrsaí Eorpacha san Dáil
- » Go n-osclófar Oifig Phairlimint na hEorpa I mBéal Feirste
- » Go mbunófar grúpa oibre ad-hoc ilpháirti ar chúrsaí Eorpacha murar athbhunófar an Chomhthionól



BUILDING THE PEACE

Real and lasting peace is the most important issue facing the Irish people today. Defending and advancing the peace process is Sinn Féin's primary focus. We need to halt the downward spiral and the pointless recriminations. Peace is too important. The peace process is too important.

The Six-County statelet has been characterised since its inception by injustice, inequality, repression and conflict.

The peace process provides, for the first time, an alternative to all of this. It is an alternative through which we can address and resolve all of these issues through purely political and democratic methods.

In an historic intervention in April 2005, Sinn Féin President, Gerry Adams, made an appeal to the IRA to commit itself to this alternative.

Gerry Adams's initiative presents a huge challenge to the IRA leadership and to IRA Volunteers.

In December 2004, the IRA was prepared to address issues within its control in the context of an overall agreement. This was blocked by the DUP.

The Sinn Féin leadership has now asked the IRA to act. Doing so would:

- » Revive the peace process
- » Deny the DUP a veto over progress
- » Remove unionist excuses for non-engagement
- » Expose unionist intransigence
- » Put the onus firmly on the two governments to move forward

Gerry Adams's initiative is a huge challenge, not just to the IRA, but also to all other participants in the process to face up to their responsibilities.

It is a challenge to the British Government to face up to the many issues within its control, including equality, human rights, the Irish language, demilitarisation, and justice and policing.

It is a challenge to the Irish Government to face up to the many issues within its control, including advancing the all-Ireland agenda and Northern representation in the political institutions of the Irish state and to uphold their responsibilities for promoting and achieving national and democratic rights.

It is a challenge to unionism to finally and fully reject sectarianism and to accept equality, human rights, inclusivity and mutual respect. We all share a responsibility for saving and developing the peace process.

We now have an unprecedented opportunity to make progress, to finally and conclusively deal with outstanding issues and to see the Good Friday Agreement realised in full and to set in train a process of national reconciliation.

There is a collective responsibility to seize this opportunity, to build on the enormous potential that now exists and to make the political alternative deliver for all the people of the island.

After this election we will return to the negotiating table. Sinn Féin will face into these negotiations positively and determined to consolidate the enormous progress we have made over the last 10 years. With a renewed and strengthened mandate from the people, North and South, we have the vision, the leadership and the commitment to finish the work of securing a just and lasting peace for all the people of Ireland.

DEMILITARISATION

Sinn Féin has taken the lead in the negotiations with the British Government to ensure that they honour their commitments to demilitarise society.

It is unacceptable that, eight years on from the Good Friday Agreement, more British troops remain in the Six Counties than are currently stationed in Iraq. It is also unacceptable that the British spy posts continue to blight the hilltops of South Armagh and heavily militarised bases remain dotted across the Six Counties.

Sinn Féin will continue to push the British Government on the issue of demilitarisation in the negotiations which will take place after this election.

GETTING POLICING RIGHT

For generations now, the police force in the North has been an instrument of political repression. It has been a partisan, political, Protestant and paramilitary force which has been used in the main against Catholics, nationalists and republicans.

For that reason, Sinn Féin puts policing high on the negotiations agenda with the British. We have made very substantial progress. The old regime will be unrecognisable in the new beginning to policing that Sinn Féin is striving for.

A NEW BEGINNING

The Good Friday Agreement promised a new police service that would be “impartial; representative; free from partisan political control; efficient and effective; infused with a human rights culture; decentralised; democratically accountable at all levels”. The British Government reneged on their obligations to deliver this.

Regrettably, the SDLP broke the nationalist consensus and endorsed the PSNI before negotiations had been completed. Under the present Policing Board, nationalists have seen more political policing, repressive laws extended, tens of thousands of plastic bullets purchased, collusion inquests obstructed and attempts to sabotage the Pat Finucane inquiry.

Sinn Féin wants a policing service which is democratically accountable, representative, routinely unarmed, community based and free from partisan political control. Our strategy is for a new all-Ireland policing and justice system. That cannot be achieved without transfer of policing and justice powers away from London, into an Executive and Assembly and the all-Ireland institutions. We will continue until we achieve that new beginning to policing.



THE NEXT NEGOTIATION

The issue of transfer of powers on Policing and Justice to Ireland through the local Assembly, the Executive and hence into an all-Ireland context through the all-Ireland institutions is central to achieving democratic accountability. Transfer of powers is the only way that control of policing and justice can ultimately be wrestled out of the hands of British securocrats in London and the NIO who have run policing as a paramilitary political force for generations.

Other outstanding issues which remain to be resolved include:

- » A ban on the use of plastic bullets
- » In the meantime, an accountability mechanism is required to deal with plastic bullets which are fired by British Army personnel
- » Further changes to the inquest system to ensure that the wholesale abuse of the past will cease
- » Repeal of repressive legislation
- » An inquiry to meet the demands of the family of Pat Finucane for truth
- » An acknowledgement by the British Government of state violence and collusion and the dismantling of the structures which perpetrated collusion
- » Agreement between the parties on the departmental model and the powers to be transferred
- » The enactment by the British Government of the legislation to give full expression to this transfer of powers on policing and justice away from London; and
- » A DUP commitment to a short timeframe for the transfer of powers on policing and justice

In that event Gerry Adams, the Sinn Féin president, would propose to the Ard Comhairle that it calls a special Ard Fheis to decide Sinn Féin's position on new policing arrangements. Before doing so Sinn Féin requires that new legislation be enacted to ensure British Government compliance. A history of British bad faith on this demands this approach. On that basis the Ard Comhairle, the membership of Sinn Féin and the wider nationalist community would then have the opportunity to debate the very fundamental issues involved. Sinn Féin's position would be decided at a special Ard Fheis.

DEFENDING THE PEACE PROCESS

Policing and justice cannot be viewed in isolation from other key issues such as the stability of the inter-dependent institutions, equality and human rights, demilitarisation, the ending of discrimination, collusion and so on. The militarised barracks, armoured vehicles, guns and plastic bullets are not acceptable. The continuing political raids and political policing, the partisan policing of loyalist marches and the lack of action on sectarian attacks and drug dealing must end. But we will pursue proper policing and justice with all our energy.

The rights of those seeking full equality in our society is being consistently undermined by policy makers and by direct rule British ministers. Privilege has been the foundation stone of British rule in the North of Ireland. Inequality has been the price of privilege.

More than 35 years after the Civil Rights Movement launched its campaign to highlight the nature of structural discrimination in housing, voting and jobs these same issues remain at the core of continued inequalities. Thirty-five years on, according to latest statistics, nationalists are:

- » More likely to suffer from poverty
- » Less likely to be in employment
- » More likely to be unemployed
- » More likely to be among the Long-term Unemployed
- » At greater risk of living in lower income households and/or being dependent on benefits and
- » At greater risk of experiencing multiple deprivation

The entrenched inequality within the northern state is such that more than 35 years later we are still evidencing these same patterns of inequality.

Sinn Féin wants an end to second class citizenship and an end in the mindset of policy makers who despite equality legislation and equality mechanisms like the Equality Commission, pay lip service to eradicating poverty and undermine the equality agenda.

Sinn Féin is committed to challenging and exposing inequalities and to ensuring that people's rights and entitlements are secured, regardless of class, creed, nationality, ethnic origin, martial status, disability, religion, or sexuality.

Poverty, discrimination and marginalisation must be challenged and eradicated. While the peace process has made a marked difference in several other aspects of people's lives there is still a considerable distance to travel to achieve full equality.

Public bodies, policy makers and direct rule ministers must apply the equality legislation to the maximum. The Equality Commission must use its powers to robustly challenge discrimination. The British government's latest bid to downgrade the Equality Commission by recruiting for a part-time Chief Commissioner is further evidence of its aim to undermine the equality agenda.

Sinn Féin will challenge discrimination in all its forms. We will work to secure the rights of all communities and sectors within our society who continue to experience inequality and discrimination.

This demands:

- » A comprehensive and adequately resourced all-Ireland anti-poverty strategy
- » Putting Targeting Social Need on a mandatory statutory footing to ensure that resources are directed to areas of greatest social need
- » Compliance by employers with affirmative action measures
- » Ensuring that the Single Equality Act is harmonised and provides the fullest anti-discrimination protection for all citizens and sectors in society
- » Enhanced monitoring mechanisms to measure outcomes of policies



- » Effective measures to eradicate the unemployment differential between Catholic and Protestant males within five years

Taxation justice is an integral part of all of this. The tax system is fundamentally unjust and biased against those on low and middle incomes. It does not raise enough tax overall to pay for effective public services.

Sinn Féin's priorities are designed to tackle immediate needs and the most extreme inequalities. A comprehensive approach is required to move towards an Ireland of Equals. Prioritisation of those most in need is a must.

"It is essential to reform and re-weight the taxation system in favour of the low paid and to increase the overall tax take by targeting wealth, speculative property and corporate profits to fund improved social provision.

Every year hundreds of millionaires and thousands of high earners pay no income tax at all. The tax system must be reviewed, reformed and restructured to increase overall tax take, social spending and infrastructural development. This must be based on equity and efficiency.

A start should be made. Measures could include:

- » Ending tax avoidance schemes for the super rich
- » Increasing Capital Gains Tax for owners of multiple residential properties.
- » Creating a 50% tax band for incomes in excess of £100,000.
- » Taking the low paid out of the tax net.

The eradication of discrimination and the realisation of equality of opportunity in employment will be clearly visible in a workforce which, by and large, reflects the denominational ratio in the community as a whole. Especially at the level of those in government who formulate and implement policy

IRELAND IS MOVING TOWARD UNITY AND INDEPENDENCE

The primary political objectives of Sinn Féin are Irish unity, political independence, sovereignty and national reconciliation. We are working to achieve this in our lifetime.

Sinn Féin has consistently urged an island-wide approach in key policy areas. We have given practical expression to this through the work of our ministers in the Executive, the all-Ireland Ministerial Council, in Leinster House, the Assembly and the European Parliament.

Sinn Féin has also led the way in:

- » Putting the all-Ireland agenda at the centre of the negotiations
- » Bringing forward plans for the integration of services and infrastructure along the Border Corridor
- » Engaging in a wide-ranging consultation with Non-Governmental Organisations and rights bodies on our 'Rights for All' document
- » Campaigning in Europe and in Ireland for an increase in INTERREG and Peace funding and for a substantial peace dividend to be allocated by the British Treasury towards the regeneration of the Six-County economy
- » Securing Irish passport services in the Six Counties
- » Campaigning for Northern representation in the Oireachtas and for Presidential voting rights

CAMPAIGNING FOR A GREEN PAPER ON IRISH UNITY

The Irish Government has a duty to bring forward a strategy to achieve national independence, sovereignty and national reconciliation. The Irish Government must clearly be among the principal persuaders for Irish unity. There is an onus on the Government to persuade the British Government to adopt a united Ireland policy and to engage with unionists at all levels of society towards this end.

- » The Taoiseach should commission a Green Paper on Irish unity to be published within one year.
- » The aim should be to identify steps and measures which can promote and assist a successful transition to a united Ireland and to develop detailed planning for a new state and a new society that all Irish people can share.
- » All stakeholders in society on this island must be given an opportunity to take ownership of the debate and be part of the process this initiates.
- » The Green Paper should be referred to a specially dedicated Joint Committee of the Oireachtas on Irish Unity to monitor, assess and report progress on implementation.
- » A Minister of State should be appointed by the Irish Government with the dedicated and specific responsibility of driving forward and developing policy options and strategies to advance the outcomes of the Green Paper and to direct and co-ordinate the Government's all-Ireland policies.
- » A representative forum - 'A Caucus of the Irish Diaspora' - should be created to promote national and democratic interests internationally and to give immigrants and their descendants an ownership role in the pursuit of an Irish national democracy.
- » Economic planning for Irish unity must be a key part of this process. The Irish Government, in consultation with the social partners and other stakeholders, must begin the process of co-ordinating economic planning on an all-Ireland basis.
- » Practical measures would include all-Ireland common currency, tax and spending policies, and



economic development agencies and market regulators - energy, telecommunications and transport - coming together on an all-Ireland basis.

- » The Irish Government and those political parties advocating Irish unity need to build a 'community for reunification' and develop strategies that look beyond North-South cross-border co-operation as an end in itself but rather as a means to an end that is to evolve into joined-up practice that actually delivers.

NORTHERN REPRESENTATION IN THE OIREACHTAS

- » Pending the reintegration of the social, political and economic systems of the two existing jurisdictions, the 18 Westminster MPs should automatically be accorded membership of the Dáil, with consultative and speaking rights.
- » A determined number of seats should be allocated, in the Seanad, to Six-County parties in proportion to their electoral representation.
- » The Oireachtas should open the door to those of the unionist tradition who may, in the future, wish to avail of representation. Unionist seats should be left vacant as a constant assertion of the recognition of the Irish nation that they have right of entitlement in national institutions.
- » The list system for direct election to the Seanad should be truly national and citizens in the Six Counties should have the vote.
- » Voting rights in Presidential elections should be extended to citizens in the Six Counties, beginning with the next such elections.

GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT - EXPANDING ALL-IRELAND STRUCTURES

Even at this embryonic stage it is clear that all-Ireland developments can bring about considerable benefits to all of us living on the island. Sinn Féin is campaigning for:

The all-Ireland Ministerial Council to have its remit developed and expanded.

New areas of ministerial co-operation, including Community Development, Art and Heritage, Economic Co-operation and Public Investment.

Dáil procedures to be amended to facilitate direct reporting of the progress of the all-Ireland Ministerial Council.

The remit of the six existing all-Ireland implementation bodies to be expanded and for the creation of further implementation bodies. This should include Policing, Justice, Agriculture, Rural Development, Social Economy, Pollution Control, Mental Health, Further and Higher Education, Communications Infrastructure and Energy.

PROMOTING BALANCED INTEGRATION ALONG THE BORDER CORRIDOR

The Border Corridor is one of the most deprived areas of Ireland. The border impedes development and impacts detrimentally on the quality of life of those communities and businesses adjacent to it. The border has been independently acknowledged as an impediment to the social and economic development of that area.

A co-ordinated integration to create common systems and shared infrastructure and services will deliver the balanced development needed for people living within the Border Corridor.

The most appropriate frameworks for regional development should be integrated and inclusive – encompassing all the counties of the Border Corridor.

Sinn Féin’s representatives on the three Cross-Border Corridor Groups, Local Strategy Partnerships, County Task Forces and on the Border Regional Authority will continue to use their influence on both sides of the border to promote sustainable cross-border integration, linking up services and infrastructure to the benefit of the whole border region.

Sinn Féin will lead the way in arguing for and constructing a meaningful grassroots campaign, building a ‘community for integration’, promoting balanced regional development involving all the counties of the Border Corridor.

THE ALL-IRELAND BILL OF RIGHTS

Seven years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the British and Irish governments have failed to bring forward an All-Ireland Charter of Fundamental Rights.

A Bill of Rights must be brought forward now and its powers must be enforceable.

THE ALL-IRELAND CIVIC FORUM

The all-Ireland Consultative Civic Forum allowed for in the Good Friday Agreement should be established. This would offer local communities, trades unions, voluntary groups, women’s and youth organisations and local businesses an opportunity to become involved in decision-making on an all-Ireland scale.

Sinn Féin will vigorously campaign for greater participative democratic platforms, allowing grassroots involvement in decisions affecting governance.

ALL-IRELAND INTER-PARLIAMENTARY FORUM

Sinn Féin is calling for the establishment of an all-Ireland Inter-Parliamentary Forum, as set out in Strand Two of the Good Friday Agreement. This Forum has the potential to act as strategic link between Leinster House and the Assembly.



EDUCATION

When Martin McGuinness took office as Education Minister in December 1999 he set about the task of bringing our education system into the 21st Century. He took the decision to scrap the 11+ and began to undo the damage caused by decades of under-investment. Unfortunately since the imposition of British direct rule in a number of areas the future of our children and young people has been undermined.

- » The under-funding crisis that has engulfed all of the Education Library Boards has been mismanaged and frontline services are now under threat
- » Progress that had been agreed on the establishment of the Middletown Autism All-Ireland Centre of Excellence has been dogged by political inertia
- » The ring-fencing of resources for young people and children in the Executive Children's Fund has ended
- » Progress achieved by Sinn Féin in reversing decades of chronic under-funding in our schools has been threatened
- » There is still no firm direction on what will replace the 11+ when it is finally abolished in 2008

A radical education system is vital to changing the lives of individuals and for stronger communities and a society that can embrace diversity. A commitment to education and substantive long term funding commitments are essential if our children and young people as well as adult learners are to realise their full potential and play a full and active role in our society.

Sinn Féin also believes that all quangos, including the Education Library Boards, should have a majority of non-executive elected representatives to ensure transparency and accountability.

Sinn Féin is committed to:

- » Opposing cuts to vital frontline services
- » Democratic education services
- » Enhancing and developing healthy school meals
- » Protecting and maintaining money for specific and special educational needs
- » Safer play and recreational areas for children and young people
- » Maintaining library services
- » Additional funding for small rural primary schools to enable them to remain viable, including support for strategies on sustainable rural communities
- » The creation and extension of Education Action Zones
- » All-ability 11-18 comprehensive schools with substantially increased support for pupils and teachers in those schools where the measured social and educational need of the school population is relatively high

EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION

Investment in primary education, including school building programmes and support for disadvantaged pupils should be a key priority. Eliminating educational disadvantage and increasing participation in education would greatly benefit our society and our economy.

Sinn Féin calls for:

- » The School Building Programme to move to multi-annual funding based on a five-year plan of targeted investment with the objective of eliminating the school building waiting list by 2010
- » Extension of the Sure Start programme to all schools serving communities with significant levels of disadvantage
- » Increased capitation grants for primary and secondary schools
- » Increased investment in the Education Library Boards to enable it to fulfil its statutory obligations

EDUCATE THAT YOU MAY BE FREE

Sinn Féin views education as an instrument of liberation for all, and in particular for the most disadvantaged and marginalised. Equality of opportunity, access and provision is a basic entitlement and we strive to present a model and advocate a practice of education that has this vision of education as its driving force.

Many people are left feeling disempowered, inadequate and alienated as a result of their experience of the current education system that marks them for life with a deep sense of under-achievement. More than 20% of the adult population has numeracy and literacy problems, and many in the workforce have few or no qualifications. There is a deficit of skilled technicians and an alarming percentage of school leavers with little or no qualifications.

We also need to see greater investment and recognition of non-academic and vocational education.

Sinn Féin will support and continue to work for an education system that will:

- » Liberate and facilitate the potential of all
- » Address and redress educational and generational disadvantage
- » Deploy resources to promote access to education by disadvantaged and marginalised groups
- » Ensure that the means are available to establish an Irish-medium higher education sector
- » Put learners and teachers at the heart of neighbourhood networks of learning
- » Promote school educational achievement through quality of delivery and resources rather than narrow measurement of performance
- » Intervene at the earliest possible stages to include people and groups excluded, disempowered or alienated by the operation of the present systems, North and South
- » Increase harmonisation of education on an all-Ireland basis and European basis

THIRD-LEVEL AND FURTHER & HIGHER EDUCATION

Education is a basic right. Introducing the marketplace into our universities will lead to a two-tier third level education system. We are opposed to top-up fees. We believe in a proper maintenance grant paid for by progressive general taxation.

The government has a fundamental duty to provide funding for the Higher Education system, and must recognise that the university campus is a learning place, not a market place.

Education and training is an entitlement for all and should be free at the point of entry. In addition, Sinn Féin will not accept any proposed structure of further education that does not embrace the community sector as an equal and valuable partner. Community education has been the most proactive agent in addressing the literacy and numeracy deficit.



Sinn Féin will continue work for:

- » Integration of diploma and degree courses to ensure ease of transfer from further education colleges to universities
- » Balancing the funding of research to ensure adequate attention to fields promoting social development and the humanities as well as science and industry
- » Ensuring that research assessment has minimal negative effects on the teaching environment and morale by valuing teaching
- » The creation and maintenance of an adequate third level Irish medium provision
- » Better access to life-long learning for teachers

BULLYING

Bullying is a problem that needs to be confronted in the schools, on the way to and from school and by involving parents.

Sinn Féin believes that all schools should be obliged to have a rigorous, proactive and effective anti-bully strategy in place.

HEALTHY EDUCATION

What children eat at school will affect how they eat for the rest of their lives. We need to ensure that the increasing problem of obesity is tackled through healthy eating and through increased participation in sports. Rather than cutting budgets for school meals, which the current British administration is doing, it is essential for the health of our children that the school meals budget is increased in order to give schools the ability to supply proper nutritional meals.

This would include more fruit and healthy options on the school menu and the phasing out of unhealthy options such as fizzy drink vending machines. When Minister for Education, Martin McGuinness made great strides in this direction by introducing improved regulations about the quality of food that could be served to children.

There also needs to be more resources for sports facilities. A greater involvement of local sports clubs and sportspeople can also help build on stronger links between schools, the community and young people.

Sinn Féin also supports an expansion of the school breakfast programme and after schools and homework clubs.

SPECIAL NEEDS EDUCATION

We believe that the approach to children with special needs should be child-centred and holistic. Their care should be carried out in the form of 'wraparound' services based on best practice.

There must be adequate provision of supports within mainstream classrooms for children with a learning disability, together with a joint departmental and governmental approach to the early detection and remediation of special educational needs.

PRIORITIES 2005 -2010

- » A significant increase in funding for education in accordance with European agreements
- » Ending of academic selection
- » Equal access to second level education for all
 - The widening of access to universities and other third level institutions
- » Well-funded training schemes for those not in second or third level education
- » Equal emphasis and valuing of vocational and academic qualifications
- » Abolition of student top-up fees and extension of student loans and grant programmes
- » Creation and maintenance of an adequate third-level Irish-medium provision
- » An emphasis on building Emotional Intelligence and Verbal Confidence at all stages of learning
- » The harmonisation of teaching and academic qualifications within an all-Ireland and European context
- » The further development and exploration of the potential offered by the integration of all Irish universities
- » The establishment of an all-Ireland anti-bullying charter for the protection of children, adults and teachers which includes a teacher-training module and universal code of practice
- » The continuous development and promotion of an island-wide numeracy and literacy recovery programme



CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Almost one third of children in the North of Ireland suffer from poverty and experience deprivation of basic needs such as proper food and heating. Tackling poverty must be prioritised to improve the lives of children and young people.

Sinn Féin has consistently campaigned for a minister with the specific responsibility to promote the rights of children and young people.

Sinn Féin reaffirms its support for the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) with its clear demand:

“that the child should be fully prepared to live an individual life in society and brought up in the spirit of the ideals proclaimed in the Charter of the United Nations and, in particular, in the spirit of peace, dignity, tolerance, freedom, equality and solidarity.”

Sinn Féin’s ‘Rights for All Charter’ promotes specific rights. That is:

- » Every child has the right to be protected from all forms of physical, emotional or mental violence, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, injury or abuse (including sectarian and racial abuse), neglect, bullying, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual exploitation or abuse.
- » All children born on the island are citizens, and as such have the right to remain in Ireland, in the care and company of their parent(s), regardless of the national origin of the parent(s).
- » Children have the right to be heard, to be consulted in all matters affecting them and to access information regarding them
- » The child’s best interest will be the paramount consideration in every matter concerning the child. The state will provide adequate support and assistance to parents and other primary carers to enable all children, insofar as is possible, to grow up and thrive in a stable and safe environment where the child is valued and encouraged to attain their full potential.
- » All children will have access to affordable childcare and crèche facilities of a high standard.
- » Education is a right. All children will have access to free education.

Sinn Féin’s priorities include:

- » Ensuring the development of an action plan to implement the UNCRC throughout Ireland
- » Promoting legislation to remove the ‘reasonable chastisement’ defence and outlaw physical punishment and support a public education campaign around the negative impact of physical punishment
- » Ensuring all decisions taken which affect children’s lives should be taken in the best interests of the child
- » Promoting the right of the child to be consulted on all matters concerning them
- » Providing awareness training to all our public representatives on children’s rights issues

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE’S COMMISSIONER

We call for an all-Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People. In the meantime, there should be a formal relationship between the Commissioner for Children and Young People in the Six Counties and the Children’s Ombudsperson in the 26 Counties to maximise co-operation and integration.

We also reiterate our call for the creation of a Minister for Children in the Six Counties and the development of a formal relationship between that minister and the Minister of State for Children in the Department of Health and Children.

CHILD FRIENDLY CITIES

Sinn Féin will introduce motions to all district, city and county councils calling for the appointment of a children's advocate to ensure that UNICEF's 'Child Friendly Cities' approach to protecting and enhancing the rights of children is advanced at local levels throughout the country.

PROTECTING CHILDREN

We call for the immediate establishment of a single, all-Ireland body responsible for the holding of standardised child protection information, to be supported by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, the Department of Health and Children, and the Departments of Education.

LISTENING TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

We support the establishment of an all-Ireland youth forum to ensure that the views of children and young people have an influential platform. We call on all public bodies to take full account of children's views to reflect their obligations under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and, in the North, Section 75.

CHILD BENEFIT

The single most effective social welfare measure for addressing the needs of children is child benefit. We therefore advocate a progressive increase in the level of child benefit that is greater than the rate of inflation.

THE HEALTH OF CHILDREN

It is widely recognised that the most effective and efficient form of healthcare is primary care, including GP services. To be most effective, these services must be accessible in terms of affordability, 24-hour coverage and location.

CHILDREN'S SERVICES

We call for the ring-fencing of funding for children's services to ensure that these services, which are often seen as soft options for cutbacks, are protected. Our priority is the reintroduction of the Executive Children's Fund.

YOUTH SERVICE PROVISION

Sinn Féin will strive to enhance youth provision and encourage genuine partnership. There are not enough resources for young people in many areas throughout the North of Ireland. This is particularly acute in rural areas where there are transport problems. Increased investment needs to be based on working with young people to find out what they want and need.



Priorities include:

- » Increased provision for the youth services
- » An expansion of peer education projects and community based youth work
- » A single body to provide resources for youth services - there are currently six funding bodies for the voluntary youth sector, the Youth Council and the five boards, all funded by DENI
- » Involving young people in the design, building and running of local facilities to develop ownership and new skills
- » Greater links between sports centres and other community centres and schools, including reduced rates for young people
- » Removing barriers to utilising school facilities for local communities and youth groups outside school hours

CHILD CARERS

We call for the governments, North and South, to take immediate steps to systematically identify children who are acting as carers with a view to developing individual support packages to suit the needs of these child carers.

INFORMATION ABOUT CHILDREN

In order to act effectively in the interests of children, it is essential to have adequate information on their lives and needs. We therefore call for the development of rigorous and standardised statistical instruments that will enable the accurate measurement of the state of children across Ireland. This data should be published annually in an all-Ireland 'State of Our Children' report.

CHILD CARE

Sinn Féin proposes the following measures to implement the right of all children to the best care, allow parents to care for their children full-time up to one year of age and to help equalise women's participation in the labour market:

- » To enable all parents, who so wish, to exercise their choice to care for their children full-time up to one year of age
- » To establish universal provision of early childhood care and education based on the Swedish system, which involves local authorities providing high quality and educational childcare facilities for low fees, enabling all parents to reconcile their childcare needs with participation in the labour force, education and training
- » Universally available, publicly funded pre-school education for all children from the age of three to five years, with appropriate resources to facilitate on-site work with parents and accommodate the earliest and most effective detection of Special Educational Needs

Everyone is entitled to equal access to a quality health and social service. Inequalities in health must be tackled across all departments and in partnership between the statutory, community and voluntary sectors. The modernisation plan for hospital services put forward by Sinn Féin Minister for Health, Bairbre de Brún, will cost £1.2 billion to implement over a ten-year period. This sum needs to be in the form of direct government investment rather than relying on public-private partnerships, which will result in future service cutbacks to meet loan repayments and limit future service development.

In order to have effective health and social services provision, resources must be increased and targeted. The various forms of discrimination in hospital provision have to be reversed. All-Ireland co-operation will enhance the quality of health and social care to the benefit of all.

Sinn Féin will continue to campaign to end the creeping development of a two-tier health service in the Six Counties. We will actively work for the creation of a better and more efficient health system. The guiding principle and primary function of this will be the equitable and efficient delivery of health and personal social services, free at the point of delivery, to each person and on the basis of need alone - not on the basis of a person's ability to pay.

Traditionally, the health debate has focused on hospitals, doctors and nurses. We must also address the issues of poverty, housing and education as well as environmental issues of water, air quality, food safety, waste management and transport. These issues determine our health.

This means prioritising tackling poverty, preventative healthcare, health promotion and education.

It also means a commitment to healthcare free at the point of delivery funded through general taxation and an increase in healthcare funding.

Sinn Féin will campaign to secure an immediate increase in resources to frontline services across all medical disciplines.

Sinn Féin representatives will continue to fight to secure sustainable acute hospital services and to balance health services west of the Bann in a manner that is responsive to need.

Sinn Féin has:

- » Campaigned against British Government cuts to health spending
- » Fought to maintain a viable hospital system west of the Bann
- » Campaigned for the improvement of mental health services and the development of suicide prevention strategies
- » Pushed for the development of autism services on an all-Ireland basis
- » Supported the development of cross-border links between health services

During the lifetime of the Assembly, Health Minister Bairbre de Brún:

- » Invested £112.6 million in upgrading services
- » Invested in cancer services, including a new chemotherapy unit, providing an integrated service for oncology patients in a unit with its own dedicated staff with accommodation for



- 10 patients and support accommodation for patients and relatives at Antrim Hospital
- » Invested £8.5 million in building 22 new children's homes, increasing total provision from 332 to 409.
- » Led the way in the development of all-Ireland co-operation in healthcare in cancer research, accident and emergency services, emergency planning and health promotion
- » Brought forward the Sure Start programme, which ensures that thousands of children now benefit from targeted action to enable them to make the best start possible

Our focus is on prevention and treatment and recognising the complex inter-related determinants of ill health. Prerequisites for improving public health include tackling:

- » Social and economic factors
- » Environmental factors
- » Quality of the health service
- » Life-style issues

In particular we are calling for:

- » A total ban on tobacco advertising and smoking in the workplace
- » Increased funding for services to help people quit smoking and an increase of the age limit to 18 years for the purchase of tobacco
- » Major restrictions on the advertising of unhealthy foods targeting children
- » Action from every area of government to tackle inequality and poverty

Sinn Féin also believes that:

- » All levels of planning and decision-making in the healthcare system should be clear, transparent and inclusive and uphold equality legislation which takes into account the concerns of healthcare professionals, service users, elected representatives and trade unions
- » Direct employment by the National Health Service of all staff delivering primary and acute care, thereby ending pay and conditions inequalities
- » Genuine all-Ireland partnerships to provide improved training and career progression opportunities

DIABETES - ARTHRITIS

Sinn Féin will encourage the development of a diabetes strategy to reflect the report of the Task Force on Diabetes. We support the development of an arthritis strategy aimed at ensuring that people with arthritis have the care, treatment and support required to live positive and productive lives.

MENTAL HEALTH

Current mental health promotion strategies have failed to effectively tackle the taboos surrounding these illnesses, compounding the problems of people who are unable to seek help and failing those in our communities who are most at risk.

Border areas and interface areas have higher rates of suicide, particularly among young men. We intend to continue our ongoing work with those in the community and voluntary sector, with health professionals and others, to see a single, all-island suicide prevention strategy put in place.

TRAINING

Sinn Féin also believe that it is important to widen participation in the healthcare professions by:

- » Fair and open entry to healthcare and medical courses, regardless of class, income, disability or gender.
- » Choosing students for aptitude as well as academic ability.
- » Increasing the number of properly funded medical, health and higher training schemes places to meet this future demand for trained doctors, nurses and allied health professionals
- » Reforming postgraduate training
- » Designating a number of post-proficiency training days to allow clinical skills development for all staff.
- » Resourcing the development of practice-based teaching models.
- » Intensifying the integration of student teaching, GP training, and research.
- » Establishing closer links between practices involved in teaching, training or research, and those in service delivery.

ENCOURAGING FLEXIBLE WORKING OPPORTUNITIES

Sinn Féin supports a proactive approach to the introduction and maintenance of family-friendly policies that are worker friendly. The current NHS shortage of women doctors could be addressed in a meaningful way by flexible working hours, extension of the job-sharing scheme, part-time work and the introduction of term-time working.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND THE NHS

Sinn Féin believes that healthcare should be supplied according to need rather than on ability to pay and that it should be free at the point of use. Sinn Féin believes in an effective health system predicated on the NHS as the dominant provider of healthcare. There should be no hidden subsidies for private healthcare business either from the tax payer or from the use of NHS personnel or facilities.

Sinn Féin will continue to oppose the use of Public/Private Partnerships and Private Finance Initiatives within health and social services.

MAKING PATIENT CHOICE MEANINGFUL

Meaningful and genuine patient choice will not be delivered by introducing more private provision or an open market with competition for referrals. Choices should be available for treatment and different pathways of care. The patient-doctor relationship should be strengthened where GPs have a crucial role in supporting and developing patient care choices.

ALL-IRELAND CO-OPERATION ON HEALTH

On an island of six million people it is inefficient to have two distinct health systems. The skills of service providers, North and South, can be better utilised and hospitals and other resources more efficiently deployed through enhanced all-island co-operation leading to a single all-Ireland health service.



Our representatives will actively campaign for:

- » The development of a cross-border network of hospital services
- » Greater co-ordination in the provision of primary care services
- » The setting up of the proposed Regional Authority under the joint control of health departments, North and South
- » The expansion of the cross-border 'Co-operation and Working Together' model
- » The reform of accreditation procedures to allow for the free movement of staff throughout the island
- » The establishment of joint training strategies for healthcare workers

PRIORITIES

The delivery of high quality health services is hugely important to people across society. It is vital that the 'Review of Public Administration' addresses this in a meaningful way. Elected representatives should be full members of Health Boards to ensure public accountability.

Sinn Féin representatives will seek to ensure that 'Investing for Health' partnerships meet meaningful targets to address health inequalities and improving the health and well-being of communities.

PRIORITIES

- » Full implementation of Bairbre de Brún's 'Investing for Health' public health strategy, with its emphasis on the maintenance of good health
- » Promote full equality of access to health care services, irrespective of class, creed or location
- » Prevent the creation of a two-tier health service
- » Greater integration of health services, North and South
- » The development of adequate mental health services
- » The development of a coherent diabetes strategy

ENVIRONMENT

Everyone has the right to a safe, clean and unpolluted environment. Sinn Féin is committed to the promotion of environmental renewal through investment in reduction, recycling and policies working towards a zero waste economy.

While Ireland's overall environmental quality remains relatively good in comparison with other European countries, government failure to respond to the increasing global environmental challenges to protect the environment and to develop the waste management solutions for the 21st Century is irresponsible. Sinn Féin is working for a change in priorities and a genuine commitment to sustainable development and environmental protection. We need legislation that promotes change and challenges the attitudes of businesses and consumers alike.

Sinn Féin priorities for 2005-2010 include:

- » Sufficient investment from central government funds to bring our water treatment plants up to the standard required by EU directives
- » An all-Ireland campaign of public, political, legal and diplomatic pressure to force the complete closure of Sellafield
- » A properly resourced and effective Waste Management Strategy - based on waste reduction, re-use and re-cycling, at all levels in the waste production stream
- » The rejection of incineration as a means of waste disposal
- » An audit of all existing mobile telephone base stations and antennae, leading to a system of adequate control over radio frequency fields generated and the establishment of physical exclusion zones around such stations
- » The establishment of an all-Ireland Environmental Protection Agency to drive forward a strong environmental programme of enforcement and to stand up to the powerful vested interests who refuse to live up to obligations on emissions and pollution

GLOBAL WARMING

While Europe has done much in leading worldwide efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it is clear that we also need strategies at European, regional, national and local level to adapt to climate change.

The Kyoto Protocol involves modest reductions of less than 5%. The US does not support it; developing nations do not have to make any cuts and it expires in 2012.

Progress on achieving long-term targets relies on greater pressure on the US, which emits eight times as much CO₂ per head of population as China and 18 times as much as India.

Sinn Féin will work towards:

- » Abandoning Kyoto-style piecemeal negotiations on individual national targets in favour of a global plan to cap concentrations of critical greenhouse gases
- » Setting more ambitious targets to cap the concentration of greenhouse gases
- » Major changes to the manufacturing process, to the way that energy is generated and to our lifestyle as oil and natural gas supplies dwindle



ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

The Department of Regional Development has a statutory role in promoting alternative energy use. We will press for the implementation of alternative energy strategies and targets on an all-Ireland basis. Sinn Féin supports the continued development of discreet hilltop wind-farms. We will initiate programmes to develop energy from coastal wave power and ensure that there is continued support for biomass, solar and heat-pump technology through initiatives such as 'Clear Skies'.

WASTE MANAGEMENT

There are no easy answers or quick fixes to the problem of waste and its disposal. Indeed, current attempts at a quick fix through the use of incinerators threaten to make the problem worse rather than better. Incinerators need waste to feed them, thus encouraging its production.

Sinn Féin has a Zero Waste Policy. We are opposed to the use of incinerators for waste management. Rather than trying to find ways to dispose of waste by burying it or burning it, efforts should focus on minimising the amount of waste produced and on recycling the waste that does exist.

The failure of the Department of the Environment to progress a coherent and sustainable waste management plan for the Six Counties is irresponsible. There is an urgent need to put in place a robust and realistic funding plan to provide the necessary infrastructure needed to meet our responsibilities.

ALL-IRELAND

- » Waste management to be urgently developed as an area of cross-border co-operation and implementation with an all-Ireland waste management plan
- » The 26-County Environmental Protection Agency to be reconstituted as an all-Ireland body with strong enforcement powers
- » Existing legislation and enforcement procedures concerning cross-border waste disposal to be reformed to tackle the illegal dumping of waste
- » Plastic bag levy should be extended to the Six Counties

REDUCTION AND RE-USE

- » Regulations to be compiled with respect to the design, composition and production of packaging in line with the international standard of eco-labelling
- » Regulations to be introduced on an all-Ireland basis to enforce minimum standards of waste reduction at the point of production.
- » Products that are non-recyclable, and for which there is a recyclable alternative, should be banned
- » All public bodies' procurement policies must contain a strict environmental clause that ensures that they purchase ecologically friendly goods
- » A polluter must bear the full costs of any measures required to protect the environment as a result of their actions
- » Encourage government and local authorities to use their powers of procurement to promote minimum waste products
- » Regulations to be introduced to require deposit and refund schemes on the sale of liquids in glass bottles
- » An all-Ireland Waste Reduction Institute to be established. One of its functions should be to research the reuse potential of products
- » Government to support the use glass as an aggregate in the construction of roads

RECYCLING

- » Create national facilities capable of recycling major recyclable materials. In the first instance this should involve the development of a paper mill capable of dealing with the volume of paper waste produced throughout Ireland
- » Support government intervention to create markets for recyclables
- » There should be 100% composting scheme for non-hazardous green waste produced by government bodies, local authorities and large corporations
- » All councils should be mandated to produce strategies that have a minimum target of 50% recycling by 2010. This may seem an ambitious target but it should be noted that Dublin's plan aims to achieve 60% by 2008
- » Speed up the introduction of blue bins - as the first phase of any successful recycling strategy that has raised recovery rates from 3% to 20%
- » Challenge blockages in the planning system to proposals for anaerobic digesters and other alternative treatment methods
- » Encourage major retailers to reduce packaging by providing low packaging aisles

INCINERATION AND LANDFILL

The establishment of a widespread system of incinerators is becoming a real threat. The 26 Counties currently has seven industrial incinerators but, under the Irish Government's regional waste management plan, at least five major municipal incinerators are proposed including one at Carronstown. In the North, the same threat exists but plans are not as developed. Sinn Féin councillors in Meath, Louth and Newry and Mourne Councils and in Dungannon, Armagh, Omagh and Monaghan Councils have been very pro-active in opposing incineration and putting forward viable alternatives.

Sinn Féin proposes:

- » A ban on the development of municipal incinerators in Ireland
- » In the absence of such a ban, that all councils pass motions refusing to allow incinerators to be situated within their areas
- » A planned strategy for the progressive and co-ordinated reduction of landfill volume throughout Ireland. This plan should be designed in the light of targets for increasing the proportion of recycled waste and reducing the amount of waste produced
- » Push for the closure of landfill sites that have not been properly engineered to minimise the danger of contamination
- » By 2010 no compostable waste should be disposed of in landfills, and local authorities should develop composting facilities of sufficient capacity to ensure that this is possible
- » Ongoing support for community campaigns against incineration
- » Develop economies of scale by building on the work of Arc 21 and SWaMP to deliver alternatives to incineration and landfill, and to develop greater partnerships across the border



AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The agricultural industry and rural life in Ireland is being continually damaged by central government on both sides of the border, the EU and world economic policies. It is a serious problem that requires an urgent all-Ireland response.

Sinn Féin is committed to keeping farming families on the land and ensuring a good quality of life for everyone living in rural communities. We support agricultural diversification in mixed and organic farming as well as off-farm employment, training and the development of rural communities. We believe that agriculture in Ireland can be sustainable within the context of an all-Ireland agricultural policy.

Sinn Féin wants to see viable rural communities with access to all public services, a strong community infrastructure and a sustainable future. Sinn Féin has put the need for a better co-ordinated and coherent strategy for the agriculture and fishing industries and sustaining rural communities developed on an all-Ireland basis, high on the political agenda in the Assembly, Executive and the Oireachtas.

Sinn Féin has been working for a new deal for rural Ireland. We have:

- » Argued for full decoupling as part of CAP reform, resulting in Minister Joe Walsh overturning the Irish Government's position
- » Opposed plans to concentrate dairy production
- » Led the campaign to have the Beef Export ban in the North removed, allowing the North to export beef separate from the rest of the 'UK'
- » Promoted the positive aspects for the North to export beef on the same basis as that of the South
- » Brought forward proposals opposing attempts to introduce GM (Genetically Modified) food and crops into Ireland
- » Set out how the impact of the European Nitrates Directive can be reduced
- » Pursued the spending of rural development money in rural areas and lobbied intensively to have PEACE II money spent
- » Articulated the ways in which British agricultural policy is detrimental to Irish farming
- » Challenged the cost of running the Six-County agricultural department
- » Highlighted the failure and the unwillingness of DARD to properly eradicate both TB and Brucellosis

FARMING IN CRISIS – NEW OPPORTUNITIES

Many families in the farming sector are now more dependent on off-farm employment or on EU transfer payments than farming itself as the primary source of income. With the decline of farming, we have seen the erosion of other cornerstones of rural communities such as schools and post offices. New strategies, particularly in planning policy and a more integrated rural policy, are essential to give new impetus to halt the decline of rural communities. Both agriculture and rural development policy must become more integrated with other agencies and departments.

For example, the implication of rising oil prices should see the government look at all options in relation to renewable energy, particularly the many ways in which land use can assist energy production.

France has over 6,000 rural jobs working in the energy sector; this example, along with the new EU directive on renewable energy should give farming and rural communities hope of a sustainable economic future.

The future of Irish farming must be planned on an all-Ireland basis with close co-operation between the two departments, North and South.

CAP REFORM – THE FREEDOM TO FARM?

Sinn Féin has led the way in Ireland in arguing that full decoupling is the best way to provide a future for Irish farming in the context of major CAP reform. Full decoupling of all EU farm payments will enable farmers to move away from the current system and plan production on the basis of demand. This should lead to higher quality and have beneficial effects on farm incomes. We are, however, concerned at the amount of paperwork and regulation which is being introduced. This goes against the ethos of the new CAP proposals which were to allow farmers the freedom to farm.

Millions of pounds in direct payments are to be paid to exporting companies. This is scandalous, a betrayal of farmers and rural communities. We are totally opposed to this money going to these companies. It should be capped at the same level as that for farmers, with the additional money redistributed to small farms.

A GM-FREE IRELAND

The British Government's GM crop trials raises serious questions regarding any decision to introduce commercial GM crops into Ireland. There are too many unanswered questions, not least the findings that GM crops have an adverse impact on levels of bio-diversity in the vicinity of GM crops.

Sinn Féin is totally opposed to the introduction of GM food and crops. This is an issue that will impact on Ireland's clean, green farming image and has implications for farmers across the island of Ireland. We see no environmental, economic, nutritional or consumer benefits from GM or improvements for developing countries in Genetic Modification. Sinn Féin believes that across the island we need one policy on this - a GM-free Ireland - because cross-contamination of hybrid plants and crops could contaminate the whole island.

SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES

Our priorities are for the all-Ireland co-ordination of agriculture and rural development and a long-term agricultural development strategy based on higher value added production and the removal of 'UK' status on food exports.

Sinn Féin believes that the core objectives for the future of our rural communities should be:

- » Creating a co-ordinated programme that links agriculture, enterprise, environment, culture, health and education and social services strategies into a comprehensive integrated rural development programme
- » Creating the conditions where rural communities themselves can rebuild their local economies
- » Ensuring that everyone has a dignified standard of living, access to proper education, housing and health resources



- » Removal of 'UK' status from food exports from the North
- » Support to make a case to the European Commission to have the beef export ban lifted, if necessary for the North to go it alone
- » All-Ireland integration of the agri-food industry and agricultural services
- » An all-Ireland food promotion agency
- » Pressure on DARD to increase the financial assistance available to farmers under the farm waste management scheme, up to 60% grant assistance
- » Support social infrastructure and integrated services to rural communities
- » Sustainable agricultural, fisheries and forestry programmes that are environmentally sensitive
- » An all-Ireland strategy to promote animal health and consumer confidence
- » Introduce early retirement schemes
- » A coherent cross-departmental strategy for rural economic development
- » Full decoupling of all EU farm payments
- » End to cutbacks in the provision of public services to rural communities
- » An increase in the quota allocation for fishing fleets throughout Ireland
- » Decentralisation of DARD central offices in tandem with a wider programme of decentralisation of offices

RURAL REGENERATION

The future of farming is very uncertain and this has consequences for the future economic shape of not just our rural communities but also urban communities.

Sinn Féin recognises and supports people's right to live in rural areas. We are committed to keeping farming families on the land and ensuring a good quality of life for all those in rural communities.

Sinn Féin will begin by commissioning an all-Ireland Rural White Paper, recognising the different needs of all those living and working in rural areas on the island.

A lot of rural development policy is driven by the Common Agricultural Policy, which has directed financial support towards securing economic and social cohesion.

Europe provided funding for programmes which encourage greater participation in making plans and programmes work. These programmes are central to rural community networks yet many of these are pilot programmes, not guaranteed long-term funding. All government departments involved in rural regeneration should establish a rural policy and then commit resources to implement that policy in conjunction with other departments.

The lessons of the Leader Programmes must be integrated into a long-term national strategy drawn up in consultation with farmers, local business, local government, communities and their representative organisations.

EQUALITY

The Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is legally obliged to redress inequalities in practices and policies.

Urgently needed is a strategy to support the role of women in rural development and for the provision of proper childcare in rural areas to enable women to access training and employment opportunities. Funding must be made available to allow the Rural Women's Network become a mainstream programme.

Sinn Féin will work for:

- » Employment and recruitment practices to be monitored
- » Policies to reverse under-representation of minority groups within agricultural bodies
- » Urgent examination of the reasons for under-representation of women in rural development initiatives and recommendations on positive ways of involving women
- » The Department of Agriculture to develop a strategy to take account of the statistics in relation to the under-representation of women in agriculture and introduce quota systems to ensure their adequate representation in farming organisations.

PLANNING

Planning is crucial for the future sustainability of rural communities. There has been a legacy of planning discrimination particularly in councils west of the Bann.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- » A significant increase in the number of new house-building allocations for rural areas
- » Proper consultation between local councils, rural communities, farmers and environmental campaigners on any new legislation pertaining to rural development
- » The new rural development regulations to be implemented and delivered in a way acceptable to local government, taking into account all-Ireland structures
- » Members of existing farm families to get priority planning permission and that the criteria used in calculating eligibility in terms of livestock units needed for a farm to be viable be redrawn, taking into account the change in farming to a part-time basis
- » Planning in rural areas to take into account the need to increase the viability of rural towns and villages by clustering future development in hamlets, villages and towns

RURAL ADVICE BUREAU

Sinn Féin is also seeking to establish a Rural Advice Bureau (RAB) within each council area to:

- » Assist farmers with stress-related issues, and working with government departments
- » Develop services to farm families, especially small farms, to help them maximise family income through work on and off the farm;
- » Develop a food safety and farm safety strategy
- » Support the role of women in rural development and provide proper childcare in rural areas to enable women to access training and employment
- » Lobby all councils for financial support be given to the Rural Women's Network



EQUALITY FOR WOMEN

Sinn Féin starts from the simple belief that everyone is equal and should have equal rights. It is this guiding principle that directs our policies, the structure of our party and the campaigns in which we are involved. In government in the Six Counties, in the Assembly, in Leinster House and in local government, Sinn Féin has led by example. We will continue to fight on issues that affect women's lives - promoting equal rights, healthcare, housing, pensions, childcare and equal pay for equal work.

WOMEN IN THE ECONOMY

Sinn Féin will campaign for:

- » Introduction of a system of paid parental leave
- » Unpaid caring work to be legally acknowledged, measured and paid for in economic terms
- » Abolition of the current means test for full-time carers
- » 'Social security' benefits to be raised to ensure an equitable standard of living and increased thereafter in line with general inflation hikes
- » Benefits for lone parents to be raised to the standard of average earnings
- » Basic minimum wage to be increased
- » The low-wage economy, which mostly affects women, needs to be eliminated
- » Anti-discrimination legislation to be rigorously enforced with employers to tackle the growing gender pay gap between women and men
- » Flexible working hours and job-share practices to be advanced by employers to ensure their workforce environment is removing barriers to women's participation

WOMEN AND HEALTH

Sinn Féin demands:

- » A significant increase in resources for health and social services
- » A free, prompt and co-ordinated breast-screening programme for all women over 40 and free and regular cervical screening for all teenage girls and women
- » A renewed focus on preventative healthcare

WOMEN AND CHILDCARE

We will continue to call for:

- » Government-funded childcare facilities and government subsidies for employers wishing to provide facilities on site
- » All centres for further and higher education should have on-site childcare facilities
- » Paid parental leave for employees
- » The promotion of quality, affordable community childcare, specifically in areas of social disadvantage
- » Development and extension of after-school care facilities
- » Transport costs to be provided as part of childcare provision

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Sinn Féin supports:

- » Mainstream funding for all frontline and community services which support women and children affected by violence
- » The development of all-Ireland awareness raising and educational initiatives that challenge attitudes which generate violence against women in society
- » Promoting awareness on violence against women in schools, in the media and within the legal and judicial systems where specific training is needed for the police, lawyers and judges
- » The development of family-friendly courts throughout the island

WOMEN AND EDUCATION

Sinn Féin will campaign for:

- » Access to affordable education and skills training that is appropriately matched to career opportunities
- » Promotion of a wider range of educational and career choices for girls and young women

OLDER WOMEN

We will demand:

- » Rights-based guidelines for pension policy to reflect the differential labour market position of women
- » A rights based initiative where pensioners' social insurance contributions during their working life are linked to inflation
- » Retrospective pension credits for women who spent their working life caring for others

RURAL WOMEN AND ISOLATION

Sinn Féin supports:

- » The development of a local services and information infrastructure to cater for the health, welfare and social needs of rural communities
- » Rural transport initiatives, vital for the survival and well-being of rural communities

WOMEN'S MEANINGFUL AND EQUAL PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AND CIVIC SOCIETY

Sinn Féin will campaign for:

- » Targets and timescales to be set for achieving equality of representation for women in all aspects of public and political life
- » Addressing the barriers which prevent women's equal and meaningful participation in political and public decision-making forums
- » Equality of outcome in employment, education and training
- » Gender proofing in appointments, policies and resource allocation to be obligatory for all public bodies
- » Gender proofing measures to be included in the 'Review of Public Administration'
- » Mainstream funding for women's groups in the community sector and for frontline organisations providing services for women



A SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE IRELAND

Sinn Féin advocates the right to social, economic, gender and cultural equality. This encompasses equality for all, irrespective of race, age, marital or family status, sexual orientation, physical or mental capacities, ethnicity, social origin, political or religious affiliations or membership of the Traveller Community.

Creating the conditions for establishing an equal society means recognising that many diverse groups and sections of society need support.

DELIVERING EQUALITY FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Sinn Féin is working to achieve a society in which all people with disabilities can participate fully as equal citizens. Central to this is the right of people with disabilities to live independently, with choices and dignity. This includes people with mobility, sensory and learning difficulties, and people with mental health and other health conditions.

We need action to address many key environmental issues affecting people with disabilities - planning, design and management of services; transport; communications; and buildings and spaces as well as the attitudes of society and individuals.

SINN FÉIN PRIORITIES 2005-2010

- » People with disabilities are far more likely to be unemployed than people without disabilities. This transfers into increased poverty rates. We support meaningful employment targets, including within the public sector, to address this unacceptable situation
- » Greater investment in Special Needs Education
- » All public buildings should conform to universal design standards with regard to accessibility
- » Right to advocacy for people with mental disabilities
- » Strengthening and full implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)
- » Legislation to ensure that long term residential institutions are properly regulated and fully inspected
- » Examine the possibility of appointing a Disability Ombudsman
- » Disability equality training for health service staff
- » People with disability to be included as a category in the single equality act
- » Free offpeak public transport for people with disability to promote mobility and reduce social isolation
- » A time limited programme to make all public transport accessible
- » Increase support services to help people with disability get a job and stay in employment
- » A widening of the list of long-term conditions that qualify for exemption from prescription charges.

SENIOR CITIZENS' RIGHTS

In Ireland by the year 2020, more than half the population will be aged 60 plus. Changing lifestyles, nutrition and education have all contributed to a lifespan which is well beyond 'three score and ten'.

Sinn Féin pledges to support and actively pursue the political and legislative changes necessary to establish a decent standard of living, full access to services and the right of senior citizens to fully participate in the life of their community.

SINN FÉIN MAIN PRIORITIES 2005-2010

- » A Commissioner for Senior Citizens
- » Fundamental review of the standard of living of senior citizens, including pension provision, cost of living, fuel poverty and disposable income
- » Removal of discriminatory policy in respect of the sale of bungalows to people over 60 years old.
- » All new public housing to be designed to meet life-long needs
- » Year-on-year targets to eliminate unnecessary deaths from cold
- » Simplify and streamline the system of grants applications for adaptation work for access to basic amenities in the home
- » Design of streets and roads to ensure a safe environment for senior citizens
- » Introduction of free personal care
- » An adequate level of nursing care in residential accommodation
- » Fair access to healthcare for senior citizens based on clinical need
- » Extension of resources available for home security provided through Health and Social Services.
- » Free telephone line rental, free TV licences and examination of potential of free Internet access

PROMOTING DIVERSITY IN AN IRELAND OF EQUALS

Sinn Féin advocates the right to social, economic, gender and cultural equality. This encompasses equality for all, irrespective of race, age, marital or family status, sexual orientation, physical or mental capacities, ethnicity, social origin, political or religious affiliations or membership of the Traveller community.

Sinn Féin recognises that in order to create the conditions for establishing an equal society, we all must embrace the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-linguistic diversity in Ireland. It involves protection and promotion of rights and equality of opportunity for all persons who find themselves marginalised, isolated and under-represented in Irish society.

Sinn Féin believes the Single Equality Bill and Bill of Rights must be strong and inclusive.

RACISM

There can be no doubt that racism is becoming a major social problem in Ireland today. Sinn Féin recognises that sectarianism and racism must be eliminated from society.

Sinn Féin believes that the responses to racism must be addressed at two levels: through local communities and at statutory level. Local communities should be at the forefront of the campaign to advance and implement the equality agenda. Statutory agencies must ensure that all policies and procedures ensure human rights are upheld and that staff are trained to implement them.

- » Anti-racist and inter-cultural education must be mainstreamed through the curriculum at primary, secondary and teacher training levels
- » Additional English-language classes should be resourced for all minority ethnic children within the education system to ensure equality of opportunity
- » Interpreting and translation services and materials should be made fully available within health and social services to ensure the equal access to care and support
- » All political parties on the island of Ireland sign an anti-racist pledge and make a commitment that they will not play party politics with the equality and ethnicity issue and they will not tolerate any form of racism within their party



ASYLUM SEEKERS AND REFUGEES

- » Sinn Féin calls for an all-Ireland policy for asylum seekers and refugees to be developed within the framework of the all-Ireland bodies. This policy should address the negative consequences of the Dublin Convention for asylum seekers who cross into the Six Counties or from the 26 Counties and find themselves in a bureaucratic nightmare in which many do not understand but has very serious implications for their cases
- » The responsibility for asylum seekers and refugees should be devolved to the Assembly
- » The detention of immigration detainees at Maghaberry Prison is a contravention of human rights laid down by the Geneva Convention and is tantamount to internment. Sinn Féin believes this practice should stop immediately
- » Sinn Féin believes resources should be made available for voluntary and community organisations working with asylum seekers and refugees
- » A co-ordinated all-Ireland approach supported by the all-Ireland bodies would ensure that services meet the needs of asylum seekers in the most appropriate way
- » All asylum seekers should receive legal representation and legal aid should extend to appeal cases. Resources should be made available to speed up cases
- » Sinn Féin believes that asylum seekers should be allowed to work while their cases are being heard. Currently, asylum seekers survive on 70 per cent of income support for indefinite periods of time. Many of these people have to report to immigration services at Belfast International Airport on a weekly basis; the cost of transport creates even further poverty

TRAVELLER COMMUNITY

- » Sinn Féin believes that the Citizen Traveller Campaign piloted in the 26 Counties should be revived and extended to the Six Counties to work towards eliminating the discrimination and abuse of this indigenous minority community
- » We welcome the transfer of responsibility for Traveller accommodation from local councils to the Housing Executive. This must be implemented speedily and fully resourced financially
- » Sinn Féin believes there should be no further delay in implementing the recommendations of the Promoting Social Inclusion Working Group on Travellers
- » A 'Good Practice Guide' should be developed and implemented on the provision of health and social care for Travellers. All staff should be trained to ensure Travellers receive the care and treatment everyone is entitled
- » An all-Ireland strategy should be established to develop and ensure that Traveller children, particularly those who are nomadic, gain access to education. Resources should be made available for Travellers and Traveller support groups to develop alternative education programmes

IRISH LANGUAGE

The Irish language is a central component of our culture, which belongs to all of us who live on this island irrespective of creed or political outlook. It enriches all our lives. This is why Sinn Féin believes strongly in the need to protect and promote the Irish language. Our policy is aimed at creating a bilingual society at every level. Our objective is to allow the people to reclaim their language. This document sets out practical ways of doing this across a number of key areas - legislation, broadcasting and youth and social provision, Legislation Sinn Féin believes that the Irish language in the 6 counties needs strong legislative protection in line with that in the 26 Counties.

Sinn Féin proposes:

- » The introduction of an Irish Language Bill for the north which will give Irish speakers at least the same rights as those on the rest of island
- » Strengthening and enactment of the clauses chosen by the British Government in part III of the European Charter for Regional and Minority languages
- » The rights of the Irish language speakers to be recognised, protected and promoted in both the proposed Human Rights Bill and the Single Equality Bill
- » A Commissioner for the Irish language in the north

BROADCASTING

Sinn Féin is demanding:

- » Establishment of an Irish language television channel and at least one Irish language radio station within five years
- » Proper resourcing for the Irish language film and television production fund
- » The amendment of the British Communications Act to give a formal recognition to Irish
- » Speedy delivery on the promises to make TG4 readily accessible in all areas of the north

IRISH LANGUAGE YOUTH AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

Sinn Féin believes that suitable and sufficient funding must be made available to encourage the development and creation of services for young people in Irish.

Sinn Féin are proposing:

- » Funding aimed at the creation of computer programmes and computer based activities in Irish
- » Involvement of young people in playing and recording modern and traditional music in Irish
- » Creation of films, television and radio programmes in Irish
- » Funding of Irish language dramas
- » Publication of books and magazines in Irish
- » Initiatives aimed at increasing the involvement of young people in social activities in the Irish language.
- » Initiatives to develop Gaelic games on a par with the initiative for the promotion of soccer.
- » An integrated policy aimed at meeting the needs of the younger members of the Irish language community including the provision of training and vocational studies through the medium of the Irish language.



EDUCATION; A IRISH LANGUAGE COLLEGE OF HIGHER AND FURTHER EDUCATION

Continuing the progress already made in the Irish medium education sector and building on the work of Martin McGuinness as Minister of Education. Sinn Féin are proposing:

- » Development of an all embracing programme of language classes as an integral part of a curriculum
- » Increased access to Irish language courses from pre-primary right through higher and further education levels
- » Extra provision for the pre-school sector
- » A focused approach, involving both the education and health departments, to provide special needs education in the Irish medium sector
- » A third level Irish language college must be established which will develop and deliver a range of courses through the medium of Irish, including degree and post graduate courses and qualifications.

TACKLING THE HOUSING CRISIS

There is a crisis within the housing sector. There is not enough social housing being built to meet demand, waiting lists are growing and within rural communities there is a growing problem in relation to the unfitness of housing.

Sinn Féin believes that access to affordable decent housing is a basic human right. But, unless there is a radical rethink about meeting the demand for social housing, there will continue to be increases in homelessness and increased pressure on Housing Executive waiting lists. And since the Housing Executive was stripped of the power to build and supply social housing in 1999, the situation has deteriorated.

Sinn Féin believes that 70,000 new social homes need to be built by the year 2025. Meeting these targets requires a new approach. We believe that the use of housing associations, which have consistently failed to meet their supply targets, is an abdication of responsibility and a back-door route to the privatisation of responsibility for the supply social housing.

In campaigning on the issue Sinn Féin has:

- » Called for the Department of Social Development to be stripped of housing power because it has failed to deliver an effective social house-building programme
- » Led the demand for fundamental changes in the provision of social housing.
- » Argued for the Housing Executive to be allowed to take the lead in the build and supply of social housing
- » Questioned the role of housing associations as the main suppliers of social housing when it is clear that they are failing to meet targets for the supply of social housing and are not open to local democratic scrutiny
- » Called for a review of the housing selection scheme, which has condemned many people to lengthy waits in hostels and on waiting lists without any hope of being housed.

Sinn Féin also wants changes to the way private landlords operate. We want to see:

- » The registration of all private landlords and enforceable penalties for non-registration
- » The establishment of a proper framework on the rights and responsibilities of both landlords and tenants
- » Stronger legislation to deal with unscrupulous landlords who charge inflated rents for rundown homes.

HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

Housing Executive figures for Belfast show that in the allocation of housing, nationalists are under-allocated by 16% while unionists are over-allocated by 21%. Across the North this differential of nationalist under-representation in housing allocation is repeated with allocation to unionists of Housing Executive homes showing an over-representation of 7% compared to an under-representation of 5% for nationalists. These figures point to a very significant 'waiting list' differential that is unacceptable. There is a significant and disproportionate housing need within the nationalist community that is not being addressed.



PLANNING

Proposals in the Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan and the plans for other areas drastically underestimate housing need. Sinn Féin objected to housing growth indicators published by the Department of Regional Development because they would create a huge shortfall in housing supply, particularly west of the Bann. While the figures have been revised upwards they remain woefully inadequate to ensure the continued viability of rural areas. Sinn Féin is continuing to campaign against all forms of housing discrimination, including this attempt to drive young people out of the countryside.

Sinn Féin believes that a complete overhaul of the planning service is required because:

- » It is unable to effectively deal with today's planning issues
- » It is undemocratic in its make-up
- » Local government must have a greater role in community planning

HOMELESSNESS

The failure to implement a strategy to tackle the problem of homelessness has meant that the situation is getting worse. There is an urgent need for appropriate transitional housing and hostel accommodation, including hostels for young people with on-site specific support services. There is also a need for a review of the housing points system and allocation of housing.

Sinn Féin is calling for:

- » Increased funding for the 'Supporting People' initiative
- » Development of a statutory multi-agency approach to tackle housing poverty and homelessness that is preventative, innovative and flexible
- » The creation of preventative, caring, integrated community-based support mechanisms to support and reintegrate homeless people, particularly those who are periodically or persistently homeless
- » Supportive training and education for people who are homeless
- » Transparent and accountable procedures for assessment of homelessness

Sinn Féin priorities for 2005 -2010 include:

- » An affordable housing policy
- » The extension of the house sales scheme and the reversal of the cuts in incentives to buy
- » Regulations to limit the density of houses of multiple occupations in urban residential areas
- » The need for major housing developments to be open to democratic and community scrutiny to ensure they adhere to a sustainable community model
- » Legislation to ensure that sustainable development clauses are incorporated in future developments
- » The repopulation of inner cities and town centres as a way of tackling the serious problem of housing, especially amongst young people (eg: residents' plans for mini sustainable villages in Belfast city centre)
- » Tackling the growing problem of inflated house prices across the North, and subsidies for first-time buyers to allow them to compete fairly
- » Addressing the increasing level of mortgage defaults especially amongst the young

REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For Sinn Féin there are three main aspects to regional development: economic, social and environmental. Through policies dealing with transport infrastructure, public services and energy we are able to promote economic activity and enhance people's quality of life while protecting our environment and natural heritage.

Sinn Féin is leading the way in:

- » Promoting regional development on an all-Ireland basis in the Six Counties, the 26 Counties and through our MEPs in the European Union's Regional Development Committee
- » Ensuring that the 26-County 'National Development Plan' and the Six-County 'Shaping our Future' development plan are integrated and implemented together
- » Opposing water charges and the privatisation agenda being pursued by direct rule ministers
- » Working for the redevelopment of 'brown field' sites, including the Long Kesh regeneration programme and the proposed redevelopment plans for key strategic sites in Derry and elsewhere
- » Supporting community-based public transport systems with a particular emphasis on providing public transport for those with disabilities and the many who face barriers to mobility, in urban and rural settings
- » Bringing forward plans for integrated regional development in the Border Corridors
- » Promoting the redistribution of economic activity throughout the country and, in cases, away from the major metropolitan areas or towards areas of high social need
- » Opposing the misdirected Department of Regional Development (DRD) 'Regional Transportation Strategy'

ENDING INEQUALITY

The DRD's 'Shaping our Future' and the 'Regional Transportation Strategy' have failed to address social exclusion and inequality. Furthermore, the regional development plans produced were originally blind to the presence of the 26 Counties. Sinn Féin has highlighted and begun to redress this situation.

Regional development and spatial planning has a fundamental contribution to make to the equality agenda as outlined in the Good Friday Agreement and provide a basis for tackling spatial/geographic inequalities in employment opportunities.

We need better regional infrastructure to increase economic activity in areas of high unemployment such as Strabane, Derry, West Belfast, Mid-Ulster and elsewhere.

Sinn Féin will challenge the role of the Strategic Investment Board with its limited remit to deliver on regional disparities.

With an increased mandate and the election of two MEPs, Sinn Féin will continue to work endlessly towards extending the Structural Funds programmes under Peace II. The Community initiatives have proved vital in delivering key Community infrastructures throughout Ireland, North and South.



SINN FÉIN'S PRIORITIES FOR 2005–2010

TRANSPORT

We need to recognise that building a sustainable transport infrastructure for Ireland is not about a choice between roads, rail, sea and airport but the complementary development of them all. Sustainable economic growth requires investment in all aspects of infrastructure in order to attract inward investment and increased economic activity.

Sinn Féin's transport priorities for 2005 -2010 include:

- » Harmonising transport policy across the island, including the co-ordination of roads agencies, roads development strategies, traffic signage and notation
- » An overhaul of the 'Regional Transportation Strategy' which proposes to leave Fermanagh, Tyrone and South Armagh with little or no public transport and has abandoned the North-West Transportation Strategy
- » Prioritising investment in the key transport corridors of Larne-Belfast-Newry-Dublin-Waterford; Belfast-Derry; Waterford-Cork-Limerick-Galway-Sligo-Letterkenny-Derry; Derry-Dublin; Galway/Sligo-Dublin; Limerick/Cork- Dublin
- » Enhancing the northern regional transport routes of Coleraine-Cookstown-Dungannon-Armagh; Dungannon-Aughnacloy-Monaghan;Cookstown-Omagh-Donegal-Sligo-Enniskillen-Cavan

Sinn Féin is opposed to Belfast Metropolitan Area Plan (BMAP) proposals to widen existing road infrastructure within the Inner City, including the widening of the M2, expansion of the Westlink and widening of the A2.

Sinn Féin believes that a priority must be attached to a phased programme to establish a dual carriageway/motorway from Derry to Belfast and on the Derry-Dublin Road.

The development of Enniskillen as a gateway town into the West will need infrastructure, including road quality to link Sligo, Galway and the West, whilst also linking Fermanagh via the A4 route to Belfast.

TRANSPORT TAXATION

Sinn Féin will work for the harmonisation of Irish fuel taxes to prevent the cycle of boom and bust on either side of the border associated with filling stations. Sinn Féin wants the control of key elements of taxation devolved to the Six-County Assembly.

INVESTING IN PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Sinn Féin is campaigning for:

- » Creation of a unitary Irish rail system
- » Investment in the existing rail network and bringing forward imaginative additions to the existing infrastructure, such as rail terminals at the International Airport (Aldergrove), Derry Airport and Belfast and Derry Harbours (Freight), all of which are close to the existing main lines
- » The maintenance and expansion of the railway system, including the lines to Larne, Derry and Portrush which remain under threat. The current single-track railway provision is inadequate and requires major capital investment if any attempt to promote the railway as a source of public transport is to be successful. We will continue to support the integration of bus and rail timetables.

- » The installation of Quality Bus Corridors on the main arterial routes in Belfast. We will initiate similar routes in Derry and other urban centres
- » Support for community-based public transport systems such as the 'Black Taxis' in Belfast and Derry
- » Support community-based rural flexible transport initiatives aimed at marginalised groups and isolated town lands. However, we will continue to redress the unfair excess mileage surcharge imposed on such rural transport providers as Foyle Connect and Bridge the Gap

WATER AND DRAINAGE

Immediate investment in our dilapidated water and sewage infrastructure, which is in breach of various European guidelines and directives, is urgently needed. Sinn Féin is vigorously opposed to the introduction of water rates, which are a form of double taxation, to pay for this investment. We call for adequate central funding to redress the decades of under-investment in this service.

The drainage infrastructure, much of which dates from the Industrial Revolution, requires modernisation and a full analysis of existing provision should be undertaken.

Government attempts to marry the issue of providing clean drinking water and paying for the privilege are misleading. This ignores the reality that communities have been funding the water and sewerage infrastructure through domestic rate payments for the past 40 years.

We will fight to preserve the Water Service as a properly resourced public utility. We will also oppose any attempts to introduce redundancies in the service.

Sinn Féin also supports the 'Polluter Pays' principle - consumers should not pay to clean up water polluted by others.

Sinn Féin calls for adequate funding to promote systems which involve the recycling of rain and 'grey' water (water that has been collected or already used for some other purpose).

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

There is an urgent need for greater investment in information technologies that are now the cornerstone of modern economies. Public sector involvement is essential to ensure equity in how these communication resources are developed and rolled out. Sinn Féin supports:

- » Rolling out new cable infrastructure throughout the island, not just to larger towns and cities but in rural communities as well. It is our aim to have Ireland a fully designated IB zone by 2010
- » Funding the deployment of information technology resources to schools
- » Providing training to end the literacy problems that prevent many people from having the skills in information technology systems necessary for the modern workplace
- » Providing community access to information technologies.

'BROWN FIELD' SITES

Sinn Féin has been at the forefront in the campaigns to redevelop 'brown field' sites (former industrial sites) for economic and social benefit in areas of social need. These include the former Long Kesh regeneration programme and the proposed redevelopment plans for key strategic sites in Derry and elsewhere. The double benefit of creating economic activity and cleaning contaminated sites is something that should be encouraged.



DEVELOPMENT CONTROL

The full planning of community infrastructure and diversity of uses needs to be monitored to prevent the situation whereby vast areas of the city centre have only commercial development and elsewhere we have over-intensity of residential development with inadequate economic and social infrastructure.

Local environmental impact of development needs to be carefully considered and it is essential that local consultations take place.

Economic impact studies should be undertaken in relation to new multinational retail proposals in order to assess potential effects on the existing market, in particular on local indigenous and community-based commercial outlets.

Sinn Féin supports the integration of housing types rather than single-type developments.

In scenic coastal areas and other small towns, new private and exclusive developments have priced local people out of the housing market. We will initiate legislation to ensure a better mix of development so as to respond to all local needs and not solely developers' profits.

All aspects of social, economic, recreational, environmental and cultural activities and development opportunities should be assessed and agreed from the outset in all areas of new large-scale developments. This should not be done in the zoned approach (which has led to the problems associated with Craigavon, etc). but should be local, defined and small-scale. These types of integrated community 'villages' will better serve the requirements of society at large.

SINN FÉIN'S VISION FOR A JUST ECONOMY

Sinn Féin wants to build an all-Ireland economy where everyone can have a dignified and productive working life, a fair income and a good quality of life.

We want to see the transformation of the war economy in the North of Ireland and the elimination of the economic distortions created by conflict, partition, under-investment and policies of discrimination.

We want to see the positive redistribution of resources to eradicate economic marginalisation and social exclusion by investing in the health service, education, housing, infrastructure, pensions and child welfare.

Securing economic development and facilitating business growth is a vital priority.

An all-Ireland economic growth and development strategy is needed to tackle declining manufacturing industries and agriculture and to foster local industry.

A human-rights-based economy must realise productive and well-remunerated employment for all. Economic strategic planning to address economic inactivity rates and the steady collapse of manufacturing capacity in the Six Counties are priorities for Sinn Féin.

Infrastructure and investment must be based on the guarantee of universal access, whether it is in energy, roads, public transport, information and telecommunications, or social, health and educational resources and facilities.

MAKING THE ALL-IRELAND ECONOMY A REALITY

Sinn Féin will continue to promote economic development in an all-Ireland context. We support:

- » The development of an all-Ireland economy with one tax regime, one currency and economic strategies that benefit the island as a whole, particularly Small-Medium Enterprises and local industry;
- » The expansion of the number of areas of co-operation under the all-Ireland Ministerial Council with all-Ireland bodies created for agriculture, education, health, energy, the social economy, transport and telecommunications to harmonise policy development and decision-making;
- » All-Ireland infrastructural development strategies, particularly in roads, rail, energy and telecommunications;
- » One all-Ireland agency to deal with all the indigenous businesses in Ireland. A single development agency will end financially wasteful separate and competing development strategies;
- » The integration of the workings of DETI and DETE to harmonise employment and investment strategies.
- » Build on the work at IntertradeIreland, a key all-Ireland Implementation Body



CHALLENGING FAILED ECONOMIC STRATEGIES

Despite many advances in recent years, serious structural weaknesses and significant deprivation continue.

Persistent unemployment 'black-spots' remain. Headline figures of increasing employment mask increasing poverty levels in the Six Counties. More than half a million people in the Six Counties remain economically inactive. Full-time employment levels have actually fallen while the part-time female sector has increased. This is traditionally a low-wage sector. Thus the Six-County economy is heavily dependent on the low-wage economy and public sector employment. Employment in the manufacturing sector is less than 100,000.

Sinn Féin wants:

- » The development of a more diverse economic base with particular emphasis on indigenous industry and SMEs and the social economy;
- » Research and development support for SMEs and community enterprise businesses;
- » Inward investment policies combined with social responsibility obligations to ensure that large-scale industries and global companies help drive the economy as a whole and develop infrastructure;
- » The promotion of all-Ireland sectoral clustering to ensure benefits arising from an all-Ireland scale are fully exploited;
- » The development of mutually beneficial bilateral economic ties with developing countries.

A GENUINE PEACE DIVIDEND

The total budget for maintaining Britain's war machine in Ireland is approximately £1.4 billion per annum. Sinn Féin is calling for these resources earmarked for expenditure on military installations and on so-called security operations by the British Army and the PSNI to be transferred for special job creation measures in areas of high unemployment, for supporting the social economy and in rebuilding communities damaged by years of conflict.

Sinn Féin is calling for a new mechanism for calculating the Block Grant that takes these factors into account and ensures the allocation of funding on the basis of need and a fairer distribution of resources.

GREATER ECONOMIC SOVEREIGNTY

Sinn Féin wants to see the introduction of an unrestricted borrowing facility as opposed to the Reform and Reinvestment Initiative (RRI). The RRI is no substitute for a peace dividend as it must be repaid through rates increases and the imposition of water charges, neither of which deal with the core problem of the Barnett Formula, which is used for calculating the Block Grant, or the legacy of under-investment in the Six Counties.

Sinn Féin supports the introduction of tax varying powers within the Six Counties to develop and target tax incentives towards areas of high unemployment, encouraging small businesses and other specific sectors such as social economy initiatives.

Sinn Féin calls for the harmonisation of tax rates across Ireland at a progressive level adequate to sustain equity and enforcement to ensure compliance by everyone.

Sinn Féin supports greater control over the setting of our objectives and goals for public service expenditure and investment

PRIVATISATION AND PRIVATE FINANCE INITIATIVES

PFI/PPP are not a good deal, either financially or in terms of public ownership and control of public assets.

The privatisation agenda within the Six Counties has its origins with an Executive, where Sinn Féin was a minority and which failed to learn the lessons of being locked into poor contracts as witnessed by the high energy costs resulting from the privatisation of electricity.

Sinn Féin consistently argued, both within and outside the Executive, that all options for public finance be fully considered. While there was agreement in principle, the Executive refused to adopt this policy in practice. Sinn Féin is calling for:-

- An adequately financed peace dividend, tax varying powers, economic sovereignty, unrestricted borrowing and other mechanisms to raise money for investment expenditure to negate the wholesale reliance on private finance and the consequential privatisation agenda.

REBALANCING ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

There is a significant East-West prosperity gap within the Six Counties that is replicated on the wider all-Ireland basis. There is an imperative to rebalance economic development and distribute economic opportunities and resources fairly.

Sinn Féin supports the development of an integrated regional development strategy to redress the legacy of neglect and under-investment that has left the North-West an economically neglected and peripheral region of Ireland.

SINN FÉIN'S PRIORITIES

- » Greater investment in and expert guidance for small business ideas at the embryonic stage. With the right guidance and support small businesses could, through joint ventures develop, produce and market products outside Ireland
- » Long-term support for indigenous enterprises focused on developing infrastructure and enhancing the skills and technological capacity of our labour force
- » Government support for the social economy, including local businesses and micro enterprises
- » Sinn Féin will make grants and assistance to businesses conditional on the acceptance of the right to trade union membership and representation
- » All grants should be recoverable where businesses close operations in Ireland inappropriately
- » A commitment to retraining and education and support for business start-ups in areas hit by job losses

INSURANCE COSTS

High insurance costs are damaging SMEs. In some cases, businesses are unable to reinsure and there are gaps appearing in the ability to secure public liability cover. These issues need to be urgently addressed. If the insurance industry is unable to self regulate then there must be regulation introduced with strong guidelines on premiums policy and monitoring of increases. Sinn Féin calls for research into the viability of a state-run insurance cover.



THE RATES REVIEW

The current system of valuations is outdated and the rates system leads to an inequitable distribution of rates payments that impact disproportionately on areas where deprivation levels are highest. The rating system needs to be reformed. However, we have grave concerns about the manner in which the British Government is going about these reforms.

Any review of the rating system must be based on ability to pay. The system of reliefs being proposed is totally inadequate.

The 25% blanket relief for people with a disability that is being considered is not sufficient. Every disabled person has different needs, some greater than others. The proposed 25% rate relief is an absolute minimum.

The proposed rate relief scheme for those just above the housing benefit threshold is to be welcomed. However, Sinn Féin has real concerns on how this is to be funded. Current plans to fund this subsidy are to raise this from other ratepayers. We believe that such a policy has the potential to be divisive. If it is felt that a certain group is in need of rate relief, then that relief should be centrally funded.

Sinn Féin does not consider that it is acceptable to leave it to a possible future executive to provide for a deferment for owner-occupiers of pensionable age. Any rate relief scheme should be considered and implemented now. Members of our society of pensions age are the most vulnerable, the most likely to live in fuel poverty and therefore should be given the utmost priority in these considerations.

No consideration has been given in current proposals to household size and to the consumption of services.

Any new system established must be transparent and understandable to ensure that the public are aware of what they are paying for and to whom. This should be clearly defined on the new rates bill. Consumers should be made aware of exactly what their rates payment is funding and therefore they will feel more able to challenge any payments based on, where applicable, the non-or-under provision of these services.

It is not acceptable that rural areas are once again going to be discriminated against with rural homeowners paying higher levels of rates.

In combination with attempts to introduce water rates, we suspect the rates review is part of a strategy by the direct rule administration to force the people of the Six Counties to pay for the historic lack of investment by British administrations through radically increasing the amount of regressive taxation that people will have to pay. This extra burden on taxation is not acceptable.

INDUSTRIAL DE-RATING AND VACANT PROPERTY RATING

Ending industrial de-rating and the introduction of vacant property rating for non-domestic property must include a proper reflection of how best we can support our local businesses and their vital role in the local economy. The objective should not be to wipe out support for our local manufacturing base or to introduce taxation mechanisms that mirror those that have existed in England and Wales. The removal of industrial de-rating should create opportunities to bring forward proposals for a relief scheme for all small businesses and not just those concerned with manufacturing.

SINN FÉIN AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

The European Union is a more dominant force than ever in the political, economic and social life of Ireland. Sinn Féin has a policy of critical but constructive engagement with the EU. This means we decide to support or oppose the many and complex developments in the EU each on its own merits.

We have supported EU and other Europe-wide measures that promote and enhance human rights, equality and the all-Ireland agenda - measures which are an example of the EU at its best, promoting a guarantee of a basic level of rights protection in all member states. But Sinn Féin has also never been afraid to stand up against EU measures damaging to Irish interests.

We want to build a Europe of Equals -- a true partnership of equal sovereign states, co-operating in social and economic development in Europe and beyond. We want an EU that promotes peace, demilitarisation and nuclear disarmament and the just resolution of conflicts under the leadership of a reformed, renewed and democratised United Nations. Ultimately, we want a future united Ireland to take an active, leading role in such a reformed EU.

DEMOCRACY AND THE EU

Nearly three quarters of all legislation affecting people in Ireland has its origins in the EU. Much of this is drafted and agreed with little or no public involvement from people here. The institutional structures of the European Union and Westminster do not provide for adequate involvement local views and needs at every stage of the legislative process.

The election of two Sinn Féin MEPs means that there is now a real all-Ireland voice in the European Parliament, providing genuine and effective input to that body. However, MEPs on their own are not enough. We need a greater level of political and institutional engagement with the EU at all levels to ensure that the needs and views of people here are heard and incorporated into the national and local impact of EU decisions.

In the absence of any Assembly structure to scrutinise the impact of EU directives on the North of Ireland this gap is all the greater.

In order for local peoples views to count when it comes to EU decision Sinn Féin advocates:

- » The creation of a Minister for Europe in any future Assembly
- » The mainstreaming of EU scrutiny into all Assembly committees
- » An expansion of the all-Ireland Ministerial Council to include the respective Ministries for Europe to ensure effective all-Ireland co-ordination on EU policy matters
- » The National Forum on Europe to have a 32-country remit, representation and programme of activity
- » Standing invitations to Six-County MEPs to the Oireachtas European Affairs Committee
- » The opening of a European Parliamentary Office in Belfast
- » The creation of an all party ad hoc working group on European Affairs in lieu of the restoration of the Assembly