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**UNITED IRELAND**

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# The first First Minister for All

## A Letter from Ireland

a Chara,

It always amazes me how the new becomes the normal. This week marked one year since the institutions of the Good Friday Agreement were re-established, and Sinn Féin Vice President Michelle O'Neill became First Minister.

I remember watching the Assembly session on TV that day. I knew what was due to happen, but nonetheless found it incredibly emotional as Michelle spoke about being the First Minister for All.

Here was a Sinn Féin leader taking on the role of leading a parliament at Stormont. Up until that day, the position had been held by a Pro-British Unionist. The position had been held by one community to exclusively represent that one community. We now had a dedicated Irish Republican vowing to represent all the people. Michelle embodied the Irish Republican ideals of anti-sectarianism and equality. I remember talking with a group of unionists and one of them candidly said that he feared that Irish Republicans in power would do to unionists what unionists in power had done to Irish Republicans. I assured him that we had no interest in retribution, exclusion, or repeating the mistakes of the past.

Since then Michelle has turned the rhetoric of that day into action. She has acted to respect and honor many identities that make up society. An Irish Republican being the First Minister is no longer a news story, and the past abuse of power remains in the past.

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in the North. On the week marking the anniversary of the re-establishment of the institutions, Hilary Benn, the British Secretary of State, thought it would be a good time to remind the locals that they have to live within their designated budget and be prepared to make “the hard decisions”.

I always bristle when a Government Minister talks about making hard decisions as the cost of those decisions is normally felt by the poorest in society. Ministers remain with health salaries, perks, and pensions. No Minister has ever made a hard decision that left them hungry.

The North is dealing with years of underfunding and the economic impact of partition. At the time of partition, the North was a net contributor to the British economy. Within ten years it would require a subsidy, and so it has remained since. Partition never did and never will make economic sense.

The truth is that post-Brexit, the British economy is failing. The people in the North voted against Brexit. Neither Hilary Benn nor anyone in his government in Westminster has a single vote in the North of Ireland. Yet this government claims to speak on behalf of the people and control the budget.

This week the British again demonstrated the economic and democratic deficit of partition. Hilary Benn represents the failings of the past and the costs of partition and union with Britain.

Michelle O’Neill, by her actions, demonstrates that a united Ireland will be a home for all. A new and united Ireland is the hands of the people.

Have a great weekend.

Is mise,

Ciarán

**Ciarán Quinn is the Sinn Féin Representative to North America**

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## **British Army killing of 4 IRA men in Clonoe in 1992 ruled “not justified” by**

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Relatives for Justice, a nonprofit established in 1991 by relatives of people killed in the conflict, is an Irish based human rights NGO providing holistic support services to the bereaved and injured of the conflict. On February 6, they released a statement following a High Court ruling that the British military was unjustified in their use of lethal force when they killed Kevin Barry O'Donnell, 21, Sean O'Farrell, 23, Peter Clancy, 19, and Daniel Vincent, 20 – were shot and killed on 16 February 1992 at St Patrick's Church in Clonoe, Co Tyrone.

Their statement reads in full: "Next week marks the 33rd anniversary of the shooting dead of the four young men in Clonoe County Tyrone. Since that date the British state has covered up the ambush and murders.

"These men were deliberately killed, the rule of law was disregarded, and the British state lied. The families have always known that and have suffered 33 years of vilification as they have sought the simple remedy of law. They fought for a human rights compliant inquest while the state vehemently resisted that. They have seen family members pass away during this time, never seeing the truth established.

"Today Justice Humphries delivered a damning judgment which found that the killings were not justified, unreasonable and unnecessary. In an emotional two hours, these extraordinary families were finally vindicated.

"The British state wrote in their own communiques in 1992 that they viewed these extra-judicial executions as "excellent".

"Today that lie has been rewritten in a Belfast Court. The killings were not justified. They never were.

"The British state planned and executed these men, including shooting them dead while they fled or lay incapacitated. There was no intent to arrest. The intent was always to kill.

"As Marian Vincent, sister of Patrick, said, "Dignity is Restored" to the families. This is exactly why the Legacy Act was introduced. Why the question of human rights compliant inquests remains resisted by the state. The British state wants to get away with murder. This is a lengthy finding with far-reaching consequences, which the families will take their time to consider with their legal teams and RFJ. Today these

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justified.”



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## Irish Diaspora continue to organize around Irish Unity with events in New York and DC

Last week, hundreds of people registered and attended a series of events featuring John Finucane, MP in Washington, DC, New York City, and Rockland County, New York.

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latest in the Irish Unity People's Assemblies: Diaspora series. While in New York, he also addressed the New York City Bar association, delivering an update on the latest in the public inquiry into his father's murder to a sold-out room, full of lawyers, judges, and supporters from all over the New York Area.

These were the 3rd and 4th People's Assembly events hosted in the United States, and after successful events in Cleveland and Columbus Ohio, the events in Washington, DC, and New York again demonstrated that the Irish Diaspora are eager to discuss all of the actors and factors of Irish Unity.

In Washington, we were hosted by the Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA), longtime supporters of the work and goal of Irish Unity. In New York, our event was hosted by the Rockland GAA, the largest GAA club located outside of Ireland.

John Finucane addressed both groups of activists with an update about the current political situation around unity. The recent general election in Ireland resulted in little change in the coalition of parties that make up the government and their commitment to unity has weakened. His address helped bring the work to be done by activists into sharper focus.



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## “Unity is coming – Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael need to proactively engage in the discussion and put plans in place.” – Kathleen Funchion MEP

The new Irish Government was established last week and Sinn Féin MEP Kathleen Funchion has expressed disappointment that the negotiations between Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil, and independent TDs did not take the issue of Irish Unity seriously. She said that the conversation around Irish Unity is an active one, and that any future government must ensure it keeps up.

MEP Funchion said, “The conversation around Irish Unity is taking place across the island of Ireland in both private and public forums. It is disappointing that the programme for government does not take this into account.

“The new government should take two very practical steps to ensure it keeps up with the discussion on Irish reunification. In the first instance, the new government should

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“These are two very basic and practical steps that can help ensure the necessary planning and preparations are put in place to ensure that any future referendum on Irish Reunification is a fact based campaign, void of any misinformation. As a Sinn Féin MEP, I will continue to work with EU officials and other MEPs to ensure that the European Union is prepared to assist in the transition from partition to Unity.”

## First Commission on Future of Ireland event in Canada scheduled for Saturday, March 15 in Montreal



### MONTREAL



Presented by



#### Leading members of Montreal Irish community

- Dr. Donal Gill - Assistant Professor of Canadian Politics at Concordia University
- Dr. Emer O'Toole - Assistant Professor School of Irish Studies, Concordia
- Eoin Ó hÓgáin - founding partner at Power Sustainable, Gaeilgeoir
- Neal Cunningham - Director of Investments at Innergex, Montreal Shamrocks GAC

#### Prominent Sinn Féin Speaker

Saturday March 15  
14h - 16h  
Concordia University Hall  
Building (H12.20)  
1455 De Maisonneuve West

Register to attend on  
Eventbrite using QR Code  
or at <https://bit.ly/4hDGSD3>



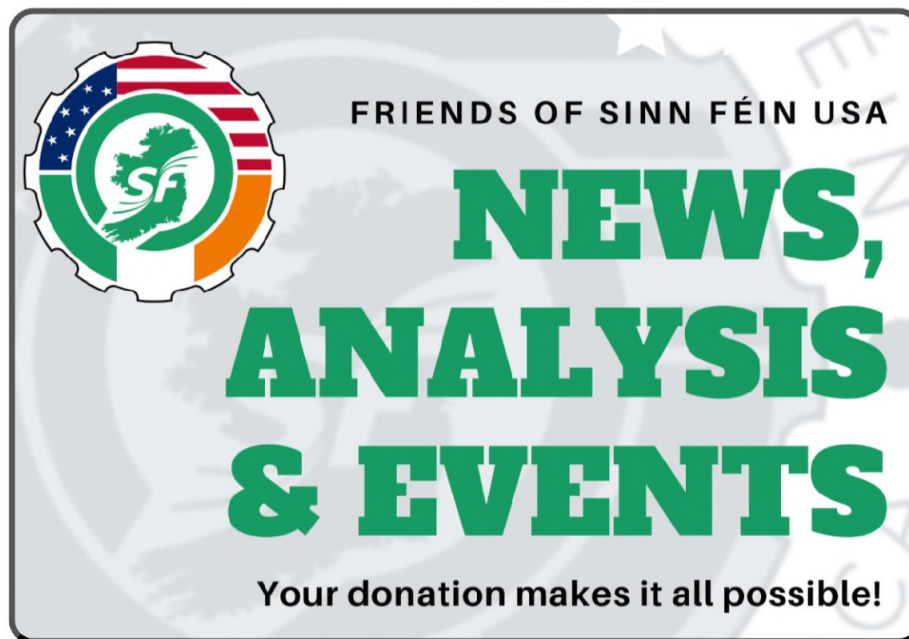
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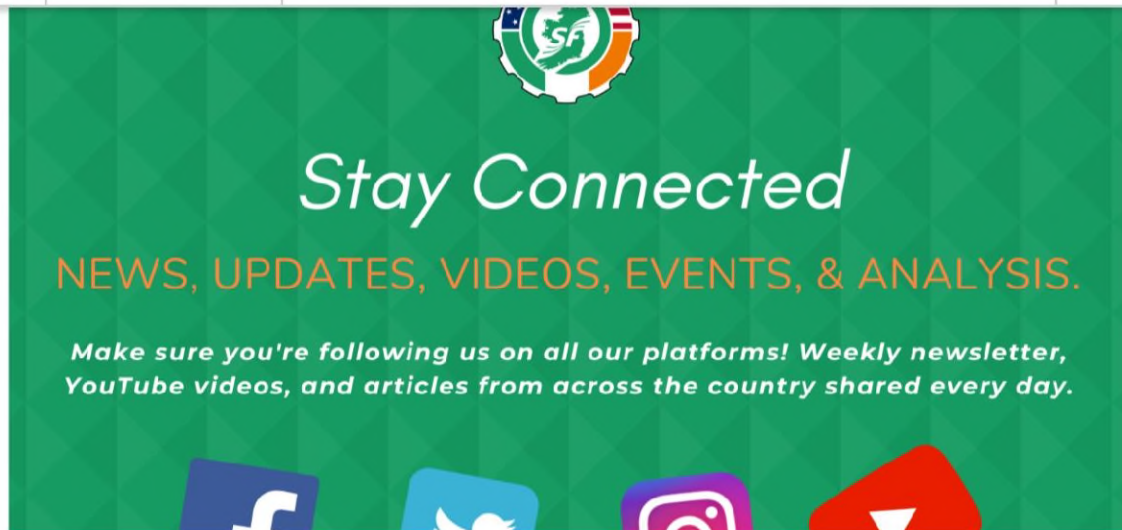
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## Hilary Benn's comments show a blatant disregard for communities in the North

Sinn Féin Economy Minister Caoimhe Archibald has criticised comments made by the UK's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Hilary Benn on his unannounced visit to Ulster University in Belfast this week.

While speaking at the University, Hilary Benn said, "It is only right that the Executive makes decisions about its own spending and revenue raising priorities.

"However, it must take responsibility for balancing its budget and living within its means, just as all other governments must."

Speaking on this, Minister Archibald said, "Hilary Benn's comments demonstrate a blatant disregard for communities here and for our democratically elected political institutions.

"Neither Mr. Benn nor his government have any democratic mandate here.

"Rather than advocating for the people of the north of Ireland, as his title suggests he should, he has become an apologist for a Tory austerity agenda which his own government has now adopted and which has stripped our public services to the bone.

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“In contrast, Executive Ministers are engaged every single day making decisions to represent and address the interests and needs of our people. We know the issues because we live here and in our communities.

“Mr. Benn’s government have shamefully cut the winter fuel payment for older people. It has introduced plans to increase tax on family farms and is increasing taxes which will damage or destroy small businesses.

“Mr. Benn’s Party committed to ‘repealing and replacing’ the Legacy Act but we continue to see the state block and deny families accessing truth and justice.

“In the case of Sean Brown, Mr. Benn is prolonging the grief of the Brown family by dragging them back through the courts in an attempt to conceal the criminality of the British state.

“Mr. Benn’s actions, and the actions of his government, are yet another compelling argument for constitutional change.”



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