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UNITED STATES
UNITED IRELAND

Between Past and Future

A letter from Ireland

a Chara,

We are always living at the point at which the past and future converge. This week, I was in Washington with Sinn Féin President Mary Lou McDonald to meet with political leaders, members of the Irish American Community, and labour leaders. The conversations were focused on the future and Irish Unity.

Twenty years ago, this week, a former political prisoner, Seanna Walsh, announced the end of the IRA military campaign. While the organisation had been on a ceasefire for ten years, the announcement made headlines across the world.

I was working for Sinn Féin in our Head Office in Dublin. My memory of the day was a frantic round of party meetings and briefings.

The IRA statement and accompanying video of Seanna marked the formal end of conflict, the eventual resolution of demilitarisation and disarmament, and a new chapter in the peace process. Irish unity would only be achieved by peaceful and democratic means as per the Good Friday Agreement.

The only guarantee of success for Irish Republicans was the strength of our argument and the commitment of activists to build support for Unity and Sinn Féin.

Seanna Walsh is now a Sinn Féin Councillor in Belfast. His commitment to Irish Unity remains as resolute as when he entered Long Kesh gaol at the age of 17, when he first met his good friend and comrade Bobby Sands.

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Ireland. Research is being conducted, books have been written, and conferences have been hosted. It is a respectful and inclusive discussion about the future.

Twenty years on from that announcement I never envisaged that I would be in the Capitol or meeting the leaders of some of the largest Unions in the US to discuss Ireland and Irish Unity.

Momentum is building, but nothing is inevitable. The British and Irish Governments have acted to block the right to self-determination as agreed on Good Friday.

A right denied is not a right. It is time to plan and prepare for Irish Unity referendums and to allow the people their democratic right to define their future.

As it was twenty years ago, so it is today. We rely on the force of argument and activism to secure and win unity referendums. When we work together, we are unstoppable. Ireland, the US, Canada and supporters across the globe can build a new and united Ireland.

The world we live in today seems more chaotic and dangerous than twenty years ago. The international rules and institutions that safeguard against wars are being undermined. Relationships between nations are deteriorating. Inequality, poverty, and division are on the rise.

Genocide in Gaza is played out on social media, Russia continues to attack Ukraine, and sometimes we feel powerless. One of the lessons of the Irish peace process is that conflicts are man-made and can be resolved.

Much has changed over the past twenty years. The future is ours to define. The work we do today can and will deliver a united Ireland.

Have a great weekend

Is mise,

Ciarán

Ciarán Quinn is the Sinn Féin Representative to North America

Séanna Walsh reflects on delivering historic IRA statement 20 years on

Senior republican Séanna Walsh says the nature of the struggle for a united Ireland has changed and the future promises much more.

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The historic statement, delivered on July 28 2005 in a video address by Séanna Walsh, was broadcast around the world.

Séanna served over 21 years in both the Cages and HBlocks of Long Kesh, and was among the first republicans on the blanket protest after his arrest in 1976.

He was a friend and cellmate of Bobby Sands, Officer Commanding in the HBlocks and first of the hunger strikers to die in 1981.

An event to mark the historic 20th anniversary of the IRA initiative has been organised for Saturday, July 26.

Looking back to 2005, Seánna says he consulted with his family before delivering the historic address.

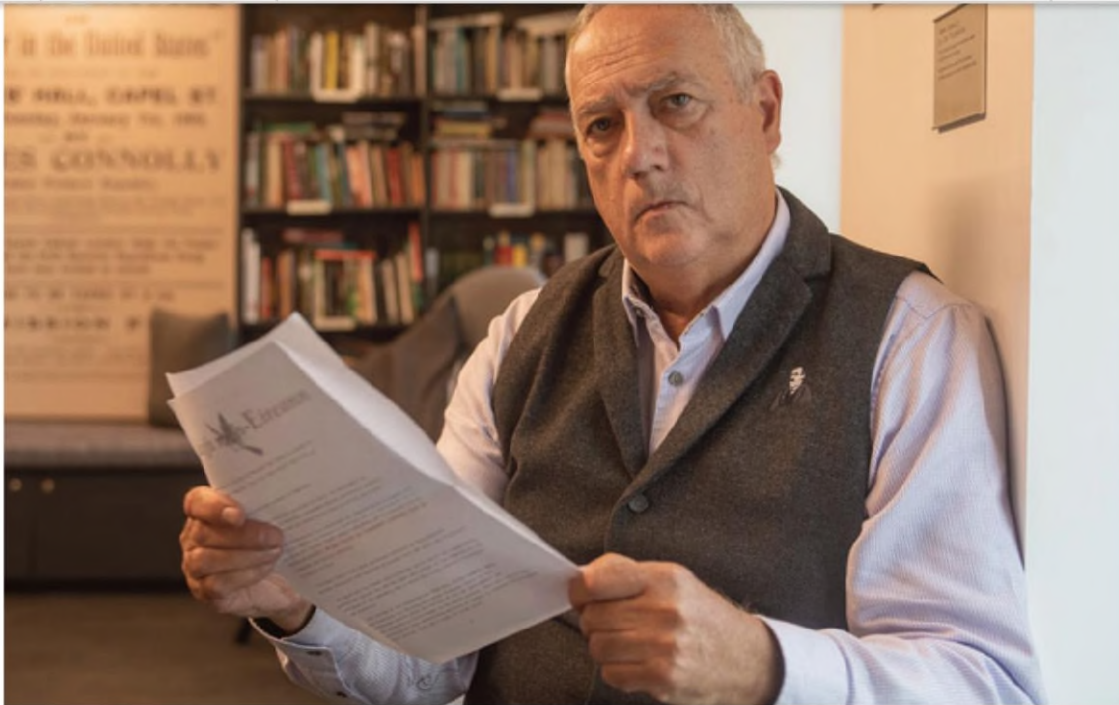
“In 2005, it was one of those periods when there were a few hiccups in the peace process. Unionists had really dug their heels in and there was still so much to be done,” he explained.

“People like myself spent time travelling the length and breadth of Ireland, meeting with the Republican community talking to them and trying to help them and get their head around this whole notion of a peace process and how we expected it to work, how we hoped it would work and what we saw for the future.

“On July 28, 2005, the IRA formally declared an end to its armed campaign.

“For me personally, I was asked to deliver that message....”

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Irish Unity, tariffs and genocide in Gaza raised during Mary Lou McDonald's US trip

Sinn Féin Leader Mary Lou McDonald was in the United States for two days to meet with the US Administration and senior political figures on Capitol Hill, including the Congressional Friends of Ireland group and Representative Rashida Tlaib.

She also met with the Ad hoc committee on the Good Friday Agreement and Trade Union leaders. During the visit, she raised the holding of referendums on Irish unity, US trade tariffs and the unique position of the island of Ireland. She also raised the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Ms. McDonald said, "Last week, the Sinn Féin leadership was in London to brief the Diplomatic Corps and address the Foreign Press Association on the holding of referenda on Irish Unity, the issue of US trade tariffs and the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

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Rashida Tlaib, the first American Palestinian woman to serve in Congress. We also met the Ad Hoc Committee on the Good Friday Agreement and Trade Union leaders. Key among the issues discussed were the holding of referenda on Irish Unity, tariffs and the potential impact on the economy and political process and the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

“We discussed the role that those in the US can play in supporting the holding of referendums on Irish unity, which we believe will happen before the end of this decade. It is important for the Irish government to prepare for these referenda and the opportunities that will arise if we are ready. It would be reckless to continue to ignore what is happening all around them and to be the only group in Ireland not discussing constitutional change. The United States was central to the achievement of Good Friday Agreement and to protecting Ireland’s interests during Brexit and will have an important role to play in the bringing about of referenda so that the people can decide their constitutional future.

“Just as with Brexit, Ireland is in a unique situation in relation to the issue of tariffs, given we still have two jurisdictions on the island – one inside the EU and one outside the EU. We have spent almost a decade dealing with the fallout from the Brexit referendum to protect the peace process, prevent a hard border on the island of Ireland and allow the all-Ireland economy to flourish. These issues are still critical today.

“We raised the ongoing genocide in Gaza. We set out the views of the Irish people and our abhorrence of what is happening to the Palestinian people and the failure of the International community to uphold international law, allowing Israel to act with impunity. We set out the urgent need for a ceasefire and an end to the slaughter of Palestinian people. We also briefed people on the Occupied Territories Bill, which is about stopping trade with illegal occupied territories which are in breach of international law.”

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The visit on 20 June by former Fine Gael Taoiseach Leo Varadkar to west Belfast was a timely reminder that the issue of a new Ireland remains for many the political priority of our time. The packed event in St. Mary's University College was organised by Féile an Phobail and Ireland's Future and it was chaired by the Rev. Karen Sethuraman.

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