

Remarks by
Richard N. Haass
On the Occasion of Receiving the 2013 Tipperary Peace Award
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Good afternoon.

I can now attest the song has it right. It is a long way to Tipperary. It matters not if you measure it by the miles flown or the diplomatic road travelled.

I am humbled to receive the 2013 Tipperary Peace Award. In part this is because of the distinguished men and women who preceded me; in part it is because of the extraordinary individuals who were considered for this year's award. Thank you.

I want to make clear, though, that I would not be here at all if it were not for others. I want to praise the colleagues who worked with me in last year's all-party talks in Northern Ireland— Meghan O'Sullivan, Charles Landow, Lindsay Iversen, Sarah Doolin, and Jeffrey Reinke. They may have been small in number, but they were big in creativity and commitment. I want to salute the many people in Northern Ireland and beyond who wished us well and supported what it was we did and tried to do. And I want to acknowledge my family, who are with me here today, but who did without me for many days last year.

Still, as honored and as happy as I am to be here with you today, I gladly would have elected to forego the award for an agreement, which, as everyone knows, we came close to getting but in the end did not.

It is ironic that you have chosen to honor me, a mediator brought in from outside to facilitate the effort to forge agreement, as one of my messages this afternoon is that mediators are rarely if ever decisive in the search for peace.

Don't get me wrong. Mediators can be important. Think of George Mitchell in Northern Ireland in 1998 and Henry Kissinger after the 1973 Middle East conflict. But many other conflicts have resisted the efforts of numerous talented envoys, including those two gentlemen. Something else is obviously at work here.

Observers also tend to give too much emphasis to the content of an agreement. Obviously, the substance of a pact matters a great deal. But the outlines or even the details of possible agreements tend to be widely known before or soon after negotiations begin. There are only so many ways to divide and share power, territory, or whatever else may be at stake. Rarely does a negotiation fail because of the absence of ideas.

This is true for Northern Ireland. It is no less true for Cyprus, the Middle East, Kashmir, Ukraine, and the myriad disputes that threaten the stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

What is most important to peacemaking – more important than any mediator, more important even than the details of a proposed accord – are local leaders, the principal participants in the process. They must be both willing and able to compromise. They must also be willing and able to stand by an agreement when it is criticized, as all agreements inevitably are. It is this combination of flexibility and steadfastness, of conciliation and conviction, that more than anything else makes a situation ripe for resolution.

What is more, no leader can do it on his or her own. All disputes and the negotiations meant to resolve them involve two or more parties. So what is needed is a set of leaders who are willing and able to enter into and sustain an agreement. This can require that protagonists see one another as partners as much as adversaries, something that means leaving enough on the table so that the person on the other side can defend the advantages of a proposed pact to his or her constituency. It should come as little surprise that the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to two or more people on multiple occasions, including John Hume and David Trimble as well as Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk.

No agreement compares well with some abstract ideal, something that reflects all get and no give. It was Henry Kissinger who recently pointed out that the only reasonable test for a proposed solution to the Ukraine crisis was not absolute satisfaction but balanced dissatisfaction. This truth requires of leaders that they explain to their frustrated supporters why what they see as imperfect or flawed is in fact in their interest. What matters in the end is simple: whether you are better off with an accord that can be negotiated than without it.

All of which brings us to Northern Ireland. Northern Ireland is already the beneficiary of a peace agreement—the Good Friday or Belfast Agreement. The accord’s accomplishments were and are impressive; that said, the agreement more ended the war than built the peace.

The agreement established the principle that individuals and organizations are entitled to their political agendas but also that they can only pursue those agendas in a non-violent manner. It paved the way for the devolution of political power to Stormont, the establishment of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and the decommissioning of arms.

All this and more has come to Northern Ireland, but not quite normalcy, not quite peace. Anyone doubting this need only consider Northern Ireland’s segregated schools and communities, the continuing terrorist threat, the high cost of policing, the all-too-often gridlocked government, and the reality that political parties are still more defined by religious traditions and national aims than by the role of the state in the economy or the relationship between the individual and government.

Another lesson is to be found here. What is often required to negotiate an agreement is a degree of vagueness, what is termed “strategic ambiguity,” something that allows each side to explain and defend the agreement on terms that will generate support from its base. But ambiguity only takes you so far. What can help with negotiation can become a problem with implementation. This is increasingly the case in Northern Ireland. At some point details must be agreed to; agreements in principle must give way to agreements in practice.

Start with flags and emblems – issues that command intense emotion given their connection to identity. There is consensus that paramilitary flags have no place in today’s Northern Ireland, but little beyond that. In the six months of talks Meghan O’Sullivan and I agreed to chair last year at the request of the First Minister and deputy First Minister, all that the five parties of the Northern Ireland Executive could agree to was to revisit flag and identity-related issues in yet another commission.

When it comes to the Union flag, there is no agreement on its role in official sites and buildings. Ideally, there would be a compromise that accorded the Union flag a role consistent with Northern Ireland being part of the United

Kingdom. Moreover, with consolidated local councils soon beginning operation, an agreed policy could help avoid what could otherwise be a series of divisive votes on policies surrounding flags.

I say this understanding full well that many in Northern Ireland identify with Ireland and want nothing more than for the six counties to become part of that Republic. This is, of course, their prerogative. As everyone knows, there is a mechanism set out in the Good Friday Agreement that provides for the possibility of union with Ireland. But regardless of what happens or does not happen, Irish identity could and should be respected in many ways within existing constitutional arrangements, possibly including a larger, official role for the Irish language.

As for unofficial displays of flags in public places, there is no getting around the reality that all too often flags and emblems are used to intimidate, to deny access, and to separate one community from another. There is no place for this in a modern, democratic society. There may be a limit to how this problem can be resolved through legislation, but there is little that could not be overcome through the exercise of real leadership at all levels of society.

Parading is another challenge to the peace of Northern Ireland. It, too, was central to our remit last year. Consistent with devolution, we aimed to create a new local body to oversee parades, marches, commemorations, and protests. Under the plan negotiated by the parties, the vast majority of parades – on the order of 95% it was estimated – would be handled in an administrative fashion. Adjudication that set limits on routes, timing or other aspects would be rare; outright bans would be even rarer. A code of conduct would be enshrined into law.

The bias was clearly in favor of parades, as they constitute an important tradition and right. But with rights come responsibilities. One of these is the imperative to recognize the rights of others. And with rights comes the need for respect if communities are to live side by side. This includes recognition that rights need not be exercised at all times in all places. Again, this is not something that can be solved through legislation alone. A degree of good will, of commitment to making the society whole, is required. Marching season is just weeks away; one very much hopes such good will and commitment will be in evidence.

The effort we were asked to chair made the most progress on the past. I am not entirely sure why this was the case. Possibly it was because less had been said and written about this issue, the result being that parties and their leaders were less dug in. It is also possible that the powerful and moving voice of many survivors and victims encouraged politicians to think creatively. Ideally, the progress reflected widespread understanding that absent agreement on the past, Northern Ireland and its 1.8 million people would not have the present and future they deserve.

Any question about the need to contend with the past has been put to rest by recent events. Here, of course, I am referring to revelations regarding assurances given to so-called On-the-Runs; the announcement by the British government that there would be no reviews of the Ballymurphy and La Mon killings; and the arrest and subsequent release of Gerry Adams.

Many have suggested that Northern Ireland must choose between peace and justice. The concern is that pursuing the latter will undermine the former. It has been suggested by some that it is time to “get over” the past and focus on preserving and strengthening the peace.

I respectfully disagree. I say this acknowledging that such approaches appear to have been successful elsewhere. But I believe Northern Ireland must have both peace and justice.

Justice without peace is obviously undesirable. Too many lives were lost or ruined by the decades of conflict to return to the dark days in which violence was a staple of daily life.

But peace without justice will not endure. People in Northern Ireland must live and work and govern side-by-side. This will not prove easy or even possible without coming to terms with the past. And justice is one essential component of doing so.

I am fully aware that pursuing peace and justice together will cause difficulties, as we have recently witnessed. It is essential, then, that certain principles are followed if there is to be confidence in and support for any process.

No one—no individual, no organization, no government-- can be above the law. This is a cardinal tenet of democracy

At the same time, the law cannot be politicized or applied inconsistently or unevenly to pursue certain individuals, organizations, or governments.

What we developed with the five parties was an approach to peace and justice that sought to support both goals. Victims, survivors, and families were provided a means to seek information about events that took place during the conflict.

People were encouraged to volunteer what they knew with the iron-clad assurance that nothing they said could be introduced into the legal system.

At the same time, there was no provision for amnesty. The state could prosecute if it independently unearthed sufficient evidence to charge a person with a crime.

If someone were to be found guilty, leniency was already in place. The Good Friday or Belfast Agreement established a ceiling on punishment for people found guilty of crimes committed during the Troubles.

There would also be a call for statements of acknowledgment of one's role during the conflict. Such statements must go beyond apologies, although apologies are obviously welcome. In my experience, a willingness to accept responsibility can go a long ways toward building the respect and trust that are essential if the present and future are not to resemble the past.

I also believe contending with the past requires collective learning. One approach was built into what was negotiated. A body was called for to determine if there were certain patterns or themes linking many of the crimes and acts of violence. If so, these would be made known. Doing this would help the public better understand what was behind events.

A second initiative that enjoyed broad support was to create an archive, a set of oral histories, to ensure that individual stories were preserved and a collective memory established.

A third, related idea proved too controversial. But I am persuaded it is essential. That would be to create a museum of the past, of the Troubles. The goal would not be to force or even seek agreement on a common narrative on what occurred, but rather to put under one roof competing narratives of what happened and why. There would, I hope, be agreement on many of the facts if not the legitimacy of what was done. Learning about the past ought to be a required part of the education for every young person in Northern Ireland. It was George Santayana who warned that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it. Northern Ireland should not risk this being its future.

I would only add one last point. Complacency is a luxury we cannot afford. Northern Ireland has not yet reached a point in which peace and tranquility can be taken for granted. It is all too easy to imagine how a parade or protest could spark violence; it is all too easy to imagine how local violence could grow and spread. Violence could also lead to

an increase in paramilitarism, as there are groups who would embrace the opportunity to demonstrate what they see as their continued relevance. Developments such as these would only discourage investment, drain public resources, motivate the most talented young people to make their futures elsewhere, and harden the divisions within society.

Do not get me wrong. I am not saying that what was negotiated last year is perfect or could not be improved upon. It was the result of compromise. But while there may be other ways to approach these challenges, there is likely to be a limit to what can change and still command broad public support.

I very much hope that the leaders of Northern Ireland, with the continued help of the British, Irish, and American governments, will make a determined effort to reach agreement. My many interactions with the people of Northern Ireland throughout 2013 led me to believe that the vast majority is ready to address the most divisive issues, compromise, and move on. Again, the critical element of any peace negotiation are leaders willing and able to make compromises and defend them. The people of Northern Ireland deserve no less.

Thank you again for so honoring me.