

NITVT

need

Northern Ireland Terrorist Victims Together

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20 April 2000

Mr Thomas Bender
Directorate General for Social Affairs
200 Rue de la Loi
B-1049
Brussels

Dear Mr Bender

Please find enclosed a copy of proposals regarding the allocation of funding through the European Social Fund.

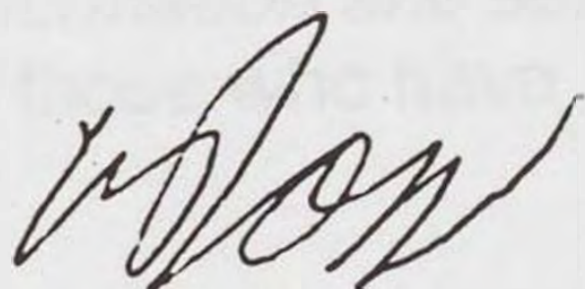
We are an umbrella organisation representing those who have suffered as a result of the thirty year long conflict in Northern Ireland. Following a recent delegation to Brussels and several very constructive meetings, we have set out recommendations on how allocation of the European Social Fund can best serve the victims' sector.

Throughout the document, we raise concerns about the disparity of allocation and benefit that has been experienced in the previous round of funding, and we believe that the proposals suggested will assist in overcoming some of the previous difficulties.

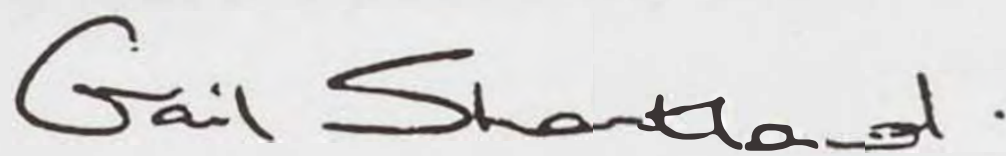
With a positive and confident approach now being adopted by victims' groups, we believe that our proposals, in conjunction with a Directive from the Commission, will ensure that essential funding addresses the needs of the most marginalised sector in our society.

Trusting you will give this your urgent attention.

Yours faithfully,



William Frazer
Chairman



Gail Shortland
Secretary

**A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT EUROPEAN FUNDING ALLOCATION PROCESSES, INCLUDING PROPOSALS FOR THE FUTURE.
PRESENTED BY THE VICTIMS' SECTOR IN NORTHERN IRELAND.**

INTRODUCTION

The victims' sector, those who represent the people who have suffered as a result of paramilitary terrorism in the thirty years of conflict in Northern Ireland, have not experienced, as intended, the benefits of the European Structural Funds, in particular the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (SSPPR). The unique needs of the sector and the relatively recent emergence of many victims groups, have in a sense, hindered capacity to obtain resources through the processes established.

Ex-prisoner organisations, with sophisticated community development structures, inherited from paramilitary structures, have been able to source funding without delay. As one commentator has noted, 'The organisation he or she belongs to provides the framework and rewards of life. It sets the agenda and structures activity.'¹ A 'survival of the fittest' scenario prevails. Whilst we seek parity of provision for our sector, key stakeholders will only ultimately benefit when action is also taken to redress the issue of disparity of product and outcome.

Concerned that the generous resources invested in Northern Ireland by the EU, are not addressing grass-root needs or achieving added value, we have suggested a number of proposals for your consideration.

APPRECIATION

From the outset, we recognise and appreciate the contribution and commitment of the European Commission to Northern Ireland through such programmes as the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation. We appreciate the intentions of Commissioners in setting victims as a priority and the focus on social inclusion and social/economic growth and regeneration.

Regretfully, we feel that the Intermediary Funding Bodies (IFB'S) have, not innovatively implemented the vision and focus of the Commission regarding victims of paramilitary terrorism. In effect, the low success rate of applications, lack of information and sensitivity have further contributed to the sense of social exclusion of those who have suffered greatly throughout the past thirty years.

¹ Max Taylor and Ethel Quayle, Terrorist Lives (London: Brassey's 1994) Pg. 57

URBAN / RURAL DISPARITY?

It is apparent that a disparity exists between the funding allocated to Urban areas and that allocated to Rural areas, with nearly 70% of total expenditure from the Structural Funds being allocated to Belfast and Londonderry.² It is recognised that many of the socially excluded and economically deprived live in Urban areas but these problems also prevail throughout Rural areas. Additional funding, which was specifically allocated to Urban areas, has not been filtering through to address grass-root needs, specifically the needs of victims of terrorism who have been subject to social exclusion.

UNIQUE NEEDS

During the period of conflict, the voices of victims of terrorist violence were unheard. A combination of lack of confidence, marginalisation, fear, intimidation and a focus on survival, particularly throughout the border counties, prevented the articulation and representation of the victims' views. Only recently in the period of relative peace and stability, have many victims spoken for the first time about their pain and suffering. Core volunteers within areas of significant suffering have come out to establish groups and many victims have found that the safe environment provided and the trust that is being established, have helped them to deal with their grief and move forward in the new political climate. Building trust and confidence is a long-term process, during which it is essential that the unique and specific needs of victims are met. These needs cannot be addressed within the confines of existing Community groups.

MOVING FORWARD

The IFB's which have funded paramilitary groups for many years are now funding the victims who have suffered as result of actions carried out by those same groups. This has further increased the feelings of fear and isolation experienced by many victims. A critical eye needs to be cast over the entire process in order to restore confidence among a sector of society that feels marginalised. Events and activities by some IFBs have involved bringing victims and perpetrators together, without prior consultation with the victims who had been invited. Medical evidence suggests that the effect of such is to heighten the suffering and lead to the re-traumatisation of victims. It is essential that the IFB's do not seek to set the pace for victims during the healing process. The Fermanagh Partnership in Practice Committee noted 'The development and enhancement of any relationship takes time, and there is some evidence to suggest that this attempt to short-circuit natural development has proved to be counterproductive.'³ The process of true peace and reconciliation can be a long and arduous road but a sensitive approach, with appropriate support mechanisms, can achieve positive results.

² Lennon K. (2000). European Funding and The Voluntary Sector, The Institute of European Studies, The Queen's University of Belfast,

³ Fermanagh Partnership in Practice Committee; 'The Way It Is!' (1999).

A precursor to reconciliation and a peace built on a solid foundation is recognition, support and assistance to the victims who have suffered during the 30 years of conflict. On many occasions, despite the prioritisation of victims by the European Commission, the IFB'S display a lack of initiative, understanding and sensitivity to the needs of victims at grass-roots level.

Victims' groups throughout the province are struggling financially due to lack of start-up assistance and core funding, to maintain outreach and project work. The necessary infrastructure for advice and support is not available through the IFB'S to assist groups in accessing funds, establishing effective managerial structures or at targeting funding towards essential projects and programmes. This leads to further marginalisation and hinders the reconciliation process in Northern Ireland. Many organisations are currently catching up on other well - organised groups, but we feel it essential that relatively new victims' groups are targeted for assistance in setting up effective management structures, and that a significant proportion of funding is allocated to those most marginalised.

ADDRESSING VICTIMS' NEEDS

Throughout our groups, we have conducted independent needs analyses to establish what programmes and projects need to be implemented to meet the real needs of victims and to enable them to move forward in their grief. Based on these needs we have applied for funding, often to be informed that we have been unsuccessful. The following have been identified as essential in assisting in the recognition and reconciliation process:-

- Centres providing training and education facilities, medical, counselling and trauma facilities specifically designed for those who have suffered as a result of terrorist violence. It is vital that there is funding to support the staff requirements to deliver the essential needs as identified within the victims groups. These wide ranging needs vary from befriending support programmes, research, counselling, outreach, training, human rights specialists and events co-ordinators to list some.
- Training projects and programmes, aimed at assisting in the re-generation of areas most affected by violence, and promoting the social inclusion of those who were deprived of educational and employment opportunities as a result of their suffering. In many circumstances, families have lost the only financial provider in terrorist atrocities. The need has been identified to provide adequate employment related training to allow other family members to fulfil this role, in particular widows.
- The need has been identified to target training programmes and projects for males in the 25 + age bracket and females who wish to return to the workplace.
- Programmes and projects to assist in employment and income generation, to enhance the opportunities within the area and a sector of the Community whose opportunities have been previously stifled by the effects of terrorism. In particular

the need for adequate IT training facilities has been emphasised to prepare victims for employment in the growing IT sector. It is important in this age of increased social and business dependence upon telecommunications, E - Commerce and E – Business, that adequate training is provided.

- There is a clear need to provide sufficient training and employment support for the young people within areas where terrorist events have prevailed. Our work has identified a need to provide opportunities for young victims to channel their energies into projects and activities, which are positive and add to the reconciliation process.
- Promotion of an integrative and inclusive society by capacity building projects, empowering local communities to play an active role towards reconciliation.
- A key area which has been recognised through the needs analyses is the urgent requirement for a human rights centre to be established in order to conduct research, training and raise awareness in this specialist field. Staffing has been identified as essential to develop this important aspect of reconciliation.

OUR PROPOSALS

We are seeking parity of treatment in the allocation of funding, with capital funding specifically set aside for victims' groups to fund the acquisition of suitable premises. This will ensure that projects, which reflect and implement good practice and added value, are achievable. Plans and strategies to ensure sustainability are of central importance.

In many situations, paramilitary groups are selling themselves as victims' groups whilst also accessing SSPPR funds for Prisoner related projects. This duplication has led to a greater disparity in funding distribution at the expense of many needy and deserving victims. We recommend that a critical review of existing accountability procedures is conducted to ensure that parity of esteem prevails in future funding allocation.

PROPOSED CRITERIA

Funding should be allocated to projects which:-

- **Benefit those who have been victimised as a result of terrorism.**
- **Reflect good practice and represent value for money.**
- **Are victim- led and have a high degree of user involvement in decision making (involvement of victims/survivors and their carers.)**
- **Demonstrate accountability, consultation and openness.**
- **Involve active networking and partnerships with other groups.**
- **Encourage self-development, positive motivation and confidence building in order to promote social inclusion and economic and social regeneration.**

- **Work towards achieving sustainability and have a clear and realistic exit strategy from SSPPR into mainstream funding.**

A EUROPEAN DIRECTIVE

There is a need for a Directive to be issued by The European Commission to the Northern Ireland Office, the Department of Finance and Personnel, Intermediary Funding Bodies and locally elected representatives, on the following matters:-

- **Instruction as to the allocation of European funding.**
- **How funding is to be prioritised – to victims of terrorism.**
- **Defining clear criteria as to who qualifies for funding.**
- **Better lines of communication and consultation with victims groups.**
- **The need for sensitivity by IFB's towards the fears, hurt, isolation and loneliness specific to victims' groups.**
- **Geographical spread of funding allocation to ensure equality.**
- **Education policies and procedures to inform groups which sub-programme is best suited to address the specific needs of each group.**
- **Guidance on how IFB's should assist groups in establishing effective managerial and leadership systems to address the unique needs of the victims they serve.**

CONCLUSION

The victims' groups represented by Northern Ireland Terrorist Victims Together appreciate the genuine efforts made by the European Commission through financial support to promote peace and reconciliation in our divided community. In previous funding, the victim sector did not benefit from the programmes for the reasons given above. At this point in time, we would hope the Commission will assist in the redress of allocation imbalance caused locally by the inexperience of Intermediary Funding Bodies in dealing with the victims of terrorism.

The vision and innovative approach by the Commission in identifying victims as a funding priority is refreshing and positive. It has given confidence and hope to a much beleaguered section of our community and is a solid foundation upon which victims can become survivors.