

DOWNPATRICK DECLARATION



The island of Ireland has known decades, indeed centuries, of conflict

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement of 1998 marks a commitment to move from force to 'exclusively peaceful and democratic means' of resolving conflict

But both governments, UK and Republic, are betraying this commitment through their involvement with NATO

NATO's so-called 'War on Terror' has put enmity in place of understanding, in a tragic cycle of aggression and retaliation

Our leaders display the mindset of what U.S. President Eisenhower called the military-industrial complex

They suggest that peace and sustainable prosperity can be achieved through producing weapons of war

Our children, our communities and our environment cannot be nourished or sustained by weapons

We need urgently to convert swords to ploughshares

Belfast/Good Friday Agreement: DECLARATION OF SUPPORT

We reaffirm our total and absolute commitment to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences on political issues, and our opposition to any use or threat of force by others for any political purpose, whether in regard to this agreement or otherwise. (Section 4)

CONSTITUTION OF IRELAND Article 29

Ireland affirms its devotion to the ideal of peace and friendly co-operation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality. Ireland affirms its adherence to the principle of the pacific settlement of international disputes by international arbitration or judicial determination. Ireland accepts the generally recognised principles of international law as its rule of conduct in its relations with other States. (Sections 1-3)





DOWNPATRICK DECLARATION

The history of Ireland is a reminder of the complexity of community and identity, and of the devastation of violence. Our Peace Process marks a break with centuries of conflict on the island. The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement establishes vital principles for recognising one another and for peacefully acknowledging and resolving differences.

Leaders in Britain and in both parts of this island have endorsed 'exclusively peaceful means of resolving differences on political issues' and rejected 'any use or threat of force'. (Declaration of Support, § 4) These principles are a guide for building sustainable communities, and for our conduct in the wider world.

We should at least not aggravate, and at best help modestly towards resolving, the challenges and conflicts of our troubled Planet Earth. No one person or group is responsible for all these problems, but we are all accountable for how we respond to them.

Tragically, both UK and Irish governments have betrayed the Agreement in their so-called 'defence' policies. Their involvement in NATO (UK) and NATO's so-called 'Partnership for Peace' (Republic) has been a moral and practical disaster.


NATO's 'War on Terror' has brought catastrophic onslaughts and human-rights abuses, perpetuating a bitter cycle of aggression and retaliation. It invokes threats but fails to address their nature and sources or to create a context where the tragic cycle could be broken.

This betrays the Republic's constitutional commitment to 'the pacific settlement of international disputes... [and] the generally recognised principles of international law'. (Article 29) It is equally at odds with the pronouncement of Northern Ireland Secretary Mo Mowlam in 1999 that 'all violence, no matter for what purpose, is unacceptable'.

Both governments display the mindset of what US President Eisenhower 60 years ago called 'the military-industrial complex'. They suggest that producing weapons of war can be a sound basis for prosperity on this island and for supporting peace and development in the wider world. We challenge them, as joint guarantors of the Peace Process, to show how this could be so.

Weapons not only kill and maim; they also wreck homes and habitats and damage our ecology. They distort and distract from the real challenges of security. They deflect resources of mind and matter from worthwhile production. They undermine the good work of governments, NGOs and others for disarmament, peace and development, instead producing a tragic tide of suffering and displacement.

Our world is sliding towards a horrific era of enmity and revenge, as dangerous and destructive as the Cold War. Our governments must bring their policies, at home and abroad, into line with the Declaration of Support. We need to produce ploughshares in a spirit of recognition and rebuilding, rather than swords with the mindset of militarism and mistrust.



Our Declaration invokes Downpatrick, a site recognised by all as emblematic of the island's ancient history. The Shrine of the Three Patrons, embodying the tradition that Saints Patrick, Brigid and Colmcille are interred there, celebrates the shared roots of the island's different Christian faith traditions, stemming from the Abrahamic roots which they share in turn with Judaism and Islam. Downpatrick itself has known conflict throughout the millennia, up to and including the recent Troubles, but remains a beacon of the values of its patrons: Patrick, an enslaved immigrant, returned with a radical message of peace and love and rejected killing; Brigid lived a life of peace and harmony with nature, selling a bejewelled sword to feed the hungry, and Colmcille left the island in repentance for his own past involvement with violence, bringing to the world a message of charity and peace.