

Record of the Summit on Sectarianism

14 February 2005



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scotland
SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Introduction from the First Minister



For far too long bigoted sectarian behaviour has been a scar on Scottish life. The images of abusive and violent behaviour that result tell the world that Scotland is not yet free of past prejudices. But it doesn't need to be like this. Our small country has a big future. Devolution has given us a historic opportunity to build a strong, healthy society, one where every Scot, regardless of their background, can be confident of success. We must make the most of that opportunity.

Bigoted sectarian attitudes have no place in 21st-century Scotland. The Summit on Sectarianism on 14 February 2005 brought together key representatives, from a broad range of interests, to discuss working together to tackle sectarianism. I was pleased that those who attended welcomed the initiative. Discussion focused on four key themes of interfaith, education, sport and marches and parades. We consider these central to the work that needs to be taken forward. I hope you find this record of the Summit interesting.

The Summit was only the next step in a long-term process. We still have a long way to go. A clear agreement emerged to work together to tackle sectarian bigotry. I gave a commitment to develop, in partnership, a national action plan to tackle sectarianism. This will build on the desire for change and the shared commitment to work to make a real and lasting difference for the benefit of the people of Scotland now and in the future.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J McConnell'.

Rt Hon Jack McConnell MSP

Opening Remarks

The First Minister welcomed participants to the first ever Summit on Sectarianism. He encouraged participants to speak freely. The First Minister made clear his commitment to tackling bigotry and religious hatred which risked holding back Scotland. He wanted to see a modern and dynamic Scotland which left behind prejudices of the past. Ministers recognised the importance of leadership and their own role in driving forward work. Changes had been made to legislation. The Summit was an opportunity to recognise progress made and commit to future action.

Discussion of Key Themes to Tackle Sectarianism

Discussion focused on four key themes central to tackling bigoted sectarian attitudes and behaviours. Those themes were:

- I – interfaith work;
- II – education;
- III – sport; and
- IV – marches and parades.

Following opening remarks made by the First Minister, each theme was discussed in turn and it was open to all participants to contribute. This record summarises the points raised and gives a flavour of the discussion. It does not attribute views.

I – The Interfaith Theme

General

- Religious intolerance was not acceptable in a modern multi-faith society although it was important to respect diversity and identity.
- Church and faith groups play an important role in people’s lives and the wider community as a whole.
- Church and faith groups in Scotland, regardless of denomination, had good working relationships and forums like Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS) and the Scottish Inter-Faith Council (SIFC) helped to foster these relationships.

- It was important that interfaith work was not confined just to Christian communities but included other faiths as well.
- A wider interpretation of interfaith work reinforced messages from the Fresh Talent Initiative, of a Scotland open to all.
- Protecting freedom of speech was important and everyone should be able to express legitimate religious views without fear of reprisal.
- It was important not to overlook other aspects of discrimination, sectarianism was often used to describe anti-Irish racism.

Common ground

- All faiths had a great deal in common and there were often more similarities than differences. More focus on commonly-held beliefs would be positive.
- Pilot projects, such as the appointment of an interfaith officer by Glasgow City Council, were to be welcomed.

Church initiatives

- There were already many examples of Catholic and Protestant churches working together, for example to tackle discrimination and poverty in Glasgow, working with young people and issuing joint statements on issues such as the Family Law Bill.

Act of Settlement

- Various views on the Act of Settlement 1701, and its implications, were raised.

Media coverage

- There was a desire for moral and ethical issues to be debated more openly in the media. There could be a large audience for this type of programming if it were done in a constructive and non-sensationalist way.

Suggestions for areas of work to be taken forward

Suggestions were made by participants for areas of work which could be taken forward:

- Producing a joint statement on religious freedom;
- Sharing and promoting some examples of church and faith groups working co-operatively;
- Looking at the role of industrial chaplains;
- Learning from community-based work in Belfast and elsewhere in Northern Ireland; and
- Working at grass roots level with congregations.

II – The Education Theme

General

- Education was key to addressing sectarian attitudes among young people in their formative years.
- The Summit recognised the good work already underway with young people. Many organisations were involved such as; projects by Nil By Mouth and YouthLink Scotland tackling sectarian bigotry; police officers' work in schools and football clubs' work with young people.
- Young people wanted to talk about the issue and it was important to build the confidence among teachers and youth workers to support those discussions.

Anti-sectarian education resource

- The Centre for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland (CERES) had been commissioned to produce an anti-sectarian education resource in partnership with a range of organisations. It was to be launched in the Spring following a successful pilot.
- The pilot demonstrated the need for such a resource and had led to a change in pupil attitudes. It was well received throughout the pilot areas showing that the issue was relevant to a range of communities.

- The resource was aimed at teachers, youth workers and young people. It included information on historical issues and its content would evolve over time.

Education in schools

- Sectarian attitudes could be addressed under a number of areas of the curriculum, such as religious education, English, history or discussion of citizenship and human rights. This would avoid it being seen as an add on but better embedded as part of other lessons.
- Young people and adults needed to understand Scottish history and traditions better and myths and preconceptions needed to be addressed.
- The role of denominational and non-denominational schools was discussed. Schools did not teach sectarianism or intolerance; rather the reverse.
- Bringing pupils from different schools together was often helpful in tackling misconceptions and prejudices and joint campuses and initiatives where schools worked together often brought positive changes in attitudes.

Education outside schools

- Education and the formation of attitudes continued outwith formal education, in peer groups and families. Young people lived in their communities and needed support to challenge some of the sectarian attitudes they could find there.
- Young people's attitudes were reinforced by many sources and there was scope for making better use of those influences, such as running stories in comics.
- Innovative projects had been taken forward, such as YouthLink's A Culture of Two Halves project at Polmont Young Offenders Institution, which had used young people's interest in football to challenge prejudice and appreciate others' feeling. Those involved saw that they had a lot in common. The materials could be used more widely in the youth work setting.

Suggestions for areas of work to be taken forward

Suggestions were made by participants for areas of work which could be taken forward:

- Identifying and sharing good practice and positive experiences;
- Rewarding good practice, through an awards scheme or other incentives;
- Developing proposals for twinning schools; and
- Ensuring better education in prisons for those convicted of offences aggravated by religious prejudice.

III – The Sports Theme

General

- Sports exerted a strong and important influence on people's lives and those involved could play an important part in tackling bigotry.
- The Summit recognised the good work already underway. This included work by the police with football clubs; football banning orders and work by the Scottish Football Association, football clubs and supporters' organisations.
- Some felt the problem within sport was not so much a religious problem but a lack of understanding of religion and history or simply loutish behaviour.
- There was a danger in over-associating Scottish football with bigoted sectarian behaviour, although there was no doubt that people perceived sectarianism to be associated with sport and football. However, sectarianism was not caused by football nor was it just a problem for football.

Achievements and ongoing work

The Summit heard about some of the key achievements and ongoing work:

- SportsScotland were launching an Ethics Standard and Strategy for use by Scottish sport to help support good practice in ethical and equity issue.
- The Scottish Football Association's (SFA) Memorandum and Articles of Association covered sectarianism and looked at promoting, fostering and developing football in all its branches "without discrimination against any organisation or person for reasons of race, religion or politics".
- Both Celtic and Rangers Football Clubs, independently and together, had developed policies to tackle sectarianism and were actively involved in projects to tackle the issue and these were welcomed by the Summit.
- Education programmes run by football clubs, governing bodies of sport and supporters' organisations had a very positive impact on the views of young people.

Football matches

- Tackling sectarianism should not undermine the atmosphere at football matches where crowd excitement was integral.
- Crowd problems had reduced over time through work by the police and clubs. However, there were still problems and there was no room for complacency.
- Earlier kick-off times for matches between Celtic and Rangers Football Clubs had improved behaviour at matches, reducing the impact of alcohol on behaviour at the match but drinking could cause problems after the match.
- Placing more emphasis on the similarities between clubs, rather than their differences, could make things better.
- Football Supporters' Associations and Trusts had an important contribution to make and Supporters' Organisations and Forums wanted to work together to tackle bigotry.
- Identifying and pursuing people making bigoted sectarian remarks through legal channels needed to continue.

Media

- The media's role in reporting football was highlighted and the view expressed that the attention the media gave to the Old Firm clubs fuelled the problem.
- Football fans were sometimes portrayed in an extremely negative way, adding to hostility.
- The media could do more to ensure more impartial and balanced coverage of football matches.
- The media recognised their role and wanted to make a positive contribution but should not be blamed for creating the problem.

Suggestions for areas of work to be taken forward

Suggestions were made by participants for areas of work which could be taken forward:

- Developing ways of sharing and supporting good practice;
- Considering how best to build on supporters' organisations willingness to participate in discussions;
- Looking at the role of alcohol after matches and the role of licensing legislation; and
- Looking at whether there should be more control on what was posted on supporters' websites.

IV – The Marches and Parades Theme

General

- Participants at the Summit welcomed the Review of Marches and Parades and supported its recommendations. They wanted to work together to ensure the recommendations were successfully implemented.
- The tenor of the recommendations was right, balancing people's right to march and the rights of communities.

- The Executive was taking forward the recommendations through legislation, through a working group with local authorities and the police, and discussions with organisers.
- Glasgow City Council was piloting some of the recommendations and was developing its own policy after an extensive consultation.
- Marches could often unfairly be tarnished with a sectarian label although the behaviour associated with them was boorish, fuelled by alcohol, rather than motivated by sectarian beliefs.
- Inappropriate behaviour needed to be tackled, there needed to be greater control of on-lookers and organisers should ensure that participants did not wear para-military uniforms.

Suggestions for areas of work to be taken forward

Suggestions were made by participants for areas of work which could be taken forward:

- Marching organisations could meet to discuss their calendar of marches;
- Building on organisations commitment to implement the recommendations;
- Looking at the sale of alcohol around marches and parades; and
- Organising a joint interfaith march to celebrate common grounds.

Conclusion and Next Steps

The Summit recognised the need for leadership. There was a suggestion that the Executive should develop national messages which could be adapted to local circumstances, following the model of community planning. There were a number of common actions across themes, including the need to share good practice and make use of accessible material to highlight and tackle the issue of sectarianism.

The First Minister drew the Summit to a conclusion. It had been a historic event, bringing together a diverse range of participants who were prepared to engage in serious discussion of a difficult issue. It was the next stage in a long-term process. He wanted to give greater momentum to tackling sectarianism. The First Minister gave a commitment to developing a national action plan through a series of smaller meetings involving a wide range of organisations. It was important that the plan was developed in partnership. The plan should be launched later in the year.

Participants

Rowena Arshad, Director of the Centre for Education for Racial Equality in Scotland

Tim Blott, Newsquest Herald and Times Ltd

Chief Superintendent Tom Buchan,
Association of Scottish Police
Superintendents

Councillor James Coleman,
Glasgow City Council

Archbishop Mario Conti, Catholic Church

Jay Crawford, Real Radio Scotland

Alastair Dempster, sportscotland

Kenneth Elder, Scottish Federation of
Football Supporters Association

Dr Alison Elliot, Moderator of the General
Assembly of the Church of Scotland

Jim Divers, Celtic Supporters Association

Joan Fraser, YouthLink Scotland

Robert Gordon, Justice Department,
Scottish Executive

Donald Gorrie MSP

Jane Gotts, Rangers Supporters Assembly

Deputy Chief Constable Ricky Gray,
Association of Chief Police Officers
Scotland

Mark Hollinshead, Scottish Daily Record
and Sunday Mail Ltd

Bill Jamieson, Scotsman Publications Ltd

Cathy Jamieson MSP, Minister for Justice

Douglas Keil, Scottish Police Federation

Alison Logan, Sense Over Sectarianism

Maggie Lunan, Church of Scotland Church
and Nation Committee

Laurence Macintyre, Rangers Football Club

John McBeth, Scottish Football Association

Councillor Jim McCabe, North Lanarkshire
Council

Rt Hon Jack McConnell MSP, First Minister

Councillor Anne McGovern, Fife Council

Bernard McLeary, Learning and Teaching
Scotland

Iain McMillan, CBI Scotland

Keith Patrick Cardinal O'Brien,
Catholic Church

Peter Rafferty, Affiliation of Celtic
Supporters Clubs

Fred Sheddon, Nil by Mouth

Jim Slaven, Cairde na hEireann

Ian Small, BBC Scotland

Bill Speirs, Scottish Trade Union Congress

Jim Templeton, Rangers Supporters
Assembly

Cara Urquhart, COSLA

Sandy Watson, SOLACE Scotland

Councillor Pat Watters, COSLA

Sandy Wilkie, Scottish Radio Holdings plc

Ian Wilson, The Most Worthy Grand Master
of the Grand Orange Lodge of Scotland

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