

Introductory Remarks – Launch of M.Phil. in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation

Dr Gladys Ganiel, Programme Coordinator, M.Phil. in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation

On behalf of all the staff, students and community-based partners of the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College, I'd like to extend a warm welcome to all of you who have joined us today to mark the launch of our new master's programme in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation.

We're honoured to have as our distinguished guest Baroness Nuala O'Loan, whom Dr Geraldine Smyth, Head of ISE, will be introducing shortly. We are grateful to Baroness O'Loan for her tireless work here in Northern Ireland and abroad, promoting the search for the peaceful transformation of seemingly intractable conflicts.

This launch is also a celebration of the growth and flourishing of Trinity College Dublin at Belfast. Many in this room have dedicated their lives to the work that happens in this building and in the community beyond. Our new master's programme testifies to their vision and perseverance. It builds on the foundations of our previous master's in Reconciliation Studies, as well as on ISE's adult education programme, Education for Reconciliation, and ISE's work with Churches Forums throughout Northern Ireland.

Our new master's is ground-breaking and innovative in many ways. Over the last number of years, staff at ISE have listened to feedback from students, practitioners in the community, and other academics here and abroad about how we might best teach and learn about the peaceful transformation of conflicts. We have taken their ideas onboard in the shaping of this new programme.

Here I'd like to recognise the efforts of my colleague here at TCD at Belfast, Dr David Tombs, and Prof. Linda Hogan, the previous Head of the Irish School of Ecumenics, who were absolutely vital in steering our proposals for this new programme through the TCD system, along with Prof. Carol O'Sullivan, Trinity's then Dean of Postgraduate Studies. Prof. O'Sullivan's helpful suggestion of 'Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation' concluded a healthy but long debate on what the new programme should be called, and gave us a new name to reflect four key innovations in the programme we officially launch today

The first innovation I'd like to draw your attention to is our teaching partnerships with the Glencree Centre for Reconciliation in Co. Wicklow and TIDES Training in Co. Antrim. Both of these organisations are staffed by world-class conflict resolution and reconciliation practitioners, who will be delivering between them three modules on our new programme. Both Glencree and TIDES will be teaching at residential sites that will offer students an insight into the 'lived experience' of the work which takes place at centres for peace and reconciliation. In this regard, we would also like to specially thank Corrymeela, which is where TIDES will provide module towards the end of this term.

We think that these partnerships will open up to our students absolutely vital perspectives on what it's like to engage in practice in conflict resolution and reconciliation work beyond the walls of academia. As these organisations have been so heavily engaged in the peace process in Ireland, they also are ideally-placed to help our students learn lessons from the peace process in Northern Ireland, In Ireland as a whole and between these islands.

The second innovation is the expansion of the community-based learning aspect of this programme. Community based learning involves placing our students in local organisations engaging in conflict resolution and reconciliation, where they work alongside experienced practitioners. While previously community based learning was but one part of a module, we now have an entire module dedicated to it. Some of our community partners are in the room today, and we thank them for all that they bring to our programme.

The third innovation is in the more open structure of the programme. Students can now choose from a wider variety of modules, specialising in ‘conflict resolution’ in ‘reconciliation’ or in both. Some of our new modules take place in intensive week-long blocs, others in the traditional week-by-week basis. These varied modes allow for maximum flexibility of access, especially for the professional, working students that this programme is attracting, and allow students based in either Belfast or Dublin to take better advantage of what it offers.

The fourth innovation builds on our long-standing commitment to disseminating the fruits of our teaching and research to the wider public. To that end we have developed and are launching today a new website, www.conflicttransformation.ie, which makes some of our programme resources publicly available. This site complements our main TCD website and our existing www.ecumenics.ie website, where the public can go for reports on our current research projects. Here, I’d like to thank for their assistance with the website Dr David Tombs and our Executive Officer Ms. Caroline Clarke, as well as the designer of the site, Mr Brian O’Neill of FreshIdeas.

Finally, I’d like to thank everyone that I haven’t yet thanked today, whose cooperation and support have made the transition to our new programme so smooth: our librarian Brid O’Brien, Mr Denis Anderson, whose help in organising the upkeep of this building has been so valuable, doctoral students Jayme Reaves and Jon Hatch, who have provided administrative and support in leading seminars, and all the students and staff who have helped to organise today’s event.

I hope I have been able to convey to you, with these brief remarks, why we are so excited about this new programme. Dr Geraldine Smyth, Head of ISE, Trinity College, will now introduce Baroness O’Loan.