

2.4. Case Study of the Situation in Northern Ireland as Expressed by Youth Experts

The moderator and facilitator of this session was Marie Smyth, Director, Community Conflict Impact on Children (INCORE) who began by providing an overview of the consequences for children and young people of political violence in Northern Ireland. This was followed by evidence in response and elaboration from youth representatives Peter Bryson, Linda O'Neill, Colin Brown and James Dunbar.

There had been sporadic insurrections and violence since the Northern Ireland state was formed in 1921 through the annexation of the northern six counties of Ireland, with ongoing violence (The Troubles) between 1969 and 1994, and sporadic outbreaks ever since. The majority of the 3,700 deaths occurred between 1972 and 1977. In a total population of 1.6 million this means that an estimated 7,000 people live in nuclear families in which someone has been killed as a result of the conflict. Estimates of injuries vary from the official figure of 40,000 to 123,000 and the number of people permanently disabled as a result is not known. The majority of deaths are males (91%) between 15 and 35 years of age. Main causes of death are shooting and those responsible have been largely members of paramilitary organisations, with republicans (Catholic) outnumbering loyalists (Protestant) in this as in the number of victims. Among children under the age of 18 years and young people aged between 19 and 25 years, the greatest number of those killed have been civilians.

Ms. Smyth stressed that family and communities had been disrupted and displaced, and that segregation is increasing and deepening in both rural and urban areas. She told the Tribunal that there are 'two worlds' in Northern Ireland. For the middle class, conflict is an option. But for those who live in poor communities, characterised by unemployment and economic deprivation, there is no choice. The impact on family life can be seen in the degree of 'self-medication' with alcohol and medical drugs, with the result that children are frequently caring for adults as well as for other children. She described children as being in 'survival mode' having learned how to manage the threat of violence in their everyday lives, with low levels of expectation about the future.

Ms. Smyth stated that children are both visible and invisible. At the level of street conflict activity, they are visible and have their own strategies. But they are also invisible in political life and their voices are not heard.

Peter Bryson reiterated to the Tribunal that children learn to manage the threat of violence, which he said has been 'normalised': 'like a steadily dripping tap'. Yet, until four years ago, there had been no public voice for children. Linda O'Neill said that it is difficult to challenge the 'normal' influence of community and equally difficult to mix with young people from opposing communities. According to Colin Brown, young people feel that they cannot express their own opinion because of the fear of violence. Young

Status	Age in years	
	Under 18	19-25
Northern Ireland civilians	253	366
Republican paramilitary	62	156
British Army	54	284
Unknown	15	14
Loyalist paramilitary	14	31
Non Northern Ireland civilians	5	31
Northern Ireland security forces	5	126
Non Northern Ireland security forces	54	11
Total	408	1019

Deaths of children and young people as a consequence of political violence in Northern Ireland 1989-1994

Marie Smyth: Evidence to the Tribunal

people are 'taking the easy way out', using drugs and alcohol or simply saying 'I don't want anything to do with it' and failing to face up to the problem. James Dunbar confirmed that children have no choice but to 'go with The Troubles'. As a member of the 20% minority Roman Catholic community, he said that he feels he lives his life 'in a goldfish bowl', in which his opportunities for leisure, shopping, libraries and pubs are severely limited.

Peter O'Neill drew the attention of the Tribunal to the problems conflict cause for education. Schools and colleges do not address the problems. The education system is characterised by segregation not only along religious lines, but also along lines of class, gender and ability. In education statistics, school failure is correlated with the more segregated areas. Social deprivation is revealed in the fact that 26% of children receive school meals. By the age of eight years, children already have the survival skills necessary to distinguish by sight between Catholic and