

**Written evidence submitted by Independent Commission for Reconciliation
and Information Recovery (ICRIR), relating to Reconciliation
[RIN0011]**

Executive Summary

- (i.) The Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (the Commission) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) calls for evidence in its Inquiry into reconciliation.
- (ii.) This submission provides commentary under the following headings, aligned to the Commission's statutory remit:
- (iii.) The Commission's interpretation of its principal objective to promote reconciliation; and
- (iv.) How the Commission has sought to embed its principal objective to promote reconciliation.
- (v.) The promotion of reconciliation is the Commission's principal objective in exercising its functions. This principal objective is laid out in section 2(4) of the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023.
- (vi.) This statutory function is not defined in the legislation, and the Commission has been clear that a definition of reconciliation cannot be imposed or prescribed.
- (vii.) The Commission recognises reconciliation as a deeply personal and subjective concept, with each victim, survivor and family holding their own perspective. There is no single, shared definition at present either locally or internationally.
- (viii.) It recognises reconciliation as a deeply personal and subjective concept, with each victim, survivor and family holding their own perspective. There is no single, shared definition at present either locally or internationally.
- (ix.) The Commission represents a central mechanism for addressing legacy issues while promoting reconciliation. It serves a dual purpose: recovering information for victims and providing transparent, accountable investigations, while also actively promoting reconciliation and understanding between affected communities. The structured approach to support, investigation, and public engagement underpins Northern Ireland's broader efforts to deal with the legacy of the Troubles and promote societal healing.
- (x.) The Commission welcomes the opportunity to discuss these and other related matters with the Committee.

1. Introduction

1. The Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (the Commission) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) calls for evidence in its Inquiry into reconciliation.
2. This submission provides commentary under the following headings, aligned to the Commission's statutory remit:

The Commission's interpretation of its principal objective to promote reconciliation; and

How the Commission has sought to embed its principal objective to promote reconciliation.

2. The Commission's interpretation of its principal objective to promote reconciliation

3. The promotion of reconciliation is the principal statutory objective of the Commission. This statutory function is not defined in the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023, and the Commission has been clear that a definition of reconciliation cannot be imposed or prescribed.
4. The Commission recognises reconciliation as a deeply personal and subjective concept, with each victim, survivor and family holding their own perspective. There is no single, shared definition at present either locally or internationally.
5. In addition to the principal objective of promoting reconciliation and the need to follow a trauma-informed approach, all of the Commission's work is determined by its three essential principles:
 - Compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights
 - Respect for the principles of the 1998 Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement; and,
 - Focus on providing information to those affected by the Troubles/Conflict
6. As regards the principles of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, the Commission highlights paragraphs 2 to 5 of the Agreement which reference the Declaration of Support¹ and contain the following principles regarding reconciliation:

The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families.

¹[The Belfast \(Good Friday\) Agreement](#)

But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all.

We are committed to partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships within Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between these islands.

...we will endeavour to strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement within the framework of democratic and agreed arrangements.

7. The Commission views its role to contribute to the conditions in which societal reconciliation may become possible. This is carried out through its core functions—recovering and disclosing information, establishing objective truths, supporting accountability, vindicating the memories of those who died, and providing trauma-informed, victim-centred support. Verbal interactions between the Commission and key stakeholders have highlighted that reconciliation is inseparable from truth. The Commission believes that reconciliation cannot be achieved alongside concealment or inaccuracy; rather, societal reconciliation is grounded in the full, unvarnished truth, accountability and acknowledgement.
8. The Commission maintains that the publication of its reports serves not only the interests of Requesting Individuals, but also those of the wider public, whose engagement is essential to the aim of achieving societal reconciliation.
9. Further to this, the Commission has integrated a trauma and resiliency-informed approach to the delivery of its work. The Commission has publicly stated its commitment to integrating a Trauma and Resiliency Informed Model (TRIM) in its work, emphasising its importance for engagements with Requesting Individuals, and more widely in embedding the skills within its workforce. In so doing, the Commission acknowledges that the integration of TRIM is a principal objective for the Commission.
10. TRIM, therefore, is not only a framework that seeks to both support and equip people, but also a governance principle shaping how the Commission delivers truth recovery. It is a foundational value that guides every aspect of the Commission's operations, from how staff interact with individuals to how policies are developed and implemented. It ensures that trauma awareness, resilience, safety, trust, and empowerment are embedded at every level of the organisation, shaping both strategy and day-to-day actions. The Commission approaches its work in a trauma informed way, doing things differently from previous legacy processes, with a focus on resilience and embedding TRIM across the Commission's work.
11. The promotion of reconciliation and TRIM are complementary, as TRIM ensures that as a Commission the team work with victims, survivors and families in a way which is aware of the impact that trauma has on the individual. Working in this way supports the principal statutory objective of the promotion of reconciliation.

3. How the Commission has sought to embed its principal objective to promote reconciliation

12. The promotion of reconciliation is the Commission's principal objective in exercising its functions. This principal objective is laid out in section 2(4) of the Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2024:

2(4) The principal objective of the ICRIR in exercising its functions is to promote reconciliation.

2(5) The functions of the ICRIR are—

- a) to carry out reviews of deaths that were caused by conduct forming part of the Troubles (see sections 9 and 11 to 13).*
- b) to carry out reviews of other harmful conduct forming part of the Troubles (see sections 10 to 13).*
- c) to produce reports ("final reports") on the findings of each of the reviews of deaths and other harmful conduct (see sections 15 to 18).*
- d) to determine whether to grant persons immunity from prosecution for serious or connected Troubles-related offences other than Troubles-related sexual offences (see sections 19 to 21).*
- e) to refer deaths that were caused by conduct forming part of the Troubles, and other harmful conduct forming part of the Troubles, to prosecutors (see section 25).*
- f) to produce a record (the "historical record") of deaths that were caused by conduct forming part of the Troubles (see sections 28 and 29).*

13. The Commission represents a central mechanism for addressing legacy issues while promoting reconciliation. It serves a dual purpose: recovering information for victims and providing transparent, accountable investigations, while also actively promoting reconciliation and understanding between affected communities. The structured approach to support, investigation, and public engagement underpins Northern Ireland's broader efforts to deal with the legacy of the Troubles and promote societal healing.

14. In 2024, the Commission published its Operational Design Framework². This Design Framework sets out how the Commission discharges its functions and duties and explains what Requesting Individuals can expect when seeking and progressing through the Commission investigation process.

15. Further to this, the Commission set out how it will seek to promote reconciliation in its submission to NIAC's inquiry into the Government's new approach to addressing the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland³:

- Recovering and disclosing information about the Troubles/Conflict;
- Objectively telling unvarnished truths about the past;
- Delivering accountability and acknowledgement for wrongdoing;

² ICRIR, July 2024, [Operational Design Framework](#)

³ ICRIR, February 2025, [Written evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee inquiry on the Government's new approach to addressing the legacy of the past in Northern Ireland](#)

- Vindicating the memories of people killed during the Troubles/Conflict; and,
 - Providing dedicated, sensitive, and sustained case support to all requesting individuals.
16. The Commission's Interim Update on the Promotion of Reconciliation⁴ noted that the six Stormont House principles, in conjunction with wider governmental, statutory, organisational and quasi-constitutional considerations, contribute to providing *the legitimate foundation of rule of law and human rights upon which the Commission's evolving strategy framework has been developed, subject to ongoing review, in observing the statutory principal objective of 'promoting reconciliation'*. The Commission is keen to build practically on its strong foundational framework of rights-based reconciliation.
17. The Commission has adopted an internal strategy framework to facilitate the promotion of reconciliation and created an internal toolkit (see Annex 1) to assist it in operationalising this. The toolkit is intended to guide staff to consider the existing rules, laws, and principles that are relevant to the promotion of reconciliation, in the context of their work.
18. The Commission's approach to the promotion of reconciliation has four key aspects:
- (i) **Due regard duty:** The Commission has voluntarily adopted a 'due regard' duty, committing it to consider the promotion of reconciliation throughout all our work.
 - (ii) **Embed principles in the Commission through learning opportunities:** Training and guidance is available to support all staff on how to consider diverse perspectives on promoting reconciliation and reach objective and evidence-based decisions.
 - (iii) **Gather information at key points in a systematic way throughout the process, both internally and externally:** At key points, and with consent, information will be gathered to explore wider perspectives on promoting reconciliation.
 - (iv) **Demonstrate and promote our novel approach to partners in government, and beyond.**
19. Its approach puts in place effective organisational compliance in human rights, rule of law and victim-centred TRIM methodology. This is designed to carefully understand the Requesting Individual's perspective. The Commission's framework requires the conscientious consideration of the promotion of reconciliation in discharging all its functions. The Operational

⁴ ICRIR, May 2025, [ICRIR-Interim-update-on-promotion-of-reconciliation.pdf](#)

Design Framework states that the Commission applies TRIM across its work. It outlines that promoting reconciliation is the Commission's statutory objective, and TRIM is central to achieving this as it ensures that investigations are conducted in ways that acknowledge trauma and build resilience for victims, survivors, and families and all those who engage with the Commission.

20. The Commission welcomed the Joint Framework announcement between the UK and Irish Government. The Commission is ready for all and any reform that further enhances confidence in its work and capability in its ability to deliver for the victims, survivors, and families of the Troubles/Conflict. The Commission believes the new legislation holds much potential to improve the existing arrangements to meet the needs of victims, survivors and their families.
21. The retention of the promotion of reconciliation as a binding statutory principle in the Northern Ireland Troubles Bill is welcome, as was the adoption of the Stormont House Principles, all of which aligns with the Commission's work to date.

4. Conclusion

22. After the announcement of the Joint Framework in September 2025 the Commission released a statement stating: *The Commission is led by the law and ready for reform. The governments' joint framework provides clarity for this. It promises new powers, enhanced independence, and improved capabilities... At the heart of legacy issues, are the victims, survivors, and families of the Troubles/Conflict... In helping to build confidence in the reformed legacy arrangements, the Commission will maintain its dedicated service to victims, survivors, and families, its efforts to seek the unvarnished truth, and its focus on the promotion of reconciliation*⁵.
23. The Commission recognises the challenging public expenditure environment. The realities of cases, demands and complexities now facing the Commission are significant. The Troubles Bill proposes additional legal obligations on the reformed Legacy Commission. It will continue to engage with the UK Government to discuss the necessary resourcing requirements that will enable the Commission to meet the demand for services and enable investigatory standards that secure public confidence in the Commission's work. Sustainable and effective government resourcing throughout the lifetime of the Commission's work is vital for successful delivery.
24. As co-guarantor of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, the Irish Government has expressed its commitment to ensuring that the suffering of

⁵ ICRIR, 19 September 2025, [ICRIR response to the joint governmental framework](#)

victims and survivors of the Troubles/Conflict is acknowledged and addressed. This is a commitment that the Commission also shares. The Agreement affirms that acknowledging and addressing their suffering is ‘a necessary element of reconciliation’. This approach is one that the Commission hopes to enhance, through encouraging and facilitating an effective cross-jurisdictional partnership approach to its work by all relevant actors.

25. The Chief Commissioner, Sir Declan Morgan, has stated that:

Achieving the confidence of the community, particularly those victims, survivors and families who have been let down and disappointed for so many years, requires commitment and delivery. Getting answers to provide the unvarnished truth is critical if we are to promote reconciliation. Promoting rights-based reconciliation is fundamental if young people are to understand the brutality and horror of settling differences through violence. We will continue endeavouring with the British government, the Irish government, all sides of the community, and particularly victims, survivors and families, to deliver this objective⁶.

26. The Commission welcomes the opportunity to discuss these and other related matters with the Committee.

⁶ Irish Legal News, September 2024, [Sir Declan Morgan: Attacks on ICIR's independence are unwarranted](#)

Toolkit: Promotion of Reconciliation

Our approach

The Northern Ireland Troubles (Legacy and Reconciliation) Act 2023 states that the Commission's principal statutory objective is to promote reconciliation.

Our code of conduct also states that all employees should:

Consider, in all that you do, how the Commission's principal objective, to promote reconciliation, can be furthered.

The Commission's approach to the promotion of reconciliation has four aspects:

1. **Due regard duty.** The Commission has voluntarily adopted a 'due regard' duty, committing us to consider the promotion of reconciliation throughout all our work.
2. **Embed principles in the Commission through learning opportunities.** Training and guidance is available to support you and your teams to consider diverse perspectives on promoting reconciliation and reach objective and evidence-based decisions.
3. **Gather information at key points in a systematic way throughout the process, both internally and externally.** At key points, and with consent, information will be gathered to explore wider perspectives on promoting reconciliation.
4. **Demonstrate and promote our novel approach to partners in government, and beyond.**

Purpose of the toolkit

This toolkit is intended to guide you to consider the existing rules, laws, and principles that are relevant to the promotion of reconciliation, in the context of your work. It contains a series of questions, linked to the promotion of reconciliation. It also provides a structure for you to record your thinking and to demonstrate that due regard has been given.

The toolkit does not replace the fact that decision makers within the Commission can demonstrate the promotion of reconciliation through how they apply discretion in the exercise of their functions.

The legal framework

Legal frameworks provide a set of guiding principles to govern behaviour and actions. For organisations like the Commission, they establish the rules that guide our responsibilities and conduct.

You should refer to the following legal framework in the decision and policy making process.

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement 1998

The Belfast/Good Friday Agreement is a key source of information on reconciliation. It is part of the constitutional framework of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. It is therefore a crucially important part of the legal framework for the Commission. In particular, the following aspects in particular detail principles relevant to the promotion of reconciliation.

Declaration of Support

Paragraphs 2 to 5 of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, in the Declaration of Support contain the following principles:

*The tragedies of the past have left a deep and profoundly regrettable legacy of suffering. We must **never forget those who have died or been injured, and their families**. But we can best honour them through a fresh start, in which we firmly **dedicate ourselves to the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust, and to the protection and vindication of the human rights of all**.*

*We are **committed to partnership, equality and mutual respect as the basis of relationships** within Northern Ireland, between North and South, and between these islands.*

*... we will endeavour to **strive in every practical way towards reconciliation and rapprochement within the framework of democratic and agreed arrangements**.*

Rights, Safeguards and Equality of Opportunity - Human Rights

The declaration by the British Government on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) was central to the implementation of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement. The statement said:

*The British Government will **complete incorporation into Northern Ireland law of the European Convention on Human Rights**, with direct access to the courts, and remedies for breach of the Convention, including power for the courts to overrule Assembly legislation on grounds of inconsistency (page 16).*

*The participants believe that it is **essential to acknowledge and address the suffering of the victims of violence as a necessary element of reconciliation**.... The achievement of a peaceful and just society would be*

*the true memorial to the victims of violence... **An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing (page 18).***

The Northern Ireland Act 1998

Section 75 statutory duty on public authorities

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 set out a duty on public bodies to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity, as well as have regard to the need to promote good relations. The key sections are:

*(1) A public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have due regard to the need to **promote equality of opportunity**—*

(a) between persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;

(b) between men and women generally;

(c) between persons with a disability and persons without; and

(d) between persons with dependants and persons without.

*(2) Without prejudice to its obligations under subsection (1), a public authority shall in carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland have regard to the desirability of **promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.***

Questions to consider on promotion of reconciliation

The questions below should be considered alongside your work:

- Can you explain how you have considered your policy/decision/approach in line with the principles set out in Belfast/Good Friday Agreement, including the ECHR? What were your deliberations and conclusion?
- Can you explain how you have considered your policy/decision/approach in line with the principles as set out in the Northern Ireland Act Section 75 duty to promote equality of opportunity as well as the need to promote good relations? What were your deliberations and conclusion?
- Have you considered preparing a compatibility statement to set out evidence of how the promotion of reconciliation has been considered throughout the development of your policy/decision/approach?

Where appropriate, the outcome of these considerations should be approved by a member of the Transitional Leadership Team. This will demonstrate that they are content that the promotion of reconciliation has been appropriately considered and they are accountable for their overall judgement.

May 2026