

# 10th Anniversary of Good Friday Agreement

29/07/2008

The 10th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement provides an opportunity for reflection on where we are now and where we have come from. The focus of some of the TV programmes has been on continued sectarianism and division.

The Good Friday Agreement and the agreement coming from St Andrews were not about people having agreed to love each other. They came from 'war' weariness, from the Republican movement discovering that they could not win, from Ian Paisley learning that he had to share power and from changes in British/Irish relations. So, where we are today comes from weariness and slow learning, not from any conversion to respect, trust and the value of reconciliation. More the Good Friday Agreement had ambiguity, pain and loss built into it – ambiguity around decommissioning that fed distrust; pain around the release of prisoners; and loss around policing.

It is remarkable that we have got so far – and Jonathan Powell's account of the period 1997 to 2007 as Tony Blair's adviser makes it clear how difficult it was. Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern may have their failings but Northern Ireland has cause to be grateful to them – most people would not have kept at it so long.

We can be sure that real change will continue to be slow – and we, Northern Irish people and not just the Aherns, Blairs, Mitchells, Powells, etc, have to keep at it.

David Stevens