



**BRITISH-IRISH
INTER-PARLIAMENTARY BODY**

**COMHLACHT IDIR-PHARLAIMINTEACH
NA BREATAINE AGUS NA hÉIREANN**

RESPONSES OF BOTH GOVERNMENTS

to

THE REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE

on

THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PARADES

**COMMITTEE D (ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE):
THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PARADES**

Response by the United Kingdom Government

Mr Kevin McNamara MP
Chairman of Committee D
British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body
Palace of Westminster
LONDON SW1A 0AA

3 May 2001

1. I am grateful to you and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to comment on your report, and I agree that you were right to consciously distance yourselves from the controversy surrounding the more contentious parades. Not to have done so would almost inevitably have distracted both you and, ultimately, the readers of your report from your principal focus.
2. You set out to explain to a wider audience the cultural significance of parades and I think your report has the potential to do that very successfully. You recognise that the world beyond the marching community gets a distorted picture of parading, whether through the media focus on the trouble spots or through lack of communication on the part of the Orders themselves. In this latter regard, however, I would make special mention of the efforts made by the Apprentice Boys to explain their tradition to the wider public and I note your acknowledgement of this in the report.
3. The importance of their religion to the various Orders is too often and, I think, too glibly dismissed as simple sectarianism and you make considerable efforts to redress that. Their faith and their sense of historical, cultural and, in some cases, civic identity are central to understanding their motivation and are ideas and values which have fallen from fashion to an extent elsewhere. It is one thing for the Orders themselves to stress these aspects, rather than the "blood and thunder" of popular perception. That an independent and objective body such as the Committee should take the time to do so should lend considerable weight to their argument.
4. I endorse wholeheartedly your view that all the Orders should admit women to their ranks, and am pleased (although, of course, not surprised) that it is the enlightened Scots who are showing the way here.
5. The Orders in Northern Ireland have often maintained that disorder associated

with their parades arises not from the Orders themselves but from "hangers-on". Your point is well made. I agree that it is incumbent upon the Orders to make every effort to ensure that non-affiliated groups, particularly, as you say, bands with paramilitary links, do not hijack parades.

6. You mention, in paragraph 43 and again in paragraph 55, that the Commission is hindered to a degree by its own statutory obligations in that it is constrained to make determinations on a case by case basis. The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, in its recent review of the Commission, made broadly the same point. The North report, on foot of which the Commission was established, envisaged that it could issue determinations in a given area over the entire marching season, or even over a period of more than one year.
7. We were unable to devise a formal way of achieving that. We believed that it would be unacceptable in ECHR terms to impose conditions on, or even ban, a parade for which notification had not even been received on the grounds that the "quota" had already been reached. Equally, it would not have been practical to extend the notification requirement from the four weeks provided for in the Act to the six months or one year which the original proposal would have required. In view, however, of the new suggestion made by the Commission, we will engage with them to see if the ideas they mentioned to you can be developed further.
8. Altogether I found your report well balanced and positive. I hope it goes some way to redress the almost totally negative impression which has grown up around the parading culture in recent years.

Copies of this letter go to Marion McGennis TD and Christopher Johnson.

Agreed by the Minister and signed in his absence.
RT HON ADAM INGRAM JP MP
Minister of State for Northern Ireland

Letter to the Vice-Chair of Committee D from the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Ms Marian McGennis TD
Vice-Chair of Committee D
British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body
Leinster House
Kildare Street
Dublin 2

23 October 2001

Dear Marian,

I refer to your letter of June 2001 and the enclosed Report of the Environmental and Social Committee of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary body on 'the Cultural Significance of Parades'.

The report was studied with interest by the Government. It represents a comprehensive examination by the Committee of a topical and complex issue. I welcome the report as a very useful and valuable contribution which will enhance further consideration of the many aspects of the parades issue.

As you have requested, I enclose the considered response of the Irish Government. Please convey my thanks to all the members of the Committee for their work.

With kind regards

Yours sincerely,

Brian Cowen TD
Minister for Foreign Affairs

Response by the Irish Government

1. The Irish Government welcomes the report of Committee D of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body on 'The Cultural Significance of Parades'. The Government also appreciates the opportunity offered by the Committee to respond to the issues raised in the report.
2. In considering the broad cultural significance of parades, the Committee sought the views of many of those involved or interested in this issue, including members of parading organisations, academics, local residents and those who have been active in seeking resolutions to contentious parades, particularly in Derry. In this regard, we note the Committee's disappointment that not all the parading organisations approached took the opportunity to meet with members of the Committee and put their case directly to them.
3. The result of the Committee's efforts is a comprehensive and insightful report which looks at the historical background and the religious and political aspects of parading, as well as the differing motivations of those who join the various parading organisations. The report also addresses the difficulties associated with contentious parades in a divided society, although this was not the Committee's primary focus. As a result of these efforts, the report helps to broaden our understanding and awareness of the culture of parades in Scotland and on this island. (It is worth noting, in this regard, that an Orange Order parade takes place annually in Rossnowlagh, Co. Donegal).
4. The report states that "the issue of parades is clouded by controversy and by intense feelings on all sides". It notes, furthermore, that parades do have an impact on the community - positively, when the parades are welcomed by the local community and negatively, in situations where parades are contested. Undoubtedly, disputed parades do have an adverse impact on community relations and, in certain cases, can seriously damage local economies, e.g. in Derry City Centre. We fully support the Committee's position that proper consultation with local communities is necessary in situations where a parade is not entirely welcome.
5. The readiness of the Apprentice Boys of Derry and the Bogside Residents Group to engage in dialogue and to reach agreement, despite the difficulties that have had to be overcome, is rightfully applauded by the report. The willingness of the marchers and residents to engage with the Parades Commission and with each other points the way forward for other communities in Northern Ireland faced with similar disagreements. The work of the local business community in Derry to assist in the process of engagement and agreement is also given due recognition in the report.
6. In this regard, the agreement brokered by the Derry business community this

Summer between the Bogside Residents Group and another Loyal Order, the Royal Black Preceptory, should also be acknowledged here.

7. In its conclusions, the report raises some pertinent questions about the nature of 'traditional routes' and 'feeder parades', as well as the presence of 'bands with paramilitary links' at certain parades. The report notes that the Orange Order in Scotland is prepared to re-route parades if there are objections from local residents and that it does not tolerate bands with paramilitary links. These are issues which could usefully be considered further by all those involved in seeking a resolution to contentious parades in Northern Ireland.
8. The report praises the role of the Parades Commission in providing "a neutral, impartial forum within which arguments for and against particular parades can be put". It also calls on all parties to engage fully and in good faith with the Parades Commission. The Irish Government agrees with these comments.
9. In its final paragraph, the report urges all parties to seek resolution to disputed parades, based on the principles of law, dialogue, mutual respect and consent. The Irish Government supports this position. We have maintained a consistent approach to the parades question based on these principles. We have also stressed that the resolution of contentious parades lies through dialogue and local agreement.
10. This is a fair, balanced and valuable report. It highlights the many positive aspects of parades - social, cultural and economic - where such parades are a welcome and accepted feature of local community life. It also acknowledges the damage that parading disputes has caused, and continues to cause, to communities in Northern Ireland where such parades are not welcome. Above all, it points to a future where parades need not create conflict and proposes certain steps which would help to bring this about, namely through engagement, dialogue and agreement.