



## **Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission Briefing**

### *Briefing Series on Accountability*

## **Truth and Reparations for Northern Ireland: A Gender-Integrated Approach**

**Friday, April 15, 2016  
10:00 – 11:00 AM  
2255 Rayburn House Office Building**

### **Opening Remarks**

Good morning. On behalf of the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, I am pleased to welcome you to our briefing on Truth and Reparations for Northern Ireland, and specifically, on the ongoing challenge of integrating a gender perspective into truth, justice and reparations programs.

I want to extend a very special welcome to our distinguished panelists, three of whom have traveled from Northern Ireland, and the fourth from Massachusetts, to join us today. Your willingness to come such a long way to help educate us here in the United States is evidence of your commitment to consolidating peace, and we greatly value and appreciate your presence today.

The conflict known as “the Troubles” was a political conflict over the status of Northern Ireland in relation to the United Kingdom and Ireland that began in the late 1960s and lasted three decades. Last Sunday was the 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, which provided the basis for bringing the conflict to an end. After that Agreement, political violence declined significantly, although it didn’t disappear completely, and the process of peace-building got underway. Since 1998, there has been a lot of progress, but it hasn’t always been easy, and there is still work to do.

One of the difficult issues that is still pending is how to deal with the victims and surviving family members of the more than 3,500 people whose deaths were linked to the conflict. About half of those who died were civilians, and 90 percent of them were men.

In the years since the Troubles ended, the world has become much more aware that the victims of armed conflicts have rights:

- the right to know the truth about what happened and why, and to preserve the memory of what took place;
- the right to justice – to investigations, prosecutions and sanctions of those who committed human rights abuses during the war;
- the right to reparations – to try to restore some of what was lost during the conflict.

During the last couple of decades, we've also learned how important it is to pay attention to the gender dimensions of armed conflict – the many and different ways that women and girls are affected by a conflict, and related to that, the specific needs that should inform truth, justice and reparations initiatives; and to involve women directly in peace-building. These lessons have been incorporated into international declarations such as Security Council Resolution 1325.

Although the Good Friday Agreement included important provisions to protect human rights going forward, it didn't address the past, nor did it take into account gender. The efforts to address these gaps have been led by people in Northern Ireland like the women who are with us today. It is their direct experience in supporting the victims and survivors of the conflict, so many of whom are women, that has led them to develop a set of gender principles for dealing with the legacy of the past. This is the work they will present to us today, and I very much look forward to hearing their recommendations.

Thank you again for joining us today, and I turn the mic over to Dr. Leah Wing of the University of Massachusetts – Amherst, who will introduce our panelists and moderate the discussion.