

**FINAL REPORT**  
**Conflict Research Society – Annual Conference in coop. with INCORE**  
**‘Multidisciplinary approaches to conflict’** **1-3 September 2004**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

|   |        |
|---|--------|
| Introduction                              | page 1 |
| The Conflict Research Society             | page 2 |
| INCORE                                    | page 2 |
| The project and the cooperation           | page 3 |
| The annual conference                     | page 5 |
| A review of the presentations             | page 5 |
| A reflection on the organisational issues | page 9 |

INTRODUCTION

This report summarises the most salient moments of this years CRS conference and highlights the contributions of participants. By doing so, we hope to both reflect on the lessons learned from the conference and develop their potential contribution to the developments of better practice in the future. We are trying to both draw lessons for policy-makers and to develop an understanding of the role and contribution of research organisations to the interplay between policy-making and research.

The first part of the report describes the two sponsoring institutions – the Conflict Research Society itself and INCORE, the international conflict research institute based at the University of Ulster in Derry/Londonderry and affiliated to the United Nations University - and looks at their involvement in this field of study. It recalls the decisions and steps that led to the cooperation of these two institutions in the preparation and organisation of the conference. It also outlines the aims and objectives of the conference.

The core of this report presents a review of the discussed presentations with a reflection on both their contribution to knowledge and the organisational issues which have arisen in their inclusion into the programme and arrangement into thematic groups. Specifically, it looks at relevant lessons for Northern Ireland and for the institutions that work in this area.

In conclusion, it offers a reflection from the organiser on how best to improve practice and procedure in organising these events, and thus offers pointers on how to improve the outcome of similar initiatives in the future.

## THE CONFLICT RESEARCH SOCIETY

The Conflict Research Society promotes research and the extension of knowledge about conflict processes and cooperation of all kinds. Though it has an international membership and presence, the events that it organises are normally held within the UK and Ireland.

The CRS was officially inaugurated in 1963 at University College, London while John Burton was lecturing there. It was the first British academic group to focus on conflict, predating the Bradford School of Peace Studies. In 1969, the CRS created the Richardson Institute for Peace Studies as its research arm. This is now housed and assisted by Lancaster University under the wing of its Department of Politics. The CRS members have included many distinguished peace researchers and others involved in related disciplines. The Society remains influential in bringing together diverse interests with the aim of advancing of our understanding of peace processes and conflict transformation.

The CRS facilitates and promotes research on peace building, reconciliation methods and effectiveness of conflict resolution and the potential for cooperation and reconciliation. It does this by:

- Publishing a newsletter
- Arranging conferences
- Providing opportunities for dissemination and exchange of ideas and information
- Making grants to promote the objectives of the Society, and raising funds for this purpose
- Co-operating with others to promote the objectives of the Society

The CRS is the primary interdisciplinary forum linking researchers in British and Irish universities studying conflict and providing a meeting point for sharing their work. Through the Sydney Bailey Fund the CRS provides small grants to postgraduate students.

## INCORE

INCORE is the co-ordinating body for all peace and conflict research and teaching across the 4 campuses of the University of Ulster. Based at Aberfoyle House on the Magee campus in Derry/Londonderry, INCORE mixes academic research into peace and conflict issues and practical grassroots work in peacebuilding – here in Northern Ireland and internationally.

INCORE was established in 1993 as a joint project of the University of Ulster and the United Nations University, which is headquartered in Tokyo. The UNU is designated as the academic arm of the United Nations itself, and has affiliated institutes in every continent, INCORE included. INCORE operates under the UNU Peace and Governance Programme and benefits from access to the UN system via the UNU office in New York, which is located in United Nations headquarters along the East River.

More information on INCORE can be found at <http://www.incore.ulster.ac.uk/>

## THE PROJECT AND THE COOPERATION OF THE TWO INSTITUTIONS

At every annual conference, the CRS invites one of its long-standing members to open the proceedings with a personal recollection of the origins and the early developments of the Society, to illustrate the historical continuity between its past and present activities to the younger generation of affiliated researchers (DeReuck, 2002). As Prof. Chris Mitchell reminded the audience at this year conference, the CRS had established a regional group in Belfast at the height of the Troubles. However, he also recalled that, due to intimidations from the paramilitaries, the activities of the society in Northern Ireland were suddenly interrupted. The links with the region were, however, not severed.

The University of Ulster has long been involved in the CRS through the membership of one representative of its staff, Dr. Stephen Ryan from the course in Peace & Conflict Studies and International Relations.

The opportunity to revive this link with the University of Ulster presented itself again in 2002, when a postgraduate research student from the University, Silvia Mussano, was invited to become CRS students representative. The following year, at the annual AGM, the student made a proposal to move the annual conference from Hoddesdon, Hertfordshire (where it had been successfully run for two years, namely 2002 and 2003) to a more symbolically relevant place for the Society's research remit. The decision to run the annual conference in partnership with INCORE at University of Ulster, Magee Campus was warmly welcomed by both institutions. - INCORE is located in Londonderry, the second largest city in Northern Ireland. This city has been the theatre of key historical points in the Northern Irish conflict dating all the way back to the 1689 Siege of Derry, up to and beyond the 1972 Bloody Sunday events.

In addition to the historical symbolism of the location, the presence and support of INCORE constituted a unique opportunity for the CRS annual conference. The outstanding international reputation of the institute and its network of partners and affiliates ensured the maximisation of both participation and dissemination of information about the event. The promotion of the conference was carried out in parallel by both the Society and INCORE through their respective websites and networks.

The organisational tasks were also shared between the two institutions under the coordination of Silvia M. who is both associated postgraduate student at INCORE and member of the Society's development committee. INCORE support focussed more specifically on both the organisation and the running in order to allow the Society to dictate the approach to be adopted. Throughout its existence, the Society has remained keen to maintain its sense of research community and to maintain its traditional approach which can be characterised as open, welcoming and relaxed (Mussano, 2002). INCORE, with the personal support of its director Prof. Robinson, was very happy to host the conference and assist in its set up as a stimulus to open up to new networks and experience diverse approaches in fostering a research culture.

Although the work carried out by the Society is not comparable with the range and volume of INCORE's activities, the two institutions take inspiration for their work from a number of shared principles which underpin their action plans:

- The two institutions shared the same open and welcoming approach and foster a research culture which facilitates and supports young researchers alongside the more important work of scholars and practitioners in the field. With this mentoring and educative goal in their mission statements, both the institutions endeavour to instil good practices and contribute to the diffusion of good quality research.
- The two institutions share a multidisciplinary approach to conflict research, whereby multidisciplinary implies both a cross-contamination across field of studies and a variety of methodological approaches
- The two institutions have well established networks at both the national and international levels with INCORE playing the leading role. On its part, the Society is trying to maintain its long-standing networks in the face of the evident ageing of the most senior members of the committee and the rapid growth of research institutes within the same or correlated fields in Britain and the rest of the UK.

In conclusion, it emerges from this account that the Society relies on the longstanding participation and involvement of a group of practitioners and scholars whose voluntary work needs the support from institutions like INCORE in order to better achieve their aims and fulfil the potentiality of their knowledge and experience.

### THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Over the years, the Annual conference has fulfilled different objectives for the overall work of the CRS:

- it allows its active members to present their work in progress to their fellow members,
- it offers the opportunity to expand the number of members by welcoming new participants,
- it allows space for gathering and discussing papers to be published in the Society's annual publication (which is currently under review in sight of a proposal of publication).

The 2004 conference, however, was different in character. The support of INCORE had ensured that the range of participants was wide in terms of both their background and geographical origins. Participants came from as far as the USA and Argentina and closer from Norway, Belgium and Italy. The largest number was composed of participants from the islands of Ireland and Britain and, generally, they belonged to academic centres of excellence in the field of peace and conflict studies (Kent, Lancaster, Limerick and Queens in Belfast).

As participants are generally invited to contribute with at least a poster contribution or asked to get direct involved in its activities, the audience was constituted mainly by the contributors themselves and a number of postgraduate research students. A number of daily attendees were also present from the voluntary sector (Community Relations Council - Belfast, DeBorda Institute - Belfast, Peace and Reconciliation Group-London/Derry, St Columb's Park House- London/Derry).

A list of titles and abstracts is available in the appendix of this report.

### A REVIEW OF THE PRESENTATIONS

The opening night saw the participation of Prof. John Hume, Tip O'Neill Chair and Nobel Laureate, and Prof. Chris Mitchell from George Mason University.

Prof. Hume's opening speech reflected on the current peace process and the need for substantial talks involving all parties and governments on the controversial issues which are still hindering the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. Prof. Hume maintained that opening the doors of communication constitutes the first step that eventually leads to some degree of negotiation and understanding. Prof. Hume argued that the creation and expansion of the European Union constitutes a case in point, as the continent had been plagued for centuries by wars and conflict which finally ended with the foundation of the Union. Furthermore, he added that the peaceful co-existence of different countries could never be taken for granted as its main pillars, namely stability and democracy, involve a process of continuous negotiations. The recent enlargement of the Union constitutes for Hume a clear example of this. Prof. Hume challenged also the perception that inclusiveness in the negotiation process cannot be extended to the men of violence. With reference to the issue of disarmament in Northern Ireland, he argued that paramilitaries have played a major role in creating the conflict and, therefore, have a major contribution to creating peace. In his address, Prof. Hume was also eager to stress the role of education in supporting civil engagement and peaceful coexistence.

In his contribution, Prof. Mitchell recalled the problems of setting up local CRS headquarters during the Troubles and how this hindrance reflected the general difficulties the Society experienced in sustaining its commitment throughout the decades. Prof. Mitchell's analysis of the role of the researcher/practitioner in divided societies was later echoed in the presentation by Roberts (PRIO-Norway) where she analysed the challenges of humanitarian intervention in mine action in Sudan. Prof. Mitchell also recalled the seminal work of the founder of the Society, John Burton, and explained that, although his theory holds ground in contemporary peace studies, the new global developments have a tendency to reduce the perspective to security, political sciences and the study of the balance of powers. This reductionist approach is reflected in the misuse of current conflict research language whereby economic sanctions are paradoxically used as a strategy to prevent conflict, whilst they actually exacerbate international relations. Prof. Mitchell believes that an alternative to this univocal focus is constituted by the recent appropriation of this area of study by developing and emerging countries. On the one hand, Mitchell observes that the founders of this discipline (namely the USA and Europe) have severely reduced the scope and variety of research in this field with severe repercussions on the educational offer and its increasing topical narrowing; on the other, new challenges are brought about by political developments in the countries in transition where the traditional paradigm of conflict as interstate warfare is somehow, if not substantially, challenged. Academic research is consequently moving towards the analysis of inter-community conflict and relinquishing the idea of the state as the sole agent of conflict. Inter-community tensions are more frequently used to describe increasingly complex conflict situations. In conclusion, Mitchell also expressed concerns at the commercialisation and marketability of current conflict research whose constant needs for government and private funding compromises the status of independent research. In this, he highlighted the example of life-long committed researchers who, once and if unburdened by the demands of teaching, developed seminal work from which research could flourish. He referred also to a recent project carried out by his institution (George Mason Univ) that aims at collecting the testimony, both personal and professional, of the

founding fathers of this discipline<sup>1</sup>. Mitchell argues that, if conflict research is to evade political manipulation and remain scientific in character and inspiration, it has to look at the future on the strength of its past achievements.

The second day of the conference was organised around three plenary sessions in the morning and two parallel sessions in the afternoon. It opened with a panel on ethnic conflicts and social movement and was chaired by INCORE director, Prof. Robinson. As noted by Robinson, this panel was enriching and informative as it presented less familiar case study to a Northern Irish audience, namely the water and gas wars in Bolivia and its social upheavals (Carolla- Universidad del Salvador, Argentina) and the ethnic independence movements in Italy (specifically Tyrol and Valle D'Aosta) (Prof. Cook, Loyola Uni. – New Orleans). The water wars' case became a point of lively exchange with the audience as the current attempts at introducing water charges in Northern Ireland is being met with strong resistance by local residents.

Prof. Cook's intervention was crucial in illustrating how Italy constituted a potential model of accommodation of minorities with political independence regionally. In the past, this model of political settlement was advocated for Northern Ireland by political researchers close to the Ulster Unionist party.

These two international examples and their ensuing debate set the tone for a comparative analysis between the Belfast Agreement in Northern Ireland and the Ta'if accords in Lebanon (Russell – Community Relations). Whilst the comparison between the situation in Northern Ireland and the Middle East constitutes a familiar topic for the Northern/Irish audience, this in-depth analysis of the two countries' peace accords explain, in a comparative perspectives, the effects of power-sharing and its unintended consequences. The inability to foresee side developments may prove a crucial shortcoming of peace negotiations.

The peace process in Northern Ireland and the US successful mediation (Rempe-Lancaster) was next on the agenda. This presentation argued that, contrary to current tendencies of the present administration, the US within its role as a super-power has the choice of positioning itself as 'a friend of peace processes' as opposed to advocate of armed intervention. This presentation focussed on the analysis of the positioning of the Clinton's administration in the peace process in Northern Ireland according to mediation theory and reveals how it was successful in its undertaking. This discussion on the use of political and military power opened the discussion for the following presentation on the role of the military and its perception of conflict (McGrane – Ulster). Based on a completed PhD dissertation, McGrane's presentation focussed on how interpersonal conflict can be taught to future generations of army officers who will lead the world's military activity in our future. McGrane's current involvement with the MoD offers her a unique opportunity to approach one of the main players in conflict situation, but starting from the initial level of interpersonal conflict. The presentation aimed at identifying opportunities and, indeed, obstacles, to the production of a practical, meaningful and beneficial study for the use by the military.

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<sup>1</sup> With this, Mitchell expressed his regret at having missed the opportunity to interview two outstanding past members of the CR Society, namely Cedric Smith (ex-chair) and Kenneth Lee.

Having analysed case studies involving direct conflict, the issue of reconciliation and indirect conflict came next on the agenda. Prof Daly's (Widener University School of Law) intervention questioned the meaning of reconciliation on a nation-wide scale by arguing that this term is not meaningful but at the interpersonal level. In echoing Prof. Hume words, this research study demonstrated that, in the context of societies in transition, truth and reconciliation commissions may better represent the occasion for re-formulating the past as opposed to creating real forgiveness and reconciliation. This constitutes for Northern Ireland a memento that the current Saville enquiry on the events of the 1972 Bloody Sunday might not fulfil the expectations of the victims' families, but it should contribute to the creation of a dialogue which looks retrospectively and acknowledge the suffering and injustice where they occurred. This process could constitute a lesson for the redress of other atrocities across the two communities (Omagh, Enniskillen).

At the end of this session, DeGennaro (Universita' agli Studi di Torino) presented the work of UNESCO in promoting peace through music and proposed a model of inter-cultural and inter-musical education. DeGennaro's research outlined the possibility to create reconciliation among divided people through the discovery of musical traditions and the composition, reproduction and creation of new musical harmonies. The process of playing is compared to a learning process where difference are smoothed in the final ensemble. DeGennaro's analysis is based on the UNESCO's programmes promoting inter-musical and inter-cultural exchange.

The following afternoon sessions ran in parallel:

Session A began with a lively presentation given by Peter Emerson of the de Borda Institute, Belfast which highlighted the dangers of majoritarianism in voting systems. Emerson argued that questions in politics should never be 'closed' questions and should always provide for multi-option responses. Indeed, Emerson concluded that an open democratic structure would possibly prevent further political violence and certainly help resolve conflict situations where this has occurred. As a participant's comments suggest (Appendix 1) Emerson's approach has some thought-provoking consequences for those involved in conflict resolution. Mollica's (Leuven) presentation was equally as intriguing for the audience as a series of data was presented reflecting the varied importance of different forms of communication in influencing the perceptions of children in divided societies and how information of political events are disseminated to children. The samples presented were from a Protestant Youth Club in the Fountain area of Derry/Londonderry and a Catholic school in Dungiven and essentially both samples were asked about issues surrounding the Irish National Liberation Army's (INLA) Hunger Strike in 1980-81. A comparison was then presented how information was transmitted to both sets of children; for example, through murals, songs, graveyard memorials and verbal history. Discussion after the presentation centred on the make-up of the samples and problems faced by Mollica in obtaining responses.

In Session B, Pepin (Nottingham Trent) recognized that the threat to human identity constituted a profound and underpinning cause of intractable conflict, and additionally, acknowledged the fulfillment of human needs as being primary and essential to conflict resolution. The problem on intervening to alleviate the needs of people in conflict-torn countries and to fulfill the primary needs, such as safety, was the topic of the following presentation (Roberts-PRIO). Both Roberts and Pepin supported the theoretical background underpinning the society's work. Drawing inspiration from Burton's studies, the promotion of behavioural approaches to conflict has been at the forefront of the Society's research agenda (Bryant, 2002).

In the final morning, two parallel sections were entirely dedicated to Northern Ireland. In session A, members from the University of Ulster UNESCO centre introduced the audience to the problems and dilemmas encountered by education in its promotion of human rights and citizenship education in divided societies. The work of the postgraduate students (Gallagher and Wasson) was incorporated in the framework presentation of two leading research officers from the UNESCO centre (Niens and Reilly) whose paper comprised the explanation of theoretical models and their operationalisation in local educational programmes. Gallagher examined how addressing controversial issues in the curriculum requires the support of a new language with performative powers in education, that is to say a language that activates both agency and structure. Wasson explored the problems of underachievement in young masculinities by investigating the impact of gender and social class on educational success in the construction of masculine positions, whereby old models of young men as perpetrators or victims of violence can find an alternative.

In Session B, Harris (University of Ulster) presented a work-in progress that highlighted, due to the relatively little work completed on the military dimension of the Northern Ireland conflict, there was a need for a re-interpretation of Loyalist terrorist organisations. This, Harris asserted, could be achieved through the use of a synthetic framework - namely the 'Strategic Approach'. Maguire (Limerick) discussed the implications of the introduction of Internment following the IRA's Border Campaign in 1950s by presenting a detailed case study of Gerald Lawless. The delegates were particularly intrigued by the legal precedents set by the Lawless case. The session was concluded by Kanisin (Lancaster) and a discussion on the importance of 'Commitment' in peace-processing. In particular, Kanisin, from a socio-psychological perspective, examined the role played by commitment in the Northern Ireland peace process and a case example detailing the problems faced by David Trimble facilitated energetic discussion amongst the conference delegates.

#### A REFLECTION ON THE ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES INVOLVING THE PREPARATION AND THE RUNNING OF THE CONFERENCE.

Having outlined the cooperation of the two institutions and the complementarities of their roles, this report wants to summarise a few considerations which could ensure a greater success to this kind of initiatives in the future.

- 1) A true international spirit and full cross-cultural and geographically-representative participation was seriously hindered by the inability to provide financial assistance to potential attendees and contributors from the developing countries who have to travel long distances, thus adding to the cost of attendance. Whilst the current Sidney Bailey arrangements suit students in the UK and Ireland, its support proves insufficient for non – EU would-be participants. It would be worth investigating if an institution outside the European Union would be willing to work in partnership to bring the CRS to those countries or if funding could be available from funding bodies (British Council?)
- 2) Funding opportunities attract a high number of bogus applicants and support funding can de facto only be allocated at registration, and exclusively then. Participants will thus have to anticipate the money for the expenses. This also raises questions on the form of reimbursement.

- 3) The established practice not to divorce postgraduate/work in progress from scholarly presentations has worked to the benefit of the former and sustained the ethos of the Society according to which a research culture can be also fostered through the transmission from one generation to the other.
- 4) The idea to move around the annual conference ensures the possibility to reach a wider target audience and avoids the possibility that repetitions occur in terms of thematic arguments.
- 5) Although the multidisciplinary approach presents the organising into thematic units with difficulties, it ensures that the interdisciplinary links emerge more clearly. At this stage of the development of the society, it would be counterproductive to limit the remit of research to a fixed number of specific areas. This could be easily done in the proposed journal
- 6) The cooperation with institute of excellence such as INCORE and the UNESCO Centre in Coleraine, as well as the participant universities at the 2004 conference, has been vital to the success of the Society's initiatives
- 7) Research centre such as INCORE and UNESCO, along with the Research Graduate Schools of relevant faculties, should be interested in having their work publicised and presented. Strategies to maximise the impact of events such as the conference in their aftermath should be discussed (e.g. the dissemination of lesson learned, a publication of a selection of papers etc..)
- 8) This brings the discussion to the final point whereby the conference itself is an invaluable occasion for learning, but the aftermath and sustainment of the acquired lesson constitute the steep way ahead.

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**Appendix I - Participants' comments:**

- From Kenneth Heuston, MA in Peace and Conflict

'I attended the conference as a prospective post-graduate student. The diverse scope of contributions included examinations and comparisons of specific conflicts, and the exploration of thematic topics relevant to conflict research. As a current MA student in Peace and Conflict Studies here at Magee, I was left with much food for thought. All the papers proved extremely interesting, and one paper in particular did much to provoke a reassessment of a long held position.

The unlikely subject of voting systems and majority rule, dealt with by Dr Peter Emerson (Director of the De Borda Institute), has serious implications for several areas of conflict research. It highlighted to me the fact that majoritarianism cannot take account of the complexities of diverse societies. One can see, through his enlightened perspective, how this system of 'democracy' has the potential to lead to conflict – even political violence. As a recent student to the field it is astounding that this subject has not gained more currency, particularly in relation to ethnically divided societies. While not disregarding other factors, the tyranny of the majority has much to answer for. There are many tragedies which testify to this.

Dr Emerson's contribution placed the other papers that dealt with specific conflicts in an important light. The manipulation of the question by unscrupulous leaders, and the subsequent 'legitimacy' of the majority decision, leaves minorities alienated and societies polarised. Often violence is resorted to by these minorities in order to redress a perceived imbalance in influence.

The conference was a valuable introduction to a fascinating field of research'.

- From Steve Hills, CRS committee member

The CRS aims to be a point of contact between different disciplines involved in the study of conflict, and the range demonstrated in the papers presented was very wide. Historians, lawyers, and political scientists contributed alongside specialists in peace studies, interpersonal conflict, music and culture, the influence of the built environment, and education.

The subjects were also wide ranging. They included the idea of home-ness and its relationship to individual identity (the raw data coming from slum-clearance in South Africa), the meaning and process of reconciliation, the IRA and Human Rights legislation in the Irish Republic in the later 1950s, the rôle of music in encounters between cultures, the complex implications of mine clearance in the Sudan, the rôle of the US in the NI peace process, the meaning and mechanisms of commitment to peaceful dialogue, and social movements in Bolivia. Two contributions focussed directly on comparisons. One contrasted the power sharing arrangements in NI and the Lebanon. The other looked at how the Italian state had dealt with potentially divisive disputes with French and German minorities who were, in their regions, majorities (the solution was regional autonomy). The delegate from Sandhurst (the UK's Army Academy) led a discussion about what kinds of conflict research might be most useful in the military context. Another UN-related institution based at Ulster's Coleraine Campus- a branch of UNESCO – contributed a number of papers around the rôle of the education structure in undermining the prejudices which lead to community conflict. British, Irish, Italian, American, South African, Argentinean, Norwegian, Belgian institutions or speakers took part.

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