



CHURCH of IRELAND GENERAL SYNOD
CHURCH in SOCIETY COMMITTEE

**STATEMENT FROM THE CHAIRMAN OF THE CHURCH IN SOCIETY
COMMITTEE ON THE CONSULTATIVE GROUP ON THE PAST**

A response to the statement released by the Consultative Group on the Past issued by the Bishop of Clogher, the Rt Revd Dr Michael Jackson, Chairman of the Church of Ireland's Church in Society Committee and of the group appointed by the Standing Committee of the General Synod to make submissions to the Consultative Group on the Past.

The Church of Ireland, through a group appointed by the Standing Committee of the General Synod, had the privilege of making a presentation to the Consultative Group on the Past in November 2007. At the meeting where we made our presentation, a number of significant issues relating both to the work of the Consultative Group and the life of the Church of Ireland in contemporary Ireland was discussed and the Hard Gospel Project of the Church of Ireland was showcased.

Yesterday's keynote speech delivered by the co-chairperson of the Commission, Lord Eames, makes a number of significant points which seek to draw together the findings of the Commission and to draw out implications for a future society in Northern Ireland. I have no doubt that the content of the speech was carefully weighed by all members of the Commission ahead of its delivery.

It expresses a number of things which we have not heard before from a publicly appointed body of this sort. First, it asks serious and important questions of the IRA, Loyalist Paramilitaries and elements of the State in relation to responsibility for the deaths of innocent people in our community. Secondly, it asserts that the State sometimes acted illegally and calls upon the State to acknowledge both the totality and the complexity of its role over the past forty years. Thirdly, it draws attention to the failure thus far properly to address the many health and welfare issues still endured by victims and survivors of The Troubles. Fourthly, it invites all citizens of Northern Ireland to address an issue which will definitely not go away, however painful and unpalatable, namely that as each day passes securing justice becomes less and less likely.

Undoubtedly the content of this speech will arouse strong and conflicting emotions among members of the Church of Ireland as well as among other members of the population. To some it will speak of outrage and betrayal, to others of something too little and too incomplete. Deep within it there lies the courage to ask questions which have not been asked before. Its full import will become clear only when the Final Report of the Commission is published. Its honesty of expression, based on the all-important process of careful listening, is to be welcomed.