

# National Freedom for All Ireland May 2023 Report

## FFAI Chairperson Dolores Desch

### Freedom For All Ireland Christmas Appeal

The monetary awards for the 2022-23 FFAI Christmas Appeal were presented in Ireland by President Madigan and myself on a recent trip to Ireland. We were joined by National Secretary Sandi Swift, Webmaster Brianna Curran and four FFAI Committee members – Kathleen Savage, Louise Sullivan, Nancy Tindall-Sponsel and Rita O’Hara. This year we awarded an incredible \$80,000 in grants and donations. I received a record \$40,000 in donations from our members and that was matched by our anonymous donor. We also had pin sales money and some additional funds donated from our anonymous donor which the Committee voted to roll into next year. Thank you, Ladies, for your great generosity. The FFAI financial reports for this year are posted to the <https://ladiesaoh.com/membersonly/> page.

Groups that we gave to include the Ballymurphy Massacre Families, Belfast National Graves Association, Bloody Sunday Trust (Museum of Free Derry), Bogside Artists, Bridges Beyond Boxing Belfast, Duchas Oiriall, EALU, Greater New Lodge Cultural Society, Green Cross, Jim O’Neill & Robert Allsopp Memorial Flute Band Omagh Thunder Basketball, Passionist Peace and Reconciliation Office (Holy Cross), Relatives for Justice The Spring Project, St. Patrick’s Center Downpatrick, The Martin McGuinness Foundation, The Witness Project, Tyrone National Graves Association, Springhill Westrock Massacre Committee, HerStory, James Connolly Center and Irelands Future. Our committee also included a donation to Roddy McCorley Women’s Garden of Remembrance, The Peace Players, and Friends of Sinn Fein which we will be sending out soon. All the groups we met with were very thankful for the funding, especially this year where the British government has cut funding significantly for nonprofits and charities in the north. For more information and photos of the trip please go to our Facebook page and scroll down to the April entries. <https://www.facebook.com/LAOHFFAI32>

As a reminder, we collect funds all year round. Funds received going forward will be applied to the 2023-24 Christmas Appeal. All donations should be mailed directly to me from the entity making the donation. My address is 20 Arlene Ave, Albany, NY 12203.

### Good Friday Agreement – 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

**REFLECTIONS ON THE GOOD FRIDAY AGREEMENT:** I attended the Cooper Union event in NYC on April 3 which was a spectacular way to start off the month of celebration for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the GFA. National President Marilyn Madigan served on a panel along with leaders from the other six American Irish organizations. We were addressed via video by Senator George Mitchell, the architect and mediator of the talks in 1998. President Bill Clinton, Gerry Adams and Richie Neal were present as well as others. The Good Friday Agreement brought a lasting peace to the north of Ireland, however there is still work to be done when it comes to some of the items that have still not been delivered. Those include a Bill of Rights, the right to Justice via inquests and court cases, and the right to self-determination via a Border Poll.



**Belfast Agreement 25:** I attended the Belfast event held at Queens University on April 17 and 18<sup>th</sup> along with President Madigan and Webmaster Brianna Curran. This was an incredible experience to be sitting with so many people who were impacted by not only the conflict but the sustained peace.

We heard from Hillary Clinton, George Mitchell, Jerry Adams, Bill Clinton, Bertie Ahern, Tony Blair, and others regarding the peace talks back in '98. The peace and prosperity that followed were all due to US involvement with George Mitchell leading the mediation and displaying patience as each party stormed out during negotiations. While the GFA required concessions by both sides and is in no way perfect it brought peace to a war-torn community and there are hundreds of people alive today because of the GFA.



*Joe Kennedy, Marilyn Madigan, Dan Dennehy, Dolores Desch, MaryLou McDonald, Ciaran Quinn, Brianna Curran and Mark Thompson attending Belfast Agreement 25*

The panel discussions over the two days were important, and one of the most interesting was made up of 5 main political parties in the north. Representatives from Sinn Fein, Alliance, SDLP, UUP and DUP were there. We heard from all but the DUP on how the road to success was through standing up Stormont and getting back to work for the people in their communities who haven't had a government in a year. The nationalist parties Sinn Fein and SDLP talked about the future in Ireland, and the goal of a united and inclusive Ireland respecting all cultures. We heard from Doug Beattie of the UUP (unionist party) talk about his concerns for unionist community in the future of Ireland and his concerns were treated with respect by all the other parties. The leader of the largest unionist party, Jeffrey Donaldson was absent. He sent a representative, Emma Little-Pengelly who brought a sentiment of DUP negativity to the stage. It was disappointing to see that there is still no progression in that party, and even the audience some of which were unionist were embarrassed by her lack of engagement, once more proving that the phrase 'moving the country forward' is not in the DUP leadership's vocabulary.

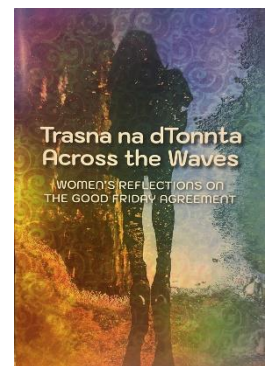
For more information on the event and to watch excerpts: <https://www.qub.ac.uk/agreement25/>

**"GFA 25 Years Peace"** We still have some pins left "GFA 25 Years Peace" so help us sell out! I have them in both gold and silver finish and they are \$10.00 each. For orders of 5 or more we are waiving postage. The pins are selling so get your orders in soon! You can mail in a check to my address listed above.



### **Trasna na dTonnta – Across the Waves Women's Reflections on The Good Friday Agreement**

In celebration of the anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement, our National President Marilyn Madigan, the National FFAI Committee and Relatives for Justice collaborated on a preparing and publishing a booklet which we launched on April 15 at the James Connolly Center in Belfast. We had Andree Murphy, Marilyn Madigan, John Finucane MP, and Kathleen Savage address the audience. We also had several members from the community who contributed and were impacted by the conflict as well as the benefit of peace give moving testimony to their experiences. Our goal was to celebrate and promote the contributions of women to peace and progress in their communities since too often women are written out of the history books and through this project looks to add them back in. We collected submissions from both sides of the Atlantic who shared their thoughts and



reflections over the past 25 years in a written piece. The electronic version can be downloaded from our website at: <https://ladiesaoh.com/freedom-for-all-ireland/>

## It's Different for Mothers



At Queens University Botanical Gardens, we attended the Relatives for Justice launch of **“It’s Different for Mothers”**, a photographic collection (with each photo approximately 5’x8’) of women who lost children during the conflict. Michelle O’Neill, Andree Murphy, Mark Thompson, Naomi Long and President Madigan spoke at the event. Evanna Devine, a 22 year old emerging photographer and student at Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art Design and Technology, captured the portraits. 'It’s Different for Mothers' is her debut exhibition. You could feel the embrace of the community for these mothers.

The following blessing was written and read by Rev Karen Sethuraman:

This is our home where we all belong.

Where our different stories make up the rich tapestry of who we are.

We know what it is to suffer pain and loss.

**But it is different for mothers...**

Your pain and loss none of us can ever/will ever be able to grasp,

As this is your story, because you have walked this path.

Will there be beauty for ashes?

Joy for mourning?

Beauty for grief?

No matter how brief.

Today reminds us that hope and light begin to break through.

It breaks through and spreads throughout our city (and beyond) through each and everyone of you.

So ladies, tell your stories... through your laughter and your tears.

Because blessed are those who are courageous enough to say 'this has been my pain for all these years'.

We are here to listen.

We are here to remember.

We are here to acknowledge and learn from your deep loss.

We are here to stand with you as you continue to fight for justice.

Blessed are you warrior mothers.

## **News from Ireland**

Stormont House which hosts the devolved government in the north of Ireland has still not seen a government formed since the May 2022 election. This is due to the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) refusal to accept the results of the election where for the first time a Nationalist party has won the majority votes. What this means is that Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neill would be the First Minister and DUP's Jeffrey Donaldson would be the Deputy First Minister. The DUP has said that their reason for the refusal to form the government is that they want the "Withdrawal Protocol" scrapped – a protocol that they endorsed prior to the election last spring which they lost. Their stance over the past year will no doubt cause them to lose seats in the local elections which take place on May 18.

### **For More Information...**

Thanks to all of you for your support of Freedom for All Ireland. Stay tuned and follow our Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/LAOHFFAI32> and visit the LAOH National webpage for FFAI at: <https://ladiesaoh.com/freedom-for-all-ireland>.

### News Outlets:

<https://belfastmedia.com/>

<https://belfastmedia.com/>

<https://www.belfastlive.co.uk/>

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