

Committee on International Relations

Subcommittee on Europe and Emerging Threats

Statement of Chairman Elton Gallegly

The Northern Ireland Peace Process: Policing Advances and Remaining

March 15, 2006

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I would first like to thank you for organizing this hearing and your work over the years to bring a just, lasting peace in Northern Ireland. I agree with your views, which you have articulated on many occasions, that a critical element in bringing about reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants is for both communities to have complete faith in the impartiality of the police service and criminal justice system of Northern Ireland.

Since the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in April of 1998, the issue of police reforms has been one of the main issues that has prevented that Agreement's full implementation. Simply stated, Sinn Fein still does not believe that the police reforms, most of which came out of the Patten Commission report, have not gone far enough. In addition, unlike the Social Democrat and Labor Party and the two principal Unionist parties, Sinn Fein has refused to join the Police Board, the body that oversees the Police Service of Northern Ireland, until there is a deal to revive northern Ireland's power-sharing institutions.

At the same time, the dominant Unionist party, the DUP, currently refuses to enter into power-sharing negotiations with Sinn Fein, and even refuses to negotiate directly with them. As Ambassador Reiss stated in his written testimony, the DUP continues to harbor doubts about whether Sinn Fein and the IRA are truly committed to democracy and the rule of law.

Given the impasse in the peace talks, the riots that occurred in Protestant neighborhoods of Belfast last September, and the coming of marching season this summer, I am concerned that there is still very real possibility of more violence this year.

The United States has always played an important role in trying to bring the two sides together and reach a political settlement in Northern Ireland. Therefore, I would like each of our witnesses to address what, in their view, are the main obstacles to the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement, and secondly, what specific action or role should the U.S. play in helping to achieve a long-lasting peace.

Lastly, I would like to commend the work of Chairman Smith, as well as full Committee Chairman Hyde, Congressman King and Congressman Walsh for their efforts on behalf of peace, justice and economic development in Northern Ireland. I would also like to personally thank each of them for working with me and my staff to try to come up with a resolution that we can all agree upon that articulates the support of the House of Representatives for the peace process in Northern Ireland.

Again, thank you Chairman Smith for organizing this hearing and for your work on this issue.