

Negotiations faltering year after IRA cease-fire

By Patrick Nolan
Catholic News Service

DUBLIN, Ireland — A year after the Irish Republican Army declared a cease-fire, peace talks to end the conflict in Northern Ireland are sputtering.

Among the pivotal issues is whether the IRA's political wing, Sinn Fein, can engage in talks before the IRA starts disarming and whether Britain is moving fast enough to release IRA prisoners.

In an interview on Vatican Radio Sept. 1, the anniversary of the cease-fire, Irish primate Cardinal Cahal Daly said all sides of the conflict must compromise if a permanent peace is to be found.

This is difficult because compromise can be interpreted as betrayal by militants on both sides, he said.

A successful agreement would have to be drafted so that it could not be interpreted as a victory for one side and a defeat for the other, the cardinal said.

The peace brought about by the cease-fire has been a blessing for parents who have not had to receive news that their children have been murdered or that a relative was caught in a bomb explosion, the cardinal said.

Albert Reynolds, former Irish prime minister and a key figure in promoting Northern Ireland peace talks, warned that the vacuum created by the two gov-



On the eve of the Sept. 1 cease-fire anniversary, Brian Burns, age 8, plays against the graffiti-covered wall of his house in the nationalist Newington area of North Belfast.

Reuters/CNS

ernments' inability to compromise eventually may be filled by extremist groups wanting to undermine the process.

The pace of peace talks must be accelerated, he said Aug. 27.

"We are all mature enough to know that there are no instant solutions, and

we all accept that there will be detours and delays, but the sooner inclusive dialogue starts, dialogue between the voices of reason, the better," he said.

Signed Sept. 1, 1994, the IRA cease-fire, was followed in October by a cease-fire declared by opposing paramilitary

groups. These groups, supported primarily by Protestants, have fought to maintain Northern Ireland's union with Britain. The primarily Catholic-supported IRA wants Northern Ireland to be annexed by the Republic of Ireland.

Since violence broke out in 1969, nearly 3,200 people have been killed.

For several months, the British government and unionist parties have insisted that paramilitary groups on both sides of the conflict should start turning in their weapons before all-party talks can begin. The Irish government and Sinn Fein, meanwhile, hold that surrendering the arms should not be a prerequisite for the start of talks.

An August public opinion poll in Northern Ireland showed that 64 percent of the respondents believed all-party talks and the disarming of paramilitary groups should take place simultaneously, a "twin-track" approach similar to that advanced by the Irish government.

Another August survey showed that a majority of Northern Irish Protestants fear that the IRA is likely to resume violence. Sixty-two percent of Protestants said the IRA is likely to return to violence, while only 25 percent of the Catholics thought so.

It also showed that 30 percent of the Catholics and 59 percent of the Protestants feel that unionist paramilitary groups would also resume violence.

Overall, 40 percent of the 608 Protestant and 462 Catholic respondents believe the IRA would return to violence, a 2 percent increase since February.

The other stumbling block to peace talks is the early release of political prisoners. Britain moved a step in that direction at the end of August.

At women's conference:

Pakistan's leader calls for aid to girls

By Cindy Wooden
Catholic News Service

BEIJING — Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto opened the Fourth World Conference on Women with a call to love, protect and educate the world's female children.

Discrimination against women and girls is "a fundamental moral issue," she said Sept. 4.

The Muslim leader of a Muslim nation, Bhutto said she felt obliged "to counter the propaganda of a handful" who claim the second-class status of females is a matter of Islamic faith.

The Muslim holy book, the Koran, condemns injustice against anyone and particularly condemns the practice of female infanticide, which was common in pre-Islamic Arabia, she said.

Yet, she said, "girl children are often abandoned or aborted. Statistics show that men now increasingly outnumber women in more than 15 Asian nations."

"Boys are wanted because their worth is considered more than that of the girl," Bhutto said. "Boys are wanted to satisfy the ego: They carry on the father's name in this world."

Bhutto, who is not a delegate at the conference, called on delegates to re-

spond to "the cries of the girl child."

Education, jobs and the right to own property are essential elements of fostering equality between women and men, ensuring that the perceived worth of a female equals that of a male, she said. Promoting equality also is essential in stopping domestic violence.

"If my father had not educated me or left me with independent financial means, I would not have been able to sustain myself or to struggle against tyranny or to stand here before you today as a special guest speaker," said the prime minister, the first woman ever to be elected to lead an Islamic nation.

Bhutto also asked delegates to strengthen the draft document's support for mothers and for families, a request the Vatican delegation also made in pre-conference negotiations.

The traditional family, Bhutto said, is "the bedrock of the society. Disintegration of the family generates moral decay."

Gertrude Mongella, a Tanzanian Catholic who is the conference's secretary-general, said the draft was the result of a joint effort by women and men of all nations, races and religions to map out a plan of action to make women's equality a reality and to foster

peace and development.

The same kind of cooperation will be necessary to make the goals a reality, she said. "It will not be possible to attain sustainable development without cementing the partnership of women and men in all aspects of life."

"Women have all along struggled with their menfolk for the abolition of slavery, the liberation of countries from colonialism, the dismantling of apartheid and the struggle for peace," she said. "It is now the turn of men to join women in their struggle for equality," she added.

U.N. Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, who could not attend the opening because of illness, said the conference must address the fact that "for centuries the world has given women less than their due."

"Those empowered by nature to create life itself have had their own lives impoverished," he said in a message.

"Those who have proven their skills at raising children have been considered unfit to participate in popular governance on equal terms," Boutros-Ghali said. "Those who have built homes upon foundations of trust and affection have been denied the shelter of society's concern and care."

Vatican paper terms air raids a 'warning'

ROME (CNS) — The Vatican newspaper has described NATO's air raids in Bosnia as a warning to the Bosnian Serbs, not war, and a crucial turn of events aimed at "restoring hope to the martyred people of the region."

In a front-page commentary, the newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*, said Aug. 31 that the air raids should not be seen as an act of war, but as a warning to the Serbs to respect human rights.

The NATO attacks were aimed at targets in territories held by Bosnian Serbs and used to shell civilian targets, in an effort to bring the Serbs to the negotiating table and break their siege of Sarajevo. The operation was launched after a mortar attack blamed on Serbian forces killed 37 civilians in Sarajevo, the Bosnian capital.

"The heavy retaliation undertaken by the United Nations and NATO to respond to the massacre in Sarajevo cannot and should not be considered an act of war against one party," the Vatican newspaper said.

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