

On Sunday, June 29th 2025, Ottawa got its chance to host a very successful event as part of the global series of Sinn Féin Commission on the Future of Ireland meetings.

See <https://sinnfein.ie/futureofireland/> for more information.

The previous day, Friends of Sinn Féin Canada (FoSFC) had held a similar gathering in Toronto, and the visitors from Ireland, Rose Conway-Walsh, TD, and Ciarán Quinn from the office of party president and leader of the opposition in Dáil Éireann, were in attendance

Ottawa activists had assembled a very broad panel of local Irish and Irish Canadian business, cultural and sports leaders to bring our discussion on Irish unity to another level.

Patrick McDonald of The National Irish Cultural Centre at Brigid's Well was a well-informed host. Patrick preceded our discussion with a land acknowledgment of the rights of the Indigenous people as follows:

Our meeting today acknowledges that it is taking place on the traditional, unceded territory of the Algonquin Nation. This recognition is a formal statement honouring the Algonquin people and their historical and ongoing connection to the land. It also signifies a commitment to building respectful relationships with Indigenous communities and working towards reconciliation.

This acknowledgement was important to FoSFC, since (among many reasons), the Indigenous people of Canada have always been supporters of the Irish people under colonialism, particularly during An Gorta Mór when the Choctaw and Saugeen nations, in particular, contributed to famine relief in Ireland.

Our panellists also included,

- **Jackie Gilna-Turton**, Founder and CEO of We Are Global Irish Inc
- **Wayne Gudbranson**, Founder and CEO of Branham Group
- **Michael McBane**, Author, and historian on The Irish Famine
- **Kerry Mortimer**. Pres. Mortimer Marketing Group, past Chairperson Canada GAA

After introductions, Rose Conway-Walsh gave an inspirational address which included the following comments.

“Now we meet here at a great time of opportunity for the Irish nation. The opportunity to build a new and united Ireland. The dream of generations at home and those who have left our shores like many here today.

The Good Friday Agreement presents a democratic and peaceful pathway to Irish unity and it places the constitutional future of our island in the hands of the people. That's in the hands of all of the people living on the island and our Irish diaspora as well. It provides for referendums north and south. If the majority of voters in each jurisdiction vote for unity, then the governments are obliged to act.

The governments have the power to call unity referendums at any time. There's a further provision that compels the British Secretary of State to order a referendum when it looks like a constitutional change is likely. This was drafted to prevent the British government from infinitely refusing to hold a referendum. Now the criteria for when the British are compelled to hold a referendum is vaguely defined within the agreement. The other relevant provision is that there cannot be a further referendum within seven years of a previous one.

The Good Friday Agreement is an international agreement between the two governments and endorsed by all of the main parties in Ireland with the exception of the DUP, the Democratic Unionist Party. The agreement was put to the people and supported by 72% of the people in the north and 94% of people in the south. It is the will of the people of Ireland, including the right to unity referendums. The pathway to unity is mapped out: secure and win referendum unity referendums both north and south.

You might ask what's this got to do with Canada and the people that are here today? Well, first of all, Canada has skin in the game. A generation has grown up known relative peace and that was made possible by the involvement of the Canadian government appointees dealing with the most sensitive issues in the peace process.

General John de Chastelain headed a commission dealing with weapons decommissioning, a vital element in the wider issue of disarmament and demilitarization.

Judge Cory ruled on the need for public inquiries into the series of killings during the conflict. All but one relating to human rights solicitor Pat Finucane have been concluded. So, in short, the Canadian appointees gained the confidence of all sides in the conflict and allowed for progress to be made.

The Irish in Canada and supporters of peace have been vocal in securing, protecting and implementing that agreement. They have asserted the civil rights and equality for all. When the then British government sought to impose a hard border across Ireland as part of Brexit, the parties in the Canadian Federal Parliament made clear that there would be no new trade deal if the Good Friday Agreement was not protected. The progress we enjoy in Ireland today is part due to the international community, including Canada, as I said, and the Good Friday Agreement is in part your agreement."

Ms. Conway-Walsh continued in a similar vein and then the panellists each gave their personal reasons for participating in the discussion. Each drew on personal love for Ireland, memories, and also on sporting, cultural and business links that are strong, and can be the basis to grow even more important in the context of a united island.

Following the panel discussion, the MC invited questions from the audience and a wide variety of questions relating to the deep feelings of unionists, economic development, EU membership and cultural respect ensued.

One panellist commented, that although she is not a political person, this was the first time that she had ever seen any Irish political party engage with the Diaspora Irish in Canada, to learn their ideas, thoughts and hopes about Irish unity.

The bottom line, is that Ottawa is now on the roadmap for thinking about, supporting and promoting the reunification of our island.