



Pat Sheehan addresses the annual republican commemoration at Bodenstown, Co Kildare, on June 19

Bodenstown 2011: Sinn Féin on the rise across Ireland

WEST Belfast Assembly member Pat Sheehan gave this year's address at the annual Wolfe Tone commemoration in Bodenstown, Co Kildare, on June 19, focusing on the significance and legacy of the 1981 Hunger Strike, and the growing strength of republicanism today.

Mr Sheehan spent 55 days on hunger strike in the H Blocks in 1981 before the strike was called off.

The Bodenstown commemoration followed the most successful Assembly and Council elections ever for Sinn Féin in the Six Counties on May 5, the 30th anniversary of the death of Bobby Sands.

Mr Sheehan said: "This year has witnessed the greatest political resurgence of Irish republicanism since the partition of our country. Elections North and South have seen Sinn Féin become the third largest party on the island of Ireland. The all-Ireland project has received a massive boost and added momentum.

"We have seen the arrival in Leinster House of Sinn Féin as a truly significant political force in the 26 Counties – with 14 TDs, including our party leader Gerry Adams and three Senators.

"Not only were there tremendous gains with the 14 newly elected TDs but several other candidates came very close to making this election even more historic.

"Almost a quarter of a million people voted for Sinn Féin in that election.

"Sinn Féin's platform in that election was based on core, genuine republican values. We talked about sovereignty and independence and standing up for people's rights and our interests. We talked about political choices and the need for real change. We said there was a better way and produced costed proposals to get the economy back on track. We offered more than just hope – Sinn Féin offered a real alternative and the people responded.

"In the Six Counties, the Assembly and Council elections on May 5th – Bobby Sands' anniversary – produced the most successful results ever for Sinn Féin.

"In the North we now have 29 MLAs, and 138 councillors.

"Joint First Minister Martin McGuinness and the new team of Sinn Féin Ministers are providing principled republican leadership in the Executive.

"Inside and outside the Executive and Assembly, Dáil and Seanad, Sinn Féin Ministers, TDs, MLAs, Councillors, and activists will use every opportunity to forward the radical republican alternative to the social and economic crises facing families, north and south, east and west and will forge ahead with the all-Ireland agenda.

"The general election in this state saw a change of faces around the cabinet table. But the Fine Gael/Labour coalition is continuing to pursue the failed policies of the past, kow-towing to the diktats of the EU/IMF and heaping more misery on families on low and middle incomes trying to get by, families struggling to pay their bills and their mortgages while the banks are bailed out with billions of taxpayers' money.

"The new government has done 50 U-turns in 100 days – that's one every 2 days.

"Sinn Féin provides the only real political opposition to the bankrupt policies of Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael and Labour. Throughout the 32 Counties, Sinn Féin must use its increased political strength and growing support to build for a united Ireland and a New Republic built in the interests of citizens."



From left, Michelle O'Neill, John O'Dowd, Martina Anderson, Martin McGuinness and Carál Ní Chuilín

New ministerial posts announced

FOLLOWING the May 5 Assembly elections, Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams announced the party's Ministerial appointments to the Northern Executive. The party leader thanked all the outgoing Sinn Féin Ministers and wished the new team well.

The appointments are as follows:

- Deputy First Minister – Martin McGuinness
- Education Minister – John O'Dowd
- Agriculture and Rural Development Minister – Michelle O'Neill
- Culture, Arts and Leisure Minister – Carál Ní Chuilín
- Junior Minister in the Office of First Minister and Deputy First Minister – Martina Anderson.

In addition to these new Executive Ministerial appointments, on the Belfast City Council Sinn Féin's Niall O'Donoghue was appointed as Mayor of Belfast. At 25, he is the youngest ever mayor of the city.



Short Strand resident Niall Ó Donnghaile (26) was elected to the Belfast City Council in May and became the city's youngest ever mayor and the third Sinn Féin mayor

Belfast Mayor Niall Ó Donnghaile slams UVF attack on Short Strand

Sinn Féin Mayor of Belfast and Short Strand resident Niall Ó Donnghaile wrote the following article following an attack on nationalist residents living in the Short Strand – a small nationalist enclave within loyalist East Belfast – beginning on June 21.

“IHAVE lived in the Short Strand for my entire life. It is a proud working class inner-city community. I am very proud to come from this area. The people of the Short Strand, in common with those ordinary people who live in the neighbouring unionist communities in the Newtownards Road and Alberbridge Road want to be able to raise their families and live their lives in peace.

For some weeks there have been sporadic instances of anti-social stone throwing across the interface in this area. Local community representatives and politicians have been trying to deal with it with some success. It is important that this good work continues.

However, what happened last night was not anti-social behaviour or a sectarian riot. What happened was a well-planned and orchestrated attack on the Catholic community in the Short Strand by the UVF.

The activities of the UVF in East Belfast have been giving people cause for concern for some time. These have been well documented in the media by a variety of commentators. There has been a marked increase in UVF flag flying, the painting of new paramilitary murals and significant agitation around Loyal Order parades. This has caused deep unease within both communities in East Belfast.

Last night this manifested itself with a premeditated violent attack by over 100 masked UVF men on the community where I live.

It is my clear view that the PSNI could and should have responded better. And I think with the power of hindsight senior officers may well agree with this view.

The rioting which followed the initial UVF attack and which saw homes in both communities damaged and significant inconvenience caused was also unacceptable. Those who choose to bring guns onto the streets also need to know that their foolish and reckless actions contributed nothing last night and both communities in East Belfast want no part of such actions. It is only through good fortune that nobody was killed.

What my primary focus today as the First Citizen of Belfast has been to try and put mechanisms in place to ensure that there is no repeat tonight of what we witnessed last night on the streets of East Belfast.

I have met with the PSNI and other statutory agencies today and also convened a meeting of political leaders in the city.

But this issue will not be resolved unless there is a very direct challenge put up to those responsible for initiating last night's incidents – namely the UVF. There is a perception that unionist political leaders are not willing to address the very serious problem that the UVF is now posing to the everyday lives of citizens in Belfast. It is no good for us simply to clean up the mess left behind by actions like last night. We all know where the problem lies and there is a particular onus on political and

civic unionism to intervene and address them.

I will make every avenue available to me a Mayor of Belfast to those within that community who wish to sort out these problems. I will be open to any and every suggestion from within the unionist community in East Belfast to assist them in that.

Let us act now to make sure yesterday's UVF actions are not allow to set the agenda for the summer months in the city of Belfast.



100 days of Fine Gael/Labour government littered with broken promises – Adams

SPEAKING at a protest against Government policies at Leinster House on June 16, Sinn Féin leader Gerry Adams TD said that the first 100 days of the Fine Gael-Labour coalition government has been littered with broken promises and U-turns.

He said: “The most serious U-turns were the decisions by the government to continue with the EU/IMF bailout and to hand billions of taxpayers’ money over to the banks.

“There is an understandable suspicion that yesterday’s u-turn on imposing burden sharing on senior bondholders: to burn these bondholders in Anglo Irish Bank and Irish Nationwide is a stunt to mark the 100 days of this government.

“But there are dozens more damaging u-turns in health provision and education, the introduction of water and household charges, and more,” he said.

“Fine Gael and Labour have adopted almost the entire economic policy of the failed and rejected Fianna Fáil-Green government.

“They have failed to protect the most vulnerable, cut essential services and been at the beck and call of the EU/IMF.

“The government has demonstrated no leadership out of the crisis which is destroying the lives of working people.

“In just 100 days it is clear that the people deserve better than what this administration has to offer,” he concluded.

Mr. Adams was speaking outside the gates of Leinster House, where members of Dublin Sinn Féin were protesting to mark the government’s first 100 days.

‘No to water charges’

Also on June 16, Sinn Féin TDs Aengus Ó Snodaigh and Brian Stanley called on all parties to support the Sinn Féin motion on water charges which was debated in the Dáil.

Mr Stanley said: “Sinn Féin is totally committed to campaigning against the imposition of a charge for water. We believe that this charge will place even more of a burden on families who are already struggling to cope with the rising cost of living, unemployment and Government austerity measures.”

Mr Ó Snodaigh said: “Our motion calls for the €500 million which the Government intends spending on the installation of water meters to be spent upgrading the antiquated distribution network. Such an investment would more than pay for itself in a relatively short time and both retain and create jobs in the local economy.

“The motion also affirms that the central taxation system is the only appropriate funding mechanism for domestic water.

“This is an important motion and I am calling on all parties to reject these unfair and regressive stealth taxes.”

Hundreds attend 'Uniting Ireland' conferences in Dublin and Cork

TWO major conferences have been held by Sinn Féin in June in Dublin and Cork to promote the objective of uniting Ireland. Both conferences brought together a range of speakers from different backgrounds, including unionists, economists, trade unionists, journalists and historians to discuss 'Uniting Ireland – Towards A New Republic'.

The conferences in Ireland follow several major conferences in England, the US and Canada on the same topic.

Mr Adams said: "Sinn Féin's primary political goals are Irish reunification and the construction of a new national democracy on the island of Ireland, including reconciliation between nationalists and unionists.

"Sinn Féin is not alone in believing that uniting Ireland is desirable. The vast majority of citizens on this island, republicans and nationalist, support the goal of a united Ireland, but turning that aspiration into reality requires more than fine words.

"The Good Friday Agreement provides a legislative, peaceful and democratic route to achieve Irish unity.

"Partition holds back Ireland's potential for economic growth. On an island this small it does not make sense to have two competing political systems, two health services, two education structures and two economic systems competing with each other for jobs and investment. Uniting Ireland makes political and economic sense, especially in a time of severe economic recession.

"The people of this island, organised and working together, can overcome any obstacle and build a new and better society, based on equality, that works for everyone. And let us do it in our time.

"Advancing this requires republicans reaching out to and building a new relationship with unionists.

"Sinn Féin understands the importance of addressing the genuine fears and concerns of unionists in a meaningful way. We need to look at what they mean by their sense of Britishness and be willing to explore and to be open to new concepts.

"I believe that the unionist people can find their place in a new Ireland, a shared Ireland. For this to happen they must have equal ownership.

"It will be a place in which there is political, social, economic and cultural equality, and respect for cultural diversity.

"Making this happen requires a new dialogue. That's the rationale behind the two Uniting Ireland conferences this month," he concluded.



The panel of guest speakers at the 'Towards A New Republic' conference in Cork City Council Concert Hall on June 25

Full statutory inquiry into Magdalene laundries is required – McDonald

SINN Féin Deputy Leader Mary Lou McDonald TD secured a commitment from the Taoiseach on June 15 that the Inter-departmental Committee tasked with a limited investigation into the treatment of women and children held in the Magdalene Laundries would report back to the Dáil within three months.

Ms McDonald said: "Whilst this decision by Government to set up the



Sinn Féin Vice President and Dublin TD Mary Lou McDonald

Inter-departmental Committee is, as the Justice for Magdalenes group have stated, a welcome first step, it cannot be used as a mechanism to avoid the setting up of a full statutory inquiry as demanded by the UN Convention Against Torture.

"The Government's failure to issue a formal apology to the women held in the Magdalene Laundries is deeply disappointing.

"As many as 30,000 women passed through the Magdalene Laundries in the period from 1922 to 1996. Women and children were held as prisoners and forced to work without pay.

"They were abused and many of the women had their children taken from them. Some became so institutionalised that they could never leave or function outside of the institution. The State was complicit in all of this.

"The UN Committee against Torture in Geneva last month heard that courts in this state regularly sent women and girls to the laundries as an alternative to jail and others were transferred into them from industrial schools, which were the absolute responsibility of the state. The Gardaí were also responsible for capturing and returning women to these institutions, if they managed to escape.

"These were not privately run institutions, with no state involvement, where women or girls were sent 'voluntarily' as the Government has claimed. There can, on this basis, be no abdication of the State's complicity and responsibility for the Magdalene laundries."

Evidence of collusion at every stage in Loughinisland murders

COMMENTING on June 24 on the publication of the Police Ombudsman report into the UVF murder of six civilians in Loughinisland, Co Down, in 1994, Sinn Féin Assembly member Caitríona Ruane said that Al Hutchinson had failed to match the findings of his report with the obvious conclusion that the murders were carried out through collusion.

Ms Ruane said: "I want to pay tribute to the families of those killed at Loughinisland. It is clear that the intention was that the circumstances surrounding these murders would never be properly investigated and revealed. It is only through their determination that the campaign for the truth has reached this point.

"If ever there was a case which demonstrated collusion it is the murders at Loughinisland. That is the only conclusion which can be reached, even from the information put in the public domain today by the Ombudsman. His failure to reach that very obvious conclusion on the basis of the evidence in front of him is a matter which he needs to explain.

"But let nobody reading the conclusions of this report fool themselves. The people who planned the murders at Loughinisland, those at the very top of the UVF, are agents. The Mount Vernon UVF who carried it out, a number of whom are currently being debriefed, are agents. The driver of the car is a convicted paedophile who is an agent and who later received a Royal prerogative. This isn't speculation or propaganda it is fact. At every stage in this murder plot a state agent was central. British State agents murdering citizens is collusion.

"Sinn Féin will continue to support the families in their campaign for the truth. Today's report does not mark the end rather the start of a new phase."



Bik McFarlane addresses the conference

London conference marks 30th anniversary of 1981 Hunger Strike

BY JAYNE FISHER, SINN FÉIN LONDON OFFICE

A FITTING and poignant event, organised by the Sinn Féin London Office, marked 'one of the most heroic chapters in human history' on June 18. Opening the event in the London Irish Centre, with these words from Fidel Castro at the time of the 1981 Hunger Strike, more than 300 people packed in, to listen to speakers, in what was a moving day of both testimony and political analysis.

The event was organised to mark the 30th Anniversary and to put the Hunger Strike in its wider political context. Organisers commented that the Hunger Strike was not only a turning point in Irish history and the struggle for Irish freedom, it was one of the most important and courageous struggles to have taken place anywhere in history, anywhere in the world.

The conference heard a wide range of speakers from Ireland and internationally, to look at how events unfolded, how they shone an international spotlight on the conflict and shaped the political developments for decades to come.

1981 – a turning point in history

Brendan 'Bik' McFarlane, as the Officer Commanding of the IRA prisoners in Long Kesh during the Hunger Strike, gave a moving and unique insight, setting the tone for the day. Bik outlined the stakes involved, and how there was a clear political understanding of what was necessary. It was clear that the British government's 'criminalisation' policy was central to their whole strategy overall; by criminalising the prisoners the whole struggle became criminalised and so the stakes for both the British government and Irish republicans were immense.

Ultimately the British government were defeated, but this took the lives of ten men in the course of the struggle. He also spoke of the importance of the families, the quiet dignity and strength, in the face of immense pressure. During his detailed and extraordinary account of what took place, the audience sat in rapt silence, many near to tears and struck by the magnitude and heroism of those involved, and with a feeling that this was indeed a unique and privileged occasion to hear so directly about such a key moment in history.

Sinn Féin MEP Bairbre de Brún spoke about the development of the solidarity movement outside the prison, from her own involvement in the anti-H Block/Armagh Committee. With clear points to be drawn on for today, she outlined how a huge coalition developed, based on the simple demand of supporting those who wanted the inhuman condition of the prisoners to end, around their struggle.

Developing a broad basis for the campaign, she related how this mass movement was possible to develop in a way not seen before. She pointed to the huge upturn in protest activity on the streets, and how it was met

with violence from the British state, such as the use of 16,500 plastic bullets in just one month.

Former British Labour MP Kevin McNamara analysed how the Hunger Strike impacted within the British State, and how there were some voices, like his own, who refused to go along with the British imperialist agenda, in the discussions at the time. Writer, academic and journalist, Roy Greenslade, spoke about the lies told in large sections of the British media about the Hunger Strike, which was all a part of the propaganda war, and how such misinformation still prevails today.

US-based academic and writer Professor Christine Kineally gave a factual analysis of the events leading up to and after 1981, and pointed to the subsequent rise of Sinn Féin and the peace process, which underlined how the magnitude of the Hunger Strike was greater than anyone could have envisaged at the time.

International solidarity

How 1981 shook the world, and the international impact of the Hunger Strike in breaking the isolation of the prisoners, formed the theme of the second panel discussion. Legendary leader of the struggle to defeat apartheid, Ronnie Kasrils, gave an inspiring and incisive account of how the South African movement learned from the Irish struggle and vice versa.

Quoting James Connolly on 'The cause of Ireland is the cause of Labour and the cause of Labour is the cause of Ireland' he argued that the national and social struggles were indivisible. He spoke of the worldwide struggle against imperialism and how alliances and common links were absolutely vital.

Former French MEP Francis Wurtz, who chartered a plane to travel to Belfast to attend Bobby Sands' funeral, related the impact across Europe, which helped overcome the idea that the prisoners were isolated. In fact it was the Thatcher government which became isolated and hated for its actions.

Writer and activist on Palestine and the Middle East, Kevin Oviden, related how the whole of the Arab world was, and remains, inspired and influenced by the Hunger Strike. He spoke of how the unity of prisoners could be a unifying factor in the wider struggle and how the issue of human rights for prisoners could bring a wider interest and support.

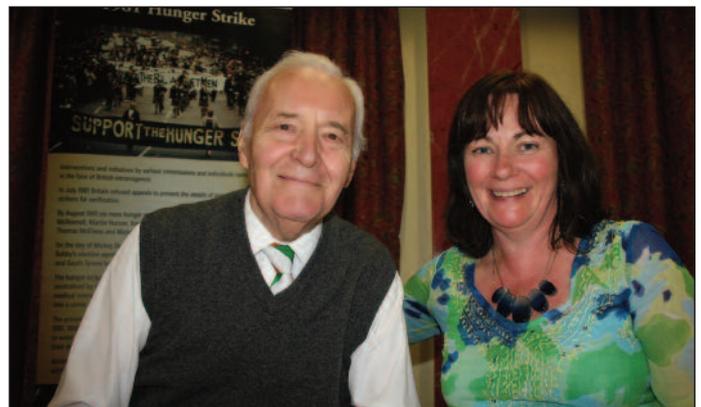
From the chair British Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn spoke of the lasting legacy of the Hunger Strike and how it resonated with many of today's international struggles, in Palestine and elsewhere.

Reunification

Sinn Féin's Assembly chief whip, and former political prisoner and friend of Bobby Sands Jennifer McCann spoke of the role of women in Armagh Women's Jail in the prison struggle, and how strongly interconnected the men and women involved were at the time.

Bobby's election to Westminster, she said, and that of two of his comrades to the Dáil, marked a sea-change in how Irish republicans looked at elections, and their potential, and could be seen as a catalyst for Sinn Féin's electoral intervention since. She brought the discussions up to the present day, outlining the development of Sinn Féin's political strategy and pointing to the growing strength and dynamic towards Irish unity – economic, social and political.

The final speaker, Tony Benn, spoke of the necessity to see the Irish struggle for self-determination not simply as a small isolated fight, but as part of a huge and general struggle against colonialism worldwide. He said this was not the case of a small band fighting a bigger monster, but a worldwide anti-colonial struggle. He spoke of his own conviction that Irish reunification would happen, it was only a question of how soon. Videos of the speakers are available via YouTube.



Tony Benn and Jennifer McCann at the conference



Kerry Sinn Féin TD Martin Ferris

Martin Ferris to speak on 'Uniting Ireland' in Australia in July

OVER the past two years Sinn Féin has organised a series of 'Uniting Ireland' events in the US, Britain and Canada to mobilise international supporters on the issue of Irish independence and unity.

Friends of Sinn Féin Australia and the Casement Group Melbourne are organising a series of similar events in a number of Australian cities in late July.

Kerry Sinn Féin TD Martin Ferris will be visiting Australia to speak on the issue of 'Uniting Ireland' and the role that the Irish diaspora and supporters can play in advancing this cause in Australia. Commemorating the 30th anniversary of the 1981 Hunger Strike will also be a theme of the events.

Martin was part of the Sinn Féin negotiating team in the lead up to the signing of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 and he has travelled extensively in support of the peace process and Irish Unity. He was first elected to the Dáil in 2002 when he topped the poll, after spending a number of years on Kerry County and Tralee Town Councils. He was re-elected to the Dáil in 2007 and again in 2011.

Martin Ferris will be speaking in Perth (July 27), Canberra (July 28), Sydney (July 29) and Melbourne (July 30).

For more information phone Emma on +61 450 835 189.

Maghaberry agreement 'must be implemented'

SINN Féin Vice-Chair of the Assembly Justice committee Raymond McCartney MLA has called for the agreement reached between republican prisoners in Roe House in Maghaberry jail and the prison administration reached last August to be implemented in full as a matter of urgency.

He said: "There are continuing concerns about the treatment of prisoners being held in Maghaberry with allegations of mistreatment by prison staff.

"It is important that prisoners' rights are protected and that human rights are to the fore of the prison regime.

"Carál Ní Chuilín and myself have met with senior prison management on numerous occasions to outline our ongoing concerns about the situation in Roe House and in relation to the prison system overall.

"During that process an agreement was reached between the prisoners and the prison administration. This agreement needs to be implemented in full as a matter of urgency.

"I have pressed the prison administration and the Justice Minister on the matter to ensure that this is done. The situation cannot be allowed to deteriorate any further and a resolution must be forthcoming without further delay."

'Rescind Marian Price decision'

Mr McCartney also reiterated Sinn Féin's position on the imprisonment of Marian Price following her participation in an Easter Commemoration..

"The revoking of Marian Price's licence is completely unacceptable. "The move by Secretary of State Owen Paterson amounts to detention without trial. This runs contrary to natural justice. The justice system must be human rights based and the revoking of Marian Price's licence is totally unacceptable.

"Sinn Féin raised our concerns on this issue with the British Secretary of State at the time of Marian Price's arrest and will continue to do so in the interests of justice and the human rights of the individual."



Best wishes to Irish Ship to Gaza MV Saoirse

SINN Féin Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Pdraig MacLochlainn has sent his best wishes to the crew of the MV Saoirse, the Irish Ship to Gaza which will travel with the International Freedom Flotilla.

Several Sinn Féin activists including three elected representatives are among the 20 Irish citizens on the Irish Ship to Gaza.

Mr MacLochlainn said the flotilla should be allowed safe passage to Gaza to bring much needed aid to the besieged Palestinian people there.

He said: "I want to congratulate the organisers of this trip and wish them the best of luck. It is an extremely brave thing to do given the murderous actions of Israeli forces when they boarded the Mavi Marmara last year when the first flotilla attempted to enter Gaza.

"This second flotilla should be allowed safe travel and the Government should be speaking to the Israeli authorities to ensure that they get it.

"Furthermore, the Government should be doing all in its power to end the siege of Gaza and the suffering of the Palestinian people there including calling for an end to the preferential trade agreement between the EU and Israel until such time as the siege is lifted."

Irish government must back the flotilla

The Minister for Foreign Affairs must call on the Israeli government to allow the flotilla carrying humanitarian aid through to Gaza, Sinn Féin Senator Trevor Ó Clochartaigh has said.

Speaking in the Seanad on June 20, the Sinn Féin Senator said that given the clear connections with Ireland that the MV Saoirse has, there is a clear onus on the Government to put pressure on Israel to ensure the safety of the crew, and to allow the essential humanitarian aid through to Gaza.

Senator Ó Clochartaigh said: "The humanitarian situation in Gaza has become deeply troubling as trade embargoes, travel restrictions, and food, fuel and medical shortages have had an enormous impact on the lives of ordinary Palestinians.

"According to the World Food Program, the Israeli blockade means that 59% of Gaza's food import needs aren't being met. People don't have proper access to drinking water because pumps are out of action. The medical sector is facing further crisis due to severe drug and personnel shortages and lack of medical equipment.

"Frankly it's unheard of for the victims of an oppressive regime to be subject to such sanctions yet not the oppressive regime itself."

"The Government should be doing all in its power to end the siege of Gaza and the suffering of the Palestinian people there, including calling for an end to the preferential trade agreement between the EU and Israel until such time as the siege is lifted.

"Given the precarious situation the people of Gaza find themselves in, it is only fitting that we acknowledge such initiatives and to do our utmost to ensure this boat reaches its destination and I have called on the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs to do so on behalf of this State."

Basque independence leader Arnaldo Otegi must be released

SINN Féin President Gerry Adams TD, in a joint statement on June 15 with party colleagues Martin McGuinness MP, Alex Maskey MLA and Bairbre de Brún MEP, have called on the Spanish Government to release Basque Nationalist leader Arnaldo Otegi.

Arnaldo Otegi is currently in prison in the Basque Country and is due to go on trial late June/early July.

The Sinn Féin representatives said that the continued imprisonment of Mr Otegi only made the process of building a peace process in the Basque Country more difficult.

Mr Adams and his colleagues said: "We have all met Arnaldo Otegi many times and have visited the Basque Country. We are convinced that Arnaldo is committed to bringing about a democratic and peaceful resolution to the conflict in that region.

"Otegi is a widely respected political figure and leader of a political constituency which has a clear and significant political mandate. His continued imprisonment makes peace building in the Basque country more difficult.

"We are convinced of Arnaldo Otegi's personal and political dedication to the development of the peace process, as are other key parties and stakeholders in the Basque Country. His continued imprisonment is an obstacle to this. It is also contrary to basic human rights standards.

"The release of Arnaldo Otegi and the un-banning of Batasuna and Sortu would demonstrate courage and confidence on the part of the Spanish government and a willingness by it to play a constructive role in bringing one of Europe's oldest conflicts to an end."



Padraig MacLochlainn with Ernesto Sentí Darias and Cuban Ambassador to Ireland Teresita Trujillo

MacLochlainn meets senior Cuban official in Leinster House

SINN Féin Foreign Affairs Spokesperson Padraig MacLochlainn TD met with Ernesto Sentí Darias, the Cuban Director of European Affairs at the Department of Foreign Relations, on June 15.

The meeting was part of an effort by the Cuban administration to develop relations with EU member states and to set up an Oireachtas Friends of Cuba group.

Speaking at the meeting in Leinster House Mr MacLochlainn said: "The key objectives for the group should be to lobby for a move away from the common EU position on Cuba, to develop full trade relations between the EU and Cuba and to lobby for an end to the US Embargo."

Speaking after the meeting he said: "I look forward to working with the new group in the Oireachtas and hope that we can play a constructive role in bringing about normalised relations between the people of Cuba and the rest of the world.

"This is the key issue in bringing about an end to the extreme hardships facing the Cuban people."

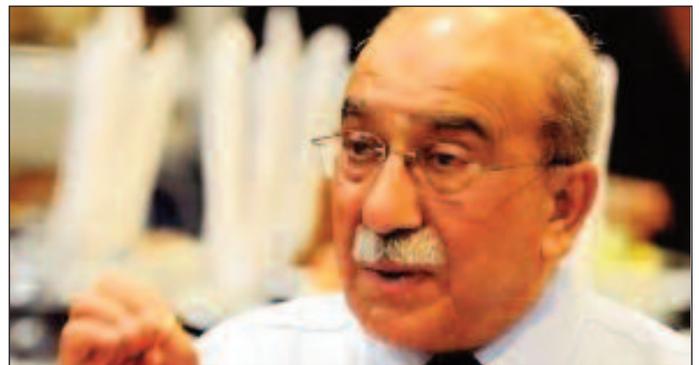
Ronnie Kasrils launches new book in Belfast

REPUBLICAN ex-prisoners support organisation Coiste na nIarchimí hosted the launch of the book *The Unlikely Secret Agent* by Ronnie Kasrils – former ANC commander, South African Government Minister and lifelong anti-apartheid activist – on June 16 in Conway Mill, Belfast.

West Belfast MP, elected to the seat vacated by Gerry Adams in June, Paul Maskey said: "The book offers an insight into the earliest days of the armed struggle in South Africa, the workings of the embryonic ANC underground movement and its growing network of support.

"Its narrative tells of the threat posed by state agents and the betrayal of Eleanor – Ronnie's wife and the 'Unlikely Secret Agent' of the title – her imprisonment, escape and then exile.

"Ronnie has been a major influence on thinking within Irish Republican circles. His experience of the conflict and the ANC's move into conflict resolution and peace process with his former enemies has been a major influence on events in Ireland."



Adams in tribute to anti-apartheid activist

CONDOLENCES have been extended by Gerry Adams TD on behalf of Sinn Féin to the family, friends and comrades of South African former government minister Kader Asmal (76), pictured above, who died at his home in Cape Town on June 22.

Kader spent almost 30 years in exile in Ireland during the apartheid regime's rule and led the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement as well being a civil rights activist here. He was a law lecturer at Trinity College Dublin.

When he returned to South Africa after the toppling of apartheid, he became a minister in the ANC Government. His loyalty to the freedom struggle never stifled his critical voice in the cause of civil liberties and social justice.

Gerry Adams said he had heard of Kader's death "with great sadness". "I met Kader many times in Ireland and in South Africa when he was first the Minister of Water Affairs and later when he was Education Minister," he said.

"He was an active member of the national executive of the African National Congress and a fearless human rights champion.

"Kader devoted his life to ending apartheid and building a new society in South Africa reflective of all its citizens.

"D'oibrigh Kader Asmal in Éirinn ar son a phobal i nDeisceart na hAfraice a bhí faoi ionsaí, faoi ghéarleanúint, faoi chiapadh faoin córas apartheid ansin le blianta fada.

"Bhí Kader an-gníomhach freisin ins an obair in Éirinn ag am a bhain le géarleanúint i dtuaisceart na hÉireann agus cúrsaí cearta daonna a hardú le cibé rialtas a bhí i réim.

"I first met Kader here in Ireland where he worked for nearly 30 years. Here too he was a champion for human rights. He was a vigorous opponent of British injustice in the North and his work on British state killings in the North, in which he identified almost 400 victims, was groundbreaking.

"To his wife Louise and his family and friends at home and internationally I extend solidarity on the loss of a great advocate for equality and human rights. Suaimhneas síoraí dó."