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# NORTHERN IRELAND

**NOTE (autumn 2007) – This policy dates from 1997. In the light of recent developments in Northern Ireland, the Green Party is currently reviewing the policy with help from the Green Parties in Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic and Scotland, and an updated policy will replace the current one in due course.**

## Introduction

NI100 The Green Party approaches the problems of Northern Ireland in partnership with our sister Green Parties in these islands: the Northern Ireland Green Party, *Comhaontas Glas* (the Green Party of the Republic of Ireland), and the Scottish Green Party. We are committed to a common approach.

NI101 We share the principles of the international Green movement, and base our policies for Northern Ireland on these:

- a) Just as the survival of life on the planet depends on the biodiversity of its ecology, so the survival of humankind depends on the rich diversity of ourselves, our cultures and communities.
- b) The separation of religion and state is an essential feature of a multicultural society.
- c) Political objectives should not be obtained, maintained

- or prevented by the use of force.
- d) The solution of Northern Ireland's problems lies not least in greater economic self-reliance.
- e) Government should take place at the lowest effective level, thereby empowering citizens.
- f) Power may be devolved from one level to another, but responsibility must be shared between them.
- g) The right to self-determination must be tempered by responsibilities to neighbours without and minorities within.
- h) In a Europe of regions, sovereignty will be shared, and national and regional identities will be able to exist in the same territory.
- i) No constitutional settlement should ever be regarded as unchangeable.
- j) Within Northern Ireland there is no consensus for the current constitutional position, and every endeavour must be made to find a consensus.
- k) International co-operation should focus on human rights, conflict resolution and ecological protection.
- l) The international community has a responsibility to all lands beset by conflict.
- m) Any intervention should employ minimum force and maximum impartiality, and should use non-violent methods wherever feasible.
- n) Policies proposed for Northern Ireland should be appli-

cable at least in outline to other lands beset by conflict.

NI102 There is no simple solution of the severe and deep-rooted problems of Northern Ireland and their consequences elsewhere in these islands. We advocate a twin-track approach which builds convergence on basic issues and encourages a constitutional solution, enabling the communities of Northern Ireland and their neighbours to live together in amity.

NI103 The solution of Northern Ireland's problems must lie with the people there, but responsibilities also exist outside the province, in particular with the Governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. Present and past Governments have been guilty of neglecting the problems of Northern Ireland and their consequences. Consideration of those problems and their solution must be a priority.

## Removing Barriers, Promoting Progress

NI200 Green policies offer progress on a wide range of issues, from ecology to security to government, in Northern Ireland and the rest of these islands. Their application across communities and borders offers convergence on basic issues, removing barriers to a solution of the problems of Northern Ireland.

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## ***Common ecology***

NI210 The Green Parties recognise the common interest of those living in Northern Ireland and the rest of these islands in their common ecology. Environmental problems such as pollution do not respect human-made borders. We promote ecological policies which can be applied irrespective of human borders to the benefit of all, and co-operation across borders to achieve those policies.

## ***Own economy***

NI220 The increasing concentration of economic power at a supranational level has weakened the ability of a region to develop its own economy. Northern Ireland needs help to build a strong, diverse and self-reliant economy, linked to neighbouring regional economies for mutual advantage.

NI221 The Green focus on the local economy encourages developments by local communities to meet their own needs. It encourages networks of such development to enable local communities to benefit from each others' efforts, including appropriate cross-border trade and development.

NI222 We recognise the need to increase the economic opportunities available to all in Northern Ireland, and to ensure that they are available equally irrespective of creed. We would strengthen the implementation of fair employment legislation to: extend its application into all major areas of employment currently exempt, particularly in the public sector; increase the penalties for non-compliance; ensure that effective action is taken to achieve compliance; and give priority to areas of

very high unemployment. (see NI233)

## ***Social policies***

NI230 The Green Parties have a full range of social policies, which meet individual and community needs. Our Citizens' Income scheme would assure everyone of the basic resources needed to live, and thus allows greater freedom to undertake economic and other activities. It addresses the problems of unemployment.

NI231 Green policies for housing would provide an appropriate mix of dwellings for families, single people, and different age groups, in a balanced variety of tenures and at reasonable cost. They promote the building and improvement of housing to high environmental standards. We are concerned to encourage integrated rather than segregated occupancy of housing estates.

NI232 Our policies for health emphasise preventive health care and local community health centres, linked to specialist facilities.

## ***Areas of particular need***

NI233 Areas of very high unemployment occupied by the different communities in Northern Ireland tend to suffer a variety of social and economic problems as well as high levels of sectarian violence. Such areas must be assisted with co-ordinated and comprehensive aid and reform involving empowerment over local services and housing, locally controlled development agencies, improved and accessible training programmes, urban regeneration and business start-up schemes. The achievement of fair employment is particularly important to such areas.

## ***Integrated education***

NI240 Segregated education in Northern Ireland is both a cause and a symptom of the sectarian conflict. Cross-community, integrated education with a multicultural approach is needed. Non-denominational schools have been successful in Ireland.

NI241 A Green Government will seek to ensure that integrated education becomes available locally throughout Northern Ireland. This objective will take a significant number of years to accomplish. Resources will be allocated and redistributed accordingly.

NI242 The initial emphasis will be on supporting local initiatives for integrated education, and on integration of new schools, colleges and resource centres. Integration will normally be a condition for public funding of new educational establishments and initiatives.

## ***A Bill of Rights***

NI250 The Green Parties seek Bills of Rights embodying the same basic human rights for all throughout these islands. We recognise the consequences of the lack of such legislation in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. We seek a Bill of Rights applied in full in Northern Ireland.

## ***Confidence in justice***

NI260 We seek a system of justice in Northern Ireland which defends human rights and has the confidence of all sections of society. Restitution to victims of crime, and rehabilitation of of-

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fenders, are more important than mere retribution.

NI261 The Green Parties work for the replacement of the present judicial system peculiar to Northern Ireland with one accepted in all parts of these islands as fair. It must include the end of courts with one judge as the sole arbiter and of extended arrest without trial, and provide common standards of local justice.

### ***True security***

NI270 Our priority is the security of ordinary citizens. True security lies not in defence, deterrence or pre-emptive attacks against threats; it lies in reducing those threats. Only thus can we end the norm of the gun.

NI271 Long term security for the people of Northern Ireland will not be achieved by high levels of security forces and repressive legislation, such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Such excessive force generates political support for those attacking the security forces, and is self-defeating.

NI272 A Green Government would give priority to political measures. The deployment of security forces in Northern Ireland and Britain would be reduced progressively as circumstances allow; our aim is demilitarisation, with the troops withdrawn from active duty. Repressive legislation would be repealed, including the Prevention of Terrorism Acts and the Emergency

### ***Provisions Act of 1973***

NI273 European and other international bodies, such as the Conference on Security and Co-

operation in Europe (CSCE) and the United Nations, should be invited to survey the security arrangements in Northern Ireland and render assistance therein. This would involve legal, police, military and other personnel. The main aim would be to create a peace-keeping presence whose impartiality will be accepted by all sections of society in Northern Ireland, and which would replace the deployment of British troops.

NI274 We perceive the long term need of local community-based police who have the respect of the whole population and do not carry arms. The involvement of the Police Service of Northern Ireland in security roles incompatible with that must be reduced and then phased out. Policing methods and organisation should be reviewed to enhance the prospects of cross-community support. Common standards of policing must be laid down, and achieved in all areas.

### ***Para-military organisations***

NI280 The violence of para-military organisations is a threat to both communities in Northern Ireland and elsewhere in these islands. A lasting cease-fire is a vital part of a solution for Northern Ireland, and we support negotiations to achieve a cease-fire.

NI281 For the long term the violence of para-military organisations should be tackled by offering the communities which enable them to operate political, economic and social alternatives. This would reduce the support of such organisations in the community and their ability to be a threat. At the same time such organisations must be encouraged to use political means instead of

violence, by facilitating their involvement in politics.

### ***Appropriate self-government***

NI290 The Green Parties seek a Europe of regions, each comprising local authorities of a size which promotes active involvement of citizens in the government of their local communities. This includes self-government for the nations and regions of these islands.

NI291 The democratic deficit in Northern Ireland is a significant obstacle to progress. Reshaping and rebuilding the political process must be a priority. We seek the involvement of local community and other organisations, not least to offer constructive alternatives to discredited traditional politicians. NI292 Rebuilding the political process requires transfers of responsibilities to current local authorities, to encourage positive involvement in them, and at the same time measures to ensure that authorities are prevented from discriminating against minority communities, to prevent abuse of those responsibilities. Local authorities guilty of discrimination should be liable to a range of penalties up to and including dissolution for a new election.

NI293 A Green Government would give self-government to the people of Northern Ireland, under a system which provides an effective regional government and local authorities under democratic control of all electors. The inadequacies of "majority rule" demand that elections at all levels be by proportional representation.

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NI294 Self-government does not mean independence. The question of the relationships between a self-governing Northern Ireland, the rest of Ireland, Britain, and Europe, must be a matter for negotiation and agreement by all those involved. A greater emphasis on regional rather than central government in these islands will facilitate such arrangements.

NI296 The relationships need to cover the full range of issues. They need to provide not only for the communities in Northern Ireland, but also for those in neighbouring countries, including the Irish community in Britain.

## Constitutional Issues

NI300 The constitutional conflict in Northern Ireland symbolises the divisions among its people. Long histories sustain those who seek to promote or resist the incorporation of Northern Ireland in the Republic of Ireland (the Republic) or its retention in the United Kingdom (the UK). Those views are validated for their holders by experience and fears on a whole range of issues - economic, social, cultural and political.

NI301 Our policies in NI200 onwards for those issues seek to create better conditions for a settlement of the constitutional issues, which in turn would facilitate wider progress. This long-term and purposeful strategy offers the prospect of a lasting solution. Past governments short-term reactions to events have conspicuously failed to achieve a settlement.

## *The role of Governments*

NI310 Governments should take initiatives to encourage progress towards a settlement, such as the Anglo-Irish Agreement, and build progressively on them. They must consider whether progress can be improved by suspending existing constitutional positions or setting timetables for change.

NI311 In particular, the incompatibility of the claims in Articles 2 and 3 of the constitution of the Republic to the territory of Northern Ireland on one hand, and the assurances given by the government of the UK about the continued inclusion of Northern Ireland in the UK on the other, make a long term settlement more difficult. The Green Parties believe these conflicting claims should be replaced by a common UK and Republic guarantee in the interim, and a common undertaking to accept the result of the process set out in NI320-332.

NI312 Governments should seek to involve European organisations and countries in facilitating the international dimension of any proposed settlement.

## *Discussion and negotiation*

NI320 The Green Parties seek a process of discussion and negotiation which encourages the involvement of local community and other organisations, not just politicians. Nonetheless we support all discussions between governments and political parties seeking a settlement. Attempts to block progress by intransigence or veto must be overcome. No group participating in discussions can be allowed to exclude any other.

NI321 The process must include the promotion of public debate on the issue, and the provision of accurate information through the media. Censorship of a political viewpoint is self-defeating, and can only encourage its expression through violence. Broadcasting bans imposed on particular organisations must be repealed, while maintaining laws against incitement to violence.

## *A constitutional initiative*

NI330 If there is no progress, an interim authority under the aegis of the Anglo-Irish Agreement, the CSCE and the UN should be established for a transitional period. British troops would be gradually withdrawn from active duty, while policing and security would be provided as in NI270-274.

NI331 The interim authority would initiate a public inquiry into the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. The inquiry would be open to all political and non-political groups and individuals. It would investigate the ecological, social, economic, legal and political consequences of all reasonable options. It would consider the necessity of inherent safeguards for all sections of society, and the feasibility of measures by the governments of the UK and the Republic which could create better conditions for a settlement.

NI332 The inquiry would produce options for consideration. The interim authority would offer a set of feasible options to the people of Northern Ireland. Their choice would be made democratically, under a multi-option voting system which would promote consensus and the consideration of all views rather than a stark

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choice between the views of a majority and those of a minority.