Irene Sherry Project Director of Bridge of Hope

I would like to begin by welcoming you all here tonight to share what we believe is a positive step for peace building in North Belfast.

This brief, yet historic statement is a reflection of the significant and lasting inter-community relationships that have been built up over many years here in North Belfast.   After the success of last year’s Respect Programme in the Greater New Lodge and Mount Vernon, it was felt right across the board that we could expand our activities to include even more areas of North Belfast.
When we began having discussions about 2010’s Respect Programme earlier this year, we could sense that we were at a turning point in terms of openly addressing our conflict legacy issues.

North Belfast suffered terribly. One fifth of all the people killed during the conflict took place within one square mile in North Belfast and people must realise the depth and breadth of the hurt that was inflicted on so many families.

Once talks began, the concept of a remembrance ceremony was a natural progression and we felt that an agreed form of words from both sides of the community looking at our past would be crucial to the integrity of any such event.
We held a number of meetings where community representatives from across North Belfast all attended. A statement was agreed and then it went to the joint committee of the Greater New Lodge CEP and Loughview Community Action Partnership. Then it came before the North Belfast Respect organising committee.

It goes without saying that all of us were very mindful of the hurt that is still very real for a lot of people and in terms of that, we wanted to be as respectful to all sides as possible.
Language is very important in terms of peace building and we tried our level best to take that into consideration when drafting the statement.
The words also project a positive vibe for all of us into the future.

Positive community relations are carried out on a day to day basis and have been prevalent for years now albeit behind the scenes.
A lot of the time we can’t talk about our work because it can be delicate and sensitive but we feel we have got to a point where we can say, “We are working together and this is just how strong we can be together.”
The remembrance event potentially represents the first time that people will see our communities standing together as one. Commentators and conflict experts from all around the world constantly watch North Belfast to see what is happening. They see North Belfast as a model for the future because if we can achieve so much progress here - then it is possible anywhere.

**I would now like to call for a minute’s silence to remember all those who have died or suffered as a result of the conflict.**

**Thanks You**

Can I now call Jim Weir to sing?