



RAMSES RAMIREZ

Building houses, building communities, and building peace

In many parts of the world, Habitat for Humanity has been a leader in practical measures to build peace and reconciliation in the aftermath of civil war. Habitat's work has been a testament to how building houses together can bring communities together—even communities in conflict.

Civil War and Conflict End, Building Peace Begins Northern Ireland—A cease-fire in 1994 ended three decades of violence between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. During those years, more than 3,600 people—both Catholics and Protestants—were killed, and one in every 50 people was injured. Despite the 11-year cease-fire, paramilitaries remain present throughout Northern Ireland neighborhoods. Many Catholics and Protestants still hold tightly to

their personal beliefs and, although it is not as severe as it once was, sectarian violence continues.

In 1994, Habitat for Humanity established itself in Belfast and throughout Northern Ireland. Habitat is gradually helping to bridge the clash in identities by bringing Catholics, Protestants, Irish and British together to meet one common need in their communities—simple, decent housing. Habitat has experienced little resistance in the neighborhoods where it works, said Rab Branney, a construction supervisor. “They know we’re coming in to do a positive thing in their community, and people recognize the importance of decent housing.”

With the support of many individuals, churches, businesses and other organizations such as the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, a government-funded housing agency, Habitat's work in Northern Ireland has been able to move forward. Habitat has built 47 houses since it formed in 1994, but the number of houses they build is less important than the unification it brings among those who are working together in the home-building mission.

“In Northern Ireland, we are more and more concerned with measuring the outcomes of our work rather than the outputs,” said Peter Farquharson, executive director for Habitat for Humanity-Northern Ireland. “It’s not about the

number of houses or even the number of volunteers or the number of Protestants and Catholics that have been involved, although that's a good indicator. We're entering a new area of exploring what reconciliation looks like. What are the indicators of reconciliation? If you're talking about a sustainable peace, what does that look like? We are at the front line of working with organizations to define more clearly what effective peace-building means."

South Africa—The effects of Habitat for Humanity are spreading throughout South Africa. The 2002 Jimmy Carter Work Project sowed seeds of hope in the Ethembeni (a Zulu word meaning "place of hope") community in Durban, a project that continues to grow and thrive. Youth involvement in Habitat is on the rise; Habitat for Humanity clubs are at work in some of South Africa's largest universities, and are in the process of becoming official campus chapters. In June 2003, students in the Habitat club at the University of Stellenbosch, along with students of Cape Town, coordinated an International Student Build to invite young people from around the world to participate in the Habitat experience. As more and more young people join in Habitat's work in South Africa, they bring hope that the country's racial reconciliation will continue with their generation and generations to come.

Continuing the Mission

At work in nearly 100 countries, Habitat for Humanity is transforming lives all over the world. We continue in our efforts to make people aware of the need for decent, affordable housing, and we continue to invite them to take action and be part of the solution—not only for housing but for peace and reconciliation.



SAMANTHA SCHROEDER

Contact

Mike Carscaddon, Executive VP–International
mcarscaddon@habitat.org

