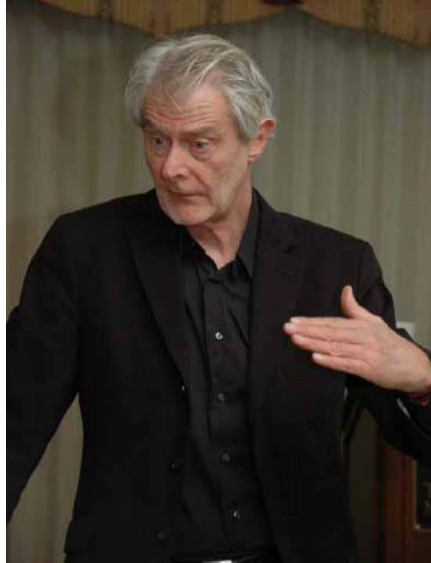


UMass Boston McCormack School, Moakley Chair to Host Mayors and Other Officials from “Divided Cities”



Padraig O'Malley, the John Joseph Moakley Distinguished Professor of Peace and Reconciliation. (Photo by Harry Brett)

By Will Kilburn

Building on his successes at bringing together leaders from divided societies in South Africa, Northern Ireland, and Iraq, Padraig O'Malley, the John Joseph Moakley Distinguished Professor of Peace and Reconciliation at the McCormack Graduate School of Policy Studies, is convening a meeting of leaders from places where the dividing lines run straight down city streets.

Called the “Forum for Cities in Transition” (FCT), the conference, to be held April 14 through 16, will bring together leaders and representatives from Kirkuk, Iraq; Mitrovica in Serbia and Mitrovica in Kosovo; Belfast and Derry/ Londonderry in Northern Ireland; and Nicosia, Cyprus. Conceptually, the conference builds on O'Malley's long-held belief that people from divided societies are the best people to help others in divided societies.

“In most cases, these cities bore the brunt of the conflicts in their societies, and sometimes they are left to deal with the residuals even when some kind of settlement is reached,” says O'Malley. “The transition in these cities is emblematic of the larger transformation that is taking place in their societies.”

“This conference is precisely the kind of creative reconciliation work that Joe Moakley envisioned for the UMass Boston chair in his name,” said McCormack School dean Stephen Crosby. “It is particularly fitting to have this conference in Boston, a city which has itself struggled with racial and ethnic divisions. We will learn from the international delegates, as I hope they will learn from one another.”

In addition to dealing with issues such as race, ethnicity, religion, and political ideology, as well as the geographical flashpoints within each city where different sides clash, conferees will also discuss, in smaller groups, nonpartisan topics such as electricity, water, and sewer systems—seemingly mundane topics, but topics about which O’Malley believes opposing parties can find common ground, and then work toward a greater understanding.

Ultimately, says O’Malley, the hope is that the representatives will agree to form a “club” of divided cities—annual meetings with each of the participating cities hosting the others on a rotating basis. For now, though, O’Malley just hopes to bring the group together, show them their common ground, and let the participants take it from there, including the setting of each day’s agenda.

“If they say, ‘Where’s the agenda?’, my response will be ‘There is no agenda, because this conference is yours,’” says O’Malley, “‘and you, as people from divided cities, have a far better idea of what you should be talking about to each other than I do. This conference is yours, not ours. We are here to serve you, not to impose on you.’”

The conference will end with a public panel discussion on Thursday, April 16, at 7:30 p.m. at UMass Boston’s Campus Center, titled “Divided Cities: Common and Uncommon.” The conference is being created through a partnership with the American Ireland Fund, with sponsorship from Robert and JoAnn Bendetson, the Connors Family Fund, the Doubletree Hotel Bayside, the Institute for Global Leadership at Tufts University, the John Joseph Moakley Archive and Institute at Suffolk University, the Joiner Center for the Study of War and Social Consequences at UMass Boston, the University of Massachusetts system, the University of Massachusetts Boston, the University of Massachusetts Lowell, and the William Monroe Trotter Institute at UMass Boston.