

The Big Hope Global Youth Congress 2008 Lecture Series

7. Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

by President Mary McAleese



**THE
BIG
HOPE**



Global Youth Congress





Mary McAleese

Mary McAleese, President of Ireland, graduated in Law from the Queen's University of Belfast in 1973 and was called to the Northern Ireland Bar in 1974. In 1975, she was appointed Reid Professor of Criminal Law, Criminology and Penology at Trinity College Dublin and in 1987, she returned to her Alma Mater, Queen's, to become Director of the Institute of Professional Legal Studies. In 1994, she became the first female Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Queen's University of Belfast.

of Law. Born on June 27th 1951 in Belfast, she is the first President to come from Northern Ireland. She is married, since 1976, to Dr. Martin McAleese, an accountant and dentist. They have three children, Emma, born 1982 and twins Justin and SaraMai, born 1985.

The eldest of nine children, President McAleese grew up in Northern Ireland through the violent times that have come to be known as 'The Troubles'. Her family was one of many adversely affected by the conflict. President McAleese is an experienced broadcaster, having worked as a current affairs journalist and presenter in radio and television with Radio Telefís Éireann. She has a longstanding interest in many issues concerned with justice, equality, social inclusion, anti-sectarianism and reconciliation. Her appointments include Director of Channel 4 Television; Director, Northern Ireland Electricity; delegate to the 1995 White House Conference on Trade and Investment in Ireland and to the follow up Pittsburg Conference in 1996; Member of the Catholic Church delegation in 1996 to the North Commission on Contentious Parades; Member of the Catholic Church Episcopal Delegation to the New Ireland Forum in 1984 and founder member of the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas. On 11th November, 1997, Mary McAleese was inaugurated as the eighth President of Ireland. Mary McAleese was re-elected on Friday 1st October 2004 being the only validly-nominated candidate. The theme of her Presidency is 'Building Bridges'. She is a barrister and former Professor

The Big Hope Lecture Series

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Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

President Mary McAleese

Chancellor, Liverpool Hope University, Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Archbishop Kelly, ladies and gentlemen, thank you, first of all, for that lovely welcome. Thank you, Vice-Chancellor, for your lovely and welcoming words.

It is good to be here in this great Congress of people, of young people in particular, some not so young, but you are welcome too - but good to be in your company also. I am more on your side than the other side maybe – unfortunately! I know that this is an international gathering, a gathering from right around the world and we gather in a very, very appropriate place to look at this great word. This great big word called 'Hope'. I think the words 'Student' and 'Hope' fit; they are a very, very good fit. And so I wanted to talk mainly out of my own experience, about our own peace process in Ireland and, in particular, in that part of Ireland from which I come - Belfast, Northern Ireland. To see really how hope, this thing, this amorphous word, was the source energy of what is actually a whole new history for us. A fresh history, not just for Northern Ireland, not just for Ireland but for these neighbouring islands - and I hope too, a story that has some resonance particularly for those of you who are living inside very serious conflicts, or who are living with situations that might be described as interminable, intractable: under-achievement; poverty; conflict; oppression - all these things that diminish us humanly and drain away our hope, drain away our confidence.

There couldn't be any better place to discuss these things and, indeed, no better place to contextualise the story of my own home place, than in Liverpool and in this university. This university that broke the mould between Catholic and Protestant. That focused on the commonality rather than the division. And in focusing on the commonality built a great university. This place that champions looking at things from the shared ground, rather than looking at things through the prism of difference, the fear and the contempt of difference. This is a very special place and it is also very important that we talk about these things in Liverpool. Because, of course, Liverpool has sometimes been regarded and even identified as Ireland's second capital city, because so many of our people come here or came to live here, or came through here as immigrants and when they came here, not just in their suitcases but in their hearts and in their heads, they brought their history. They brought the baggage with them and of course so much of the story of Liverpool is also a story that tells of sectarian differences that were reconciled here in this place. A generation that said. "Actually, we've had enough of that, you know. Actually, we've had enough of difference that makes us strangers to one another. We want to accommodate difference in such a way that we become friends to one another", and that's what Liverpool Hope has been always about, and so it is a particular pleasure to be in this place. It is also important we're here, in another sense, because all through the

troubles of my lifetime - and we tend always to focus on our own lifetimes, but I am very conscious of the fact that the difficulties between Ireland and Great Britain go back some 900 years - we didn't just solve a 40 year old problem; we solved a centuries old problem in recent times and somehow, through the most difficult years, the most difficult past years that took so many lives, some 4000 lives, we received from so many people, but particularly here, we received so much crucial, psychological help. It was such a source of renewed hope and energy.

I have just come from Warrington this morning, from a wonderful centre set up there by the family of Tim Parry. Colin and Wendy Parry, whose gorgeous little son was blown up by an IRA bomb in Warrington 15 years ago. It would have been so easy for them, just so easy for them to become, in their loss and in their grief, to become angry and bitter and full of hatred, full of vengeance and they did not take that road. They took a different road, they took it the very day of Tim's funeral when they said they wanted their son to become a unifier, a sign of peace and here, 15 years later, they have this wonderful foundation for peace that builds peace between young people. Young people who might be fearful across grounds of ethnicity or race, religion or even just a street or district. All those places and spaces that have the capacity to shape the way we look at each other and sometimes to shape it in such a way that all we see is another to be feared or to be looked down

on contemptuously. So it is a wonderful thing. Those things gave us hope through our bleak times. And the important thing, I think about this great word, this great notion of hope, this concept - it is no namby pamby word; it is no easy, little word. It's a driving force; it's a life source, an energy source. It is the indispensable, pre-condition of change, of positive change. You cannot bring it about; you cannot look at the world and say "Look at these dreadful problems. How are we going to solve them?" unless, in your heart, you have a hope that drives an expectation that you can actually be an agent of change.

And in a world that is characterised, and I am conscious that many in this audience come from places that are characterised as places of intractable problems - whether it is endemic disease, endemic poverty, endemic under-achievement, endemic oppression, poverty, all of these things - hope in those places is the great sign of contradiction; it's the great human NO. It is the great refusal to accept the intractability, the impossibility of ever solving these problems. It is the life force that energises transcendently, that galvanises the brain power and the heart power that eventually allows us to overcome the worst that nature can impose on us and the worst that human nature can inflict upon us.

In our own case, in my own case and the case of Ireland, it was hope that helped us eventually transcend a history of endemic poverty and under-achievement. In this

generation, we have completely turned that story around to become the success story of the European Union. A country whose greatest export, historically, was her people, because we had nothing to offer our people at home. We have after 150 years of net outward migration now have net inward migration to a country of opportunity. But the biggest triumph of all, really, the thing that hope has allowed us to transcend, is hatred. And hatred frightens me, you know. I have been on the receiving end of it too. Hatred is a dreadful thing and one of the things that I have learnt about hatred is its shelf-life. Its shelf-life is frighteningly, stunningly long. In our case it has lasted for centuries and it has been carried from one generation to the next. A toxin carried, not actually in bags, not even in history books, quite frankly, but in hearts and in heads. We learn to hate, we carry it like a toxin, we give it to our children unwittingly. We make each generation carriers of hate. And hope is the bulwark in this generation. It was the people of hope who just stopped that toxin in its tracks and said "No more". We have been a people who have had to hope, I suppose, in many ways we haven't had much else over the years. In our darkest times, during and after the famine, the Great Famine in the 1840s & 50s, when a million of our population died and a million more arrived here in Liverpool. They were driven by a kind of a desperate hope. A hope that there was some place where they would actually be able to get enough food to live. Many stayed in Liverpool, many travelled on to other parts of Britain,

America and beyond. Even, indeed, my own family ended up in your part of the world, Vice Chancellor, in Dunedin. In fact my own family home is called Dunedin in their honour. My own family name, my mother, my grandmother's family name died out in Ireland during those years and the only place it is found now is in Dunedin in your own country of New Zealand.

And the story of the Irish Diaspora is our own story. A story of absolutely irrepressible hope. For a long time we didn't really realise just how the story constantly changed. When our emigrants left and they were mostly our young people, taking their energy and their hope, that surging hope of youth, elsewhere. It was a drain on Ireland. It was a place, when I was growing up, of an awful lot of grandparents and not many grandchildren. The grandchildren were pictures that came from America at Christmas.

Now, of course, we see immigration differently because we watch as our immigrant family struggled at the beginning, to establish themselves, found themselves up against all sorts of prejudices, all sorts of racism and transcending those things created the conditions in which their children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren would become great civic contributors. Here, for example, in Liverpool, throughout these Islands and in America, Canada, New Zealand, Australia. And so, in my generation, we see immigration differently because now it has come back to us as a

kind of a gift. A gift of a scattered family, right around the world who are still very strongly plugged into each other and who refresh from every corner of the globe, refresh this thing and challenge and expand this thing that we call Irish identity and that we call Irish culture. We're so grateful that we have this huge Irish family all around the world. Born initially out of frustrated hope but now showing us what hope does when it lives and breathes in new lives.

Their success right around the world quite literally fed us and educated us during the very lean years in Ireland, when, in the building sites in Liverpool, the building sites in Boston, they scrapped together pennies and dollars which they religiously sent back to their homeland of Ireland to their families. And there, in the countries in which they lived, their step-by-step social advance in their new homelands – over time, we watched as their children became corporate America. They became intellectual Australia. They became political Great Britain. They became the music of Liverpool - names like Lennon & McCartney - don't forget, we own a piece of them also, they're ours too, you know. We even have to remind the French every so often that Samuel Beckett is a Dubliner It's amazing, the number of people, you know, who took our genius and kind of adopted it!

So we have been very blessed in this family, this Irish family all around the world and their genius planted all around the world and just doing normal things, well. It sent

a very powerful message back to us. That we could be them, that we could redeem ourselves out of our poverty, out of our history of oppression, out of that awful post- colonial malaise, out of that sense of victimhood. That we could drag ourselves up by our bootstraps and we could make of ourselves all the things they wished for us and all the things they wished for themselves. In other words, they gave us this great thing called hope. Liverpool, was of course, part of that wider experience, part of our Diaspora and it seems to me a very important place in Irish history, because so many of the conflicts that were part of Irish history, they were brought in the hearts and hands that came here too. This place understands us particularly well. But the story is bigger still, because here in this city, in this university, you have healed and reconciled so many of those wounds of history.

We are now living in Ireland bequeathing to our children a set of qualitatively different contexts from the context I grew up in. Take, for example, the set of dysfunctional relationships that my generation inherited. The biggest of them was a very, very fraught relationship between these two islands: historically very fraught. One seen as the coloniser, the other as the colonised, two different mindsets. It gave rise to a very fractious kind of politics, historically. Now that's the past, that's a footnote in history. Today the Dublin and London governments enjoy the most warm, cordial, friendly, collegial relationships. That metamorphous,

that very effective new partnership was, of course, a very important driver of our peace process. It allowed a lot of things to happen that simply couldn't have happened in the past. One of the great winds at the back of the political engagement, that new political engagement, is simply the way in which so many Irish people got on so well with their neighbours; here in this part of the world, on the other island. Living, melding, growing, integrating, working together. It was their lived lives that helped to recreate, to untwist this very skewed context. In the 10 years since this remarkable outcropping of that new mood of consensus between Ireland and Great Britain, was of course, the Good Friday Agreement, which is now 10 years old. Out of that Good Friday Agreement, we created the contexts in which relationships within Northern Ireland between Catholics and Protestant, Unionists and Nationalists could be put on a happier footing; again beginning to focus on building a common homeland. A place to be shared and, again on the North-South axis, those relationships had been historically very skewed. A small island divided against itself and instead of working together, to be out in the global market place selling itself on an all island basis, selling its service, selling its genius. Doing everything separately. Going toe-to-toe rather than going hand-to-hand. A kind of a climate of wastefulness. We put that behind us and we created structures which would help us to enhance the growing of new culture, the shared culture of consensus.

It's remarkable that in the last year a new government has come about in Northern Ireland. It is headed by two people who would have been regarded as the most formidable enemies now working in a cultural collaboration. The Reverend Doctor Ian Paisley and his old nemesis, Martin McGuinness, the two of them working together and not just working together in a kind of "got to work with you" atmosphere but rather as "let us work together and smile whilst we are doing it and send that message out to the people, that we can actually work well together and be civil to one another and enjoy each other's company". Make a friend of the person who was the enemy. That old cultural conflict. Our attitudes were shaped by a culture of conflict that made us, without us even knowing or being aware of it. We grew up focused on difference. We grew up aware of the most minute, marginal differences. We ransacked history for those differences or evidence of the terrible awful otherness of the other. So we lived inside a world where the culture was "winner takes all" even though all the evidence was historically that the "winner takes all" is not actually a very happy place, even for the winner. Because in a "winner takes all" culture the loser goes away broken, diminished, angry, bitter, frustrated, vengeful. He waits for the winner in the long grass. The winner, no matter how triumphal, no matter how swaggering, knows that his win is always vulnerable to the long grass and what awaits in the long grass.

Anyway, we have left that culture aside, thank God, and now we have the best educated generation ever on the island of Ireland. They've used their brain power now to figure out something that should have been obvious a long time ago, but is actually obvious now and is working, and it is that if you focus on building a consensus, on focusing on compromising just a little, you can walk away with 90% of something instead of a person walking away with 100% of nothing and the other always threatened with the loss of what they have gained. So we have learnt and we have now created a culture around 90% of something which is really much more humanly liveable with, than 100% of nothing. That 90% allows us all to grow humanly, in dignity and an extraordinary outpouring of yesness in people that were dammed. That was hidden in a cul-de-sac - when we only focused on our differences and when we only focused on our resentment of one another. So this emerging culture of compromise has led to the most historical reconciliation of the great two traditions on our island, of the political movement on the island of Ireland. Each of them still has the same political ambition, each of them still has the same ethnicity, same faith, same identity; but now they have a different future, a shared future. It is a future in which we don't have people waiting in the long grass. It's a future which we can share the benefits evenly, justly, equally together. A hundred years went into creating, centuries went into creating, the toxic, toxic harvest that I and my generation inherited and that killed

people like Jonathan and Tim in Warrington and many, many more besides them.

It robbed so many generations of peace of mind, places you couldn't go because they were dangerous. Hopes you couldn't have, because they had been stillborn, because of who you were, where you came from, what you represented. But those invasive toxic waves of hatred, of sectarianism, they gave rise to a harvest that has been a very, very long and bitter harvest. But the extraordinary thing about this generation, I think we can safely say, I hope we can safely say, that the worst of that harvest is now in and it has been gathered. We now have this landscape, this fallow landscape, waiting, now to be reseeded. Now how do we seed it, what will we seed it with, knowing how many of us carry, still, these toxic spores of racism, of sectarianism in our hearts, in our heads, in our words, in our language, in our unguarded moments. It's just so important that, in this moment, this kind of zero moment, where a critical mass of people have gathered to say that history is no longer going to paralyse us and we are going to create a very new history, that we each take our own personal responsibility for being the people who seed the future with a much richer, much more humanly decent seed. A seed that will bring a new harvest of consensus, of equality, of justice, good things. My hope is that those seeds will have a greater longevity than that of the toxic seeds, which frighten me in their shelf-life. The shelf-life of hatred is truly astounding. The only antidote I know to be

is hope, because hope has an even longer shelf-life, thank God.

Now the worst of our appalling harvest is over. It's over, but it is just very instructive, as we stand in our sea-change moment, to remind ourselves, now is not a good time to say "because we have it sorted, that we can go back to living quiet, unengaged lives, that all the problems are solved". Actually, all we have done is that we have gathered enough people to say "we don't like the past, we want a different future". Now it is important that we keep our foot on the accelerator of creating that future and that the people who believe in good things, people who have access to that good seed and who believe very powerfully in those good things and the things that enrich us in human decency, that they do the work; and that is the work of our young people. That is the work of each and everyone one of you gathered in this room, because it is our young people who carry hope into the future.

Senator Mitchell, who was the former U.S. envoy to Northern Ireland – one of the great gifts of American administration to us (I think one of the reasons they responded to the Northern Ireland crisis was precisely because of our Irish family in America, putting pressure on government and sensitising the American people to what they could bring; that it wasn't that we were going to be alone in solving this; that we were going to use the best brains, the best expertise from right around the world and

they certainly harvested that and harnessed that) - but he warned, one of the great architects of the Good Friday Agreement, he warned that the hard part came next. It came in making the agreement stick, in making it work. To go beyond words on paper, into lived lives and into things that mummies and daddies say to children in the comfort of their four walls, where prejudice breathes, even with loving parents. To be the people now who changed the language, changed what is said, who stopped the toxins of racism, sectarianism, hatred and contempt, absolutely dead in their tracks.

So when the laurels are given, as they were to former Prime Minister Tony Blair and our own former Prime Minister Bertie Ahern, people who put their hearts and souls into bringing about peace at the macro-political level, the important thing to remember, in all of this, is that the wind at their backs, the strength and courage in their spine came from their people. It came from the ordinary people they were talking to, who were voting for them, who were prepared to be led by them. The people; the ordinary, thousands, millions of every day men and women who formed friendships across forbidden taboo divides, who created organisations that challenged the toxin of so called difference, who challenged ways of living that were humanly indecent and kept us humanly in boxes, separated from one another, casting aspersions on each other, stereotyping each other dreadfully all over the island of Ireland.

Here on this island, not very far down the road in Warrington, here in Liverpool you will find these organisations, here in this university you will find those people. People who resolutely refuse to accept that hope should be killed off by hatred. We found them all over the world, thank God. People who set up funds in Australia, in New Zealand, Canada, America and with these funds – that they had all sorts of coffee mornings in Dunedin and elsewhere all over the world – they sent that money back to resource more community endeavours to encourage those people. What were they about the business of doing? They were about the business of sending money back that would seed bed good work, sensible work, intelligent work and compassionate work. But they were saying "keep your hope alive; do not be overwhelmed by the awful events, by today's bomb, by tomorrow's killing, by the words of hatred. Keep your hope alive". They were the people who around the world gathered like family around us to help keep our hope alive. Conflicts simply blinds us to commonalities and unless you want to live in a world where you have perpetual endless cycles of conflict, then we have to explore the commonalities. We have to get to know our enemy because our enemy, in my case, in so many cases, is our next door neighbour and he is not going away anytime soon. He, she and their children are going to be my children's neighbours and it really is time we got to know one another well. To be friends with one another. To become colleagues, good neighbours, good friends to one another because that is the seed bed

of a decent future for every single person. If I want my children to flourish, I have to understand that if their children flourish too, my children have a better hope. My children have a much better hope in a world where all flourish than in a world where only a tiny elite flourish. Where the elite flourish only, well, that's the world of the long grass and we have acres and acres of history books, check the library in this university, to tell us what happens in that world, populated by people in the long grass. So focusing, as we have on the common ground, we have learnt. We don't dilute anything of our identities. We actually distilled brilliantly our humanity, we bring so much that is good, that has lain deep inside us - we bring to the surface. And we now use it as a resource that was wasted for so, so long and so many generations.

Please God we are on the way now to no longer wasting things that were given to us, no longer damaging this life that was given to us. The problems we encountered the solutions, the models that we have developed through and the many, many failures; may I also say, that have characterised our pathway to peace. These now, we also consolidate into a kind of resource base. First of all a resource base to challenge ourselves, to keep remembering what the past was like. Not because we want to ransack it for things to blame people with, but because we want to remember how bad it was, so we are not going back there again. But also, to be able to tell our story of past and now a

transcending present. So that those who are coming to us from those parts of Africa that are mired in conflict and poverty, or from Burma, or from Palestine or from Israel or from wherever in the world – those places that face the kind of things we faced as a people - that they begin to believe that there is a way out and that way lies in hope and that hope is the great energy that forces a new imagination; forces us to think differently about each other and, in forcing us to think differently about each other, releasing new ways of dealing with one another. Ways, that, will hopefully, create new pathways to the future.

Lin Yutang, a Chinese Christian writer who died back in 1976, just captures, I think, the essence of hope brilliantly. He says hope is like a road, a pathway in the countryside. There never was a road, but when many people walk on it, the road comes into existence and that is where hope takes us. It takes us down the virgin terrain, the untravelled path - it is the untravelled path to one another.

I lived in Belfast, as did my husband, and I will tell you that we lived in mixed areas. We lived next door to Catholics. We grew up in Protestant areas. We lived with neighbours and we lived in monumental ignorance of one another. It is possible to live cheek-by-jowl and to live monumentally ignorant of one another and, worse than that, to grow up believing you know so much about the other and their otherness. You know so much about them. You know

them intimately, that they are worthy of your contempt and that is such a dangerous place to be in. Now hope is the great sign of contradiction because it takes us down that terrain that we did not go. That handshake to the neighbour, that respect that says "Tell me your story and I will listen without shouting back and then maybe you will listen to me and you won't shout back. In fact you can shout back in your head, if you like, but listen". And so we listen and we engage and that really is the start of the journey of hope. Making that connection that so many generations have failed to make.

The path from this city to Ireland has become very well travelled over many, many generations, many centuries. In the middle of the nineteenth century, at the height of the British Empire, indeed when Dublin fancied, though Liverpool might also have fancied, but Dublin certainly fancied that it was the second city of the Empire; a million Irish men and women starved to death on the island of Ireland and a million more came through the gates here – they are still here – came through the gates with the word Clarence written on either side of them. Ten years ago I unveiled a monument in this city to them, in the grounds of St Luke's Church. For many of them, they did not want to come here. They were reluctant to leave their homeland, very reluctant indeed. But they came and made their lives here, many of them, and they brought with them - in those far off days and many waves of emigrants since - they brought with them the story of their homeland, its history, its

faith, its dance, its music, its poetry, its literature, its spirit, its great hope. They thought of themselves as people of little value and they were often made to feel that they were of little value. Today, this great city of Liverpool, their adopted city, is showcasing itself brilliantly, absolutely beautifully as European Capital of Culture and into its cultural tapestry is woven their story. You cannot tell the story of Liverpool, you can't showcase its cultural exuberance without also the story of its Irish citizens – it is part of their story and their children and grandchildren and great grandchildren, they have a love of Ireland but Ireland is no longer their home, this is their home. Liverpool is their home, England is their home and they are children of both Ireland and England and through their lived lives, living with these identities – which in the past kind of pulled them apart so often – we are learning from their lives now, to symphonize their stories, to make them rhyme, to make them work together, to work as friends to allow our children, grandchildren and the children of our Diaspora – to draw freely from the wells of culture in which they live and grow and to be the richer for them and to flood our own home culture in Ireland with their stories which are now part our stories deepening us, strengthening us, testing us, broadening us.

Former Taoiseach Bertie Ahern spoke to both houses of Parliament in Westminster last year and he said the success we have seen in re-imagining British/Irish relations and established peace in Northern Ireland is

not an end, but only the beginning of what we can achieve together. Today, I would like to think we are linked, not divided, by our communities of Irish ancestry here in Britain and our communities of British ancestry in Ireland. I would like to think that we are the first generation to get really relaxed around those historic links, to get really relaxed around those identities; to no longer be pulled apart by them but to symphonize them, to gather them, to harness them, now, as a new energy. Partners in Europe and importantly partners now in peace, co-architects of the peace. Here in Liverpool, the words of some of your great musicians, who as I mentioned earlier, have an Irish bone or two in their bodies; they still inspire us and they could actually be a metaphor for this moment, because one of the Beatle's songs says

"We took our sunken eyes and learnt to see.

We took our broken wings and learnt to fly,

Because all our lives we were only waiting for this moment to arise."

We are in this risen moment. It was hoped for by generation after generation, wave after wave. Now we live it. Every so often, to use that expression of Seamus Heaney's, "hope and history rhyme". We are in that rhyming moment and it is very important that we know, that we intuit that, because it is a moment, pregnant, absolutely delirious with the grandeur of momentum and traction. But we all have to push, put our shoulders to the wheel.

And so a new generation, please God, is coming up that will write the script of the new chapters of Irish and British history and our shared history. You are the people who will construct this new future for ourselves, for yourselves, for our children. You will make it here, you will make it all around the world.

And it will be you that will write the story of what kind of seeds did we plant in this moment, when the ground was fallow, when the evil harvest was in and we had this chance now to reseed the landscape. What did we seed it with? Was it weeds, or was it those gorgeous Sam McCreedy roses that the Vice Chancellor has planted; roses of a good Northern Ireland genius who planted his genius in New Zealand. Or will we plant, again, those ugly plants. Those awful, ugly plants whose shape we know well, whose tentacles we know well. We have no excuse for reseeding the future with those ugly plants. One of our lovely poets – a man called Patrick Kavanagh – says of the ugly plants that grew from conflict and contempt and hatred “their roots have fed on tears.” A phrase that I remind myself of very often - their roots have fed on tears - and we have lived for way, way, way too long, all of us, on these islands with the bitter, bitter harvest for way too long. Now, we are the very first generation ever who have the chance to see what kind of plants grow, when they are fed on hope, when they are fed on consensus, when they are no longer simply watered by tears.

We are the first generation ever, and really you have to decide, each one of you, each and every one of you, what are you to be the carriers of. Because that harvest, that 900 year old harvest, that toxic harvest, that is the same everywhere in the world, where racism or sectarianism have planted their formidable, formidable roots, they are not carried by trays, they are not carried in the air; we are the carriers. It is the human heart and human words are the carriers of these toxins. So we can be the carriers, we can keep on being the carriers of toxicity or we can make a decision, as so many people have on the island of Ireland, to strip away that toxicity from our own hearts, acknowledging that everyone of us is the carrier, to some extent. To set down, now, that baggage, that historic baggage and to lift something new, something fresh, something wonderful, something truly magnificent. To create a world that actually is the truest destiny of the human person, the truest destiny. To create, as we are hoping to create, the very best Ireland ever. The place where, in the words of our proclamation, we cherish all the children of the nation equally. That is our destiny, please God, will be our destination. I don't think it's a peculiar Irish destination.

I think it is what hope breathes in every human heart. In every human heart hope tells us that we are entitled to be cherished, to be loved. But it also tells us that the entitlement we want and create for ourselves is the right and the entitlement of every single human being on the planet, our neighbour included.

So, do you want to be somebody who lays the groundwork for this fascinating future built on hope, built on a consensus? Is that what you want for you, or do you want the long grass for your children? Which is it to be? Because really that's the choice each one of us has to make and some of us grew up learning that the hard way. I hope, please God, that the generation coming up will never have to learn that lesson the hard way, as we did, please God. You will be their teachers.

Thank you so much for your attention.

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