

HoM SPD speech

Céad míle fáilte roimh go-léir agus Beannacht Lá Fhéile Pádraig.

A hundred thousand welcomes to all and Happy St. Patricks Day!

St Patrick's Day

St. Patrick's Day, on Monday of next week, March 17th, sees Irish people - and friends of Ireland - across the globe engage in celebrations of Irish history, heritage and culture, of what it means to be *Irish*.

Of course, let's be honest – St Patrick's Day is really a misnomer. We should just call it St. Patrick's Week. Or even month.

On Sunday last, to literally kick-start the festivities, Ireland took on China in a football game in Mandela National Stadium. The match was dubbed the 'clash of the titans'.

I was privileged to take a small part in this game, and whether out of Irish luck or out of great politeness by the Chinese, I was able to score a goal! We went on to win this famous clash and the two captains, Karol and Michael are here tonight. We may have a rematch down the far end of the garden later so please stay tuned.

Tomorrow we have a traditional night in O'Leary's Irish pub, and on Saturday there is the annual St. Patrick's Ball – so well done to the Irish Society for your great work on these events, for bringing the

Wild Geese band once again to Uganda, and also for the great fundraising that you do for various local charities. The Wild Geese are going to give us a few tunes later on, so many thanks for that.

Our history

St. Patrick's Day is a time that reminds us of the enduring solidarity of the global Irish family. It is a day where we can share our pride, our history, a sense of who we are with the rest to the world!

And we have a lot to be proud of...

Remember, as recently as the 1950s, Ireland was one of the very poorest countries in Europe. Many emigrated, and took the oft-travelled routes we have taken across the globe. A scattering that means today, even though the population of Ireland is less than 5 million, there are over 70 million people of Irish descent around the world!

Our economy had been based on low-value agricultural products. We were a relatively closed society. It was not until the late twentieth century that we managed to emerge, slowly but surely, as a more open, vibrant and economically diverse nation.

Regional integration, our membership of the EU, helped enormously. We focussed on our education system and on attracting foreign investment.

N Ireland

Slowly but surely, and not without setbacks, we brought peace and security to all parts of the island of Ireland, working closely with our neighbours and good friends in the United Kingdom

And can I say how historic this year will be, with President Michael D Higgins about to become the first Irish Head of State to make an official state visit to Britain, hot on the heels of Her Majesty the Queen's visit to Ireland in 2011.

She even spoke some Irish, although she gracefully declined the traditional shot of world heads of state downing a pint of Guinness!

Opening up

In the late twentieth century, we also began to think differently about ourselves: we embraced change and accepted diversity; we looked to enable everyone living in our land to give the best of themselves: our woman as well as our men, nationals and non-nationals, people of many different beliefs, traditions, cultures and backgrounds. As the old Irish saying goes, *ní neart go chur le chéile* – there is no strength without unity. We all of us have a role to play.

Challenges

It hasn't all been plain sailing. In recent years we have again faced major challenges due to our economic slow-down. But we rolled up

our sleeves and addressed these, and this year, 2014, will be our fourth consecutive year of economic growth.

Today, Irish export levels are higher than before our economic crisis, jobs are being created and unemployment is falling. During our crisis, we were losing 1,600 jobs a week. Today, we are creating 1,200 jobs a week.

We have the youngest workforce in the EU. And an abundance of skills. 8 of the top 10 global ICT firms, 9 of the world's top 10 pharmaceutical firms, and all 10 of the largest online companies in the world operate from Ireland.

If Ireland sank into the sea tonight, ladies and gentlemen, the world wide web may be no more. Your tweets would be in vain. Your updated Facebook profiles would fall on deaf ears!

In short, we are well on the road to recovery. We can see light at the end of the tunnel. And guess what – it's green!

Embassy

2014 is also special for another reason. This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Irish Embassy in Uganda.

When we established in 1994, we had much to build on of course, such as the work of our fantastic missionaries, like Mother Kevin who arrived way back in 1903, and Irish NGOs such as Concern, Goal and

Trócaire who arrived during some of Uganda's darkest days and are still here today.

And let me take a moment here now to thank you all, Irish missionaries, NGOs, volunteers, development workers – and also now Irish business men and women, entrepreneurs, and leaders, for all the work you and your organisations have done and continue to do here in Uganda, in all four corners.

Karamoja

To mark our anniversary this evening, we have a special focus on our work in Karamoja. There is a fantastic resonance for Irish people with Karamoja and its people. The importance of the cow in Karamoja echoes the myths and legends of Ireland's past. The ongoing threat of hunger reminds us of our own times of famine, not so long ago.

And we very firmly believe that Uganda will not be developed until Karamoja is developed. That is why we are investing in education, in social protection, and HIV/AIDS prevention. We believe strongly in the promotion and protection of human rights for everyone, working hard to increase access to justice and to prevent the scourge of Gender Based Violence in Karamoja, and elsewhere.

GoU

Honourable Minister, many thanks to you and your Government for the strong partnership that we have had over the last twenty years.

Like any partnership, there have been ups as well as sometimes downs. We are committed to working with you on our shared priorities, and to the deepening of ties between our two peoples.

Our work in particular with the First Lady and Minister for Karamoja Affairs, on Karamoja and HIV/AIDS, is an excellent example of what we can achieve, when we work together.

Final word

Ladies and gentlemen, we are delighted to be able to share with you tonight a taste of the culture of Karamoja and some of our activities there. We have turned a corner of our premises into Karamoja for the night! So please do take a look at our *Karamoja House* down at the far end of the garden, it brings a taste of Karamoja to Kololo. Please also enjoy the fantastic pairing of honey from a livelihoods project we support in Karamoja with the very best of Irish cheese.

A final word of thanks to all of the wonderful staff in the Embassy of Ireland for your hard work throughout the year, my colleagues for your support, and my family and friends for above all ... your patience!

Wishing you all a wonderful evening.

And now a toast to His Excellency, the President of the Republic of Uganda, Yoweri Museveni.

To the Ugandan President!