

University of Ireland  
Galway, Ireland  
May 12, 1999

**PHOTOCOPY  
PRESERVATION**

**Millennium Lecture Series at the University of Ireland**  
**"Our Obligations to Each Other: Continuing the Quest for Peace"**  
**Lecture by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton**

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Thank you very much. I am deeply honored to be here, and especially to receive such a warm welcome and this honorary degree. I love coming to Ireland. I love it when people say how welcome I am, and offer me a "hundred thousand welcomes." I believe that my husband and I have been so fortunate to have received all of those welcomes and the great hospitality of the people of this wonderful country. For me to be back is indeed not only an honor, but a great pleasure—especially in this beautiful city of Galway.

It is a particular privilege to be here at this university. I wish to thank the president and the chancellor. I wish to thank all who have been part of this ceremony and this conferring of degrees. I also extend my appreciation to the mayor, the city manager and all those in city government here in Galway. We are also fortunate to have our ambassadors with us. Celia Larkin is also here, and many distinguished guests throughout Ireland. And most important of all, the students of this university.

I too wish to extend my recognition to Margaret Durrane, who—as the president has just said—is, we believe, the oldest person with an honorary degree and is the oldest graduate at a young 104. Now I don't know whether she can still vote in the United States, but I will certainly invite her to maintain her registration for the 2000 election, when the Democrats will need her once again. She is like so many who were born here in Ireland and emigrated to the United States, and is now, like so many, returning to her beloved country. She is a powerful symbol of the rich interplay of lives and contributions and friendships that have marked the relationships between the people of the United States and Ireland.

One must think here in Galway of all those men and women and children who began their journey to what they called the "New World" in ships sailing from this port. Some made America their home permanently and became part of those immigrants who enriched, built, and led our nation, and who now number 40 million strong. But it is also a great joy as we watch from the United States to see the economic and cultural benefits that Ireland is celebrating today. It is no wonder that so many Irish Americans and Irish living in America find their way back here—not only for a visit or retirement, but for investment and education—so that the bonds between us grow ever stronger.

I know that this university opened its doors during the height of the potato famine. I know that your mission today remains as it has always been—to teach and educate generations of young people, not only in the arts and the sciences, but in a timeless lesson about how we live with one another: What are the values we live by? How can we use our education to make a contribution, not only for our own personal success, but to the larger world as well?

I was very honored indeed to be invited to deliver this inaugural Millennium Lecture. We, too, at the White House have celebrated the millennium with a series of lectures, because we also believe that it is appropriate to mark this passage of time with some reflection. We chose as our theme, "Honor the past, imagine the future." That theme could be a theme that has a lot of resonance not only in the United States, but here in Ireland—and really, throughout the world. As we move into this new century, and indeed this new millennium, many of us are asking ourselves, "What are the paths we wish to bring with us? What are the values, the verities that we do not want to lose in this passage to new time? Yet, what do we want to leave behind? What can we de-shackle ourselves from; give up? No longer let drag us down as we move forward?" That requires imagination and courage and, particularly, imagining a future you wish to help create and then the courage to bring it about.

I wanted to talk today about our obligations to each other and continuing the quest for peace. It seems a particularly fitting and timely topic here on the island of Ireland, because we are in the middle of implementing the Accords. There is still great hope and optimism in the hearts and minds of people from one end of this island to the other. Yet we live in a time at the end of this century when we know that peace is a challenge to us—how we obtain it, and how we maintain it. We know even as we speak today that it is a challenge in the Balkans, in the Middle East, in parts of Africa and elsewhere. It seems that all of us, as we honor the past and imagine the future, have an opportunity to think harder about what our obligations are to one another and the obligations we all have for peace.

Last month at the White House, we held the sixth in a series of interactive Millennium Lectures. Perhaps students or faculties here might have logged on, because they are cybercast simultaneously on the Internet—the first time that was ever done at the White House. The topic for this last lecture was the "Perils of Indifference," and the speaker was the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Elie Wiesel. I had asked him to speak a year ago. I could not have known then what would be going on in the world today, but I knew at the time I asked him that the lessons of this too-violent century could not be forgotten, except at our peril. And I knew that his eloquence and his writing reminded all of us, year after year, how we cannot forget how we have to move forward into the uncertainties of hope.

Mr. Wiesel came to that lecture in the midst of the NATO mission, and spoke to us and reminded us of the terrible destruction in human suffering that has occurred in this century when evil has gone unchecked, and when the sacred bonds that should exist among human beings have been broken or ignored. He reminded us that those who stand by are not only bystanders, but are in danger of losing their own souls. He said that in concentration camps, there are only three kinds of people: killers, victims and bystanders. He said that we need to think hard about how we would avoid the perils of indifference.

At the end of his lecture, we had questions and answers from the audience. The last questioner there was a Catholic priest who teaches at Georgetown University. He asked Mr. Wiesel how, in light of what he had personally suffered as a young boy—whisked from his home in Romania, put into a concentration camp, losing most of his family—how he could look to the future with

any hope whatsoever. Well, he stood back for a minute and he said, "But what is our alternative? We either give in to the evil and the indifference, or we constantly nurture hope in ourselves and those who come after us."

This past century has taught us that hope is the only answer. Economic and social progress is possible, but only when people of different backgrounds, experiences and traditions let go of the past, let go of old hatreds, and decide that their common human obligations and potential common future offer greater promise than either indifference or antipathy.

It has always been true, but certainly I think—given the situation in the world today with the spread of weapons of mass destruction, and once again conflicts among peoples and religions and tribes—that we all have a role to play in the continuing quest for peace. Peace will more than ever depend on what each of us does and whether we can overcome our past on behalf of a common future.

Another Nobel Peace Prize winner, a friend of many of us in America—and many here, of course, in Ireland—Seamus Heaney, wrote something that became the guiding hope for my husband and I on our many visits to Ireland, and much more than that, in our work around the world as well. Some of you may remember that during the President's 1995 visit, he quoted from a wonderful passage that became the hallmark of why we believe hope has to be our goal. Let me remind you of those lines:

"History says, don't hope on this side of the grave. But then, once in a lifetime, the longed for tidal wave of justice can rise up, and hope and history rhyme."

Reading that or listening to Elie Wiesel, we know the great forces of history and the great evil that lurks from the cold regions of the human soul are formidable. But there is not just the possibility but the necessity for all of us to work to ensure that hope and history rhyme.

Since I first visited Northern Ireland with the President in November of 1995, I have seen with my own eyes how far people have moved from history to hope. I've seen it in the large agreements that have been reached. I've see it in the handshakes and conversations of political leaders. I've seen it in the economic growth that holds out promise for posterity. Yes, the guns that have been silenced and the prisoners that have been released and the election of a truly representative Assembly—all are fulfilling a promise of the Good Friday Agreement.

But more than that, I have seen it in small ways. Yes, we have needed and we will always need courageous leaders who are willing to take risks for peace. But more than even leaders, we will need men and women who can change their hearts—young and old, Protestant and Catholic, and in other parts of the world as well. Here the people knew it was time to end the bloodshed, to stop the hatred and the violence, to do better for our children. So in both the North and the South they set about doing the everyday work of peace—in their homes, their schools, their workplaces, and their communities. It is citizens like these who have raised their voices and used their votes, who are moving this entire island and history to hope, from war to peace, and from the past to the future.

There are some who criticize the United States because we often seem to lack a sense of history. Very often the history we have has been given a makeover, so that we find room for everyone at the table. We have had some very hard times in our own history, when we have had to fight a civil war, had to come smack up against discrimination and bigotry against all kinds of people—against the Irish, against the Blacks, against the Hispanics, against the women—all kinds of people. But slowly and surely we have moved from our history to hope. It is probably one of the hallmarks of the American experience that sometimes seems naive and even a little bit silly to those looking at us from outside our shores. This sense of possibility, this unrealistic hope in the face of reality. Yet it has served us very well. Because America, you know, is really an idea that is rooted in hope, potential, possibility and promise. Because of that, we've been able to move beyond our history. Therefore, it is difficult sometimes for an American visiting anywhere else in the world—where the grip of history seems so strong and people seem to be struggling and dying under it—to understand why that cannot be broken, why the values of the past that are good and hopeful and promising cannot be carried forward, but those which drag us back can't be left behind. We know how difficult that is.

All over the world I have met people who have seen of the worst of what human beings are capable of, and have summoned up the best of their humanity to bring peace and dignity to all. I have sat at tables with people who were combatants—one against the other in Central America, in El Salvador and Guatemala—who only recently have seen the ending of decades of bloodshed and conflict. I have listened as one guerilla leader said to a political leader who was then on the other side, "We never thought we could trust you. The hardest thing in the world for us was signing the peace agreement that included disarmament, but we knew finally the time had come; we had to move forward."

I have seen the commitment in the Middle East where so much blood had been shed and so much distrust still lingers there. I have listened to how Christians, Jews and Muslims have struggled to find some agreement with one another, yet have been willing to lay down the burdens of the past if they can be promised a hopeful future. I visited a small community in Israel, during the last visit that my husband and I made, where Christians, Jews and Muslims had made a conscious effort to live together side by side, to respect each other's traditions, to try to serve as an example for their fellow men and women. I watched three small children celebrate their own traditions. One lit a Christmas tree, one a menorah, the third a Ramadan lamp. Each was celebrating his or her own faith and learning how religion can be a source of strength and hope, not divisiveness.

Shortly after the Dayton Peace Accords, I was in Bosnia. And I met in Tuzla with a group of men and women—primarily women Orthodox Christians, Catholic Christians, Muslims and even a Jew—who had survived the horrific onslaught of ethnic cleansing. I listened to them tell me what that experience had been like, how each had fought to survive, how they had tried to keep normal life going—keeping some remnant of schooling available in a basement; trying to keep a hospital functioning despite the lack of supplies; moving from house to house, corner to corner, avoiding the bombs and the guns. They gave me a small statue of a woman, carved of wood. And embedded in her knee is a piece of shrapnel that had been picked up from the street, a

symbol certainly of the war and the pain that had been endured. But her hand is on her heart. On her other hand, a dove of peace. On her face is a confident smile that seemed to say, "I will dream again; I will work for peace for my children." And some might say that smacks of sentimentality; that is the kind of dream that is unrealistic, given what we know about the world. Yet I would argue that we need always to hope for the best and prepare for the worst. They are not contradictory. We know what lurks in the human soul. We know what men and women are capable of. But if we don't believe that it can be better, then we perpetuate the cycle of violence, disappointments and indifference.

I want to commend all of you here in Ireland for the work that your country has done on behalf of peacekeeping. Whether it be in Bosnia or the Congo or Lebanon or so many other places around the world, Irish peace-keepers have been there. I know that you have just received your first Kosovo refugees, and are offering them your hearts and your homes, as you always have done. These refugees are stark reminders, if we needed any, of how far we have yet to go at the end of this century. Who could have predicted when communism fell in the Soviet Union, and we all celebrated the actual physical destruction of the Berlin Wall, that only 10 years later we would be faced again with the kind of violence, oppression and evil that we see emanating from Yugoslavia?

I met the first group of refugees who came to the United States last week. There were grandmothers in shawls. There were students who spoke perfect English. There were children running around. There was even a woman who was on the verge of giving birth. As I looked into the eyes, particularly of the children, I tried to imagine what they had witnessed and endured. We have only seen the pictures, the haunting images of children crowded in the trains, robbed of their homes, their families, their childhood.

I was talking with our aid workers, and they told me just a few stories that they personally had experienced of being in a refugee camp. Seeing a woman surrounded by small children sobbing uncontrollably, they asked her if there was anything that could be done for her. In an attempt to make conversation, the worker said, "Well, at least you have your children with you." Then she only began to cry harder. Because as they were herded into these trains, as they were pushed apart, she lost three of her children. She had no idea where they were. We, at the Embassy, were able to locate them. I think that to any parent, who sometimes can become somewhat immune to the pictures on television, the suffering seems too much. It seems so far away, we are not sure what we can do. To bring it into those personal terms of a parent losing children, makes it all too real. Despite the suffering that they had endured, the refugees I met wanted more than anything to return home, to begin rebuilding their lives in peace and safety. That is the goal and the mission the United States and NATO have undertaken. It is also a reminder that, at bottom, that is what most people want. They want to be left alone, to be able to raise their families, to have the joys that come in life; and, too often, they have been prohibited from doing so.

As we enter this new millennium, people all over the world are looking to this island. We know how deep the bitterness has run. We know how important it is that progress continue. And we look to the people here, in both the South and the North, to teach us what enduring peace looks

like. Not just the absence of conflict, but the presence of justice—that tidal wave of justice that can rise up. And we know that justice can only rise up when citizens have access to the tools of opportunity, like quality education, healthcare, jobs and credit. When they can make their voices heard in a political system. When they all feel they have a stake in the future that we want everyone to participate in building. We know that justice can only rise up if all people are welcome in the decision-making processes of governments, of business, of academia, of every institution.

I have a particular admiration for the women of the North who have worked for years throughout the troubles to bring people together. Eight months ago I was privileged to have launched the "Vital Voices: Women in Democracy" conference in Belfast. I will return tomorrow for a follow-up teleconference. Women had come from all over this island. They were members of both traditions. Some were experienced activists. Some had never done anything in public before. One who introduced me was a student, about 15 or so. "It was the first time," as one woman had said to me, "that we realized a sense of possibility. We realized we could be the architects of a new Northern Ireland." Indeed they can, and they are.

When I meet again with them tomorrow, I will be hearing about the progress that has been made since our last meeting in September. I will be hearing about the partnerships, some of them involving American companies and organizations that are working to build services in communities and assist women and others who are starting new businesses and strengthening their leadership and advocacy skills. Because the hard work of peace—again, only when the accords are signed, whether it is the Dayton Accords in Bosnia which ended the violence and created the conditions for peace, or whether it is the Good Friday Accord here—the hard work of peace is what each of us does every day.

And so what I have seen is that hard work of peace taking place here. I have seen it. I have heard about it. I have watched it not be derailed, as some continue to resort to violence to try to disrupt and end the quest for peace. At the Vital Voices conference, I met a young woman who had lost friends when the Omagh bomb went off. One of her best friends was killed. When she was called and invited to come as one of the student representatives to the Vital Voices conference, her mother was not sure how she would feel about it, because it might be considered political. She was in no mood for politics. Yet this young woman came because she wanted to be part of that quest for peace. She knew she had to make a contribution.

This is what you are working to create here at this university, not only by educating and informing young people about their obligations, but in particular through the work of the Irish Centre for Human Rights. You understand that justice can only rise up when the everyday lessons of peace and freedom and mutual respect are passed down to every generation.

To assist you in your work, I am pleased to announce a new partnership. The Irish government has agreed to join the American philanthropy foundation, the Ferris Foundation, to create 10 scholarships for outstanding African-American graduate students to study at colleges in the North and South of Ireland, including here in Galway. I am pleased that Michael Ferris, a member of the Irish parliament, is representing the Ferris family here today. You understand

how important it is for people to live and work and learn together. I am also told that a group called Cooperation Ireland is helping to build trust and friendships between Catholic and Protestant children by organizing exchanges across the border. Children who lived only a few miles from each other, but have never met, are now visiting each other's schools and staying in each other's homes.

At the Vital Voices conference, I was struck by how little real contact existed between people in the North. Women, with some amazement, learned that they had the same feelings and experiences. They were all worried when their children went out to play, or when their husbands went off to work. They all prayed to the same God on Sunday to make sure they would come home safely. As they began to make those recognitions of their common experience, trust began to be built.

I hope that the work—the hard work—of peace, based on our sense of obligation and our commitment to the future, will have the support of all people who understand how important it is that we get on the right side of history so that hope and history rise.

I imagine that at the end of the next century, students and faculties of this university may be coming together in a setting like this, or more likely a virtual meeting. The purpose would be the same. They also will want to know what else they need to do to keep moving from history to hope. I trust that when that meeting is held we will have given them a century of better news than the one we leave behind. I trust that we will have taught them that for each generation there is the work of peace, and it is not an easy task. They cannot simply take a vote or pass a law, but that each of us has to struggle every single day. Only individuals can decide whether we are going to love or hate, whether we will respect one another or whether we will use our superficial differences—be they skin color or religious faith or gender or any other distinguishing characteristics of the human family—as reason enough to treat someone as less than human. Only individuals can decide whether we will expand the circle of human dignity to all those who are unlike ourselves. Only we can stay true to our obligations.

My husband received a letter from a family that lost a loved one in the bombing in Omagh. This man wrote to my husband because he knew he was a father like Bill is. He wrote about his hopes for his daughter who had been newly born. This is what he said: "We have a dream of what Ireland might be like when she grows up. Ireland could be a place where dreams could come true, where people would achieve things never imagined before, where people would not be afraid of their neighbors."

I go from here to Belfast to help dedicate a park. It is a park where we hope that children of both traditions will play in safety and joy together. We asked the children themselves to design this playground. And what did they dream of? Well, they dreamed of tree houses and birdhouses. They want to have a footbridge and a maze constructed from bushes. They want an area to plant things in. They dream what all of us dream of—a chance just to be safe, to laugh, to love, to play. I'm hoping that that patch of soil will be a symbol to what is possible, and all of us will look toward the future together.

I hope that I can come back and see that playground in years to come and watch children playing without fear or prejudice, learning to solve their problems without violence. And when they grow up and leave that playground, knowing that they will become architects of their community, they will be committed also to ensuring that their children play in peace, and justice is always rising up, and hope and history rise.

Thank you for what you are doing to make peace real, to make the quest for peace the responsibility and obligation of us all. Thank you for the example that this island is setting. I trust and I pray the example will stand far, far into the future as the kind of commitment that we all will be called to meet.

Thank you and God bless you.

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