

**FIRST LADY HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON
REMARKS FOR GENERATION 2000
BELFAST, NORTHERN IRELAND
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I have just spent a wonderful day in Belfast. And though my time here has been far too brief, I am grateful for the opportunity to join you at such a hopeful moment for the people of Northern Ireland. For the first time in more than 25 years, leaders of your communities are meeting and the world is watching to see whether they will end a generation of senseless killing and forge a lasting peace.

Today I have seen much evidence of why peace can and must be your destiny. At the University of Ulster, I gave the first of a series of lectures dedicated to the memory of Joyce McCartan -- a true heroine in this land's growing crusade to shake off the stifling bonds of suspicion and hate. Afterward, I met with many of the women who have been and are working very hard to build the peace that all families must have to thrive, who have focused most of their efforts on helping the young people break the cycle of violence. And just now, I have met a group of young men and women who shared with me their own hopes for peace and ^{the} future. [add details here]

I want to thank the Youth Council for inviting me here today. It is an honor and a privilege to close a conference opened by George Mitchell and addressed by Mo Mowlam. I know that George Mitchell is bringing to the peace process the same tireless commitment to finding common ground for the common good that he brought to the United States Senate. And I am constantly amazed by Mo Mowlam's extraordinary energy and dedication. You have already heard such powerful voices for progress and change that I am reluctant to add to them.

I think it is very fitting that I conclude my visit to Northern Ireland at Waterfront Hall. Here, citizens of all backgrounds are coming together to enjoy an evening's entertainment, exchange ideas and prepare for the challenges of the future. Just a few years ago, this would have been impossible. This magnificent new community building is a powerful symbol of what Northern Ireland can be and is becoming.

No one group of Northern Irish will have a greater influence on whether or not peace takes root and flourishes into the next millennium than the youth we seek to empower and encourage today -- or as you have called them, Generation 2000. I am very pleased to be joining so many men and women who have come together to make sure that these young people have the opportunities and the skills to both sustain and reap the benefits of the permanent peace we all hope is imminent.

Your task will not be easy. A philosopher once said that the deepest definition of youth is life as yet untouched by tragedy. If this is so, then the young people of Northern Ireland have never truly experienced youth. This generation has crossed into adulthood on streets littered with broken bottles and burning cars. Few have ever felt truly safe in their own neighborhoods, their own homes, their own beds. Almost all have grown up to the sounds of gunfire. And all have struggled to fulfill their greatest potentials against the often silent, but persistent plague of prejudice and bigotry, or as Seamus Heaney put it, the "maneuverings to find out name and school/subtle discrimination by address with hardly an exception to the rule."

Against all these odds, in an environment barren of opportunity and simple peace, we have asked the members of this generation to find some way to thrive, to be true to themselves and contribute their God-given talents and abilities to the building and sustaining of peace. It is a large responsibility. But I know that if this entire society pulls together to help all its youth, then they will surely succeed.

I know that there are representatives from the government, business and education communities here today as well as a considerable contingent of young people themselves. Everyone of you has a role to play in this effort. Many of you may already know that last year I wrote a book called *It Takes A Village*. Its thesis is that no one can raise a child on his or her own, that we all have a stake in providing every child the care and opportunity to thrive, and that almost every single action we take has an effect on the lives of children. It calls upon all communities to at least recognize the consequences of our actions and place the welfare of our young people at the top of their agendas. I think this is especially true for the people of Northern Ireland. The welfare of your young people must be at the top of not only the government agenda but every sector's agenda.

If we are going to expect this generation to say no to the ways of the past, then we must work together to give them more things say yes to.

They can say yes to the world of work when businesses, schools and government come together to make sure every young person has the skills to succeed in the new global economy.

They can say yes to school and job training when parents and educators and government work together to find innovative ways to address the needs of all students, from those who are excelling to those who are struggling.

They can say yes to getting to know other young people from across the sectarian divide when businesses, parents, and schools come together to sponsor integrated sports leagues and other recreational activities.

They can say yes to making friends of different religions and races when parents and other adults resolve to bite their tongues before passing on old resentments and prejudices.

Through all these efforts to expand opportunities for education, for recreation, for employment, for understanding, you can demonstrate your faith in the abilities and future of our young people.

I want to emphasize on behalf of President Clinton, that America will stand by you in all these efforts to help the peacemakers of the 21st century. American businesses, for instance, are banking on the future of peace and the talents of the young people of Northern Ireland. And as the peace progresses, more businesses will come this land, bringing ever more jobs and opportunity.

Finally, as food for thought, let me offer just a few examples of how we in America are working together to empower our young people to prepare for the future and build bridges of

mutual understanding between diverse communities. One of my husband's proudest achievements as president was to create a National Service program called AmeriCorps. Through AmeriCorps, thousands of young people across our country can earn money for college by performing public service in their communities. AmeriCorps members have worked in some of our country's neediest neighborhoods tutoring children, caring for the sick and the elderly, renovating crumbling homes and schools. They have led environmental clean up efforts. In short, they have made our communities better places to live and work.

But not only are our communities benefitting, the young people themselves are being transformed by service. They are gaining much more than college tuition, they are gaining a greater understanding of and belief in the country they live in. By working side by side with young people who come from all corners of America, and working in communities they might never have visited in their daily lives, they are learning to respect and appreciate the vast diversity of ideas and cultures that have made America strong. They are also gaining pride and self-esteem from seeing the difference they have made individual in lives and neighborhoods. As one young woman told me, "I never realized that I had anything to give until I volunteered to serve."

And in America, we have learned never to underestimate the value of fostering frank dialogue between young people of greatly differing backgrounds. Just a few days ago, I was in my hometown of Chicago to celebrate my 50th birthday. While I was there, I visited some of the landmarks of my childhood, including Orchestra Hall, the grand concert hall where in 1962 I first heard our great civil rights leader, the Rev. Martin Luther King, speak. It was then that I began

to form my own understanding of tolerance and racial reconciliation. On my visit to that same hall more than a quarter century later, I met a group of teenagers who had been brought together by Facing History, a non-profit organization dedicated to rooting out prejudice and promoting respect for difference and diversity among our country's young people. The young men and women came from all religious, ethnic and racial backgrounds. And before participating in the program they had little contact with people who were different from themselves, living complacently with the prejudices and harmful stereotypes that had been passed on to them. But after regular meetings where they spoke frankly to each other and began to know each other as individuals, not as abstract categories, their prejudices had begun to fall away. They now realized that they had much more in common than they had thought, that much more united them than divided them.

Two years ago, when my husband and I helped light the Christmas Tree at City Hall, I read aloud some of the letters we had received from the young people of Northern Ireland. Today, I'd like to echo some of their hopeful words of peace and reconciliation. A 12-year old girl wrote that she hoped the peace would be permanent, "that Catholics and Protestants...would be able to walk hand-in-hand and live in the same areas" and that everyone would come to recognize that "it is the person inside that counts."

I know that we are much closer today than we were two years ago to making that vision a reality. Each young person here today has the power to finish the job. You represent the future of this ancient and storied land -- the true Northern Ireland of the 21st century. Dare to dream. Your time to shine has come. And we will stand by you always.