

**Irish-American Peace Prize
Award Presentation**

Ambassador Bagley Residence

2/14/00

**PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION**

**Irish-American Peace Prize
Award Presentation by Niall O'Dowd**

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February 14, 2000**

The last three winners of this award have been Senator Kennedy, President Clinton, and now Hillary Clinton. And I was thinking to myself tonight, next year's winner is probably going to be President Gore. (Laughter and applause.)

I also want to say a special word about Stella. It's very easy in New York to have very strong Irish organizations; we have such a huge Irish population. It's much tougher, obviously, in Washington, and men like Father Sean McManus over the years have built great Irish lobbies here. And I think what Stella has done in such a short time is absolutely remarkable—to create such a powerhouse of Irish-American political power and activism here in the capital city. And it has never been more important, as we can all see from this week just how important it is to have people with their fingers on the pulse here in Washington. So Stella, congratulations. (Applause.)

And I also just want to say what a wonderful surroundings we're in, to visit with. It's a beautiful, beautiful place. And thank you so much for all you've done. And maybe next ... (inaudible). (Laughter.)

One of the things about Hillary Clinton, when you look at what she's done in Ireland, it's very interesting because we're all used to the big headlines of the President getting involved, and all these power meetings. But what she has done, in fact, is reach into the community—probably the weakest link in the chain. She's a woman who has gone into community centers in the (inaudible), community centers in the (inaudible). Her Vital Voices conference has spoken to people who are most in need of recognition in Northern Ireland. And that's a very, very important point.

I remember about seven years ago myself and Bruce Morrison went to Northern Ireland, and going for the first time up to the (inaudible) and finding out absolutely horrendous things that we never think about in the broad sweep of what politics in Northern Ireland is about—the fact that only 12 people had graduated high school that year, the fact that unemployment was 65 percent. And this is in the province of (inaudible).

And then going over to the (inaudible), I remember Bruce and I being at a meeting and a young woman coming up to us and saying, "We're so delighted that Americans came to see us." And then she said a phrase that would stay with me for the rest of my life. She said, "Thank you for not treating us like animals."

And that's how people felt at that time. People were very excluded. So you can only imagine what it means when the First Lady of the United States takes the time to go and talk to these people about their concerns. They're not the people you are going to see in the headlines;

they're not the people up in (inaudible). But they're the ordinary people—and in many cases the working class people of Northern Ireland—that she has reached out to, and they have never forgotten.

I think that's one of the things, if you look at the breakdown currently in the peace process and what has happened. The people who are standing with this process are those people you don't see on the (inaudible) or the (inaudible), people trying to tear down this peace agreement. It's because they now feel included. And it's mainly because of the work of people like Hillary Clinton that they feel included and they are not going to be the people who bring this down.

And you only have to go back to 1975, to the last time we were at this point in Northern Ireland, when the peace process back then broke down. And it broke down because people on the (inaudible) and people in the (inaudible) said we don't want it. And (inaudible) collapsed. That is not happening on this occasion. And the reason it's not happening is because America cared; because the President cared; but most of all, because this woman cared, took their concerns on board, became a vital voice for them. So she's not the one who's going to get the big headlines when all this is solved, but I believe that if we didn't have the (inaudible) and the (inaudible) together on this peace process, we would never have gotten it off the ground.

When I look at things this week, probably hidden from all of you is a huge announcement about a new (inaudible) at (inaudible) University, which is going to be on the peace line between the (inaudible) and the (inaudible), which is probably going to provide about 6,000 jobs in an area that has nothing. And that probably is more important (inaudible) than any other thing. And, you can guess, it was the American administration, the First Lady, the International Fund for Ireland who pressed and got the support for that campus.

So when we make Hillary Clinton the honoree this year, we're not doing it just because she's the wife of the President, but because she's done it all herself too. And she has taken the risk of walking up the (inaudible) and walking up to (inaudible) and talking to people there about their lives. So it gives me a great pleasure to say to her, she is an Irish-American of the Year. She is an Irish-American peace awardee. She's done more for it than almost anyone, with the exception of her husband, in this country. Congratulations, Hillary. (Applause.)