

Taoiseach Highlights New and Exciting Era in Ireland's Relationship with America and asks Ambassador Collins to point the way forward

**Address by An Taoiseach Brian Cowen T.D.
"Wall Street 50", New York on 17 July.**

Thank you so much for the wonderful welcome. I deeply appreciate the goodwill that has been extended to me throughout my visit here to New York, my first official visit outside the country as Taoiseach of Ireland. I felt it was important to come here for a number of reasons. Firstly, I want to thank Niall O'Dowd and all the organisers of this event for the kind invitation to speak to you this evening.

I think that it is clear we face into some uncertain times; there is turbulence in the financial markets, a credit squeeze, increased commodity prices and oil prices. There is a sense that we are moving into a different sort of an era. Ireland is certainly moving into a new era because we have consolidated progress that we have undoubtedly made.

Where are we in the world in terms of both our relationship with the United States and indeed with Europe? And what are the prospects, the strategies, the ideas that modern Ireland has, to stay at the forefront as a progressive, democratic society that wants to play its role in the world?

Coming to the United States is always a great source of inspiration for me. My own family background has been one of great gratitude to this country for what it has done for my grandmother, my mother, my uncles, my aunts, some of whom still live here and carved a life for themselves here.

And that is something that is very deep in all Irish people at home. It is not a relationship of sentimentality with the United States, there's a deep sense of kinship with the United States.

Ireland's narrative, the political narrative of Ireland, is changing very dramatically from a political narrative in the past of grievance and injustice, a sense of missed opportunity, to now being a country that has redefined itself in the modern world in which we live. Ireland has opened up not only economically and socially but psychologically as well, a country which was traditionally seen as one of the most dispersed nations has now in a very short space of time become one of the most diverse nations in the world, people from many nations coming to our shores now and finding a livelihood and a living in a far more diverse and plural society.

And that level of change has taken place in economic and social terms in the last two decades. That type and level of change has taken place in other Countries over many decades.

That sort of change has brought its own challenges but it has enabled us, I think, to flourish, to gain confidence in our own ability to dictate our own affairs in a very interdependent world.

And the United States of America and the Irish in America, and the fact that you could come to this country and be what you wanted to be, is something that has always been a source of inspiration for the Irish at home.

And it is only in recent times, in the latest political generations, that we have been able to define ourselves in a paradigm of peace and prosperity. Now a great many people in this country can take a lot of pride in the very constructive role that they played in bringing about what has been effectively the transformation of the Irish reality at home.

On behalf of all those people at home, of all political traditions and persuasions, north and south, east and west, can I from this platform once again sincerely congratulate them, all of those people who ensured that Irish America helped us overcome the limitations of our own history.

The great challenge in Ireland today therefore in this new place which now exists for us is how to harness that tremendous bond of goodwill, wisdom and expertise that is represented by the Irish Diaspora in the world today. How do we establish the new networks that are required, the new relationship that is required to make sure that your sense of participation, your sense of being Irish, is fully encapsulated as it now must be since we amended Article Two of our Constitution, which recognises the Irishness of all of those people who not only reside at home or vote at home but all those who are dispersed throughout the world who have a great sense of Irishness and who remind many of us at home of the importance of what it is to be Irish, values that we sometimes take for granted at home.

So coming to visit New York particularly and coming to the United States has always been for me a great sense of replenishment, a great sense that when we go back home that we have things to do, because there is always a great sense of possibility here.

There has always been a great sense of achievement here and tonight Brendan MacDonagh is being properly lauded for his tremendous career thus far. He is one of very many in this city and in many other cities throughout America where the Irish have prospered and have excelled.

And it is that commitment to excellence that has probably been the greatest contribution that America has given to modern Ireland; look at the industrial transformation, look at the foreign direct investment strategy that has brought so many of the frontline American industries to Ireland as a platform to the European market and indeed extended the reach of Irish exports beyond the traditional hinterland that dictated our trade patterns in the past, to be a truly global economy now and a place where you can trade anywhere in the world from Ireland. It is American industry and American expertise that brought that to Ireland, in the main, and we are deeply grateful for extending that opportunity to a very flexible and educated workforce because we knew the limitations of our resources that the greatest resource we have and had and will have is our people.

Irish-America for me is an untapped resource still. Despite its huge contribution we are only at the beginning in my opinion of what can be achieved between Ireland and America and I say very strongly that Ireland too must show its friendship in return to the United States.

Ireland has to be proactive, proactive in ensuring that we are seen to be a friend of the USA.

And indeed Americans need to know that the new political generation in Ireland is not only deeply appreciative of what America has done for us thus far but we know there are things that we can do for America to make sure that America is better understood, that America's position in the world is given the respect that it deserves, and you should be aware that under my leadership that will be a very important facet of my policy.

So tonight what I want to do is to announce to this audience that there will be a strategic review of the relationship between Ireland and America under the leadership of our ambassador to the US, Michael Collins. He will report back to me by the end of this year. He will seek out your ideas, your views as to how Ireland and America can continue to partner,

can continue to work together, can continue to share the values that have made that kinship real for this generation, as it was in the past.

And I want to say to you as well tonight that under my leadership as Taoiseach of Ireland, I want to work with everyone in Irish America and indeed everyone in the American administration, this one and future ones. And I thank each and every US administration that I have worked with for the tremendous time and effort and expertise that they provided for us as we sought to deal with our own what could have been termed 'local squabble'.

But that squabble is over and we now have a leadership in all strands of Irish opinion that is focused on making the Republic a reality, on making sure in the centenary of 2016 that the vision of those who gave us the opportunity to shape our own destiny, political, economic and social, is something that we must look up to, that we expand equality of opportunity, that we ensure just as in America that anyone whatever their talents, whatever their background has a chance to go to the very top if they are prepared to work and be disciplined and have an ecosystem, in economic terms, that enables them to pursue excellence and achieve what they proceed to achieve.

That is the Ireland we want, and America and Irish America has been a growing and constant inspiration for all of us at home to seek out that sort of vision for our own country and now as we face into whatever this uncertain future may be, it is the societies that can marry economic efficiency with environmental sustainability and energy security, which will be the progressive and successful societies of the future.

We want to work with all of you to make sure Ireland is at the forefront of that transaction. Go raibh mile maith agaibh go leir.

ENDS