

Tip O'Neill Chair of Peace Studies
Inaugural Lecture by President William Jefferson Clinton
11am Sunday 6 July 2003
Remarks by Professor John Hume MP MEP

Vice-Chancellor, President Clinton, representatives of the Ireland Funds, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen;

It is a delight for me to welcome you here this morning to the University of Ulster Magee, and it is an honour that President Clinton has accepted my invitation to deliver the inaugural lecture of my tenure as the United Nations Chair of Peace Studies - the Tip O'Neill Chair.

I speak from the heart when I say it is a pleasure to welcome you back to Derry once more. I know that the people of this city will welcome you warmly, as they did on your previous visits.

It was on your first visit to Derry, while in office in 1995, that you inaugurated the Tip O'Neill Chair in Peace Studies. It is fitting then that you would return here to share your experiences as President of the United States with us in order to help us to develop the philosophy of peace. We look forward to hearing your address.

I know that you have a personal link to the family of Thomas P. O'Neill Junior - your own mother, Virginia Kelly, sadly passed away on the same day as our dear friend, Tip.

This, though, is not your only connection with the O'Neill name. Tip O'Neill, as Representative from Massachusetts and latterly as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, had a great belief in people, in fighting against social injustice, in fighting for equality and in fighting for opportunity. In your term as 42nd President of the United States, you displayed those same characteristics.

Above all, you have shared with Tip O'Neill a great passion for Ireland and her people. From his earliest days in Congress, Tip showed a determination to campaign for peace and justice in Northern Ireland. That work, along with the efforts of the rest of the 'Four Horsemen' - Senator Edward Kennedy, the recently departed Senator Moynihan and Governor Carey of New York - helped to create an environment in which our conflict could be addressed.

Upon your election as President of the U.S., you proved that you, too, had a passion for peace and justice in Ireland. Your personal interest in our peace process and in the search for agreement on this island was shown to be beyond doubt. In gratitude for your attachment and commitment, the Irish people have shown great fondness and warmth to you in return, as they did to Tip.

None of us who were involved in the search for political agreement will forget the effort that you went to in order to support our goal of reaching an accord. The people of Ireland have, by now, heard the stories of your middle-of-the-night phone calls; the words of advice, counsel and encouragement to those involved. They remember too

your words of inspiration to the people back in 1995, when you told the crowd gathered at the Guildhall:

"You can do it."

They did do it. Agreement was reached and was endorsed by the overwhelming number of the people of Ireland, North and South, in a referendum. The lives of the people of this island, particularly in the North, have been transformed. One only has to walk around the streets of Derry, as I did in times past with Tip O'Neill, to see the change that has been brought about. There can be no turning back.

We face many challenges at this time. The challenge of bringing about the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement that people want to see happen. The challenge of increasing employment. The challenge of guaranteeing rights while promoting responsibility. The challenge of strengthening public services. The challenge of protecting our environment. The challenge of building peace throughout the world.

In each of these fields you, President Clinton, carried on the tradition of Speaker Tip O'Neill:

Working to provide opportunity

Strengthening human rights and democracy

Building social justice

Protecting our globe for future generations

Fighting for peace and justice where they are threatened.

As we gather here to listen to you share those lessons you have learned, we are mindful of the common challenges we face. I know that you are continuing your good work through the William J. Clinton Presidential Foundation. Its work combating HIV/AIDS, encouraging reconciliation, promoting economic empowerment and forging active citizenship and leadership plays a tangible part in building the world we want to see for our children.

You reminded us in Ireland, on a previous visit, of the imperative to 'work for a peaceful, just and fair solution' for our children. That solution is set out before us through the Good Friday Agreement.

Your visit is timely. We see an inability on the part of Provisional republicans to bring about completion, and an inability on the part of unionism to fully and absolutely commit to power-sharing and to working all of the institutions, and people are frustrated and disappointed. You hold a position of trust and respect from all sides in our quarrel. I hope that your words will help us to move forward.

That is what Tip O'Neill would have wanted. It is what he fought to see in Ireland throughout his political life. Like you, he shared in our Ulster heritage, his people having left Donegal many generations ago. And you are following in his footsteps again in being back on these streets of Derry.

He knew that politics was about local communities, like ours in Derry. We remember his adage that 'All politics is local'. But he was not insular in perspective. He saw the bigger picture. He realised that

global events affected local communities throughout the world. I believe it is apt, then, that from these streets which have seen so much strife in the past that we should send out a message of hope. I want to bring more speakers with international insight and experience of conflict resolution here to Derry so that we can continue to conduct a dialogue, and develop and export a philosophy of peace.

We have only to look around the world today to see the need for the promotion of peace, the protection of rights and the securing of justice. There is an apparent need to build social justice on an international scale so that the people of poorer countries can share in the wealth of our world. We see the effects of conflict in the Congo, in the Middle East, in Southern Asia and elsewhere. We have witnessed the denial of democracy in Zimbabwe and the ongoing detention of Aung San Suu Kyi by the military junta in Burma. These are only some of the challenges our global community faces.

Not least is the need to counter the prevailing philosophy of war as a means to end conflict. Instead of sending bullets and bombs, we should be sending philosophers of peace to spread the values of inclusion, justice and tolerance, no matter how seemingly intractable the quarrel.

I think that Tip O'Neill would have wanted us to do that. He would have approved of our sending out a message of peace from streets that in the past saw so much strife.

I know that you, President Clinton, have talked of your hope that American can build her 'greatest days in the new century'. I believe that the entire world can look towards a century where we end war and conflict and where we respect difference. But we must work for it.

On a wall in our family home is a treasured picture, one of my wife Pat and I, Tip and his wife Millie. On it is a message from the speaker I hold dear;

'May you have lasting peace in Ireland'.

May we have lasting peace indeed. And may that peace spread from here throughout the world.

I would now like to ask President Clinton to address us.