

90th Anniversary of Establishment of Ireland-U.S. Diplomatic Relations

**Remarks by Minister Charles Flanagan T.D.
Ambassador's Residence, Washington D.C. - Tuesday September 30**

Ambassador of Ireland to the United States, Anne Anderson, Ambassador of the U.S. to Ireland Kevin O'Malley, Minister for Justice and Equality Frances Fitzgerald, friends of Ireland in Congress,
Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you here in Washington D.C. this evening during my first visit as Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade.

I am particularly pleased that my visit coincides with the 90th anniversary of the establishment of Ireland-U.S. diplomatic relations.

As relations between our two countries operate on so many levels and stretch back over centuries, there is an undoubted sense of familiarity and ease in dealing with each other and a track record of mutual benefit and achievement in the political, economic and cultural spheres to name but a few.

But in the area of diplomatic relations, it took us a little while to get to know each other properly...

On 7 October, we recall the day when our first officially accredited representative to this great country, Professor Timothy Smiddy, presented his credentials to President Calvin Coolidge in 1924.

It was natural that Washington should be the first location where the new Irish state should seek to be represented. The ties of kin and friendship linking the American and Irish peoples today, were strong and robust a century ago - a rich tapestry of social, cultural, political and economic connections which only a unique relation such as ours could weave.

The vitality of these ties led Dáil Éireann to despatch envoys here during the campaign for independence. The path to statehood was neither straight forward nor without its tribulations. Once achieved, our young country wished to take its place in the world, to reach out to the Irish across the water, and to make its contribution to the life of nations.

It was important to have a presence in the capital of a country which had done so much to provide shelter to the Irish people over many decades; that inspired the world's first institution of global governance, the League of Nations; and an increasingly important economic and global power.

From the beginning, our mission here in this busiest of cities was involved in promoting the values and interests of the Irish people, and the state they were building. As early as the 1920s, our office here was engaging on issues of immigration, reporting on market sentiment and opportunities to boost Irish trade and tourism. And on issues such as disarmament and drugs control, Irish and American officials were working together to craft a better world. I am struck by how much of this activity has a contemporary air. Some things don't change.

Four years after our Legation opened its doors, in 1928 William T. Cosgrave became the first Irish head of Government to pay an official visit to the United States. His visit paved the way for those by successive Taoisigh and Ministers. The United States returned the compliment the same year, when Secretary of State Kellogg became the first member of an American government to pay an official visit to Ireland. He visited our shores fresh from signing the pact to outlaw war that he had championed. And although that hope would be tragically confounded, Ireland was proud to be one of the signatories in Paris, reflecting a shared commitment to the cause of peace among nations.

In the decades that have followed, this relationship has become broader and deeper in ways which can only have been dreamed of when my predecessor, Desmond FitzGerald, father of future Taoiseach Garrett Fitzgerald, sent Professor Smiddy to present his credentials and begin the work of representing Ireland in America.

Successive generations of Irish diplomats both here in Washington D.C. and across America have advanced the pioneering work of Timothy Smiddy and his colleagues and built on their achievements.

As many here tonight will be aware, we have recently announced the opening of our latest Consulate in Austin, Texas, and I look forward to visiting there in November.

The work of the Austin Consulate, as well as those in Atlanta, Boston, Chicago, New York, San Francisco and here in Washington D.C., at all times underlines the seriousness of Ireland's engagement with our American friends.

While we are always do our best to promote Ireland's interests here, I assure you that we view this as mutually beneficial at all times!

We are also conscious that the Ireland-U.S. relationship is something precious and unique that we should never take for granted.

The same point was highlighted further in the Embassy's review document of earlier this year entitled "Ireland & America: Challenges & Opportunities in a New Context", which underlined again that *"Our relationship with the U.S. must be a clear priority and command special attention. It is a relationship of extraordinary depth and energy ... It needs renewal and priority."*

As Minister it is my firm intention to ensure that Ireland-U.S. relations receive exactly such special attention and priority.

In this context, I also want to place on record my deep gratitude and appreciation for America's deep and ongoing support towards lasting peace on the island of Ireland.

This has been an important theme in several of the meetings that I have held today here in Washington.

The working relationship between Ireland and America and our British colleagues and our respective predecessors, going back over several decades to the very earliest roots of the peace process, has been critical at every stage.

I am grateful to President Obama, Vice-President Biden and their teams and to Ireland's friends in Congress for helping to ensure that this remains the case.

I am also grateful for the support and understanding that Ireland has received so far in relation to U.S. immigration issues.

While we are of course aware that this is a politically complex and challenging subject just now, I also outlined in my meetings today my own hope and that of the Irish Government and people that an early solution can be found which helps address the difficult situation of undocumented Irish migrants here in the U.S. and also an improved facility for legal Ireland-U.S. migration.

Trade and economic relations between Ireland and the U.S. is another area of critical importance.

Illustrating this point, my day here in D.C. began with a working breakfast downtown at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. It continued later with meetings with Vice-President Biden, Secretary of State Kerry and White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough, and also with D.C.-area members of the Global Irish Network where TTIP and the potential to further our trade links were on the agenda.

The strength and depth of Ireland-U.S. economic relations is clearly understood when it comes to U.S. investment in Ireland, but investment by Irish firms across all 50 U.S. states is also well worth highlighting.

Our Embassy and Consulates, in close cooperation with our IDA Ireland and Enterprise Ireland colleagues, want to be to the forefront in helping to identify and avail of investment and export opportunities that deliver win-win business and job-creating potential back home in Ireland.

Tourism is of course another key area on which we engage, likewise in close partnership with our friends and colleagues at Tourism Ireland.

None of these Embassy or Consulate activities happen by accident or in isolation. We rely heavily on you, our American friends present here tonight and here in spirit, for your deep friendship, engagement and support towards Ireland over all these years.

Therefore I thank you all sincerely – Go Raibh Míle Maith Agaibh Go Léir.

We have had a great first 90 years of diplomatic relations – here's to the next 90 and beyond.

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