



Foreword by  
Her Excellency Mary McAleese  
President of Ireland

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It gives me great pleasure to welcome Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II to Ireland on what is the first State Visit between our two countries. This historic occasion will be an opportunity to showcase the way the relationship between our two islands has developed and been transformed in recent decades into a vibrant friendship and to celebrate in particular the success of the peace process.

I had the honour to be elected President of Ireland in 1997, a few months before the signing of the Good Friday Agreement. Now as I near the end of my second term, much of the promise that was hoped for by the signatories of that Agreement has been achieved. We have peace on our island, power-sharing within Northern Ireland and an unparalleled bilateral relationship between Britain and Ireland.

We take a shared pride in these achievements and in the momentum they have generated towards a positive future as neighbours, partners and friends. The programme for Queen Elizabeth's visit comprises events which offer a chance to reflect solemnly on the past, to enjoy the present and look with optimism to the years ahead. Her Majesty will have an opportunity to get a flavour of Ireland's many charms, for

the visit will introduce her to city and countryside, history and innovation and, of course, our most precious resource, our people.

While this is the first State Visit between our two countries, Queen Elizabeth and I have met on several occasions.

Our first meeting as Heads of State was poignant and memorable. It took place at the Island of Ireland Peace Park in Messines, Belgium where we commemorated together, as we will again at Dublin's National War Memorial Gardens, the thousands of Irishmen who perished on the battlefields of World War I, while fighting in the British Army. That occasion was deeply emblematic of a new attitude and capacity to reflect more generously on each other's narratives and traditions. The same seminal symbolism will be evident when Queen Elizabeth and I stand together at Ireland's Garden of Remembrance – which honours those who died in the cause of Irish freedom and independence. These commemorative events illustrate the mutual respect which now exists between our two nations, despite a turbulent history, and the capacity we have developed for dealing with once divisive issues and events.

The contemporary agenda of tolerance, respect and parity of esteem has its roots in the Northern Ireland peace process and it is central to the Good Friday Agreement. I know from past conversations with Her Majesty that both of us have been reassured by the transformation wrought in Northern Ireland over the past 13 years. While things are not perfect and the work of conflict resolution and reconciliation goes on, life is now indescribably better for those who live, work and bring up their children in Northern Ireland. We are privileged to be part of the first generation to see peace blossom on the island of Ireland and to us falls a profound responsibility to cherish and build upon that peace.

As joint patrons of Cooperation Ireland, Queen Elizabeth and I are strongly committed to continuing the journey of reconciliation. For over thirty years Cooperation Ireland has promoted the development of a new culture of mutual understanding and acceptance of difference. Its work continues to be of great importance today as we seek to remove the remaining barriers of sectarianism in Northern Ireland and to promote cross-border cooperation and good neighbourliness on our island.

Cooperation and interdependence are strong themes in the modern British-Irish relationship. Located side-by-side at the western periphery of the European Union, we are major trading partners and crucial markets for each other. Britain is Ireland's largest source of tourists. Ireland is a significant export market for Britain, accounting for more goods than those exported to Brazil, Russia, India and China combined. Each country also serves as an important source of investment for the other.

Yet we are much more to one another than a set of economic statistics, important though such data is. The cultural relationship between Ireland and Britain is as close as it is complex rooted in ties of history, geography, politics and people.

The Celtic languages of Wales, Cornwall and Scotland are fraternally linked to the Irish language. These parts of Britain also share with Ireland a Celtic ancestry which can be heard through the cadence of traditional music and song. The now shared heritage of the English language provides a hugely important link between our two countries in terms of literature, poetry and music as well as film, television and comedy.

The English language as given expression by the Irish has provided some of the greatest works of literature through Joyce, Yeats, Beckett and Wilde and, in more recent years, Heaney. In popular culture too, Britain has often embraced Irish talent from Terry Wogan to Graham Norton from U2 to The Script, from the Chieftains to Riverdance.

Such success stories form part of a long narrative not untinged by sadness. For many years Ireland's largest export to Britain was her people. Both prior to our independence and during the economic hardships of our emerging nation, Irish people travelled to Britain in large numbers to work in construction, manufacturing, nursing and a range of other sectors. Approximately 750,000 people living in Britain today were born in Ireland and almost 6 million people in the United Kingdom identify themselves as Irish or claim an Irish heritage. Their contribution to British life has been incalculable. In times past, it was their faithful contribution, out of meagre resources, to family left behind in Ireland that kept the wolf from the door. The Irish Government celebrates with, and is proud of, the Irish success in Britain, but also provides support to those Irish people who find themselves alone or in difficult circumstances in their later years.

There are also a great many British people who have chosen to make Ireland their home, or to come as visitors. They find here our traditional welcome -C ad Mile F ailte - which means a hundred thousand welcomes. And along with it they find a hundred thousand different ways to enjoy themselves: be it a relaxed boat trip along the Shannon, an exhilarating surfing experience or a weekend shopping in a bustling city. The Irish sense of hospitality and fun means that we go out of our way to make sure any visitor has the best experience possible, and this State Visit will be no exception.

We have arrived at a notable moment in the relationship between our two nations. The past cannot and should not be forgotten, for how else do we learn? Yet it is to the future we turn on this visit. We pave the way for the future generations who depend on us to use the time we have to build a safe haven for them. I dearly hope that in years to come, the first State Visit between the United Kingdom and Ireland will come to be seen as the beginning of a new landmark era of ever deeper friendship between neighbours. **F**