

President Michael D. Higgins

Saint Patrick's Day Message 2024

“May I, on this Saint Patrick's Day 2024, send my warmest greetings as Uachtarán na hÉireann, President of Ireland, to all of our extended Irish family and indeed to all of those interested in Ireland across the world, whose interest is much appreciated.

Wherever they may be, and in whatever circumstances, the Irish scattered across the world, and all those who feel a connection to our country, are part of a global family that on this special day celebrates and invokes a shared culture and heritage, but reminds us too of a humanity of possibilities and vulnerabilities that we share despite the borders, oceans and miles that may separate us.

How so much better it would be that these celebrations be taking place in conditions of peace and shared concern for the sustainable future of our planet and all forms of life on it.

Unfortunately and tragically, our times are scarred by conditions of conflict, by wars and unresolved issues of hunger and poverty that affect so many in our human family. As we are all too aware, millions of people worldwide are struggling as a consequence of the contemporary multiple interacting crises, and of inequality, climate change and biodiversity loss.

In these challenging times, it is appropriate for us to invoke and reflect on the values that we wish to define us as Irish people. To call to mind those words and actions of which we can be proud.

Saint Patrick's life embodied the values of solidarity, friendship and concern for humanity. Coming to Irish shores as an outsider, an exile, a migrant finding solace and purpose in a foreign land, his story serves as a poignant reminder of the resilience, courage, and wide-ranging contribution of migrants throughout history, of those who seek refuge and shelter.

These migrant traits we rightly celebrate in those who have left our shores, including those who have made, and are making, such important contributions to so many causes across the world. We see it today in the contributions of the many wonderful people who have come to live their lives in Ireland over recent decades and who are now such a central part of the Irish family, whose work makes our society possible in its vulnerabilities and possibilities.

An example of Irishness at its best, in a world marked by conflicts and unrest, is Ireland's practical contribution to peace-building, as part of its commitment to living in peace and harmony with our global family. Encouraging others to do so becomes, in current conditions, ever more crucial.

On this, our National Day, we pay tribute to all those Irish women and men who are directly engaged in peacekeeping and in humanitarian relief around the world and of whom we are so proud.

Attacks on citizens have increased, as in the attack by Hamas last October followed by a reprisal of horrific assault as collective punishment. This year, all of the people in Gaza, ordinary citizens facing the most horrific of circumstances of war and displacement, will be in the thoughts of Irish people.

On this special day, it is important to call and pray for an immediate ceasefire, an end to the killing including as it does such a huge proportion of children, a ceasefire which will include too the release of all hostages. The facts of child deaths and malnutrition are carried each day on the television screens of the world – of children dying of lack of oxygen, with many more threatened with what will be a human-induced famine.

In responding to this, the lead taken by Ireland in giving increased and additional aid to UNRWA is an initiative of which Irish people can be proud, influenced as it is not only by our own history, but given the importance and urgent need for international humanitarian action, and international humanitarian law in our world.

So on this St. Patrick's Day 2024, this is a special year for holding in our minds the Irish people who are involved in building and supporting peace in so many regions across the world, including continuing the longest unbroken record of overseas service of any country in the world in peacekeeping with the United Nations, since first deploying to a United Nations mission in 1958.

This is such vital work at a time when humanity is faced with unprecedented challenges of a global kind. The United Nations, and multilateralism itself, is under grave threat.

Secretary-General António Guterres' recent comments as to how parties to conflict are not only ignoring but trampling on international law, the Geneva Conventions and even the United Nations Charter cannot be ignored. We all must respond to his words, support him.

Such a rejection of international law, of international responsibility, emphasises again how the Security Council has been weakened by abuse of the veto, leading as it has to its failure to respond with appropriate agreed resolutions both to Israel's military operations in Gaza and to Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine two years ago.

Now is the time for all those countries of the world who wish to see a world of peace, the building of a sustainable more equal world built on the UN Sustainable Development Goals, to come together and ensure our multilateral system is reformed to make these vital goals a reality.

Saint Patrick's message was also, at its core and in a fundamental sense, one of respect for nature. We need no reminder of how we are now at a critical juncture in the battle against the consequences of climate change, the effects of which are being felt acutely by the world's most vulnerable populations. As Irish people, we have the opportunity to take a lead in building a better alternative, one based on principles of respect for nature, justice and inclusion.

Today, as we celebrate the heritage Saint Patrick gifted to us, we are encouraged to be guided by a recovery and reassertion of values such as solidarity, care, kindness and compassion.

We must never lose sight of the possibilities that remain for us in conditions of a shared peace; how our lives could be without war, famine, hunger and greed in a just world that eschews the poisonous ideals of imperialism, racism and xenophobia and embraces the decent instincts of humanity; of how we can build a society of inclusion at home, while working together with other nations to build a peaceful, hopeful world.

May I wish all those who share this island, and all those who have a connection with Ireland, an interest in matters Irish, wherever they may be in the world, a happy and peaceful Saint Patrick's Day.

Beir beannacht.”