

Remarks by Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Charlie Flanagan, T.D.

Your Royal Highnesses:

A Chathaoirligh, Borough Mayor and members of Sligo County Council:

Dear friends:

It is my pleasure to represent the Government at this Civic Reception here in Sligo, a most beautiful part of the country that Mary and I know very well and visit regularly.

My thanks to Sligo County Council, to Niamh Crowley [and other performers] and to this wonderful venue for making this welcoming event so special.

Let me begin by adding my warmest welcome to the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall. This may be your first joint official visit to Ireland, but I know that both of you have come to know our country, and our people, well over recent decades.

Your past visits have brought you mostly to Dublin and the eastern half of the island - but this time we're delighted that you have come west. Your varied programme reflects important personal themes for both of you.

In particular, I am remarking on your dedicated work on sustainable development, where Irish-British co-operation can be seen firsthand at locations such as the Marine Institute in Galway and the Institute of Technology here in Sligo.

Your Royal Highnesses, so much of your visit here is about the quality of the relationship between our two countries in the 21st century - relations that can be aptly described as warm, neighbourly, dynamic and further improving all of the time.

Sligo's majestic landscape has inspired many of our great writers - including contemporary authors Dermot Healy, Neil Jordan and Sebastian Barry. You will find energy and inspiration in the art, music, science, literature, poetry and, of course, among the wonderful people that you will encounter here.

Above all, this is Yeats Country - a land beloved by W.B. Yeats, born 150 years ago this year. Yeats may have been born in Dublin - as it happens in Prince of Wales Terrace in Sandymount. However, Sligo served as his home and indeed as his muse. It was home too to his artist brother Jack, whose magnificent paintings you have just seen upstairs, and many of which depict in a wonderful way the landscape, life and times of the North-West.

Your Royal Highness, you spoke on your first official visit twenty years ago of the prospect for real and lasting peace on this island. In your inspiring remarks just now, you have returned to the themes of peace, reconciliation and dealing with the contentious legacy of the past - issues that still challenge us and issues that formed the basis of the recent Stormont House Agreement, agreed on the eve of Christmas Eve in Belfast in the company of the five party leaders, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and I, representing our two Governments.

In 2011, Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth spoke poignantly in Dublin of events which "have touched us all, many of us personally, and are a painful legacy". She spoke - and again I use her words - of "all those who have suffered as a consequence of our troubled past".

William Butler Yeats once wrote that 'words alone are certain good.'

When the flow of great words finally ceased and Yeats was laid to rest in Drumcliffe churchyard, unremarked among the enormous crowds that gathered for his burial was the Belfast poet, Louis MacNeice who wrote:

I note how a single purpose can be founded on
A jumble of opposites.

We have since built resolute peace to match our warm words of "certain good". Our two countries have created a shared vocabulary of cooperation, at times making reconciliation our "single purpose".

Your Royal Highness, your journey reflects your personal commitment to that shared purpose of peace and reconciliation.

This afternoon will bring, I hope, further healing as we all reflect on those dark moments across these islands that cast a shadow across cities and towns such as Belfast and Birmingham, Derry and Dublin, Warrenpoint and Warrington, as well as here in Sligo and nearby Enniskillen and Monaghan.

As you travel up the Sligo coast today to an ecumenical service of reconciliation at Drumcliffe and onwards to beautiful Mullaghmore, you will see just why Lord Mountbatten loved the harbour and its community so much.

I hope that you have a wonderful day in beautiful Yeats Country and that you even manage to back a few winners at the Sligo Races.

And I know I speak for all when I wish Your Royal Highnesses an early return to Ireland.

Go raibh maith agaibh go léir.