

A Christmas and New Year's Message from President Michael D. Higgins

December 2015

Christmas is a special time. For most of us, it is a time to be together with our loved ones, our families; a time to pause and reflect; a time to recognise and give thanks for the good people, and happy events in our lives.

If Christmas is a time to celebrate, it is also a time to share. We share each other's company, each other's achievements together with each other's pains, hopes and dreams.

For we must not forget that Christmas is also a time of hope. At this time, in the deepest darkness of winter, we celebrate the triumph of light over dark, of dreams over the setbacks of the past. We renew our sense of possibilities not yet realised.

As we take stock over this holiday period, we are given an opportunity to reflect on our lives and the world we live in. As we do so, we are reminded of the hardship experienced by countless people in Ireland and the suffering of millions of our fellow travellers on this vulnerable planet we call Earth.

As we reflect on the story of Christmas and the birth of Jesus, on the plight of the homeless Joseph and Mary anticipating the birth of their child, and how they were aided by complete strangers, we can perhaps draw inspiration from what they experienced for our own lives and times. More than anything, the Christmas story gives us guidance on how to shape our own shared humanity with a regard for future generations. This year in particular, we welcome the acceptance of new obligations by nation states in relation to global poverty and climate change.

During 2015 we learnt that 1 in every 122 people on the planet is now a refugee, a "displaced person" or otherwise forced to leave their homes. Wars, conflict and persecution have forced more people to flee than at any other time since records began.

As people of a migrant nation we are perhaps uniquely placed to understand the great agony experienced by the 60 million displaced people.

In this context, it is heartening to see how countless people in Ireland have chosen to respond with warmth and real hospitality. Our NGOs, our medical services, and our uniformed services – both at home and overseas – are peopled by those who have chosen to take action, and to be the stranger that offers a helping hand, a shelter, a meal to those in need. How we treat the weakest among us is the finest test of us as a nation.

During the past year both Sabina and I have experienced and valued the warmth and friendship of people both at home and abroad – and it is something we deeply appreciate. In villages and towns around the country and on working visits abroad we have had the privilege of witnessing the contribution to community and the public world made by Irish people in so many different ways.

Together, we can strengthen that web of solidarity that binds us as a people and as a global

community next year. As we prepare to commemorate the momentous events of a century ago that shaped the birth of our Republic, we are encouraged not only to recall those events, but also to re-imagine and take inspiration from the Republican ideals proclaimed almost a century ago.

It is my sincere hope that those ideals can inspire each and every one of us on our shared journey where each step made by each citizen, in every generation, matters; a journey that we all make together, never alone.

Mar Uachtarán na hÉireann, guím gach dea-ghuí oraibh go léir agus go raibh Nollaig agus Bliain Nua shona agus shíochánta agaibh.

As President of Ireland may I offer people everywhere the warmest wishes for a peaceful as well as a happy Christmas and New Year.

ENDS