

## **EMBARGO TO TIME OF DELIVERY CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Speech by President Michael D. Higgins,  
at the Mercy International Association,  
Baggot Street, Dublin,

Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> September, 2014

Ambassadors, distinguished guests, missionaries, ladies and gentlemen, it gives me great pleasure to join you here today to mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the Mercy International Association. I would like to extend a particular welcome to those who have travelled from so many parts of the world to attend this important event here in Catherine House.

Maidir leis an lárionad seo, a bhfuil aithne ag Siúracha na Trócaire air mar “ionad oilithreachta agus athnuachana, mar theach fáilte agus féile”, a thugann lámh chúnta agus ionad fáilte agus atá ina phointe fócais chun filleadh agus chun athcheangail a dhéanamh do Chlann na Trócaire timpeall an Domhain.

[Known to the Mercy Sisters as “a place of pilgrimage and renewal, a house of welcome and hospitality”, this centre extends a hand of support, a point of welcome and is a focus point for making a return and a reconnection, for the Mercy Family worldwide.]

Its purpose is so powerfully worded on the Centre’s website, which states that the Centre:

“calls and challenges the Mercy family of today to hear the cries of the poor that have assumed global proportions and to use their resources to respond to issues of global poverty”

Here in Ireland the Sisters of Mercy through their work have long been woven into the very fabric of our society. In fact, at one time the Sisters were so visible on our streets, visiting the sick and engaging in other works of care and compassion, that they were known as the ‘walking nuns’. And, of course, many of our citizens owe their early education to the Sisters of Mercy, while generations of Irish citizens have been profoundly grateful to the Mater Hospital, founded by the Mercy order here in Dublin, for the excellent care they or their loved ones have received there over many years.

However the Sisters of Mercy have, for much of their existence, also been part of a larger global family engaging in missionary work across the world. They have travelled to remote and challenging environments, teaching, administering to the sick, and working relentlessly to relieve poverty and suffering.

They there brought with them so much that is best about our Irish reputation abroad, defining it through their great humanitarian work across the globe. They did so, and continue to do so, with such an assiduousness for justice and equality as has enabled them to ensure lasting change for some of the most marginalised and vulnerable communities in the world.

There can be no doubt that the history of the Sisters of Mercy, built on the vision of its founder the Venerable Catherine McAuley and rooted in her great spirit of empathy and compassion is a long and very proud one. It is a history which led, some twenty years ago, to the establishment of the Mercy International Association, the heritage, hospitality and spiritual centre for the worldwide Mercy Community, now active in forty two countries around the world.

Today, as a global network, the Mercy International Association is critically positioned to ensure that the voices – and most importantly, the fundamental rights - of the most marginalised are heard and advocated for at a global level.

By coming together as one compassionate and determined voice of Mercy, to advocate for a more just and equal world, the power of what you do is immeasurable. Your focus on sustainable development, human trafficking, and the achievement of co-ordinated responses to global catastrophes addresses some of the greatest modern challenges facing the global community.

It also reminds us of the great ability of the Mercy Sisters to constantly respond to a rapidly developing and changing universe while remaining true to the beliefs and principles of its founder.

Although the spirit and vision of Catherine McAuley lies very much at the heart of the ethos of the International Association, I was most impressed to learn of the considerable time, thought and work which went into developing a fresh and refocused vision for the Association in recent years.

The decision to analyse ones purpose and ones project indicates courage and above all, vision. I have often spoken of the importance of being open to new paradigms of thought and action; of being unafraid to re- invent and re-imagine, to open new chapters, embrace change and advance innovation. It takes courage to seek out change, and great humility to constantly strive to know more and to do better, in order to realise a better and improved world. It is that combination of courage and humility that defines all those who work at the heart of the Mercy International Association.

I would like to conclude by thanking you, once again, for welcoming me here today. During my time as President - and indeed well before that - I have had the privilege of engaging with missionaries throughout the world. Irish missionaries have long been to the fore in ensuring that linkages are created and the voices of the most marginalised are heard – be it at local, national or indeed global levels.

Nationally, it is widely recognised that Irish missionaries led the way for much of what the Irish Government, through Irish Aid, is now doing in the area of development assistance. The partnership with missionaries is of real importance in the achievement of our Government's overseas development objectives.

Globally, associations such as Mercy International have a key role to play, particularly during the critical period ahead as negotiations intensify on the development of a new international development framework post-2015.

I believe that representatives from all ten Mercy Associations have gathered here in Dublin for this special anniversary, Over the coming days, I know that you will have the opportunity through Mercy Global Action to debate and consider critical issues of relevance to our future development. I want to wish you all well in your celebrations, and indeed your important deliberations, over the coming number of days.

Molaim sibh as bhú r obair leanúnach agus is deimhin liom go leanfaidh Compántas Idirnáisiunta na Trócaire leis den fhás is den fhorbairt sna blianta amach romhainn.

[I commend you for your ongoing work and am confident that the Mercy International Association will continue to grow and further flourish over the years ahead.]

Go raibh míle maith agaibh uile agus go n-eirí an mbóthar libh!