

Ronald Wilson Reagan (1911-2004)

Address Before a Joint Session of the Irish National Parliament

given on June 4, 1984

I am fully cognizant of the great honor that has been done me by your invitation for me to speak here. [Applause]
Thank you.

And I can't help but say, I wonder if there is an awareness in some that there are countries in the world today where representatives would not have been able to speak as they have here¹.

- 5 When I stepped off Air Force One at Shannon a few days ago and saw Ireland, beautiful and green, and felt again the warmth of her people, something deep inside began to stir.

Who knows but that scientists will someday explain the complex genetic process by which generations seem to transfer across time and even oceans their fondest memories. Until they do, I will have to rely on President Lincoln's words about the "mystic chords of memory"—and say to you that during the past few days at every stop here in your
10 country, those chords have been gently and movingly struck. So, I hope you won't think it too bold of me to say that my feelings here this morning can best be summarized by the words "home—home again."

Now, I know some of us Irish Americans tend to get carried away with our ancestral past and want very much to impress our relatives here with how well we've done in the New World. Many of us aren't back in Ireland 5 minutes before, as the American song has it, we're looking to shake the hand of Uncle Mike and kiss the girl we used to swing
15 down by the garden gate. [Laughter]

Well, I do want you to know that for Nancy and me these last few days will remain in our hearts forever. From Shannon to Galway, to Ballyporeen to Dublin, you have truly made us feel as welcome as the flowers in May, and for this we'll always be grateful to you and to the Irish people.

Now, of course I didn't exactly expect a chilly reception. As I look around this chamber, I know I can't claim to be a
20 better Irishman than anyone here, but I can perhaps claim to be an Irishman longer than most any of you here. [Laughter] There are those who just refuse to let me forget that. [Laughter] I also have some other credentials. I am the great-grandson of a Tipperary man; I'm the President of a country with the closest possible ties to Ireland; and I was a friend of Barry Fitzgerald. [Laughter] One Irishman told me he thought I would fit in. "Mr. President," he said, "you love a good story, you love horses, you love politics—the accent we can work on." [Laughter]

25 But I also came to the land of my forebears to acknowledge two debts: to express gratitude for a light heart and a strong constitution; and to acknowledge that wellspring of so much American political success—the Blarney Stone. I don't have to tell you how the Blarney Stone works. Many times, for example, I have congratulated Italians on Christopher Columbus' discovery of America, but that's not going to stop me from congratulating all of you on Brendan the Navigator. [Laughter]

30 I think you know, though, that Ireland has been much in our thoughts since the first days in office. I'm proud to say the first Embassy I visited as President was Ireland's, and I'm proud that our administration is blessed by so many Cabinet members of Irish extraction. Indeed I had to fight them off Air Force One or there wouldn't be anyone tending the store while we're gone. And that's not to mention the number of Irish Americans who hold extremely important leadership posts today in the United States Congress.

35 I can assure you that Irish Americans speak with one voice about the importance of the friendship of our two nations and the bonds of affection between us. The American people know how profoundly Ireland has affected our national heritage and our growth into a world power. And I know that they want me to assure you today that your interests and concerns are ours and that, in the United States, you have true and fast friends.

Our visit is a joyous moment, and it will remain so. But this should not keep us from serious work or serious words.
40 This afternoon, I want to speak directly on a few points.

I know many of you recall with sadness the tragic events of last Christmas: the 5 people killed and 92 injured after a terrorist bomb went off in Harrods of London. Just the day before, a Garda recruit, Gary Sheehan, and Private Patrick Kelly, a young Irish soldier with four children, were slain by terrorist bullets. These two events, occurring 350 miles apart, one in Ireland, one in Britain, demonstrated the pitiless, indiscriminate nature of terrorist violence, a violence

45 evil to its core and contemptible in all its forms. And it showed that the problems of Northern Ireland are taking a toll on the people of both Britain and Ireland, north and south.

Yet, the trouble in the north affects more than just these two great isles. When he was in America in March, your Prime Minister courageously denounced the support that a tiny number of misguided Americans give to these terrorist groups. I joined him in that denunciation, as did the vast majority of Irish Americans.

50 I repeat today, there is no place for the crude, cowardly violence of terrorism—not in Britain, not in Ireland, not in Northern Ireland. All sides should have one goal before them, and let us state it simply and directly: to end the violence, to end it completely, and to end it now.

The terrorism, the sense of crisis that has existed in Northern Ireland has been costly to all. But let us not overlook legitimate cause for hope in the events of the last few months. As you know, active dialog between the
55 governments—here in Dublin, and in London—is continuing. There's also the constructive work of the New Ireland Forum. The Forum's recent report has been praised. It's also been criticized. But the important thing is that men of peace are being heard and their message of reconciliation discussed.

The position of the United States in all of this is clear: We must not and will not interfere in Irish matters nor prescribe to you solutions or formulas. But I want you to know that we pledge to you our good will and support, and we're with
60 you as you work toward peace.

I'm not being overly optimistic when I say today that I believe you will work out a peaceful and democratic reconciliation of Ireland's two different traditions and communities. Besides being a land whose concern for freedom and self-determination is legendary, Ireland is also a land synonymous with hope. It is this sense of hope that saw you through famine and war, that sent so many Irish men and women abroad to seek new lives and to build new nations,
65 that gave the world the saints and scholars who preserved Western culture, the missionaries and soldiers who spoke of human dignity and freedom, and put much of the spark to my own country's quest for independence and that of other nations.

You are still that land of hope. It's nowhere more obvious than in the economic changes being wrought here. I know Ireland faces a serious challenge to create jobs for your population, but you've made striking gains, attracting the most
70 advanced technology and industries in the world, and improving the standard of living of your people. And you've done all of this while maintaining your traditional values and religious heritage, renewing your culture and language, and continuing to play a key role in the world community.

Based on Ireland's traditional neutrality in international affairs, you can be proud of your contribution to the search for peace. Irish soldiers have been part of eight United Nations peacekeeping operations since you joined that
75 organization.

In the economic sphere, we Americans, too, are proud that our businesses have been permitted to prosper in Ireland's new economic environment. As you know, there are more than 300 American businesses here providing between 35,000 and 40,000 jobs. We're continuing to encourage this investment. And I assure you today that we will encourage even greater investment for the future.

80 I think part of the explanation for the economic progress you are making here in Ireland can be found in your nation's historic regard for personal freedom. Too often the link between prosperity and freedom is overlooked. In fact, it's as tight as ever. And it provides a firm basis for increasing cooperation, not only between our two countries but among all countries of the globe that recognize it.

Men and women everywhere in our shrinking world are having the same experience. For most of mankind the oceans
85 are no longer the fearful distances they were when my great-grandfather, Michael Reagan, took weeks to reach America. Some men and women still set out with their children in small boats fleeing tyranny and deprivation. For most of us, though, the oceans and airways are now peaceful avenues, thronged with ideas, people, and goods going in every direction. They draw us together. Slowly, but surely, more and more people share the values of peace, prosperity, and freedom which unite Ireland and America.

90 In the last year, I've made two visits to America's neighbors across the Pacific in Asia. This century has brought the Pacific nations many hardships, and many difficulties and differences remain. But what I found everywhere was energy, optimism, and excitement. Some nations in Asia have produced astounding economic growth rates by providing incentives that reward initiative by unleashing freedom. More and more, there is a sense of common destiny

and possibility for all the peoples of this great region. The vast Pacific has become smaller, but the future of those who
95 live around it is larger than ever before.

Coming to Ireland, I sensed the same stirring, the same optimism toward a better future.

I believe that great opportunities do lie ahead to overcome the age-old menaces of disease and hunger and want. But moments of great progress can also be moments of great testing. President Kennedy noted, when he was here, that we live in a "most climactic period" but also, he said, "in the most difficult and dangerous struggle in the history of the
100 world." He was talking about our century's struggle between the forces of freedom and totalitarianism, a struggle overshadowed, we all know too well, by weapons of awful destruction on both sides.

Believe me, to hold the office that I now hold is to understand, each waking moment of the day, the awesome responsibility of protecting peace and preserving human life. The responsibility cannot be met with halfway wishes; it can be met only by a determined effort to consolidate peace with all the strength America can bring to bear.

105 This is my deepest commitment: to achieve stable peace, not just by being prepared to deter aggression but also by assuring that economic strength helps to lead the way to greater stability through growth and human progress—being prepared with the strength of our commitment to pursue all possible avenues for arms reduction; and being prepared with the greatest strength of all, the spiritual strength and self-confidence that enables us to reach out to our adversaries. To them, and to all of you who have always been our dear and trusted friends, I tell you today from my
110 heart, America is prepared for peace.

What we're doing now in American foreign policy is bringing an enduring steadiness, particularly in the search for arms reduction. Too often in the past, we sought to achieve grandiose objectives and sweeping agreements overnight. At other times, we set our sights so low that the agreements, when they were made, permitted the numbers and categories of weapons to soar. For example, one nation from the time of the signing of the SALT II agreement until
115 the present has added 3,950 warheads to its arsenal. That might be arms limitation; it certainly isn't arms reduction. The result was—it wasn't even arms control. Through all of this, I'm afraid, differing proposals and shifting policies have sometimes left both friends and adversaries confused or disconcerted.

And that's why we've put forward, methodically, one of the most extensive arms control programs in history. We believe there can be only one policy, for all nations, if we are to preserve civilization in this modern age: A nuclear
120 war cannot be won and must never be fought.

In five areas, we have proposed substantive initiatives. In Vienna less than 2 months ago, the Western side put forward new proposals on reducing the levels of conventional military forces in Europe. In the same week in Geneva, Vice President Bush put forward a draft agreement for a worldwide ban on chemical weapons, the gases that have been used in Afghanistan and in Kampuchea. In Stockholm, we're pursuing at the Conference on Disarmament in
125 Europe a series of proposals that will help reduce the possibility of conflict. And in Geneva—as most of you are aware—we have been participating, until recently, in arms reduction talks on two fronts: the START talks on reducing intercontinental nuclear forces, and the INF talks, which deal with the issue of intermediate-range missiles worldwide. In addition, we're working to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and to require comprehensive safeguards on all nuclear exports.

130 During the months the START and INF talks were underway, the United States proposed seven different initiatives. None of these were offered on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. Indeed, we made a number of adjustments to respond to the stated concerns of the Soviet side. While Soviet flexibility did not match our own, the Soviets also made some steps of the kind required in any serious negotiations. But then, after the first deployment of intermediate-range missiles here in Europe, the Soviets quit the bargaining table.

135 Now, this deployment was not something we welcomed. It had been my hope, and that of the European leaders, that negotiations would make the deployments unnecessary. Unfortunately, the Soviet stance in those talks left us no alternative. Since 1977, while we were not deploying, but urging the Soviets to negotiate, they were deploying some 370 SS-20 missiles, capable of reaching every city in every country in Europe. We and our allies could not ignore this threat forever.

140 But I believe today it is still possible to reach an agreement. Let me assure you that in both the START and INF talks, we want to hear Soviet proposals; we want them to hear our own; and we're prepared to negotiate tomorrow if the Soviets so choose. I'm prepared to halt, and even reverse, the deployment of our intermediate-range missiles from Europe as the outcome of a verifiable and equitable agreement. But for such an outcome to be possible, we need to

have the Soviets return to the bargaining table. And before this body, and the people of Europe, I call on them to do
145 so.

Indeed, I believe we must not be satisfied—we dare not rest, until the day we've banished these terrible weapons of war from the face of the Earth forever.

My deepest hope and dream has been that if once we can, together, start down the road of reduction, we will inevitably see the common sense of going all the way, so that our children and grandchildren will not have to live with
150 that threat hanging over the world.

In addition to the arms control negotiations, I want to stress today that the United States seeks greater dialog in two other critical areas of East-West relations. Just as we seek to reduce the burden of armaments, we want to find, also, ways to limit their use in troublesome or potentially difficult regional situations. So, we seek serious discussions with the Soviets to guard against miscalculation or misunderstanding in troubled or strategically sensitive areas of the
155 world. I want to stress again today the serious commitment of the United States to such a process.

In the Stockholm conference I mentioned a moment ago, the United States and 34 other nations are negotiating measures to lessen East-West tensions and reduce uncertainties arising from military activities in Europe, the area with the greatest concentration of armed forces in the world. The 16 nations of the Atlantic Alliance have advanced concrete proposals which would make conflict in Europe less likely. The Soviet Union has not accepted these
160 proposals, but has focused upon a declaration of the non-use of force.

Well, mere restatement of a principle all nations have agreed to in the U.N. Charter and elsewhere, would be an inadequate conclusion to a conference whose mandate calls for much more. We must translate the idea into actions which build effective barriers against the use of force in Europe. If the Soviet Union will agree to such concrete actions, which other countries in the Stockholm conference already seem prepared to accept, this would be an
165 important step forward in creating a more peaceful world.

In [If] discussions on reaffirming the principle not to use force, a principle in which we believe so deeply, will bring the Soviet Union to negotiate agreements which will give concrete, new meaning to that principle, we will gladly enter into such discussions. I urge the Soviet Union now to join all other countries in the Stockholm conference to move promptly to take these steps which will help ensure peace and stability in Europe.

We seek to build confidence and trust with the Soviets in areas of mutual interest by moving forward in our bilateral relations on a broad front. In the economic field, we're taking a number of steps to increase exchanges in nonstrategic goods. In other areas, we have, for example, extended our very useful incidents at sea agreement for another term. And we've proposed discussions for specific steps to expand and multiply contacts of benefit to our people. I might add here that the democracies have a strong mutual obligation to work for progress in the area of human rights. And
175 positive Soviet steps in this area would be considered by the United States a significant signal.

In summary then, we're seeking increased discussion and negotiation to reduce armaments, solve regional problems, and improve bilateral relations. Progress on these fronts would enhance peace and security for people everywhere.

I'm afraid the Soviet response has been disappointing. Rather than join us in our efforts to calm tensions and achieve agreements, the Soviets appear to have chosen to withdraw and to try to achieve their objective through propaganda,
180 rather than negotiations.

The Soviets seek to place the blame on the Americans for this self-imposed isolation. But they have not taken these steps by our choice. We remain ready for them to join with us and the rest of the world community to build a more peaceful world. In solidarity with our allies, confident of our strength, we threaten no nation. Peace and prosperity are in the Soviet interest as well as in ours. So, let us move forward.

Steadiness in pursuing our arms reduction initiatives and bettering East-West relations will eventually bear fruit. But steadiness is also needed in sustaining the cause of human freedom.

When I was last in Europe, I spoke about a crusade for freedom, about the ways the democracies could inaugurate a program promoting the growth of democratic institutions throughout the world. And now it is underway. And this can have an impact in many ways in many places and be a force for good.

Some, of course, focusing on the nations that have lost their freedom in the postwar era, argue that a crusade for
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democratic values is impractical or unachievable. But we must take the long view. At the start of this century, there were but few democracies. Today there are more than 50, comprising one-third of the world's population. And it is no coincidence—showing once again the link between political, economic freedom and material progress—that these nations enjoy the highest standards of living.

195 History is the work of free men and women, not unalterable laws. It is never inevitable, but it does have directions and trends; and one trend is clear—democracies are not only increasing in number, they're growing in strength. Today they're strong enough to give the cause of freedom growing room and breathing space, and that's all that freedom ever really needs. "The mass of mankind has not been born with saddles on their backs." Thomas Jefferson said that. Freedom is the flagship of the future and the flashfire of the future. Its spark ignites the deepest and noblest aspirations
200 of the human soul.

Those who think the Western democracies are trying to roll back history are missing the point. History is moving in the direction of self-government and the human dignity that it institutionalizes, and the future belongs to the free.

On this point of democratic development, I think it is vital to appreciate what has been happening in the Western Hemisphere, particularly Latin America. Great strides have been made in recent years. In fact, 26 of 33 Latin
205 American countries today are democracies, or are striving to become democracies. I think it is also vital to understand that the United States current program of assistance to several Central American countries is designed precisely to assist this spread of democratic self-rule.

Now, I know that some see the United States, a large and powerful nation, involved in the affairs of smaller nations to the south, and conclude that our mission there must be self-seeking or interventionist. Well, the Irish people, of all
210 people, know Americans well. We strive to avoid violence or conflict. History is our witness on this point.

For a number of years at the end of the last war, the United States had a monopoly on nuclear weapons. We did not exploit this monopoly for territorial or imperial gain. We sought to do all in our power to encourage prosperity and peace and democracy in Europe. One can imagine if some other countries, possibly, had had these weapons instead of the United States, would the world have been as much at peace in the last 40 years as it has been.

215 In a few days in France, I will stand near the only land in Europe that is occupied by the United States—those mounds of earth marked with crosses and Stars of David, the graves of Americans who never came home, who gave their lives that others might live in freedom and peace. It is freedom and peace that the people of Central America seek today.

Three times in little more than 2 years, the people of El Salvador have voted in free elections. Each time they had to brave the threats of the guerrillas supported by the Sandinista regime in Nicaragua and by Cuba and the Soviet Union.
220 These guerrillas use violence to support their threats. Their slogan in each one of those elections has been, "Vote today and die tonight." Yet the people of El Salvador, 1.4 million of them, have braved ambush and gunfire and trudged for miles to vote for freedom and then stood in line for hours waiting their turn to vote.

Some of our observers who went down there—many of them going down convinced that perhaps we were wrong in what we are trying to do there—came home converted. Some of them came home converted by one woman standing
225 in the voting line—had been there for hours. She had been shot. She suffered from a rifle bullet. She refused to leave the line for medical treatment until she had had her opportunity to vote. They came home convinced that the people of El Salvador want democracy.

All the United States is attempting to do—with only 55 military advisers and \$474 million in aid, three-fourths of which is earmarked for economic and social development—is give the Salvadorans the chance they want for democratic
230 self-determination, without outside interference. But this the Government of Nicaragua has been determined not to permit.

By their own admission, they've been supplying and training the Salvadoran guerrillas. In their own country they have never held elections. They have all but crushed freedom of the press and moved against labor unions, outlawed political freedoms, and even sponsored mob action against Nicaragua's independent human rights commission and
235 imprisoned its director.

Despite this repression, a hundred thousand Nicaraguan Catholics attended a rally on Good Friday this year to support their church, which has been persecuted by the Sandinistas' Communist dictatorship. And the bishop has now written a pastoral letter citing this persecution of the church by that government. And yet, even in our own country we didn't read anything of that demonstration. Somehow word of it didn't get out through the news channels of the world.

240 In a homily to 4,000 Nicaraguans packed into Don Bosco Church several weeks ago, the head of the Nicaraguan Bishops Conference, Bishop Pablo Antonio Vega, said, "The tragedy of the Nicaraguan people is that we are living with a totalitarian ideology that no one wants in this country." You may not have heard about this—again, as I say, the words of Nicaraguan Archbishop Obando y Bravo. "To those who say that the only course for Central American countries is Marxism-Leninism, we Christians must show another way. That is to follow Christ, whose path is that of
245 truth and liberty."

Well, the vast majority of those now struggling for freedom in Nicaragua—contrary to what the Sandinistas would have the world believe—are good and worthy people who did not like the Somoza dictatorship and who do not want the Communist dictatorship. The tragedy is they haven't been given the chance to choose.

The people of Nicaragua and El Salvador have a right to resist the nightmare outside forces want to impose on them,
250 just as they have the right to resist extremist violence from within whether from the left or right. The United States must not turn its back on the democratic aspirations of the people of Central America.

Moreover, this is a worldwide struggle. The Irish orator John [James] Philpot Curran once said, "The condition upon which God hath given liberty to man is eternal vigilance." And yes, military strength is indispensable to freedom. I have seen four wars in my lifetime, none of them came about because the forces of freedom were too strong.

255 In the moving words used by the Czechoslovak Charter 77 group just a week ago, in reply to supporters of nuclear disarmament in the West, they said, "Unlike you, we have personal experience of other, perhaps less conspicuous, but no less effective means of destroying civilization than those represented by thermonuclear war; some of us, at the very least, prefer the risk involved in maintaining a firm stance against aggression to the certainty of the catastrophic consequences of appeasement."

260 The struggle between freedom and totalitarianism today is not ultimately a test of arms or missiles, but a test of faith and spirit. And in this spiritual struggle, the Western mind and will is the crucial battleground. We must not hesitate to express our dream of freedom; we must not be reluctant to enunciate the crucial distinctions between right and wrong—between political systems based on freedom and those based on a dreadful denial of the human spirit.

If our adversaries believe that we will diminish our own self-respect by keeping silent or acquiescing in the face of
265 successive crimes against humanity, they're wrong. What we see throughout the world is an uprising of intellect and will. As Lech Walesa said: "Our souls contain exactly the contrary of what they wanted. They wanted us not to believe in God, and our churches are full. They wanted us to be materialistic and incapable of sacrifices; we are antimaterialistic, capable of sacrifice. They wanted us to be afraid of the tanks, of the guns, and instead we don't fear them at all." Lech Walesa.

270 Well, let us not take the counsel of our fears. Let us instead offer the world a politics of hope, a forward strategy for freedom. The words of William Faulkner, at a Nobel prize ceremony more than three decades ago, are an eloquent answer to those who predict nuclear doomsday or the eventual triumph of the superstate. "Man will not merely endure," Faulkner said, "he will prevail . . . because he will return to the old verities and truths of the heart. He is immortal because, alone among creatures, he has a soul, a spirit capable of compassion and sacrifice and endurance."

275 Those old verities, those truths of the heart—human freedom under God—are on the march everywhere in the world. All across the world today—in the shipyards of Gdansk, the hills of Nicaragua, the rice paddies of Kampuchea, the mountains of Afghanistan—the cry again is liberty. And the cause is the same as that spoken in this chamber more than two decades ago by a young American President, who said, "A future of peace and freedom."

It was toward the end of his visit here that John Fitzgerald Kennedy said, "I am going to come back and see old
280 Shannon's face again." And on his last day in Ireland, he promised, "I certainly will come back in the springtime."

It was a promise left unkept, for a spring that never came. But surely in our hearts there is the memory of a young leader who spoke stirring words about a brighter age for mankind, about a new generation that would hold high the torch of liberty and truly light the world.

This is the task before us: to plead the case of humanity, to move the conscience of the world, to march together—as
285 in olden times—in the cause of freedom.

Thank you again for this great honor, and God bless you all.
(4987 Wörter)

Quelle: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=40011&st=&st1=>

¹After he was introduced by Prime Minister Garret FitzGerald, three members of Parliament protested the President's presence and left the room.