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AN ROINN GNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA
Department of Foreign Affairs
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SPEECHES

REMARKS BY PRESIDENT MARY McALEESE AT THE RECEPTION TO MARK "THE TWELFTH"

11 July, 1998. ÁRAS AND UACHTARÁIN

- I would like firstly to welcome each of you to Áras an Uachtaráin – and to thank you for accepting my invitation to come here to mark the "Twelfth" in this way. As you know, this is the first occasion on which the events of 1690 have been marked at Áras an Uachtaráin – and in that respect you are part of unfolding history. As with all landmark battles, there were winners and losers – histories were shaped and we were shaped by those histories. We gather today with the winners and losers – each transformed by newer historic events – and we gather as neither winners nor losers – but users of the future to craft a common home.

- The history of this island is a shared history – with different sets of memories – different interpretations of events – and different perspectives on the outcomes of those events. The pages of our shared history deal with a complex set of relationships – giving accounts of the storms and calms – of the victories and defeats – and of the fortunes and misfortunes of the peoples and traditions of this island.

- Today, Ireland is a vastly different place to the Ireland of 1690. The pace of change that impacted relatively slowly in the 18th and 19th centuries – has increased exponentially in this century – and particularly in the decades since the Second World War. Now we have a prosperous country – playing a full part in modern Europe – and competing with the very best in terms of commerce, education and the arts. It is very far removed from the power struggle that had such a profound impact on Europe during the Williamite Wars.

- We are a forward-looking people, with a self-confidence that has allowed us to shake off the old inhibitions - and to reach out to new horizons with boldness and determination. That spirit of self-belief and self-confidence is reflected in a willingness to look at ourselves in a new light – to look afresh at the wounding and wounded aspects of our past – to accept that there were victories and defeats – but to see them as being a part of their own place and time - resting in the chronicles of history – yet echoed today in the identities and cultures of the communities that make up the tapestry of this modern country.

- All over Ireland there are relics of our shared past – places and communities that cherish the historic links which are part of their identity. That is as it should be. It is important to note that this house is

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itself a repository of both British and Irish history – Our shared history. Those who cherish their British identity and culture can find it here – just as those who seek their Irish heritage can see it reflected in its artifacts and architecture. It is particularly timely this evening to recall that it was at the former Vice Regal Lodge near Chapelizod – part of the Phoenix Park – and only a "stone's throw" from this house – that King William of Orange came to rest a while after the Battle of the Boyne.

- Tonight we are here to recognise and understand the significance of the Battle of the Boyne on our history and culture – to join together in commemorating and in marking our culture – and particularly the shared aspects of our culture. The Orange tradition – those who identify with and celebrate the victory of King William at the Boyne – are a minority in this country. But that must not and cannot take from its existence – or from our ability to co-exist with each other. The true measure of our success as a modern country – as a self-confident and mature people – with an openness to others – and a willingness to embrace diversity – is in our ability to let the past go, yet recognise the different traditions and cultures that today make up this country – share in the commemoration of their histories – accept that each has a right to their heritage – and that theirs is also part of ours – each shaping the other subtly and sometimes crudely - and each an integral part of our shared history and heritage.

- This evening we have been honoured to have a mix of entertainers who have brought us a flavour of the traditions and cultures that we share. I would like to thank Different Drums for their moving and robust welcome – the Belfast Harp Orchestra for delighting us with a selection of music appropriate to this momentous occasion – Frank McGuinness for giving us an extract from his very moving and pertinent play ***"Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme"*** – and Frankie Gavin for his selection of music from both traditions. I would also like to pay a particular tribute to the many people who helped us to organise this evening - especially the Dublin Wicklow Loyal Orange Lodge – the Ulster Society – and the Orange Cultural Society. Finally, I would like to thank Pamela Ballentyne who added the final professional touch to the evening.

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