



Bio: Nicola is Ireland's Ambassador to Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi, the Seychelles and Comoros. She is also Ireland's representative to the East Africa Community. Prior to this role she was Ireland's Ambassador to Ethiopia, South Sudan and Djibouti, and Ireland's representative to the African Union, and the UN Economic Commission for Africa. Nicola has been many years with Department of Foreign Affairs, prior to her ambassador work. She has been instrumental in the development of Ireland's International Development Policy, A Better World. For 5 years, she led the Department's response to the AIDS pandemic. She worked closely with our fellow Jesuit, the late Michael J Kelly SJ, and we are most grateful to her for hosting so many of the annual Irish Aid Father Michael Kelly Lectures on HIV and AIDs.

IRISH AID & MISEAN CARA: PARTNERS IN DEVELOPMENT

– Nicola Brennan

Thank you for inviting me to speak today. It is an honour to be with you to join in the celebrations of your work, your vocation and your commitment. Congratulations on your 80th anniversary! You are 80 years old. Irish Aid is 50 years old. And I am almost 30 years old – that is 30 years working for the Department of Foreign Affairs as part of the Irish Aid team and programme.

I have just returned from Ireland where I attended our Global Ireland Summit and Ambassadors conference. I was very proud to listen to both the Taoiseach and Tanáiste expressing Ireland's deep commitment to its values; values that have been borne out of our own history – a history of struggle for our own independence as a nation, a history of poverty, a history of hunger, a history of emigration and a history of resilience.

This is what Irish Aid stands for and over the past 50 years Ireland's overseas development programme has grown – not only in money terms but also in its impact and relevance – and it is now central to Ireland's foreign policy and global engagement.

Irish Aid started out in 1973/74 at a time when Ireland was beginning to look more to the outside world and to see its role in a global context. At that time, we joined the European Economic Commission – EEC – now the European Union – and the Irish Aid programme was small – it mainly focused on multilateral contributions with some projects related to the provision of Irish technical assistance.

But while Ireland was looking outwards and fulfilling its international obligations it was Irish missionaries who paved the way for the Irish Aid programme.

Ronan Murphy – previous Director General of Irish Aid wrote a book on the history of Irish Aid. In it he said that the overwhelming view of those he interviewed for his book was that it was above all Irish missionaries we must thank for the interest in which Ireland takes in the developing world.

He said, ‘Ireland had a huge advantage when it started out, in that the missionary tradition had built up a real connection with Africa in particular, which resonated with the Irish public’.

Irish Missionary presence was also a factor that influenced where Ireland established its aid programme with Tanzania and Zambia being chosen as two countries with long standing Irish missionary presence. And we know that a number of our best NGOs – including Trócaire and Concern have their roots in the missionary movement also.

Part of the story of Irish Aid is one of growth.

When Irish Aid was established in 1973 it started with a modest budget of £1.5 million. It began to grow significantly from the 1990’s and today Ireland’s Official Development Assistance (ODA) is over €2 billion with €810 million allocated to Irish Aid in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade – the highest ever allocation since the establishment of the aid programme in 1974, and the 9th consecutive year in which the government of Ireland have increased ODA.

Irish Aid has also grown in quality and professionalism over the 50 years of its existence and is considered a credible player internationally on development. Irish Aid is highly regarded by the OECD Development Assistance Committee who undertake a peer review of our aid programme every 5 years. We consistently rank among one of the best for our focus on poverty, on least developed countries, on effectiveness, on sustainability and on consistency and flexibility. We are also rated by the Brookings Institute and the Centre for global Development as one of the best donors in the world. We consistently provide grant aid rather than loans and our aid is not tied to the purchase of goods and services from Ireland.

We are also very fortunate to continue to have cross party-political support for development – and broad public support for development – we stand out in the EU as having a public and

a political system that continues to support Ireland's aid programme

I am very proud to work for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. I started out nearly 30 years ago in our embassy in South Africa. I then moved to work in our Embassy in Uganda – following which I had about 9 years in Ireland as our Senior Adviser on HIV and AIDS. I then spent a short time in Zambia after which I had another 9 years at home in Ireland holding different portfolios – the most exciting being as our Director of International Development Policy where I led the development of Ireland's first whole of government development policy – A Better World. I was then very proud to be appointed Ireland's Ambassador to Ethiopia and now in Tanzania.

In each country I have worked in I have been consistently inspired by the Irish missionaries I have met. In fact, it was missionaries that initially inspired me to work in development and the developing world. I think the story of Irish missionaries helped me to relate to the outside world – to see beyond Ireland. As Mary McAleese said, '[missionaries helped us to be citizens of the world](#)'.

I have witnessed the amazing work of Irish missionaries – their vocation, their focus on those less fortunate, their commitment and passion for peace and justice. Irish Missionaries have often been pioneers – willing to go to the remotest of places, to endure hardships

and to try out new things. I understand that at their height there was 6,000 Irish Missionaries working and living overseas – and while numbers are falling – the influence of Irish Missionaries in Africa and elsewhere is still very much felt.

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No matter where you go in Africa Irish missionaries are very well known – the leaders of many countries were educated by the Irish including President Nyerere of Tanzania. I recall in 2003 meeting President Museveni of Uganda during a visit of our then Minister of Foreign Affairs David Andrews. Of course as good diplomats we briefed and prepared the Minister in advance of the meeting. President Museveni opened the meeting, thumped the table and stated that 'I have a problem with the Irish!' – we had no idea what was coming next and of course were very concerned about what we had missed. The head of the best girl's school in Uganda – an Irish nun – Sr Cephas – was due to retire and return to Ireland. He did not want that and requested Minister Andrews to intervene with her order back home to enable her to stay in Uganda and continue her work!

Others too have made huge contributions – from Dr Maura Lynch, Sr Ursula Sharpe, and Sr Dymphna Hannelly in Uganda; to Fr Michael Kelly in Zambia; to Fr Sean O Leary, Sr Aine

Hughes and Fr John Cleary in South Africa; to Fr Owen Lambert and Fr Paddy Moran in Ethiopia and now Fr Dan Noud, Sr Nora McCarthy and many others in Tanzania. There are so many who have contributed so much – too many to mention by name – but one in particular I must remember with deep admiration and affection is one of your own Fr Michael Kelly. I am sure you all knew Fr Michael and were also touched by the man he was.



Michael J Kelly SJ meets with Dr Kenneth Kaunda, first President of Zambia and last remaining founding father of the African Union. Michael's work on education and HIV advocacy brought him recognition worldwide. He was conferred with The Order of Distinguished Service by Zambian President Edgar Lungu, in Lusaka in October 2018 and the Irish Presidential Distinguished Services Award of the Irish Abroad in 2012.

I first met Michael in 2003 when I was appointed as Senior HIV Adviser in Irish Aid and Michael was working with us especially in advocating for education as a social vaccine against HIV.

In the words of another dear friend Kevin Carroll – Michael was the kindest and warmest of men, deeply spiritual and humble, and a great Irish missionary.

He spent 67 years of his life in Zambia as an academic, an advocate for the poor and in particular for those most excluded from society including women and girls. He played a major role in the global response to the AIDS pandemic – publishing many books and articles, advocating for those devastated by HIV and in particular giving voice to the voiceless. He became the dearest of friends – I was so grateful to have had him in my life and his dedication, compassion and goodness continue to inspire.

So, while the missionary movement influenced the work of Irish Aid in turn Irish Aid supported and continues to support to the work of Irish missionaries including funding for human rights and social justice, for education and health, for youth and community-based initiatives. Over the years this funding has been put on a more formal footing with the establishment of the Irish Missionary resource service which was later named Misean Cara.

The 50th anniversary of Irish Aid is an important moment to look to the future. Our world is

changing and those changes present both challenges and opportunities for our overseas development programme. We are at somewhat of a turning point right now – many countries including the US, UK, Netherlands and others are reducing their ODA funding and investing more in their own security, and their own prosperity.

I am proud of what I heard from our leaders a few weeks ago at our Global Ireland Summit. Their commitment to our values is strong, our aid programme is strong, but in the current geopolitical context it is clear that we will need to adapt to the rapidly changing situation.

I am confident though that whatever the changes, we will remain committed to reaching those furthest behind first in Africa and around

the world; we will remain committed to playing a meaningful role in resolving conflict; and we will remain committed to responding to humanitarian need and to assisting those affected by poverty. Commitments based on and informed by our fundamental values – values inspired by our history and the work of Irish missionaries over many years.

Thank you again for the opportunity to join you today, thank you for listening to me and again congratulations on your remarkable work – work that means so much to so many; you are creating an incredible legacy throughout the world.

Go raibh mile maith agaibh go léir.



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