

# **Speech by President Michael D. Higgins Launch of Restored 'Éire 6' Sign Howth**

Saturday, 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2022

A cháirde,

Sabina and I are delighted to be here with you all today in the beautiful surroundings of the Howth peninsula as we formally launch the restored 'Éire 6' wartime neutrality sign.

May I pay tribute to the Éire 6 Restoration Group, drawn as it is from such local community organisations as Howth Peninsula Heritage Society, Howth Pathways, Howth Writers Group and the Irish Coast Guard, all of whom have been involved with the painstaking restoration of the 'ÉIRE 6' sign on Howth's eastern mountain.

'Éire 6', a large Second World War aerial recognition marker, was intended to be visible to encroaching aircraft of the combatant powers. It is a surviving monument of that war and, along with the more than 20 other surviving aerial markers that are dotted around our coastline, forms part of our national heritage and local history.

The sign had become hidden by overgrown shrubbery, buried from sight and in disrepair. The concealed sign was partially revealed in 2018 and was assessed to be still largely intact.

In the involvement of youth groups, clubs and local societies in its restoration, your Committee has helped promote a growing awareness among the local community of its historic significance.

Even before the installation of the sign neutrality was being given expression by the local volunteers of the Coast Watching Service who manned the nearby look-out post from 1939 to 1945 and installed the 'Éire 6' sign in 1943. We commemorate today then all those who played an integral part in defending Irish neutrality during World War II through their role in guarding the coastline.

The work your committee and supporting organisations have undertaken, situated as it is in an environmentally sensitive part of Howth, is covered by a Special Area Amenity Order (SAAO), with UNESCO Natura 2000 protection, required meticulous care and sensitivity in order to ensure that habitats on the site must be protected.

It is a credit to all those volunteers who worked on this project, as well as ecologist Dr Mary Tubridy, several other botanical and horticultural experts, and staff from the National Park and Wildlife Service, that this work by demonstrating compliance with these important ecological protections was able to receive a Ministerial Order and was thus granted permission to proceed in what is an exceptionally sensitive area of great ecological importance. And it is an example of how one can be ecologically responsible and at the same time achieve an important heritage result.

*Comhghairdeas libh go léir.*

The 'Eire 6' sign will now serve as a welcome for passengers flying into Dublin, but also a reminder of the violent, bloody recent past that Europe has endured. Wars that were a catastrophe and as they proceeded destroyed generations of the young. Wars that should serve as a reminder of how we must always exert all of our efforts to avoid war and armed conflict, and how we must relentlessly pursue a diplomatic approach and particularly through the multilateral institutions to avoid yet more bloodshed.

It was unthinkable to many that Europe could find itself once again embroiled in war in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A great sense of darkness has fallen across the world at the unfolding tragedy in Ukraine that has resulted from this outrageous act of invasion by its powerful neighbour operating with total disregard for the principles of international law.

The hearts of the Irish people go out to all of those who are suffering and to all those brave Ukrainian people struggling to defend their homes and their people.

The rise of the bellicose language of militarism must end. There is a special role for peoples and countries who embrace neutrality to be active in making the case for diplomacy to the very end, in demanding full humanitarian access to all civilians in need. We must seize every glimmer of hope through diplomacy, reflect on that great principle that is lodged in the words of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and its affirmation that "recognition of the inherent dignity, and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family, is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world".

These times, these events, however challenging, are times when diplomacy is tested. It is a time when multilateralism must come to the fore in our international institutions. The citizens of the world were

coming together when they sought the peace that is contained in the Charter of the United Nations, not only as an alternative to war, but as our best hope for humanity's future.

So today we commend the outcome of the toil of all those volunteers who put in their time to restore this important war memorial, this act of positive neutrality. Let us celebrate their achievement, but let us also recall how this monument is not passive, it serves as a reminder of the horrors of war, the unnecessary destruction and waste of human potential that it constitutes. So let us exert all our collective efforts to bring an end to the war in Ukraine so that we can return to living in a Europe and in a world that is free from war.

We live on an island that has been an exemplar to the world in building a sustained peace over the past 25 years, whose citizens value peace and understand the misery of war. We must remember so many of our Irish people died in the wars to which I have made reference. Let us all commit to play our part in an international peace-building effort, one that will deliver a more peaceful and inclusive world.

Beir beannacht.