

Rev. Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.

Speech for EQUALITY and RIGHTS ALLIANCE

February 14, 2011

I want to thank Joanna McMinn and Rachel Mullen and the Equality & Rights Alliance for inviting me to Ireland this week to launch the **ERA Roadmap**, and to support the **Make Your Mark for Equality and Human Rights election campaign**.

I'm delighted to be back in Ireland, having visited last in 2004 when the Celtic Tiger was roaring, making Ireland the 2nd most prosperous nation in Europe. But the Celtic Tiger has lost its teeth – it's economic manufacturing clawing power – in part driven by too much bank concentration without regulation and oversight. No nation has escaped the global economic crisis – and the virtual collapse of Ireland's economy.

We've globalized capital and exploited cheap labor – often trading off the power of tyrants over democracy, leaving us with false security as we've just seen in Egypt and Tunisia, and South Africa.

These trade-offs undermine the middle class in too many nations – they export jobs and manufacturing and undermine housing, construction.

While we are continents apart and divided by oceans, we are bound together – linked by the similarities between our common struggles against oppression...even genealogy and family lines.

My own family lineage through my mother and father finds its way back to Ireland – my great grandfather was an Irish plantation owner who was sheriff of Greenville County before the Civil War. Many African American have roots in Ireland. If Alex Haley – author of Roots – traced his family through his father's side, he would have ended up in Ireland.

So in a real way we are members of the same, human family, making the real choices to advance the cause of equality and freedom?

But in a deeper way, the Irish and African American struggles for equality and freedom from oppression are intricately linked. Great

African American scholars and activists commented on these pattern of parallels between Irish and American slave experiences:

Frederick Douglass, on his five week lecture tour in Ireland in 1845 at the time of the Great Famine. He illuminated the shared experience between slavery in American and oppression in Ireland: “I see much here in Ireland to remind me of my former condition...He who really and truly feels for the American slave cannot steel his heart to the woes of others.”

W.E.B. Du Bois bore witness in the 1870's in Massachusetts, “the racial angle was more clearly defined against the Irish than against me (Blacks).”

Writers of the Harlem Renaissance invoked their Irish forerunners, and Marcus Garvey often referred to the Irish national struggle as a model for other liberation movements. He linked the Irish fight for freedom with the African liberation movement – few know that the “green” in the red, black and green “African liberation flag” symbolizes the Irish struggle for freedom.

I've spent a lifetime trying to remove ancient walls of separation and hurt, and build bridges of hope and new possibilities. Again on

behalf of our human rights struggle launched from America, the Rainbow/PUSH Coalition – the organization in which I serve as President – let me thank you.

To be members of the family, we are morally to lift as we climb. A threat to equality human rights anywhere affects the human family everywhere.

Ireland today stands at the edge of the freedom struggle, where it can exert much positive influence. You can turn your historical pain into immense power. You can use your scars to illuminate the way in other places in the world searching for light.

When I last visited Ireland, I met with Prime Minister Ahern he spoke glowingly about Ireland's economic journey these past few years. But sadly, the economic wonder has turned into a nightmare for too many people.

The financial crisis was global, pushing the U.S., Ireland and all of Europe, Asia, the world banks to the brink of collapse. Jobs vanished at the whims of a small elite of corporate "banksters."

But greed never resolves its own contradictions. A globalized capitalist system is not magically self-correcting.

The modern day system of finance capital collapsed. That system failed. And it put in peril millions upon millions of every day working people in the U.S., Great Britain, and around the world.

For every Bank of America there was a Anglo Irish Bank; American had its Black Friday; Ireland its Black Thursday.

Once bailed out with taxpayer funds, the banks recovered while workers got demolished. The rich get richer, the poor get poorer, the gap between rich and poor widens. Something is wrong with this picture.

They said, "Banks were too big too fail." The European Union and IMF injected upwards of £85 billion to bail out Ireland, but demanding draconian cuts in public services in return. Now too few banks control too much.

Fundamentally, the crisis is rooted in an unprecedented era of unchecked, modern day finance capitalism – free market philosophy, absent any government intervention and regulation—which drove the global economy to the brink of collapse. Globalized banking and technology were not coupled with integrity and honest values.

Our systems are so intertwined that whether we are in Ireland or the US, the same systems of top-down exploitation required the same massive bailouts.

The big banking system was re-fortified, reinforced; now it needs to be restructured. Instead of concentrating more and more power into fewer and fewer banks, they should be broken up in smaller, community-based banks focused on lending to small businesses, homeowners and communities. Democratic principles of checks and balances, separation of powers, oversight and regulation must be restored.- Glass Seagall separated lending from

investing – on their own, banks will choose investment banking.

EQUALITY RIGHTS NOW

This is a change moment, a time to re-set priorities and forge a roadmap to the future.

We must democratize capital, and globalize participation. The freedom struggle was not just for freedom; it was a prerequisite to equality and justice. Freedom gets you in; Equality get you up!

Now is our time to pass a “Robin Hood” tax on financial speculation. Now is our chance to globalize human rights and workers rights, protect women and children, save the global environment. Now is our chance to democratize capital and media, to pass the structural economic changes that were untouched by the freedom struggle's political reforms. Now is the time for the Equality & Rights Alliance and your Roadmap.

Democratic, people's governments must play a stronger role, not a lesser – we've seen the disastrous economic crisis resulting from a philosophy that relies on the free market and guts the role of government. The people's government must intervene to regulate, and enforce needed checks and balances to curb unmitigated greed. It must intervene to protect the majority from the tyranny of the ruling minority.

Democratic governments must set policies that preserve economic security and equity in our homes and pensions, to protect jobs; provide health care. They must advocate for EQUALITY and promote democratic and just values; protect our environment thru prompt attention to curbing global warming.

My friends here in Ireland - Now is the time to make Equality a centerpiece of the national election debate, to Vote Equality February 25, to as you say in your RoadMap, take "the practical steps required to envision and build a

new generation equality and human rights infrastructure; to make the fulfillment of equality and rights not just a wishful or ethereal goal – but an investment strategy to work our way out of this economic recession and of consolidating our future.”

No one can be left behind. Equality for all is critical to build a sustainable future for Ireland.

Your campaigns leading up to the national elections February 25 are critical. Collectively ERA and the 160 organizations, trade unions and activists in your coalition are the change agents of a new Ireland – you have the power to determine the way forward for Ireland, to empower Ireland as part of the global fight for equality. As Dr. King would write, “where do we go from here.” The power is in your hands. You must seize the time.

Dare to struggle, Dare to Win

I congratulate ERA for standing up to the cutbacks; formulating your RoadMap to Equality; and creating a Vote Equality and Human Rights agenda for this month’s national

election.

You stand in a moral tradition of refusing to submit to degradation, humiliation, oppression – we see that resistance blooming all around the globe today. From Egypt to Ireland, from Tunisia to the USA, we need democratic governments and economic system that bridge the gap between rich and poor; that defend and expand equality, civil and human rights at home and abroad.

We saw it in the segregated South, where some fifty years ago, I was first arrested with (x classmates) for nonviolent civil disobedience for simply trying to use a public library in my home-town of Greenville, South Carolina.

We saw it on Bloody Sunday 45 years ago, where attack dogs and fire hoses were unleashed on people marching across the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Alabama.

But these were not merely symbolic struggles for freedom and equality. They led to structural change; we

changed hearts and minds, but ultimately we changed the laws. The historic voting rights march from Selma to Montgomery led to the enactment of the Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and later the Fair Housing Act in 1968.

This same Equality Infrastructure – a set of regulation and laws that are ENFORCED – is needed in Ireland just as it is needed in America.

Today we are free, but not equal. Today we are caught in a global economic crisis. We have globalized capital, but we have not globalized human rights. We have not globalized workers rights. We have not globalized rights for women, rights for children, environmental protections.

Let me give you an example—why do African-Americans do so well in athletics? We excel in basketball, football, baseball, golf, tennis, track. Well, the playing field is even, the rules are public and the goals are clear, and the referees are unbiased and fair.

Yesterday, when Ireland played France in the rugby match, the winner won with honor, the loser lost with dignity – but there was an inherent sense of justice on the field.

Struggle inspires hope, and when there is hope there is change.

Given my experiences and work with Dr. King as he built bridges over huge chasms in our own country, I am anxious to work with all parties in Ireland and appeal to you, “don’t miss this moment.” Justice delayed is justice denied. Don’t let opportunity deteriorate by missing the moment.

People of faith must fight these battles. We must follow our faith rooted in the admonition, “Faith without works of humane value is dead.” The character of the Christian faith is measured by how you treat the least of these. The very mission of Jesus was expressing his declaration,

“I have been anointed to preach the Gospel, the good news to the poor, to heal the broken hearted and set the captives free.”

The Christian faith is rooted in an ethic that obligates followers to

do justice: to defend the poor, to deliver the needy, to be caring, to heal the sick.”

Faith that is a spiritual motivation to do justice for the caring and long suffering. To feed the hungry and heal the sick. Faith that drove Ireland to independence in the face of persecution.

Faith that abolished slavery in the United States, after 246 years, and ended legal race supremacy after 345 years with Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, can win EQUALITY in Ireland.

A faith to survive of 50 years of assaults on that decision as we struggle to make progress against cultural resistance, centuries of bad habits, and a theology of rich young rulers judging life from the mansion down, displacing Jesus the Christ measuring life from the manger up.

Faith that knows our God can see around the curve; a faith that says weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.

It is this faith and this hope that this generation must embody to make the world a better place.

I leave you with this thought today. I urge Ireland to dream.

Dream beyond your circumstances. Even in a hole you can dream of being on a mountaintop. Like Mandela in a jail cell, you can dream of being free. Like Dr. King, you can write a letter of hope from the Birmingham jail.

You may not be responsible for being down but you must be responsible for getting up. Sometimes fate gives us a cruel hand, but faith is stronger than fate. Like John on the Isle of Patmos, put in isolation, punished and left to die, even then he dreamed of a new heaven and a new earth, as the old are passed away.

We honor those dreamers as champions, persistent in their achievement to finish their works.

We often say, "If my mind can conceive it, and my heart can believe, I know we can achieve it." It's not your aptitude but your attitude, but with a little intestinal fortitude, or guts, will determine your altitude, how high you will rise.

Dream of peace and reconciliation, dream of liberation and freedom, DREAM OF EQUALITY. Don't let anyone break your spirit.

Every day, is another day of new possibilities. Dreamers must defeat cynics from within, and outlast adversaries from with out. If the Bible suggests in our struggle, the race will not go to the swift or the strong, but those who hold out.

And so to the people of Ireland and America – it's time to make wise choices. Choose the human race over the nuclear weapons. Burn the weapons, don't burn the people. The time has come for a breakthrough. We have technology that can span oceans, and dwarf space and distance. Don't let anything or anyone break your spirit

We flew from Chicago to Dublin in the same length of time it takes to fly from NY to Los Angeles. With a push of the button we read the Chicago Sun Times and the Dublin Independent, the same time each morning. What a time to change our world.

I know its dark, but the morning cometh. It is not twilight moving toward midnight. It is dawn moving toward daylight. Move forward by hope – no grave can hold your body down. No cell can contain your dreams. The time has come. No lie can live forever. The time has come. We must leave racial battleground, move to economic common ground, and seek higher moral ground.

My words in 2004 in Ireland ring true today just as it did then – timeless in its truth: “The time has come. Be unashamed of the idea of generosity and liberalism. We gain life and we lose life. We gain by giving, not just by accumulating. We have the tools. Let us exert the will. Be the generation of hope, and lasting peace. The Bible says, blessed are the peacemakers, they shall be called the sons and daughters of God.” Let us earn that noble designation.”

Don't let anything break your spirit. Forward ever, backward never.

Keep Hope Alive and God Bless You.