

OpeningREMARKS

Toward an Inclusive Society

In 1988, while traveling in Northern Ireland, I visited West Belfast, a poverty-stricken area deeply embroiled in “The Troubles,” the relentless conflict fueled by paramilitary factions committed to continuing British sovereignty or to ending it. “After 20 years, it’s like the rain,” a man told me. “You get used to it.” Admittedly, I was not accustomed to seeing soldiers and police on patrol in armored vehicles, security checkpoints, and fortified buildings. It was unsettling and sad to think that this majestic land would be forever marred by the extreme and unforgiving violence of terrorism. Days after returning home to Central New York, I realized there was no escaping terrorism: Pan Am 103 blew up over Lockerbie, Scotland, claiming 270 lives, including 35 SU students.

Spin ahead to May 1, 2007. Amid overcast skies, with tulips and daffodils in bloom and green creeping into the trees, the Honorable Mary McAleese, president of Ireland, visited campus in celebration of the School of Education’s centennial. During her visit, the Belfast native placed a bouquet of flowers at the Place of Remembrance, paying tribute to those students lost in Pan Am 103. As timing would have it, Ireland was on the verge of finally putting “The Troubles” to rest. “Thankfully the days of conflict that claimed almost 4,000 lives are over, and next week sees the start of a new administration in Northern Ireland, a development bordering on the miraculous,” McAleese told the audience gathered in Hendricks Chapel. At the heart of McAleese’s speech were her thoughts on providing access to those with disabilities and the importance of empowering individuals through education and social inclusion. “We hope to use our historic experience of being emigrants to help create a tolerant society, where difference is not just respected but acknowledged as an important source of knowledge and creativity,” she said.

In this issue, you will find several examples of how tolerance and understanding can empower lives and build societies, creating hope and opportunities for those who have been passed by. For instance, a group of students spent spring break learning how three faith traditions coexist in Turkey; and two graduate students created a nonprofit organization to educate orphans of AIDS victims in Zimbabwe.

Such experiences teach us about negotiating the complexities of life. McAleese recalled a time when she and her deaf brother were surrounded by family members chattering away, and he tugged at her arm, saying, “Remember me—I’m here too you know.”

“Through him I got my first taste of what it means to be excluded and how easy it is for all sorts of people to be overlooked in the world,” McAleese said. That’s a lesson we can all embrace.



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