

# **OPENING REMARKS FROM CARDINAL KEITH PATRICK O'BRIEN**

## **GLENEAGLES REVISTED**

**THURSDAY 5 APRIL 2007**

### **Introduction:**

I am very happy to have the opportunity of being here with you all and to welcome you all to Gleneagles – especially our principal guests, Mr Gordon Brown and Mr Kofi Annan – but each and every one of you!

My mind goes back to that wonderful event in Edinburgh on 2 July 2005 when the cry 'Make Poverty History' went up from 250,000 voices.

Here today we must recognise that some important progress was made at Gleneagles in 2005, following on the Make Poverty History Campaign. However, there remains a vast amount still to be done – and that with great urgency. I do not think that we are here this afternoon to celebrate the 'successes' of Gleneagles – rather we must be considering what to do next and to realise something of the urgency of what we must do.

### **A Renewed Call to Make Poverty History:**

SCIAF, the Scottish Catholic International Aid Fund, recently commissioned a Scotland wide public opinion poll which posed the statement:

'Fighting poverty will do more to make the world safe for all of us than fighting wars.' 78% of the population agreed.

Two years ago the Catholic Bishops of Scotland, on the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of SCIAF, said "Feeding the hopes and hunger of the poor will do more to ensure a stable and secure world than fanning the fears of the rich".

Forty years ago Pope Paul VI wrote that "development is the new name for peace".

And, as I indicated, it is almost two years ago now since the cry went up from the peoples of our land 'Make Poverty History'.

It would indeed be easy to get discouraged at this present time when we see how our money is being spent. The British Government has just agreed to renew Trident at the cost of at least 25 billion pounds. It has spent up to 4.4 billion pounds on war in Iraq – more than the Department for International Development's expenditure in 2004/5. And at the same time it has failed to meet its 37 year old commitment to spend 0.7% of our Gross National Income on international aid. Consequently many are discouraged!

The world can't wait. With all the knowledge, technology and wealth at our disposal, another generation must not be consigned to a life of misery and unnecessary struggle for the want of political will.

## **What we must do:**

We need trade, not Trident.

We need to keep our promises on aid.

And we need to make aid work.

We need a just trading system because world trade rules currently operate against developing countries. In the SCIAF poll, 90% of Scots said that people in poor countries should be able to work their way out of poverty and that international trade rules should help them to do so. Yet despite the fine words that emerged from Gleneagles in 2005, no progress on trade issues seems to have been made since then. The UK government must use its position to put development back on the agenda of the World Trade Organisation.

We need to keep our promises on aid because nearly 30,000 children still die every day because of poverty.

And we need to make aid work in order to have a lasting effect on people living in poverty. Once debt relief is excluded from the aid we currently give, government figures tell us that it amounts to just 0.38% of our national income. And some of the aid we give has harmful conditions attached. The government must do more to increase and improve aid.

## **Suffering continues:**

We are gathered here today at the start of the most solemn time in the Christian Church's calendar – Holy Thursday, the first day of the Easter Triduum, when we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus.

We are not merely recalling an historical event. **Archbishop Oscar Romero**, who was assassinated for speaking out on behalf of the poor in El Salvador 27 years ago, memorably referred to 80% of his fellow countrymen and women who lived in poverty as a “crucified people.”

We know that on this very day a letter is being issued by the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Zimbabwe entitled: ‘God Hears the Cry of the Oppressed’, with the outstanding name on that letter being that of **Archbishop Pius Ncube**, the Archbishop of Bulawayo, who just recently was staying with me in Edinburgh, while receiving the Robert Burns Humanitarian Award presented in Culzean Castle, Ayrshire. The bishops write eloquently and very movingly about the situation in their country:

“Over 80 per cent of the people of Zimbabwe are without employment. Scores risk their lives week after week in search of work in neighbouring countries. Inflation has soared to over 1,600 per cent, and continues to rise, daily. It is the highest in the world and has made the life of ordinary Zimbabweans unbearable, regardless of their political preferences”. But the bishops want to convey a message of hope in their letter: “God is on your side. He always hears the cry of the poor and oppressed and saves them”. We must continue to cry out with the poor and oppressed – of El Salvador, Zimbabwe, and so many others.

Like many of you, I have seen for myself the crucified people of Africa; I have met the grieving parents, the hungry children, the people dying of AIDS. They call out for justice, for putting right a wrong that has existed for far too long.

**My appeal today:**

So I appeal to our own government and to the G8 to hear the cry of the poor and redouble their efforts to make poverty history. I will be welcoming a group of bishops from developing countries to Europe in advance of the G8 at the beginning of May 2007, visiting with them leaders and economic experts in London, Berlin and Rome. They are coming to put the case for their people, for an end to poverty. I hope very much that our Chancellor, Gordon Brown, can indeed meet with them.

Consequently, while we look back to that great event at Edinburgh in 2005, we also look forward to what must be accomplished – I say ‘**must**’ – in the very near future, with very great urgency.

Very many people of goodwill are involved in various campaigns – but we do appeal to our leaders in government to really lead us along the right paths and along with us to hear the cries of the poor and the oppressed throughout the world

Spend our money! But spend it justly and fairly, not on weapons of mass destruction but, in the words of Scripture, ‘turn our swords into ploughshares’ and help us feed those who are starving in our world of plenty.