

# Report of Event hosted by President of Ireland Michael D Higgins in his Role as UN HeforShe Champion World Leader

Áras an Uachtaráin, Dublin, 11<sup>th</sup> March 2016

Tuarascáil ar Imeacht arna óstáil ag Uachtarán na hÉireann  
Micheál D. Ó hUigín ina Ról mar Cheannaire Domhanda Tacadóra do  
HeforShe de chuid na Náisiún Aontaithe

Áras an Uachtaráin, Baile Átha Cliath, an 11<sup>th</sup> Márta 2016



THE PRESIDENT OF IRELAND  
UACHTARÁN NA hÉIREANN

## BACKGROUND

In February 2015, President Higgins was happy to accept the invitation of Phumzile Mlambo-Ngucka, UN Under-Secretary General and the Executive Director of UN Women, to become a Champion of the HeforShe campaign. In taking up this role he was, along with a number of other Heads of State and Heads of Government, making a commitment to use the influence of his office to convey a simple but essential message: that men must stand up and show leadership if women's rights are to be achieved.

Throughout his career in public life, President Higgins and his wife Sabina Higgins have been involved in many campaigns for equality – in the areas of labour, welfare, housing, education, healthcare and in relation to private life – and they share the perspective of HeforShe that the cause of women's rights and equality is a political project in which men have as great an interest and as onerous a duty as women.

Also in February 2015, President Higgins delivered a major address at an international conference hosted by the National Women's Council of Ireland and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. In that address President Higgins set out a broad view of the key obstacles to women's rights both in Ireland and internationally and emphasised the centrality of gender equality to the great global challenges of development and climate change.

In September 2015 President Higgins participated in the Global Leaders Meeting on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Summit in New York. In that address, he emphasised the urgency of objectives set out in the SDGs in relation to women, and in particular the urgency of eliminating violence against women immediately.

Also in November 2015, President Higgins spoke at an event hosted by the Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence, an alliance of Irish and international civil society organisations who work mainly in the field of development. The consortium is aimed at prioritising gender based violence in development practice. In that address, the President spoke of the central importance of women's rights as a development issue and specifically on the relationship between poverty and development in the struggle to eliminate gender based violence.



## NOTE

- President Higgins' address to the National Women's Council of Ireland and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Conference, February 2015 <http://www.president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/womens-rights-one-of-the-great-ethical-challenges-of-our-time>
- President Higgins' address to the Global Leaders Meeting on Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women, New York September 2015 <http://www.president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/address-at-summit-dialogue-on-global-leaders-meeting-on-gender-equality-and>
- President Higgins' address to the Consortium on Gender Based Violence, Royal Irish Academy November 2015 <http://www.president.ie/en/media-library/speeches/standing-up-speaking-out-transforming-mens-attitudes-and-behaviours-to-end>

## DETAILS OF THE EVENT

In his role as HeforShe Champion World Leader, President Higgins is committed to furthering the objectives of the campaign in all sections of Irish society. To that end, on 11 March 2016 President Higgins hosted an event at Áras an Uachtaráin (the Residence of the President). There were 100 guests in attendance on the day drawn from civic society, public institutions and stakeholder organisations, including a significant representation of the main national organisations working in the field of women's rights and gender based violence.

The event was opened by President Higgins who gave a 15 minute address outlining the importance of the HeforShe campaign and his priorities as a HeforShe Champion. The second speaker was Sharon O'Halloran, CEO of SAFE Ireland, who spoke about their MAN UP Campaign, a complementary campaign to HeforShe at the national level which addresses the role of men in combating gender based violence. This was followed by a series of five pledges of support by male representatives of major national organisations who undertook to advance the aims of HeforShe and MAN UP within their membership:

- Gerry Collins, President of IBEC, the Irish Business and Employers Confederation
- David Joyce, Equality and International Development Officer with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions
- John Delaney, CEO of the Football Association of Ireland
- Jack Leahy, Vice-President of the Union of Students in Ireland
- Vice Admiral Mark Mellett, Chief of Staff of the Irish Defence Forces



Following these statements of support, the event was closed by popular music artist Hozier who performed his song “Cherry Wine”, which is currently being used in an international campaign to highlight the issue of domestic violence.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xIAMFr2Gh4Y>



Speech by President Michael D Higgins  
At a Reception Celebrating UN Women's HeforShe Campaign  
and SAFE Ireland's MAN UP Campaign  
Áras an Uachtaráin

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Friday, 11th March, 2016

Dear Friends,

You are all very welcome to Áras an Uachtaráin. Sabina and I are very pleased that you are joining us this morning for what is a very important event to mark UN Women's HeforShe Campaign and to celebrate the role of men in advancing women's rights in general, in the fullest sense, and in particular in combating gender based violence.

Earlier this week I participated in a ceremony celebrating the role of women in the Rising of 1916 and in the foundation of our state. That event gave all of us cause to reflect on the experience of women in Ireland over the last 100 years. I spoke of how the hopes and aspirations for an equal Ireland, for women and men, which are so clearly articulated in the 1916 Proclamation were frustrated and were denied for the greater part of the 20th century. The women of 1916 were feminists, many of them of the most radical disposition, but the true Republic for which they fought has still not been achieved, and will not be realised until we have full equality for all our citizens.

My message to that event on Tuesday was that, as we commemorate the courage and idealism of those revolutionary women from our past, we must be inspired to do everything we can to complete the journey towards the full enjoyment of women's rights.

The equal Republic is incomplete, but we do have causes for optimism both in Ireland and at global level. In Ireland, access to education, access to employment, participation and representation in political life, equality of pay – are all areas in which progress has been substantial and where equality can now be considered to be within our grasp.

In this spirit of optimism I accepted, in February 2015, the invitation of Phumzile Mlambo-Ngucka, UN Under-Secretary General and Executive Director of UN Women, to become a Champion of the HeforShe campaign. This global campaign is one that has the engagement of men and boys at its core, seeking to bring one half of humanity together in support of the other half of our human family, and engaging

institutions and organisations that are in a position to influence change within communities, and particularly those settings where women are most vulnerable to gender inequality and discrimination.

In taking up this role, along with a number of other Heads of State and Heads of Government, I committed to using the influence of my office to convey a simple but essential message: that men must stand up and show leadership if women's rights are to be fully achieved.

Throughout our public life, Sabina and I have been involved in many campaigns for equality – in the areas of labour, welfare, housing, education, healthcare and in relation to fertility and private life. Over those many years we have spent working on those issues, it has always been clear to us that women's rights and equality is a political project in which men should have as great an interest and as onerous a duty as women. All of society loses when you have gender inequality. All of society is flawed if gender violence is allowed to occur, is tolerated, and if an intolerable silence prevails around this grave issue. Then too, no invocation of cultural differences or tradition can ever be accepted as an excuse for gender violence.

Ours is a moment of great significance in that, by initiating the HeforShe campaign, the United Nations has provided the focal point for an international campaign aimed at harnessing the efforts of men and women working together for equality. HeforShe thus provides a framework for individuals, institutions, corporations and civil society to direct their efforts at areas identified as ones of priority concern:

- Education
- Health
- Identity
- Work
- Politics; and
- Violence – in any form.

The HeforShe campaign identifies actions that can be taken by all of us to contribute to change. It presents a unique opportunity to realise the dream of a truly equal world in which the relationships between the genders is one of mutual support, equality, and respect.

A defining change in how the international community addresses issues of equality can be seen in the way women's rights are now conceptualised as a universal human rights issue. This is recognised, not just in the HeforShe campaign, but also in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed in New York last September. Those 17 SDGs, and the 169 targets associated to them, were adopted by the largest gathering of world governments in history. They are universal objectives for all nations, rich and poor, and provide a pathway to addressing complex questions of distribution of wealth and resources over the medium term – distribution within countries as well as between countries.

We must all rejoice at the fact that gender equality was tackled in New York both as a transversal issue and as a specific Goal – Goal no.5 – which calls on all the nations of the world to, I quote:

“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”

Within this Goal no.5, there is also a specific target aimed at gender violence, which is phrased as follows:

“eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.”

The SDGs are aimed at the medium term, the aspiration being to end gender-based violence within 15 years. While we must all welcome the fact that women’s rights are recognised as a central question of development throughout the agreed text, we should, however, be animated by an even greater sense of urgency when tackling the issues facing women globally. We must give leadership as citizens of a Republic. We should not have to wait 15 years.

Indeed, given what we know, what we understand about the causes and consequences of such violations of human rights, and given the resources and expertise available to us, as well as the strong public support that exists in Ireland for this work, we can say unambiguously that 15 years is far too long to wait for equality, and that even a day is too long to end gender-based violence in our country or anywhere else for that matter.

That is why I am so pleased that in hosting this event today we also have the opportunity of partnering with SAFE Ireland and their MAN UP campaign, which exemplifies the spirit of HeforShe in calling on men to stand up and play their part in ending gender-based violence

We are delighted to have with us today not only Sharon O’Halloran as Chief Executive of SAFE Ireland and the members and partners of SAFE Ireland, but also Ryan Tubridy, representing the male champions who have stood up and confronted prejudice, stereotypes and stigma by declaring their commitment to “man up” in the face of gender-based violence. The great importance of HeforShe and MAN UP lies in their recognition that the change we wish for cannot be achieved simply by laws, policies or funding. Social change is necessary as well as a change in consciousness.

One step in achieving that change is the building of an environment where men feel comfortable and empowered to identify themselves as feminists and as champions of women’s rights. In standing up to be counted in this respect and in using your public profiles to convey this message, Ryan Tubridy and others have shown great leadership and courage.

We are also honoured to have male leaders from large national organisations who are willing to show that same leadership and who are willing to advocate the messages of HeforShe and MAN UP among their members. We welcome today Gerry Collins from IBEC, David Joyce from ICTU, John Delaney from FAI, Kevin Donoghue from USI and Vice-Admiral Mark Mellett from the Defence Forces.

Finally, when embarking on a campaign for change there is something that is more powerful than words, policies, slogans and posters - and that is music. You might even argue that this was proven by the renaissance of the campaign song as a feature of the recent election!

It is a great gift to have the power to communicate ideas through the medium of melody and sound and I want to congratulate Andrew Hozier for choosing to lend the power of his musical gift to this important cause. Through his song “Cherry Wine” and his video collaboration with Saoirse Ronan, he is bringing the message of today’s event to a wider audience and it is a great thrill to Sabina and me, and I know to all of you, that he has given so generously of his time to be here this morning and we look forward to hearing him perform later.

As a final word, may I, once again, thank you all for being with us this morning, in this week of International Women’s Day, at a moment of great hope, when there is an unprecedented consensus and momentum internationally to achieve true equality between men and women.

HeforShe and the MAN UP campaign are such important and valuable tools and platforms made available to us, and I ask all of you here today to avail of these tools and these platforms – Do become a supporter of the HeforShe campaign through the website, and consider the actions that you as an individual or an organisation can implement. Similarly, consider ways in which you or your organisation can play an active part in SAFE Ireland’s MAN UP campaign.

Today is a day of celebration, celebration of what is possible, and celebration of a new relationship between men and women which is being forged by those, like yourselves, who are showing leadership.

Beir beannacht.





## MATERIALS

- Photos, audio and video of the event are collated on the President's website: <http://www.president.ie/en/diary/details/president-hosts-a-reception-in-his-role-as-a-global-world-leader-of-un-wome>
- Photos from the event: <http://www.president.ie/en/media-library/photos/reception-celebrating-un-womens-heforshe-campaign-and-safe-irelands-man-up>
- Audio of the President's address at the event: <https://soundcloud.com/arasanuachtarain/11-03-16-speech-at-a-reception-celebrating-un-womens-heforshe-campaign-and-safe-irelands-man-up-campaign>
- Video of the President's address at the event: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ESqIEbmDgI>



## COVERAGE OF THE EVENT

There was extensive media coverage of the event

### ALL NATIONAL BROADSHEET NEWSPAPERS:

- <http://www.independent.ie/entertainment/music/music-news/take-me-to-the-ras-hozier-sings-for-the-president-and-guests-34533410.html>
- <http://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/people/michael-d-higgins-men-s-action-and-assistance-needed-for-women-to-achieve-full-rights-1.2572392>
- <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/president-higgins-none-of-the-rights-women-enjoy-fell-from-the-sky-1.2569839>
- <https://soundcloud.com/irishtimes-women/ep-27-waking-the-feminists-president-michael-d-higgins-hozier>
- <http://www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/president-higgins-all-of-society-is-flawed-if-gender-violence-is-allowed-to-occur-386971.html>

### MAJOR NATIONAL ON-LINE PLATFORMS

- <https://storify.com/PresidentIRL/president-higgins-hosts-heforshe-event-on-gender-b>
- <http://www.thejournal.ie/michael-d-higgins-feminism-2655506-Mar2016/>
- <https://www.facebook.com/irishtimes/posts/10153530712851158?fref=nf>

### REGIONAL PRESS

- <http://wicklowtimes.net/hozier-to-perform-at-event-to-promote-womens-rights-and-equality/>

### PROMOTED BY NATIONAL NGOS, CAMPAIGNS, AND PARTICIPANTS

- <http://www.safeireland.ie/2016/president-michael-d-higgins-holds-event-for-man-up-and-heforshe-at-aras-an-uachtarain/>
- <http://www.manup.ie/president-michael-d-higgins-holds-event-for-man-up-and-heforshe-in-aras-an-uachtarain/>
- <http://www.childfund.ie/president-higgins-global-champion-of-the-heforshe-campaign/>
- <http://www.paveepoint.ie/president-hosts-heforshe-event/>

- <http://worldpage.ir/this-hozier-performance-in-aras-an-uachtarain-gave-us-chills/>
- <http://hozier.com/visit-to-aras-an-uachtarain/>



