



# THE CLINTON VISIT

Limerick welcomes the US President



Waiting for the President: part of the huge crowd in O'Connell Street on Saturday for the visit of Bill Clinton to Limerick.

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# Bill salutes the modern Limerick

By MIKE DORAN

THE Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, and President Clinton praised Limerick's contribution to music, sport, literature and business when they spoke to the 40,000 crowd lined up along O'Connell Street and Thomas Street for the presidential visit to the Mid-West capital.

And in return, Mr Clinton received the Freedom-of-the-City, praise for his support and work in the peace process and lifting sanctions against Cuba—and a tactful rap on the knuckles for his bombing of Sudan and Afghanistan.

Accompanied by his wife, Hillary, President Clinton had made his way at 11.30am from Bob Shanahan's office in the Bank of Ireland to the podium at the junction with Bedford Row to address the crowd.

They were the last to be introduced to the crowd by RTE's Dex Cahill, who had earlier welcomed Mr Ahern, Celia Larkin and Mayor Harrington.

There was some speculation in the run-up to the Mayor's address that he might make some direct reference to American foreign policy, and in particular the recent US missile attacks on Sudan and Afghanistan.

But apart from a brief reference to "those who were killed in the Middle East," any fears of an embarrassing moment are diffused by the tact of the speech.

Mayor Harrington welcomed the President and First Lady to an "historic Limerick—a chartered city for 800 years; a sporting Limerick—a city of athletes who have left their mark on the national and world stages; a modern Limerick—a city that is a symbol of the new Ireland noted for urban renewal, tolerance and a willingness to learn from the mistakes of the past."

He referred to the binding relationship that exists between the US and Ireland, and commiserates with the dead and injured from the Omagh massacre, before thanking the President for his "courageous decision to lift the embargo on food and medicine to Cuba," a topic he discussed with the President after the address. "He turned to me and said that he had been making good progress on the Cuba issue and that he was hopeful that the trade embargo would soon be lifted," the Mayor said later.

Mr Ahern offered commiserations to the family of the 29th victim of the Omagh bombing who had died that morning and asked the crowd to be silent for a few moments.

He then gave an appraisal of Limerick's culture, literature, music and sport, before thanking the President for all he had done for the peace process.

"He has been with us from the start, an unwavering source of support and encouragement, in good times and bad, in our journey of peace and reconciliation. President Clinton, you are among friends here in Limerick," said the Taoiseach.

Dr Daniel O'Hare and Prof George Bain presented the President with the Conference of University Rectors Peace Award, a joint presentation made on behalf of the nine Irish universities, recognising the enormous and valued contribution that Bill Clinton has made to the Northern Ireland peace process.

Amid thunderous applause, Hillary Rodham Clinton accepted a gift of a Dromcollogher Dresden figurine from Mayor Harrington.

President Clinton was then made a Freeman-of-the-City.

"It is an honour not lightly given and you will be aware that past recipients include John F Kennedy, one of your childhood heroes," said the Mayor.

The President then signed the charter in the presence of Mayor Harrington and city manager, Conn Murray.

And then, at 11.55am, William Jefferson Clinton, the 42nd President of the United States of America, launched into an emotive speech that quickly wins his audience over.

He first thanks the Irish Chamber Orchestra and Micheál O Súilleabháin for the music and the combined universities for the Rector's Award. He mentions Fionn

MacCumhall, Frank and Malachy McCourt and St Patrick, emigrants and famine dead.

"Now I'll have to go home and tell Frank McCourt, 'You know Frank, you made a lot of money writing about the old Limerick, but I like the new one better.'"

The Good Friday Agreement and the Omagh Massacre come in for special mention in the President's speech: "There will be still efforts by the enemies of peace to break your will, to get you to turn back, to get you to lose faith. Don't do it! Don't do it!" urges the President. "This is you at your best. Do not let them break your will."

"You have made it possible for me, on behalf of the United States and the cause of peace in the world, to tell every warring, feuding, hating group of people trapped in the prison of their past conflicts to look at Ireland and know that there can be a better day. Thank you for that."

President Clinton commends the country for being "in the forefront of every change sweeping the world. This island is being redefined by new ideas, bringing prosperity and an increasing international world view."

He thanked Bertie Ahern and Dell for their earlier announcement of 1,700 extra jobs for the city, bringing the total there to 6,200 in three years and making the Raheen-based American computer company the largest single employer in the Mid-West.



Freeman: President Clinton hold up his scroll making him a Freeman-of-the-City watched by Mayor Joe Harrington.

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Hillary Clinton shaking hands during her walkabout.

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Clair John Ryan and Hillary Clinton share a joke.

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