

**Speech by Éamon ÓCuív, TD, Minister for Community Rural and
Gaeltacht Affairs at the Ireland Canada Chamber of Commerce
On Friday 8th May 2009 in Toronto, Canada**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be here today at the Irish Canada Chamber of Commerce and I am very grateful to Mr. Michael Power, President of the Chamber for his kind invitation and for the opportunity to discuss issues of common interest to both our countries in these difficult world economic times.

Indeed it is a great honour for me to be in Canada this weekend representing the Irish Government at a number of ceremonies to commemorate the Great Irish Famine which struck Ireland in 1845, and which saw over 1.5 million people, either perish or emigrate from Ireland.

Many of those who emigrated at the time did so to Canada in order to start a new life. The kindness and generosity shown by Canadians to Irish people at that difficult time forged strong links between both countries

and has contributed to the special relationship, which Ireland has with Canada today.

As you will be aware Ireland and Canada has a very healthy business relationship. Ireland is Canada's 15th largest source of foreign investment overall and the 10th largest source of European investment, with Irish companies employing over 5,000 people in Canada. Ireland is also currently the 5th largest recipient of Canadian outward investment. There are approximately 43 Canadian manufacturing and internationally traded services companies in Ireland, employing approximately 3,000 people. In addition, there are over 35 Canadian companies with a presence in the IFSC. These include the Bank of Montreal, CIBC Ireland Ltd, Corona Corporation, IG International Management and Scotiabank. These figures are indeed impressive.

I know my cabinet colleague, Mr. Noel Dempsey, TD, Minister for Transport, was with you on the occasion of St. Patrick's Day, and briefed you on current financial and economic matters in Ireland. Today, as requested, I am going to outline to you the mandate and role of my own Department in Ireland, including the range of policy initiatives, public services and programmes, which it delivers.

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs was established in 2002 by Government to promote and support the development of communities, both urban and rural. Its remit covers a wide range of activity, including:

- Community and local development;
- Volunteering;
- Charities Law;
- Tackling drug misuse;
- Rural development, including the development of the rural economy;
- Gaeltacht and island infrastructure development;
- The Irish language; and
- Fostering North/South co-operation in areas under our remit.

It is important to note that my Department has a specific mandate in relation to tackling disadvantage and in particular to the development and support of communities who suffer high levels of economic and social disadvantage. This is of course particularly challenging during these current difficult financial times in Ireland.

In this context my Department provides assistance through a number of mechanisms to support enterprise development and local economies across the country. This support is provided through the implementation of schemes, programmes and also the provision of funding to enterprise bodies such as Údaras na Gaeltachta and the Western Development Commission.

The Irish Government believes that in meeting future fiscal and economic challenges, it is important to recognise the role that local communities can play in generating social cohesion and developing their own local economies. The State has a role in community. In times of economic hardship it is important that the State maintains its presence and commitment among those that are most disadvantaged.

An essential element of my Department's mandate is maintaining vibrant sustainable rural communities and to ensuring access to education and to quality services to all across Ireland, regardless of geographic location. Like Canada, the rural economy in Ireland is a vital component of Ireland's overall economy as are the rich natural resources, which both countries have.

People in rural communities value, and wish to sustain, a good quality of life for themselves and their families. It is my view that a dynamic and competitive rural economy will secure the quality of life in rural areas. Some of the enterprise actions being delivered by my Department include the delivery of the Rural Development Programme 2007 –2013, which is co-funded with by the EU. This programme includes particular measures in relation to rural enterprise development and its overall aim is to improve the quality of life in rural areas and to promote the diversification of the rural economy. This programme will be key to achieving sustainable economic growth and stability in rural regions over the coming period. The funding under the programme will amount to €425.4 million and it is expected that this will result in and create, in excess of 12,000 new jobs during the lifetime of the programme.

In addition to providing funding under the RDP 2007–2013, the Department supports small enterprises and is investing in developing key rural infrastructure over the coming period under the CLAR programme, Gaeltacht schemes and the infrastructural development of the offshore Islands.

Rural recreation and tourism and marine leisure also offers opportunities for attracting more visitors to Ireland's regions and for job creation

through capitalising on the full suite of Government's rural development programmes. The presence of a small / medium size marina has the potential to create between 20 and 32 full-time jobs, can directly generate from €0.5m to €0.8m revenue locally and up to 13 times as much from related activities. Against this background my Department promotes the countryside as a recreational resource, including working with our colleagues in Fáilte Ireland in relation to the expansion of the Looped Walks network and walking festivals and these activities are expected to increase tourism and the rural economy. Gaeltacht areas also offer untapped potential on a year-round basis to develop Irish language tourism through Irish language courses and language tourism for up to 30,000 bed nights annually from abroad.

As I have said previously my Department has responsibility for community development. In my view the empowerment of communities is of critical importance - as strong communities ensure strong society.

Against this background my Department delivers the Community Services Programme, which provides jobs for vulnerable members of communities. The Programme is implemented across the country and its outputs have had a most positive impact on local economies. A total of 1,937 jobs have now been created under this scheme across the country,

and this continues to increase. In addition my Department delivers the Community Development Programme, RAPID programme and Local Development Social Inclusion Programmes, which all target disadvantage and promote social and economic inclusion in Irish communities.

The other key area, which my Department has responsibility for, is the Irish language, which is a vital part of the living heritage of the State and an important natural resource in the Gaeltacht. A core task of the Department is to promote

- the cultural, economic and social welfare of the Gaeltacht as the main source of the living language;
- the reversal of the decline of Irish as the principal means of communication in the Gaeltacht; and
- the extension of its use in the rest of the country, both North and South.

My Department is currently in the process of finalising a twenty-year strategy for the Irish language and the Gaeltacht and I am happy to provide further details on this to anyone who would like them.

As I have outlined my Department covers a wide range of activity and I am happy to explore these activities further if you wish.

Finally I would like to thank you again for your invitation today. It has been a privilege to meet with you all and to outline the work of my Department.

I would at this time like to congratulate Enterprise Ireland, who now have an office in Toronto for their work to date in terms of focusing on opportunities for Irish companies in a wide range of areas including financial services; life-sciences and medical devices; digital media and ICT; and marine sciences/ocean technologies.

I look forward to Ireland and Canada working closely in the coming years and further strengthening an already strong and close relationship.

Go raibh maith agat