

5 January 2010

2010 NATIONAL FAMINE MEMORIAL DAY TO BE HELD IN MURRISK, CO. MAYO

Éamon Ó Cuív, T.D., Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, today outlined the National Famine Commemoration Committee's plans for the National Famine Memorial Day 2010. The Committee has agreed the following for this year's commemorations:

- It is proposed that the national event will take place on 16 May 2010 in Murrisk, Co. Mayo;
- The parallel international event will be held in New York;
- That communities around the country should be encouraged to hold their own local events to commemorate the Great Famine; and
- That all public and sporting events should observe a minute's silence on the National Famine Memorial Day.

The failure of the potato crop during the 1840s was a transforming event in Ireland and no other event in our history can be likened to the Great Famine for either its immediate impact or legacy. The population of Ireland, which exceeded 8 million in the Census of 1841, was reduced by approximately 1.5 million through death and emigration. Indeed, the legacy of the famine includes a strong appreciation among Irish people of issues such as food security and a strong commitment to humanitarian aid and relief. It also resulted, through emigration, in the formation of many Diaspora communities - the Irish abroad.

The West of Ireland, and County Mayo in particular, was one of the worst affected areas during the Great Famine and against this background it has been agreed by the National Famine Commemoration Committee that the National Commemorative event in 2010 should be held in Murrisk, Co. Mayo, which is home to the National Famine Monument.

The National Famine Monument at Murrisk is situated close to the Croagh Patrick Visitor Centre and was unveiled by the then President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, in 1997. The sculpture by John Behan depicts a 'Coffin Ship' with skeletal bodies and commemorates the Great Famine of the 1840s and is the largest bronze sculpture in Ireland. A similar sculpture was unveiled in November 2000, outside the United Nations building in New York City, representing those immigrants who survived the journey to America. Minister Ó Cuív also announced today that the parallel international famine event will take place in New York during May in 2010.

Minister Ó Cuív said, "I am delighted that Murrisk, Co. Mayo is to be the location for the National Famine Commemoration ceremony in 2010, and I know that the event in Murrisk will be poignant and a fitting tribute to those that perished and suffered loss and desolation during the Great Hunger. I look forward to discussions taking place between my Department and relevant stakeholders, such as Mayo County Council and Murrisk Development Association, over the coming weeks to make the necessary arrangements to hold the 2010 National Memorial Day in Murrisk."

Minister Ó Cuív again expressed his gratitude to the members of the National Famine Commemoration Committee for their commitment in ensuring that the catastrophic events of the Great Famine are appropriately remembered and that the extraordinary contributions of those who emigrated, and of their many descendants abroad, are justly celebrated.

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