

24 April 2009

Ó Cuív announces programme of commemorative events in memory and honour of all those who suffered loss and devastation during the Great Irish Famine

Éamon Ó Cuív, T.D., Minister for Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, and Chair of the National Famine Commemoration Committee, today announced a programme of events to take place in May 2009, to commemorate and honour the 1.5 million people, who either perished or emigrated from Ireland during the Great Irish Famine of the 1840's.

The commemorative programme will commence in Canada on 10th May 2009, when Minister O Cuív will, on behalf of the Irish Government, unveil a plaque at Grosse Ile near Quebec City, to commemorate the 7,000 Irish men, women, and children who are buried there. Grosse Ile was a quarantine station during the Famine, which became known by locals as 'L'Ile des Irlandais' – the Island of the Irish. During his visit to Canada, Minister Ó Cuív, will also lay a wreath in Ireland Park, Toronto, as a tribute to those Irish emigrants who arrived in Toronto during the Famine and he will deliver a keynote address at Toronto University on the impact and legacy of the Great Irish Famine.

Following on from the commemorative events in Canada, Minister Ó Cuív will represent the Government on 17th May 2009, which is National Famine Memorial Day, in Skibbereen, Co Cork, at a dignified and solemn ceremony to commemorate all those who suffered loss during the Famine; loss of life, loss of family, loss of home and loss of country. The event in Skibbereen, Co. Cork will commence with a ceremony in O'Donovan Rossa Park, culminating in the principal formal ceremonial event, the State flag and wreath-laying ceremonies, at Abbeystrewery Cemetery, where some 8,000 to 10,000 famine victims are buried in a mass grave.

In addition to the events in Skibbereen on 17th May 2009, Minister Ó Cuív has written to each primary and post-primary school requesting that staff and pupils observe a minute of silent reflection at midday on Friday 15th May, in memory of all those who suffered loss during the Famine and those in the world who continue to suffer famine and hunger will also be remembered. He has also requested that all public and sporting events observe a minute's silence on the 17th May 2009.

In announcing the commemorative events for May 2009, Minister O Cuív said, "I am delighted that the National Famine Commemoration Committee has organised such a dignified and appropriate programme of events for May 2009, in honour of those who died and suffered during the Famine.

The Famine was a transforming event in Ireland and there is probably no other event in our history that can be likened to it either for its immediate impact or its legacy. I look forward to representing the Government at commemorative events in Canada and Skibbereen in May, both locations having been deeply affected by the Great Irish Famine."

Ends