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**Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern, T.D.,
on Independence Day to mark the Farewell to
US Ambassador Jean Kennedy-Smith,
at the Ambassador's Residence, Phoenix Park,
Saturday 4 July 1998 at 9.00 pm**

Independence Day, 4 July, is not only America's National Day. It is probably also the most important date in the development of Western democracy. We congratulate the American Government and people on their continuing achievements as the world's most powerful protector of democratic values. The Declaration of Independence of 1776 set 'life, liberty the and pursuit of happiness' as the goal of any free system of Government.

Today this year, 4 July 1998, is a day of special celebration for us in Ireland. It is the year of peace, when we hope that we have successfully resolved the terrible conflict of the last 30 years with underlying causes that go back far further in time.

The Good Friday Agreement is a distillation of the finest democratic values, as they are applied to the difficulties of a divided society. I know that a large majority of those elected to the Assembly share a determination to make it work and will not allow the Agreement or peace to founder.

American help has been crucial in enabling us to reach this point. I have on many occasions expressed our profound gratitude to President Clinton for his courage and participation in every stage of the peace process. His special envoy Senator George Mitchell steered the Talks against all the odds to a successful conclusion.

But today I want to pay a very special tribute to Ambassador Jean Kennedy-Smith, who will be leaving us shortly, after some five years in the job. Her contribution has been unique, and will find honourable mention in all the history books that will be written of this period.

She is a distinguished member of the most famous Irish-American political family. In this year, when the bicentenary of 1798 followed upon the Commemoration of the Famine, it is worth recalling that the Kennedys came from Wexford, and their ancestors were most probably profoundly affected by both events. The Kennedy and indeed the Fitzgerald family throughout most of this century raised the standing of the Irish-American community first in Boston and later in the whole of America. The unforgettable visit of President John F. Kennedy to these shores in 1963 accompanied by his sister was a source of immense pride and celebration. The visit marked an independent Ireland and an Irish-American community that had both finally come into their own. Even though lacking an overt political agenda, that visit was the beginning of a far closer political engagement between our two countries. This which has reached a climax under President Bill Clinton, who was received in parts of this country, including Northern Ireland, with equal enthusiasm in December 1995. Ambassador Jean Kennedy-Smith is the personal link between two Presidents of a different generation and their two celebrated visits.

Jean Kennedy-Smith has all the famous Kennedy magic that was a noted characteristic of her brothers. In the course of her stay here she has visited communities all over the country, and been received with the tremendous warmth and enthusiasm by the people of Ireland. She has been close to the people not remote from them. Her personal modesty and lack of fussiness about protocol has endeared her to everyone. Not for nothing, is she the President's neighbour in the Phoenix Park.

I would like to thank her for all of that. But above all I would like to express our gratitude for her single-minded commitment to peace, in which she was representing both America's interests and aims. In the advice she gave, and in the contacts she maintained especially in times of difficulty, she knew exactly what she was doing and the vital importance of it. She was independent-minded and valued by the President for that reason. She was never simply an echo or an extension of the relationship between the State Department and Whitehall.

She shook up the system, the unique circumstances of the times requiring her to make a major political contribution, something that came quite naturally to

someone from her background. Parts of the political system in these islands has been slow to adjust to a woman playing such a role, and not only Ambassadors, but Presidents, Tánaistes, Secretary of State Mo Mowlam, and our Minister of State in Foreign Affairs. It is easy for women in public life to be attacked as unconventional, when they do not confirm to previous patterns. There is no doubt that from time to time the 'empire' strikes back, or tries to. But one of the features of the peace process has been the number of women who have successfully broken the mould, among them Ambassador Jean Kennedy-Smith, who will enter the annals of the peace process and of American diplomacy.

Ambassador Kennedy-Smith is known throughout the length and breadth of Ireland for her work for peace. But she has worked just as hard in many other areas, and in one in particular, she has enriched the lives of thousands of people in her time here. That area is disability, where the contribution she has made has been nothing short of phenomenal.

In this connection, I want to mention one initiative that we are very much involved in as a Government. You all know, I am sure, that Special Olympics Ireland has put in a bid to host the 2003 Special Olympics World Games in Ireland. If the bid succeeds, it will mean that Ireland hosts the largest sporting event in the world that year. As part of the Games, it is envisaged that there will be a Host Programme which will welcome 7,000 athletes to towns all over Ireland, North and South, and we are determined to put on a Games that the athletes will treasure for the rest of their lives.

The bid was submitted only after a professional and comprehensive feasibility study, financed by the Government. We are so committed to securing the Games, and to making a success of them, that the Government has already committed itself to a grant of £5 million towards the cost of staging the Games here. We intend to offer every possible support to the Games Organising Committee to ensure that the highest possible level of corporate sponsorship is secured. But these will be a Games that reach into every community in Ireland, because we want to see them as a major celebration of the dignity and ability of the athletes who come here.

The Games would be a phenomenal success here in Ireland, and the Government are determined to help in every possible way to make that happen. If that is successful, I hope that I will be able to welcome you back, Jean, on the day that we declare the 2003 Games open in Dublin.

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I and my colleagues in Government wish to mark the occasion of Ambassador Jean Kennedy-Smith's departure from these shores by some special mark of recognition for the immense service that she has given. It would accordingly be our intention, that upon the cessation of her Ambassadorial role in this country she will become an honorary citizen of Ireland, an honour that is given to very few, and the Government have accordingly made a decision to advise the President to exercise the power she has in that respect.

I wish her much well-deserved happiness in her retirement. She will have the satisfaction and the memories of a job that she has done outstandingly well. We look forward to seeing her regularly, in both the United States and Ireland, and of course working with her successor. I would like to thank you again, Ambassador, for all you have done for peace. You have helped to bring about a better life for everyone of all traditions throughout Ireland.

When President John F. Kennedy came to Ireland in 1963, he told the Houses of the Oireachtas, that we need people *'who can dream of things that never were and ask why not'*. His sister Jean has been one of these people, and we are deeply grateful to her.

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DATE: *7/7/98*

Tavrisel's July 4th remarks honoring Mrs. Jean Kennedy Smith -
(note ref. to State Dept.).

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