

LORD MAYOR'S AWARDS

SPEAKING NOTES; KIERAN ROSE, CO-CHAIR GLEN

3RD May 2016 ROUND ROOM MANSION HOUSE DUBLIN

Thank you Lord Mayor Criona Ni Dhalaigh for your stirring words about GLEN and what has been achieved.

Lord Mayor, Councillors, Members of the Oireachtas, distinguished guests, friends, you cannot imagine what an honour it is for me to receive this Lord Mayors award on behalf of GLEN.

GLEN was set up in 1988 to campaign for gay law reform and equality legislation as well as other progress for lesbians and gay men. In 1993 we got gay law reform on the basis of equality. It is amazing to recall that up to 1993 gay men were still criminalised in this country; for young people here tonight it probably seems bizarre. The Act provided for equality with heterosexuals, it was a radical step for its time, it got a huge political and popular welcome. I think people felt relieved that we had taken that step towards equality.

The 1990s saw the introduction of powerful equality legislation that included most (but not all) groups vulnerable to discrimination. GLEN strongly campaigned for that inclusivity because we firmly believe equality and human rights are indivisible and universal.

We went on to campaign for the legal recognition of our relationships, for civil marriage. In 2010 marriage-like Civil Partnerships were introduced with the support of all political parties. There was also a huge popular welcome throughout the country expressed in the celebrations, the wedding celebrations, of the civil partnership couples. The people of Ireland, the court of public opinion, had decided, that civil marriage should be opened out to lesbian couples and gay couples.

And then last year we had the referendum on civil marriage. The referendum was about marriage equality, but it was also essentially about human rights and equality, equal citizenship and the nature of our Constitution. It was about the future direction of Irish society; was it to be hopeful, or fearful.

The referendum was passed overwhelmingly in nearly all parts of Ireland. Even in the difficult 1980s, when couples did not have the right to remarry, when contraception was difficult to access, when the status of women was downgraded, when there were powerful forces styming progress; GLEN always believed in the sense of justice, of fair play, the generosity of the Irish people. Our view was proven definitively in the referendum votes.

So we have been on a great adventure for equality – decades long

And when I say 'we' I mean not just GLEN or other LGBT groups; I mean everyone who worked alongside us, political parties, trade unions, womens groups, civil rights organisations and, of course, the people of Ireland who participated in the referendum.

From being criminalised in 1993 to full and equal citizenship and full Constitutional equality now.

This is a great historical arc of transformation and progress.

To conclude, sometimes I think Irish people can beat themselves up too much

And not recognise our achievements

But in this case of equality and human rights

And especially in the Referendum success

We can be proud in the achievements of our democratic Republic and our citizens

And that we led the world in being the first sovereign State in the world to vote Yes for Equality in a referendum

Speaking at the launch of the Yes Equality campaign in March 2015, I said that it would be a truly fitting celebration of the Equality ideals of the Proclamation if we voted Yes to opening out Civil Marriage to all citizens, and strengthening the Equality provisions of our Democratic Republic. And it happened.

Thank you again Lord Mayor Criona Ni Dhalaigh for this Award