

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by **PROFESSOR R. CURTIS**, National University of Ireland, Galway, on 29th June, 2002, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, jointly on **ALI HEWSON** and **ADI ROCHE**.

A Sheansailéir, agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile,

On April 26th 1986, the unthinkable occurred, the explosion of a nuclear reactor in Chernobyl and the worst man-made disaster of our time unfolded. The scale of the disaster, though initially shrouded in secrecy is now well known — the 4-day struggle to contain the fire, the 30km exclusion zone, the evacuation of 15,000 people from their homes and the 2000 dead from radiation sickness. This calamitous event brought both radioactive and economic fallout on over 4 million men, women and children in Belarus, the Ukraine and Russia, most of whom are still living with the horrendous consequences 16 years later.

Today we honour two remarkable women — Ali Hewson and Adi Roche - who have made an extraordinary contribution to environmental issues generally, and to the Children of Chernobyl specifically. Adi Roche is the founder and Executive Director of the Chernobyl Children Project, an Irish registered charity, and Ali Hewson is its active working patron.

Tireless and seasoned campaigners for those innocent victims of the nuclear disaster, they continue through diverse aid programmes to improve survivors' health care in tandem with raising awareness of the ever present danger of another such accident occurring, particularly close to our shores in Sellafield.

So where did this commitment to others begin?

Ali was born to Terry and Joy Stewart in Dublin in 1961. She was educated at Mount Temple Comprehensive School and at University College Dublin where as a mature student she was awarded a Bachelor of Social Science degree. She is married to Paul Hewson better known as Bono, one of the most famous singers in the world and acclaimed Drop the World Debt campaigner. This year they are celebrating their 20th wedding anniversary with their four children -Jordan, Eve, Elijah and John Abraham.

Deeply moved by the news images of the famine in Ethiopia, Ali spent 5 weeks in 1985 working on a famine relief project. Informed by this experience, she returned home imbued with the belief that long term preventative strategies is the way forward, not short-term relief.

Following the birth of her older children, she became particularly aware of environmental issues and became involved with Greenpeace campaigning against the Sellafield Nuclear Plant. On April 26th this year, the 16th anniversary of Chernobyl, the latest stage of the shut Sellafield campaign was launched with 1.3 million postcards urging its closure being sent to Prime Minister Tony Blair, Prince Charles and Norman Askew, head of British Nuclear Fuels.

Ali personally delivered a giant sized card to number 10 Downing Street of an eye with the slogan 'Tony, look me in the eye and tell me I am safe.'

Ali was invited by Adi Roche to produce and narrate the first English documentary, Black Wind-White Land, Living with Chernobyl, which Adi had initiated, researched and coordinated. This award-winning documentary dramatically brought the story of

Chernobyl to our consciousness and was viewed on national television throughout the world. This was the beginning of the partnership that has delivered so much to the Children of Chernobyl.

Rugadh Adi Roche i gCluain Meala i gContae Thobráid Árann sa bhliain naoí déag caoga cúig — iníon le Seán agus Chriss de Róiste. Dream poblachtach is ea a muintir agus anbhaint acu leis na fíníní agus is iad atá brodúil as an gceangal sin. Nuair a bhí sí ag fás aníos bhí grá mór don Ghaeilge agus do gach rud gaelach le brath go láidir ina timpeall. Fuair sí a cuid oideachais i gClochar na Toirbhirte i gCluain Meala agus i gColáiste na nDoiminiceánach, Sráid Eccles i mBaile Átha Cliath. Tá sí pósta leis an múinteoir ceoil, Seán Dunne le cúig bliana fichead.

Having worked for a number of years in Aer Lingus, Adi took voluntary redundancy to work full-time as a volunteer for the Irish Campaign for nuclear disarmament. She devised a Peace Education programme and delivered it in over 50 schools throughout Ireland. In 1990 she became the first Irish woman elected to the Board of Directors of the International Peace Bureau in Geneva. In 1991 filled with compassion and a zeal to contribute, she established the Chernobyl Children's Project.

She is author of the book Children of Chernobyl. Her dedication to this cause has been recognised by several awards including European Woman Laureate and Irish Person of the Year — both in 1994, the Belarus National Honour in 1996 and an honorary Doctor of Laws from University of Alberta, Canada 1998.

Adi's and Ali's numerous visits to Belarus and their key involvement in the documentaries, Black Wind — White Land, Living with Chernobyl, Deaths Dream Kingdom and Alexei Child of Chernobyl consolidated their continuing commitment to ensure that an accident of this magnitude and its tragic consequences should never occur again. (We are very pleased that Alexei and his parents Chris & Len Barrett are here with us today).

Fortified by the support and shared values and belief systems of their husbands Seán, Bono and of their extended families, the humanitarian record of Adi and Ali fills one with awe. Whether utilising their driving skills leading humanitarian aid convoys to Belarus or their communication skills bringing the cause to governments, school-children, business organisations and voluntary groups or using their persuasive and organisational skills in raising funds for the Project, one thing is certain -The Chernobyl Children's project has had a major impact not only in helping the survivors to a better standard of health care but also in implementing orphanage refurbishment and in the introduction of nursing programmes in Belarus.

To date over Euro26 million has been raised and distributed. These funds underpin Operation Hope Humanitarian Aid convoys of which there have been 19, the Summer Rest and Recuperation Programmes where to date, 8,500 children have come to Ireland for short stays to help reduce levels of radioactivity. The Life saving operations and medical care programme where over 60 children have been brought to Ireland for surgery and hundreds of terminally ill children come to Paul Newman's gang camp at Barrettstown each year.

Adi and Ali's contribution furthermore ranges across community care and hospice programmes in Belarus while they are continuously involved in research and education in collaboration with the United Nations. They negotiated a historic adoption agreement between Belarius and Ireland for the rights of the Chernobyl child being adopted.

Due primarily to this dynamic duo - Ali Hewson and Adi Roche, Ireland is the largest donor country of aid to Belarus and thus it was not surprising that Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations looked to Ireland and particularly to the Executive Director and Patron of CCP to mount an exhibition of Chernobyl for the 15th anniversary of the nuclear accident in the UN in New York in 2001. The Chernobyl legacy was demonstrated through digital imagery, photographs and sculpture and in 2002, it had its European Premiere in Dublin. The exhibition has had a profound impact on all those who have seen it, particularly those too young or not yet born at the time of the explosion.

Energetic, committed, passionate and selfless are just some of the attributes that come to mind when one reflects on the life and work to date of these women. Three of their parents are in the audience with us today - Terry and Joy Stewart and Chriss Roche (Adi's dad sadly died recently). They must feel an enormous sense of pride in their daughters' achievements and know that in their parenting of them, they did something remarkably right.

Recently Ali Hewson said and I quote — 'I don't want to end my life feeling I've only looked after myself, that everything I did was to protect myself. I want when I die to believe that I've achieved what I was supposed to — this is help other people in whatever way I can.' Adi Roche in an interview a short time ago referred to the work she does as inspiring and I quote — 'I think it is a privilege and an honour to do what I'm doing and I get it back a hundred fold. If I can in some way reach out and change the lives of other people even in a small way, then it is all worthwhile.'

Adi and Ali have certainly lived up to their philosophy of life, have reached out and helped thousands of people. This is all the more remarkable when one considers that the alternative could be a life of comfort and even indeed a life of celebrity. These two women are powerful role models for men and women, for young and old. They are truly outstanding humanitarians.

Chancellor it is an honour and a privilege for me to present Ali Hewson and Adi Roche jointly for the degree Doctor of Laws.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, has meas filias quas omnes scio tam moribus quam doctrina habiles et idoneas esse quae admittantur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testur ac spondeo totaeque Academiae.