

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by **PROFESSOR DERMOT KEOGH**, Head, Department of History, in University College Cork on 6 June, 2008, on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **PATRICK RICE**

A Leas-Sheansailéir, a mhuintir na hOllscoile agus a dhaoine uaisle,

Patrick Rice has spent nearly forty years in Latin America working in the area of Human Rights education and in defence of the rights of the families of the 'disappeared'. Born in Fermoy in September 1945, he was educated at the local Christian Brothers' school. He joined the Divine Word Missionaries, studied at St Patrick's, College, Maynooth, and was ordained in 1970. His order sent him to Argentina as a chaplain to the Catholic University of Santa Fe and as an assistant professor in the Philosophy Department of the same university.

Dissatisfied with his pastoral role, he left the Divine Word Missionaries in 1972 and joined the Little Brothers [Hermanitos] of Charles de Foucauld. After his novitiate had ended in 1973, he became a worker priest in Santa Fe Province serving as part of a pastoral programme to unionise forest workers and agricultural labourers. In 1974, he moved to Buenos Aires, got a job as a carpenter on a building site and lived with the Hermanitos in the shanty town of Villa Soldati.

Following the coup in 1976, the military authorities viewed the pastoral mission of the Hermanitos with great suspicion and many members were forced to go underground. Gross violation of human rights quickly became the hallmark of the new regime. Mutilated bodies were dumped near Villa Soldati, including the cadavers of two Uruguayan members of congress. In all, nearly 30,000 were 'disappeared' before the military were forced from power in 1983.

Those working in defence of human rights under the military regime could not count on widespread support in Argentina. Instead of the condemnation of human rights abuses, many people responded to the frequent disappearances with the now infamous phrase – "*algo habrán hecho*," or 'they [that is, those who were 'disappeared'] must have done something.' Nobody was safe. The outspoken Bishop of La Rioja, Enrique Angelelli was killed by the military on 4 August 1976. Accompanied by a member of the Fraternity, Patrick made the long and difficult bus journey to the diocese during a 'state of siege' to investigate the circumstances in which the bishop had died. Returning to the capital, he continued the investigation into disappearances and helped produce a report "Violence against the Argentine Church" which received international attention. Patrick later described that investigation as his first work in the field of human rights.

Patrick, despite the danger in the capital, kept working openly. His life was changed by the events of 11 October 1976. That night, he left a prayer meeting in his parish in Villa Soldati accompanied by an eighteen-year-old catechist, Fatima Cabrera. They suddenly found themselves surrounded by armed men. They were hooded, bundled into an unmarked car and taken to a secret detention centre where they were tortured over a number of days, sometimes in adjacent rooms or in the same room.

Recalling those events, Fatima wrote recently that there were moments when she had the sensation that she was no longer alive. In Fatima's own words: *Ellos, los militares, eran los dueños de la vida*. Their military torturers were the arbiters over who lived or died. But despite their ordeal, Patrick and Fatima did not share the fate of the 30,000 disappeared. Prompt and courageous action by the staff of the Irish embassy in Buenos Aires certainly helped save both of their lives. The then third secretary, Justin Harman, hearing of Patrick's disappearance, worked with Ambassador Wilfred Lennon, to establish his whereabouts. Now Irish ambassador to Moscow, Mr Harman, who is here today, did not give up. He was the source for a news item in *The London Times* on 14 October which reported Patrick's abduction. The following day, the same paper reported an Irish embassy source confirming that he was in police custody but his whereabouts and the reason for his detention were not known. Meanwhile, questions were being raised at the United Nations in New York about the whereabouts of the 'disappeared' Irishman.

The military authorities transferred Patrick to a new holding centre. Being over six feet tall, his military guard found it hard to stuff him into the boot of a car. Fatima Cabrera arrived at the

same prison a few days later. Both showed the signs of physical abuse and torture. On 19 October, Patrick was shaved by his captors and told that he was to receive visitors. He was also advised, if he did not want to wind up in a sack at the bottom of the River Plate, to say that he had fallen down a stairs. His visitors, the Irish ambassador and Justin Harman, were delighted to see him but distressed by his appearance. They assured him that they would work hard to get him out of jail.

In December 1976, as Patrick was being released from jail his captors asked him to write something positive in their records. He wrote, with characteristic understatement: "I might have been treated better."

Nearly thirty years later, a fellow prisoner and survivor told Patrick he believed that many of the prisoners in that holding centre were alive today because he had seen them. Therefore, the military were unable to make them 'disappear.'

On his return to Cork, Patrick was helped make a good recovery by Professor Bob Daly of UCC. And so began a new phase in his life as a campaigner for human rights. In 1976 to 1977, he worked in London with Latin American refugees. He was a founding chairperson of the Committee for Human Rights in Argentina. He went on speaking tours in France, Spain and the United States to denounce torture in Argentina.

Between 1978 and 1980, he moved to the United States and helped found the Washington Committee for Human Rights in Argentina. He lobbied the US Government and Congress on human rights. In 1979, Patrick helped organize with Senator Christopher Dodd a hearing on the 'Disappeared' in Argentina. He also worked with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

In 1980, Patrick moved to Caracas, Venezuela, where he lived with a community of the Hermanitos in shantytowns near the capital. He began promoting human rights within the pastoral programmes of the local archdiocese. He also cooperated in assisting refugees from Haiti. In January 1981, Patrick helped organize in Costa Rica the First Latin American Congress of Families of the Disappeared. He became one of the founding members of FEDEFAM (The Latin American Federation of Associations of Relatives of Disappeared-Detainees). He served as its Executive Secretary from 1981 to 1987.

As part of his work with FEDEFAM, he visited most Latin American countries to investigate situations of enforced disappearances and began to lobby actively at the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. He also represented FEDEFAM when, in 1982, it received the Spanish Human Rights award. He did a speaking tour of ten cities in the US organized by the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Foundation, and, accompanied by the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, received a peace prize.

With the fall of the Argentine military junta in 1983, Patrick returned to Buenos Aires. There he mourned the loss of so many members of his order and their friends. Returning to Villa Soldati, he met Fatima Cabrera. He had last seen her in prison in December 1976. She had, in the interim, spent two years in jail and a further two years under house arrest. Patrick left for Venezuela again, but kept in contact by letter with Fatima. They married in Caracas in May 1985. Two of their children were born in Caracas, and the third, Blanca, when they returned to live in Buenos Aires in 1987. She is here today with her mother.

Living back in Buenos Aires, it was not long before Patrick became involved in human rights training and education at the Ecumenical Movement for Human Rights. He coordinated training courses, seminars and workshops throughout the country. In 1992, he became the national coordinator of that organisation and got involved in prison visitation and assistance to families of the disappeared. He coordinated training courses for teachers in human rights. In 1999, Patrick began to work again with FEDEFAM and was nominated as Senior Adviser to the Executive Committee. He has

- led a training seminar in Sri Lanka in 1999 organized by the Asian Federation on Involuntary Disappearances.
- participated in the Consultation on Disappearances in Africa, in Benin in 2002.

- attended the General Meeting of Families of the Missing in Croatia in 2002.

Patrick has also taken part in 2003 in consultations with the Office of Forensics and Missing persons in Pristina, Kosovo.

In 2002, the Irish Diplomatic Mission at Geneva nominated him as the Western Group's candidate for membership of the UN Working Group on Enforced and Involuntary Disappearances. He participated in much of the advocacy to gain approval for an international instrument against enforced disappearances. That was finally achieved on 23 September 2005.

Over the past forty years, Patrick Rice has been a tireless worker in the field of human rights – as a teacher, educator, activist and lobbyist. For her part, Fatima has had responsibility for running the national adult literacy campaign in Argentina. She now directs the adult literacy campaign in the greater Buenos Aires which has a population of thirteen million.

A few days ago, before leaving Buenos Aires, both Patrick and Fatima were key-witnesses in the trial of a police chief accused of sanctioning a massacre at Pilar in 1976, in which nearly twenty people were shot. Today in Argentina such testimony is not without danger. Two years ago, another key witness in a similar trial was 'disappeared' and is presumed dead. And so the struggle continues. The leading Argentinian poet, Juan Gelman, recalled how his son, Marcello, and his pregnant wife, Claudia, were 'disappeared' by the military on 24 August 1976. Both died in a concentration camp and Gelman writes:

The military dictatorship never officially recognised their 'disappearance.' It spoke of 'those forever absent.' Until I have seen their bodies Or come face to face with their murderers, I will never give them up for dead.

Juan Gelman's determination, as reflected in those powerful lines, is shared by Patrick and Fatima Cabrera Rice. They will continue to reclaim the memory of those who have been 'disappeared' and never be intimidated into silence.

PRAEHONORABILIS VICE-CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totique Academiae.