

Keynote speech by Una MacNulty
1916 Four Courts Garrison
Relatives Gathering – Tostal Na nGaoilta
Easter Monday, 28 March 2016

Good morning everyone. I wish to extend a warm and heartfelt welcome to you all and especially to those of you who have travelled from the four corners of Ireland and overseas to attend the commemorations here in Dublin this week. I am Una MacNulty and my grandfather Peadar McNulty and Granduncle Michael McNulty were in A Company 1st Battalion Dublin Brigade and fought long side your relatives in the Four Courts Garrison in 1916.

The last time members of our families all came together in this area was one hundred years ago on Easter Monday when our relatives left their homes, not knowing if they would ever return, to fight for the freedom of their country and its people. That fateful Easter Monday morning our relatives were urgently roused from their beds, to the unexpected news that the Rising was back on. Some of the beds had already been emptied as Volunteers, having heard the previous day, that the Rising had been called off, had left for the Fairyhouse Races or other Easter excursions. Nevertheless, those still in Dublin that morning gathered their weapons, with two days rations and hastily made their way on foot,

by bike or on the tram to Colmcille Hall on Blackhall Street, just a few hundred yards from where we are gathered today.

The men and women who gathered in that hall in front of their leader Commandant Ned Daly came from all walks of life, shop assistances, teachers, labourers, artisans and poets. They stood to attention in front of Commandant Daly and heard for the first time that the Irish Republic had been declared. Similar scenes were played out at the same time in garrisons all over Dublin, and such places as Athenry, Enniscorthy, Asbourne and the GPO where the flag of the Irish Republic flew proudly over Dublin and Padraic Pearse read out the proclamation at 12 noon on Easter Monday 100 years ago.

The Irish Republic had been born and our relatives left Colmcille Hall having vowed to fight for their Republic and its people no matter what the cost to them. They immediately started to build barricades with what material they could find and set up kitchens and first aid stations. It didn't take long before the first shots were heard. One Volunteer believing the Rising was still off had reported for work at Broadstone Train Station. Having checked out a number of trains going to the

Fariyhouse races, he was startled to hear the rattle of firing nearby. On learning that the Volunteers had gone into action, he left the railway station and entered the nearby battlefield site still fully dressed as a Railway Checker.

In the battle field site of the Four Courts area for 6 days and nights our relatives bravely held off an army that vastly out-numbered theirs and had far superior weapons. They had little food and even less sleep. As the week progressed, conditions deteriorated rapidly. The dense, acrid smoke from the burning Linenhall Barracks permeated every building in which they sought shelter. Bullets whizzed past incessantly and they never knew if the next one was destined for them or the person beside them or would simply pass. Acts of bravery were carried out on an hourly basis and it would be unfair to single any one out for mention here today. In the final days of the struggle these exhausted battle weary men and women found themselves engaged in intense room to room combat with the enemy while their city burned around them. When the moment for surrender came, with great reluctance, they bowed to the decision of their Commander in Chief Padraic Pearse. In that moment of surrender 100 years ago, it felt like a defeat, but ultimately the men and

women of 1916 achieved what they dreamed about and fought for, an Irish Republic.

For this we and the people of Ireland owe them a great debt. It is our pride in our relatives, and our gratefulness to them and the sacrifices they made, which brings us here together today, to honour and remember them. As we heard in the Aisling poem earlier, they were the generation of vision and we are the generation of freedom, and it is our duty to remember them. The presence of so many of us here today is testimony to the importance we give to our responsibility to continue to honour and remember our relatives and their selfless actions.

Every one here in this room has an important role to play in ensuring that the stories and memories of our family members who fought in the Rising continue to live on, not just in our families, but in our communities, and in the collective memory of our fellow countrymen and women. We are the living connections to men and women whose actions led to the foundation of our nation. It is our duty to ensure that these extraordinary men and women are never forgotten and that the 1916

Easter Rising continues to be commemorated and honoured by all future generations in a dignified and appropriate manner.

Let this centenary of the the Rising inspire us to start a process of better commemoration of the Easter Rising and our relatives' role in it. Over the last 18 months we came together to form the 1916 Four Courts relatives group and we can now communicate with each other and share knowledge and information. We have worked with the school and community and arts groups in the Four Courts area to share our relatives' stories and the part the area played in the Rising. Let us commit today to keep these connections between ourselves and the Four Courts area strong and vibrant.

I will now ask in particular for the attention of the young people and children who are here today. We now turn to you and ask you to take on the baton and carry the stories and memories of the men and women of 1916 through to the next generations. It now falls on you to ensure the legacy of our relatives stays alive for the next one hundred years. See it not as a burden but as an honour to become the guardians of their legacy. At the 125th anniversary of the Rising one of you might be

standing, as I am now, in front of a gathering of the 1916 Four Courts relatives to honour and remember the role of our ancestors in bringing about the birth of our nation. Always be proud of your families connections to Rising and always ensure our relatives and their brave actions are never forgotten.

Finally, let us pay tribute to the Volunteers, the officers and the men and women of the Four Courts Garrison, to those who fell in this area, and to those who died at the hands of the firing squads. To these and to all who fought for their country in that week of proud memory, may I say on behalf of all of us here: Ireland remembers you.