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Ireland's First Female President, Mary Robinson, to Present Stevenson Memorial Lecture

April 7, 2006

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. - Mary Robinson, former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the first female President of Ireland, will present the 27th address in the Adlai E. Stevenson Memorial Lecture Series, "Human Rights and Ethical Globalization," at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, April 18, 2006, in Illinois Wesleyan's Westbrook Auditorium of Presser Hall, (1210 Park St., Bloomington).

The event is free and open to the public.

Robinson served as United Nations High Commissioner from 1997-2002 after a seven-year tenure as President of Ireland. As President, she focused on the needs of developing countries, linking Irish history to current poverty and policy issues, and creating a bridge of partnership between developed and developing countries. Also while President of Ireland, Robinson received an unheard of 93 percent popularity rating, and was credited by many to have revitalized and liberalized a previously conservative political office.

As High Commissioner, her role was to implement the reform proposal of Secretary-General Kofi Annan to integrate human rights concerns in all the activities of the UN. She traveled around the world, and was the first High Commissioner to visit China, signing an agreement to implement a wide-ranging program of cooperation for the improvement of human rights in that country.

Robinson now chairs the Council of Women World Leaders and is a member of the Global Commission on International Migration. In 2002, she was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize for her outstanding work as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and in May of 2005, she was awarded the first "Outspoken" award from the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission. Robinson also was named a "Hero and Icon" as one of Time magazine's 2005 top 100 men and women whose "power, talent or moral example is transforming the world."

Since 2004, she has been Professor of Practice in International Affairs at Columbia University, where she teaches international human rights. She also currently leads Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative, based in New York and supported by a partnership of the Aspen Institute, Columbia University and the Swiss-based International Council on Human Rights Policy.

Robinson attended University of Dublin Trinity College after receiving permission from then Archbishop of Dublin, John Charles McQuaid. At the time, Catholics were not allowed to study at Trinity without the rarely granted permission of a bishop. At the age of 25, she was the youngest lawyer to receive the prestigious appointment of Reid Professor of Law at Trinity, made to accomplished lawyers.

Robinson also attended King's Inn Dublin and Harvard Law School, to which she received a fellowship in 1967. She holds honorary doctorates from over 40 universities worldwide, including Harvard, Yale, Brown, Columbia, Oxford, Cambridge, London, and Edinburgh. In 1988, she and husband, Nicholas Robinson, founded the Irish Centre for European Law at the University of Dublin, and since 1998 has been Chancellor of the University.

Adlai E. Stevenson

After graduating from Princeton University, Stevenson received his law degree from Northwestern University in 1926. In 1945, Stevenson accepted a position in the U.S. State Department as a special assistant to the Secretary of State. He worked with Assistant Secretary of State Achibald MacLeish on a proposed world organization. Later that year, he went to London as Deputy United States Delegate to the Preparatory Commission of the United Nations Organization, and held the position until February 1946, when he became Chief U.S. Delegate to the United Nations.

Stevenson was elected governor of Illinois in 1947. In early 1952, President Harry S. Truman proposed that he seek the Democratic nomination for president. Winning the nomination, but losing the presidential election, Stevenson returned to law practice and traveled around the world. In 1956, he again won the Democratic nomination for president, but lost in the presidential election. Despite two defeats, Stevenson remained enormously popular with the American people. Stevenson passed away on July 14, 1965.

History of the Lecture Series

The Stevenson Lecture Series, initiated in 1965 as a memorial to the political leader and Chief U.S. Delegate to the United Nations who was raised in Bloomington, is co-hosted by Illinois State University and Illinois Wesleyan. The series was established by contributions from interested citizens.

Previous Stevenson lecturers have included Lech Walesa, former President of Poland; Jeane Kirkpatrick, former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations; Henry Kissinger, former U.S. Secretary of State; and Sir Edward Heath, former Prime Minister of Britain.

The board of the Stevenson Memorial Lecture Series, chaired by the presidents of Illinois State University and Illinois Wesleyan University, consists of 23 members who organize presentations designed to perpetuate the work of Stevenson by "promoting his ideals and furthering the cause of world peace and good will among peoples," as established by the founding members in 1965.



Mary Robinson