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**PARTNERSHIP KICKS OFF 2016 WITH NOLLAIG NA MBAN BREAKFAST CELEBRATING MARY ROBINSON AND WOMEN LEADERS**

Washington, D.C.— The Irish American Partnership kicked off the 1916 centennial, a pivotal year in Irish history, with its annual Nollaig na mBan Breakfast Celebration in Washington, D.C.

Over the past four years, The Irish American Partnership has been re-inventing the old Irish tradition of Nollaig na mBan, or “Little Women’s Christmas” by highlighting female leaders who have made an impact in their communities. While the origins of the celebration harken back to rural Ireland, when families would express thanks for women’s labor over the holiday season by sending them off to the pubs for a day of festivities with their mothers, sisters, and friends, the Partnership has reclaimed the day as a broader celebration of women’s contributions to society. The breakfast is held each year on January 6th, the day of Nollaig na mBan in Ireland.

Keynote Speaker Mary Robinson delivered poignant remarks on the importance of women’s leadership, reflecting on her term as President and UN High Commissioner of Human Rights, and her own experience with Nollaig na mBan. Growing up, Robinson remembered the day fondly as a celebration of the hard work her mother and grandmother performed not only during the Christmas season, but throughout the year. As President, she used the day as an opportunity to visit a women’s prison in Dublin and freely mingle with the inmates, exchanging stories and gaining a deeper understanding of some of Ireland’s deepest societal problems. Robinson emphasized that women often bear the brunt of conflict and are the key to solving many of the world’s most intransigent problems. As a passionate environmental advocate, she spoke of Ireland’s worsening flooding and stressed the necessity for all to live sustainably.

The Partnership donated $12,000 to the Mary Robinson Centre, Ireland’s first Presidential Library and Museum, located in Ballina, Co. Mayo. The Centre will serve as a permanent reminder of the importance of female leaders in Ireland’s history, bringing international tourism to Mayo and serving as an educational resource for students across the globe. Anyone interested in being a benefactor of the Centre should contact the Partnership for more information, including naming opportunities.

The Irish American Partnership works to empower the next generation of Irish leaders by supporting educational initiatives in Ireland, North and South, funding direct grants to primary schools, science teacher training, university access scholarships, and employment learning programs.

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