

Address of Welcome – Bishop Raymond Field
The Common Good in an Unequal World
Conference on the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church*

Croke Park, Dublin, 2 March 2006.

Your Eminence, Archbishops and Bishops, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure on behalf of the Irish Commission for Justice & Social Affairs to welcome you to the Croke Park Conference Centre for this event - The Common Good in an Unequal World – A Conference on the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church*

The Compendium of the Church's Social Doctrine was launched in Rome in October 2004, by His Eminence Cardinal Martino – present with us this morning. I had the pleasure to be present along with Fr Tim Bartlett for that significant event. It was decided then that as a Commission we should proceed as quickly as possible to have the Compendium published here in Ireland. In June 2005 it was presented by Archbishop Sean Brady and Archbishop Diarmuid Martin at a special celebration in Maynooth. I am grateful to Veritas for their support in achieving this task. I thank them along with Trocaire and the Knights of Columbanus for their sponsorship for this important event today.

The social teaching of the Church is an essential part of the Christian message. At the same time we realise that we live in a broken world – a world which we Christians are constantly called to renew. There are many issues at home and abroad on which we raise our concerns. We live in an unequal world. Over half the world's population of six billion people live in absolute poverty on less than \$2US a day and must struggle with diseases while denied access to basic medicines so readily available in the west. Many suffer from a lack of food and a denial of basic human rights. Each year over 15,000 people die as a result of landmines. Over 300,000 children fight the wars of adults as child soldiers. Here at home, we are called to welcome the strangers amongst us, our new Irish who come to our country seeking employment and to build a life here. The Church's social doctrine calls above all on lay Christians everywhere to live in a society as a witness to Jesus Christ and to the Good News proclaimed in the Gospels.

Our objective today is twofold: to raise awareness of and to promote the social doctrine of the Church. It is in that context we wish to facilitate and encourage a conversation around many of the social issues which challenge us both nationally and internationally. To help achieve this we have invited a distinguished group of speakers and guests from across a wide spectrum of our society. In addition, we are privileged to have speakers from abroad – HE Cardinal Renato Martino, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice & Peace and Lord Chris Patten of Barnes and Nuala O'Loan, Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland. In addition, though not on the programme, An Taoiseach, Mr. Bertie Ahern TD., will be with us shortly and will also make an address.

Looking around this morning you will see that we have endeavoured to achieve our objectives by inviting participants from a wide range of disciplines and areas: senior public representatives, academics and business people, members of the media, public servants, church personnel and others involved in areas of social concern - and other key opinion formers. We are deeply conscious too that all our work today is inspired by the teachings of the Gospel

Since the launch of the Irish Commission for Justice and Social Affairs last June, quite an amount has been achieved in that short space of time. I would like to express my thanks to the members of the ICJSA – for their support and cooperation and for giving so much of their valuable expertise and time.

There will be many questions raised and many words spoken during today's Conference. There will be the opportunity for questions and answers with the panels and I am deeply grateful to John Bowman for so readily agreeing to chair that particular section.

Because of the heavy agenda, you will understand and bear with me, as I try to keep all our speakers to the time allotted to them.

It is my pleasure now to turn the proceedings over to Archbishop Sean Brady, President of the Irish Bishops' Conference.