

REST HERE

SPEAKING NOTES

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This installation invites us to reflect on journeys. Long journeys made over many thousands of kilometres. Non-threatening journeys of birds, the Common Swift, who as Michael McLaughlin notes can be seen as representing the exiled, those cast away from land. The current political, legal and societal responses to those who are exiled, those who are cast away, those who for reasons of persecution or economic necessity seek to make their own journeys. Much more difficult journeys. Journeys that involve great threats, great sacrifice and entry into often much more hostility than the Common Swift will face.

The great migrations of persons from the African continent, from the Middle East, Syria and Iraq, from Asia, Afghanistan, as well as from countless other locations continues. Political violence and politically imposed economic hardship are the core reasons for these migrations. The capacity of human beings, those who exercise some forms of political power, military might or economic influence, to utilise these powers and influences to cause people to flee, to seek sanctuary, to seek economic opportunity and self-development, maybe just people attempting to ensure their continued existence.

History shows us how us how political and societal responses to migration, despite the protestations otherwise, have always reacted to migrations in Europe. As Hannah Arendt has noted in the *Origins of Totalitarianism*, the political/societal discourses in the years leading up to World War II.

“Those whom the persecutor had singled out as scum of the earth- Jews, Trotskyites, etc.-actually were received as scum of the earth everywhere”

The current migrations to Europe has revealed a deep political and societal crisis within our continent. The political acceptance of significant regimes of tyranny in Syria, Eritrea and so many other places, has not led to a yearning for protection by the peoples of Europe. Rather, we seek to exile further. We

seek to push back people from Europe's external borders. We seek to enter into agreements with 'our' despots and dictators to provide 'safe zones' and 'safe' places of shelter, far far away from European shores. We want not to actually abide by our freely accepted legal obligations to provide refuge to those who are at least fleeing persecution, we want rid of those people, we have now labelled 'scum of the earth'. Rather than inviting the persecuted to rest here, we tell them to 'stay there', we're full, we cannot possibly manage. Sure lookit, we have to look after our own.

And where these 'scum' and let's not fool ourselves that this is how those seeking protection are not only viewed by our politics, but our societies, do dare to exercise their legal rights to claim asylum- then their moral fibre must be tested. If the great journey across the Med can be survived, if countless other countries are crossed, or maybe a person has the fortune to be able to take a flight, how then do we in Ireland treat the stranger, those viewed as 'others'.

In Ireland, the persecuted or those seeking economic liberation, this category not within current international regimes for protection, are placed on the margins of our society. We condemn you. We condemn you and we withdraw your rights. If you seek asylum, you cannot work. If you attempt to do so, it's a criminal offence. We have condemned since April 2000 over 66,000 persons to spend at least some period of time within a system known as direct provision. As of April 2017, over 4,500 of you remain in this system. There are more asylum seekers in direct provision than convicted persons in our prisons.

We condemn you to significant periods of time where your privacy is set at naught through communal sleeping, communal eating and communal living. We condemn you to live on €19.10 per week for the duration it will take for our inadequate administrative and legal systems to determine if you can be considered in law a refugee or in need of some other form of protection. We condemn.

We also excuse. We also find reasons for justifying your rights denial. We need to look after "our own"- those people that we never really looked after, but become important to mention when we condemn migrant others. Ultimately, we to deny the opportunities of the exiled to rest here. The Swift this year, and the next, and the next will bear witness to our inhumanity as it flies across the Med. But there is another way, there is always another way. Whether society wants to recognise the inherent dignity of actual living and breathing human beings will continue to be the most significant challenge we will face over the coming years. Whether we will hear the pleas of humanity,

or done as we almost always have done, not listen to these pleas, only time will tell, and only history will judge.