



Launch of the **Irish appeal**
free arnaldo otegi
bring Basque political prisoners home

Dublin, Leinster House

19th November 2015



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Five years ago the Basque independence movement began an unprecedented and far reaching debate. That debate concluded with an unequivocal commitment to an exclusively peaceful and democratic pursuit of self-determination for the Basque Country. The movement renounced the use of violence and committed to the goal of ending the long and violent conflict by means of dialogue.

In October of 2011, ETA responded to a call from the *Aiete International Peace Conference* by declaring a definitive end to its 50 years of armed activity, and opening a process of dialogue. Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Desmond Tutu called Arnaldo Otegi, ex spokesperson of Batasuna and now Secretary General of the political party Sortu, "*the leader of the peace process*". Otegi was the prime mover pressing the independence movement to embrace argument and the power of word as the only means to resolve all conflict.

Unfortunately the Spanish government responded to Otegi's efforts by arresting him in October 2009. He was sentenced to six and a half years in prison for membership of the political party, Batasuna, which had been banned by the Spanish government. Since then, despite the end of ETA's armed activity - including their demonstrated commitment to disarmament, dialogue and reconciliation, including recognition of the suffering of all victims - there is still an absence of any positive response from the Spanish State.

Arnaldo Otegi, whose case has been raised to the European Court of Human Rights, is being held in a Spanish prison far away from his family and friends. The same are the cases of some 500 other Basque prisoners related to this conflict.

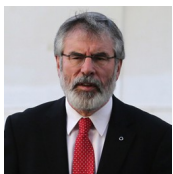
They are deliberately dispersed, often in solitary confinement, and all are in prisons long distances from the Basque Country. A reality that brings and added punishment to their families, doomed to travel long distances to visit their loved ones.

We, therefore, call for the immediate release of Arnaldo Otegi, a man who took risks for peace and democracy and who tirelessly persuaded many others to believe in the power of word alone as the mean of resolving this conflict. His release and the end of the dispersal policy, prior to an agreed early release process, are necessary steps to achieve a just and lasting peace in the region.

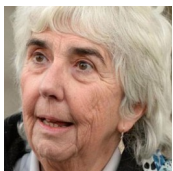
For humanity. For justice. Because we believe in a solution without winners and losers. Because we believe in peace.

Because of all this, we ask to Free of Arnaldo Otegi and to bring Basque Political prisoners home to the Basque Country.

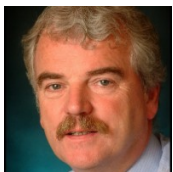
Political endorsers



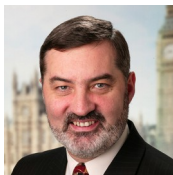
Gerry Adams TD - is the President of Sinn Féin and TD for Louth. Gerry Adams was part of the Sinn Féin negotiation team for the Good Friday Agreement. He is a former republican prisoner, he was interned in 1972 and imprisoned again in 1973 in Long Kesh.



Maureen O Sullivan TD - is an Irish independent (TD) Parliamentarian for the Dublin Central constituency since June 2009. She was first elected to Dáil on 6 June 2009 in a by-election. O'Sullivan was re-elected to the Dáil at the 2011 general election. She is part of the Dáil Technical group.



Finian Mc Grath TD - is an Irish independent (TD) Parliamentarian. He has been a TD for the Dublin North–Central constituency since 2002. McGrath was re-elected to the 30th Dáil at the 2007 general election. McGrath generally holds left-wing political views. McGrath has also campaigned against the Iraq War and the US military's use of Shannon Airport as a stopover, and on local environmental issues.



Lord Alderdice - is Liberal Democrat in the House of Lords. Lord Alderdice was Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly after the good Friday agreements, between 1998–2004, before that he was the leader of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland 1987–1998, and since 1996 has sat in the House of Lords as a Liberal Democrat.

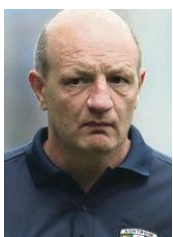
Sports Personalities



James "Jimmy" Barry-Murphy - until recently, was an Irish hurling manager and former hurler, Gaelic footballer and association footballer. He was the manager of the Cork senior team from 2011 to 2015. Barry-Murphy is regarded as one of the most iconic players in the history of Gaelic Games. Barry-Murphy's eleven-year career with the Cork senior hurlers saw him win five All-Ireland medals, a record-equaling ten Munster medals and two National Hurling League medals.



Peter Canavan - is a former Gaelic footballer and manager. He played inter-county football for Tyrone, and is one of the most decorated players in the game's history. He represented Ireland in the International Rules Series on several occasions from 1998 until 2000. Known as one the *Most Influential People in GAA History*.



Terence (Sambo) Mc Naughton - is an Irish retired hurler who played as a left wing-back for the Antrim senior team. McNaughton is regarded as one of Antrim's greatest ever players and as one of the best players never to win an All-Ireland medal. In 2013 he was chosen at left wing-back on a special "Stars of the 1980s" team. He was also given the title of Ulster Hurler of the Century.



Aisling Reilly - Current and 2 time World GAA Handball Champion. A member of St Pauls GAC in west Belfast. She is an Irish speaker and a great mentor for other young women to become involved in sport.



Trevor Hogan - is an Irish former professional rugby union player. Hogan made his first start for Munster in 2003, where he won his first Irish cap in 2005 against Japan during the Lions Tour. He went on to win 23 caps, including 7 Heineken cup caps, scoring 2 tries in the process. Trevor attempted to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza with the Freedom Flotilla in June 2011 along with other pro-Palestinian activists.



Lynne Cantwell (1981) - is an Irish rugby union player. 2014 Women's Rugby World Cup. She is Ireland's most capped female player. She played at the 2013 Rugby World Cup Sevens. Cantwell has a Sports and Exercise Science degree from the University of Limerick and a Masters in Physiotherapy from Southampton University.



Michael Conroy - is a Scottish former professional footballer who played as a midfielder. He played in the Scottish Premier Division with Celtic (winning three league championships and a Scottish Cup) and Hibernian, before playing for several clubs in the Football League. He finished his career in Ireland with Cork City. Conroy lives in Cork City.



Paul (Dudey) Mc Closkey - from Dungiven, Co Derry is an Irish former professional boxer who fought in the light welterweight division. He is a former Irish Senior Amateur Champion, former British light welterweight champion and former European light welterweight champion. He also played both Gaelic football and hurling and was part of the Dungiven side that won the Derry Senior Football Championship and Ulster Senior Club Football Championship in 1997.

Artists



Robert Ballagh - Irish Artist, Painter and Designer. Famous throughout the World, and well known as Champion of many Social Justice issues. Robert has been central to working with the families of those executed by the British in 1916 Rising in Dublin in organising Centenary activities for 2016.



Danny Devenney / Marty Lyons - Belfast famous Wall Mural artists. Their work has been enjoyed by tourists from all over the world as they flock to Belfast to see their work on the gable walls of Belfast. Their work has been profiling many social justice issues in Ireland and from around the world. Works include famous Bobby Sands mural on Falls Road and the more recent Arnaldo Otegi mural.

Irish Musicians



Frances Black - is a famous Irish singer. A pure vocal tone and an energetic stage presence has made Frances one of Ireland's most popular singers. She came to prominence in the 1980s when she began to play with her family's band, The Black Family, performing a mix of traditional and contemporary Irish music.



Damien Dempsey - is a famous Irish Musician, born and raised in Donaghmede, a Northside suburb of Dublin. His musical career began with a love of artists such as Christy Moore, Luke Kelly, Shane MacGowan, Bob Marley and Elvis Presley. A myriad of artists have covered Damien Dempsey's work, including Sinead O'Connor, The Proclaimers and The Wonder Stuff's Miles Hunt.



Bréag - Popular Irish Reggae Ska band are from Belfast. They initially formed to raise money for local Irish medium schools, they have become one of the most refined and original acts of their kind. They are now performing together for 21 years and have recently been the subject of BBC and RTE documentaries.



Gráinne Holland - is an Irish folk singer, television and radio presenter and actor from West Belfast. She comes from an Irish Speaking family. She is an up and coming Artist who sings mostly in her native language. Gráinne released her debut album, *Teanga na nGael* in August 2011. The album is a collection of traditional songs in Irish and Scottish Gaelic. She has recently released her second album, *Gaelré*.



Derek Warfield - is a singer, songwriter, mandolin player and a founding member of the Wolfe Tones, performing with the band for over 37 years. He has written and recorded over 60 songs and ballads. *The Foggy Dew* was the first of 16 albums recorded by the Wolfe Tones (1964) while the popular *Sing Out For Ireland* (1987) was the last studio album that all four members were present on. Derek now tours with his new band, Derek Warfield and The Young Wolfe Tones.



Barry Kerr - Originally from Co. Armagh Kerr is one of Ireland's most accomplished traditional musicians. He is multi-instrumentalist, a songwriter and is fastly becoming a well very known painter. Recording his first album at the age of seventeen, he has gone on to tour the world as a solo artist and at home has shared the stage with all the famous Irish artists.



Eoghan Quigg - Former X Factor Star in 2008 as a young teenager. He has toured with the once famous Irish Boyband, Boyzone. He is from Dungiven in South Derry and has been performing to audiences all around Ireland. He is also a keen sportsman and has recently switched from performing on the microphone to playing soccer.

Writers Journalists and academics



Tim Pat Coogan - is an Irish historical writer, broadcaster and newspaper columnist. He served as editor of *The Irish Press* newspaper from 1968-87. He has been best-known for such books as *The IRA*, *Ireland Since the Rising*, *On the Blanket*, and biographies of Michael Collins and Éamon de Valera. He is recognized as a leading author on modern Irish history.



Dr Laurence Mc Keown - is an author, playwright, screenwriter and former IRA Republican Prisoner who spent 70 days on Hunger strike in 1981. He and Brian Campbell wrote a film about the Hungerstrikes "H3". Laurence after his release spent many years working as a Development Officer with Coiste na nIarchimí, an Umbrella organisation for former IRA prisoners.



Tom Mc Gurk - is an Irish poet, journalist, radio presenter and sportscaster from Brockagh, County Tyrone. He is a columnist with *The Sunday Business Post*. He has also guest presented *Tonight with Vincent Browne*. Among his job as presenter includes presenting RTÉ Sport's coverage of the Six Nations Rugby.



Jude Collins - is a former lecturer at the University of Ulster. He is now a writer and broadcaster, and blogs at www.judecollins.net. Jude is a regular commentator on Irish Television and Radio on current political issues and is highly respected for his stance on Social Justice issues.



Dr. Féilim Ó hAdhmail - is a lecturer in the School of Applied Social Studies, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland. He is Programme Director for the Masters in Voluntary and Community Sector Management and teaches social policy across a number of degree programmes. He is a former Republican Prisoner who was released under the Good Friday Agreement (1998).

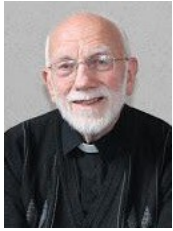
Highly respected religious leaders



Reverend Harold Good - is the President of the Methodist Church in Ireland, he was one of two independent witnesses, the other being Father Alec Reid, who oversaw the decommissioning of arms, a vital part of the peace process in the north of Ireland.



Rev Bill Shaw - Has spent the past few decades as a Protestant Presbyterian minister in North Belfast. He is highly respected by all community leaders in Belfast as a man who works at grassroots level in disadvantaged North Belfast promoting Peace and Reconciliation. He is Director of 174 Trust in North Belfast.



Fr Gerry Reynolds - A Redemptorist priest based in Clonard in West Belfast. He was a very close friend of the late Fr Alec Reid who has played a central role in search of Peace and Justice in Ireland and indeed in the Basque Country. Gerry is highly respected throughout Ireland for his role in the Irish Peace Process and for promoting the importance of dialogue.



Fr Des Wilson - has been living and working in West Belfast since 1966. In 1975 he went to Ballymurphy, one of the most impoverished and demonized areas of the city. He has inspired and supported many people to develop their own responses to the many social, economic and political crises confronting the community.

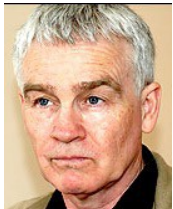
Trade Unions & Other well known Irish Citizens



Patricia Mc Keown - is Regional Secretary of UNISON the Public Service Union and one of the most senior trade unionists in Ireland. Patricia has also served as a member of the Economic Development Forum and several social partnership forums. Patricia has pioneered a range of partnership initiatives with employers in both the public and private sector.



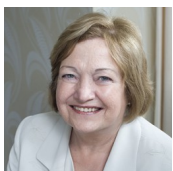
John Douglas - General Secretary of Mandate and Irish President of ICTU. This trade union was formed in 1994 with the amalgamation of IDATU and INUVGATA trade unions. Mandate has been described as an imaginative and campaigning Trade Union. John Douglas has been a strong advocate particularly for low-paid workers.



Tommy McKearney - Northern Regional Organiser for the Independent Workers Union (IWU). The Independent Workers Union of Ireland founded in 2003 is a trade union in Ireland. Tommy was a former Political Prisoner and Hunger Striker 1980.



James Connolly Heron - James Connolly's great-grandson. He has been playing a fundamental role in the 'Reclaim the Vision of 1916' Campaign. Reclaim the Vision of 1916 is a group of artists, academics, trade unionists, community activists, journalists and other interested citizens.



Mairead Maguire - cofounded the Women for Peace, which later became the Community for Peace People, an organisation dedicated to encouraging a peaceful resolution of the Troubles in Ireland, she was awarded the Peace Nobel, as well as the Norwegian People's Peace Prize, Carl von Ossietzky Medal and the Pacem in Terris award.



Tony Doherty - is a founding member of Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign.