**NUI Galway President’s Remarks**

**at 4th International Disability Summer School**

A Uachtarán, Mrs Higgins, Distinguished Visitors, Colleagues, Ladies & Gentlemen:

I am delighted to welcome you all to the NUI Galway campus this afternoon.

I am especially pleased to welcome President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins and Mrs Sabina Higgins on this … their second official visit to the University.

I would like to share with visitors here today our great sense of pride in welcoming President Higgins back to this campus.

As the 9th President of Ireland President Higgins is the first NUI Galway graduate to hold the office of First Citizen.

Exactly 50 years ago - in 1962 - Michael D. Higgins made a life-defining choice, when he enrolled as a mature student at this University.

Since then he has been inextricably linked with NUI Galway:

* Active in student life and serving as President of the Student Council;
* Going on to become a highly regarded lecturer in Sociology & Politics for many years
* and serving as Adjunct Professor at the University's Irish Centre for Human Rights.

On a personal note, I have known and respected Michael D. since I first came to this University as a student.

He has always demonstrated a commitment to education in the very broadest sense - as a mature student, student representative, academic, author and holder of public office.

These roles all highlight his deeply-held belief in the importance of education and ideas.

I am very happy that the President is with us today to address the 4th International Disability Summer School.

In President Higgins’ own words, this is a campus which is “a leader in civic engagement”.

Our philosophy of ‘scholarship in action’ encourages academics and students to use their knowledge to address challenges faced by society and to contribute solutions to these big questions.

We take great pride in this “active scholarship” across all Colleges of the University. We encourage and incentivise service learning and volunteerism.

I have been impressed by the way in which this has been embraced by the student and academic community over the past 10 years or so. It is now firmly established within the culture of our institution.

 I feel that in some sense this is a testament to the legacy that President Higgins and others university leaders of his generation have left on our campus.

One important result of the adoption of the UN treaty is that there has been an explosion of interest in this area of law around the world.

New centres on disability law and policy are now to be found in places like South Africa, Switzerland, the US and China. (I believe we have a representative of the Renmin University Centre on Disability Law & Policy in Beijing with us – you are most welcome indeed.)

Our Centre for Disability Law & Policy was formally established in 2008.

Its members have been active for many years at European level and were influential in the drafting of the UN treaty.

As a research centre, it has developed under the tremendous leadership and vision of Professor Gerard Quinn.

To give you a measure of its activity, the CDLP:

* directs a major European network of 14 PhDs working on the UN treaty.
* has published a major study with the UN on the right to community living.
* staff have published five (5) books since 2008.
* secured significant UN research funding and has, six (6) EU bids pending!
* last year it established one of the first LL.Ms in International & Comparative Disability Law. This attracted support from the SOROS-OSI foundation to enable African students take the programme and demonstrates a high level of esteem from major international funders. Dr Shivaun Quinlivan is director of that Masters Programme and I would like to thank her for sterling work.

Our Centre works with other Law Schools in Latin America and Africa also funded by SOROS. This transfer of knowledge and skills is helping Ireland to continue its outstanding record in development assistance.

The Centre for Disability Law and Policy is part of an alliance on our campus known as the Lifecourse Institute. This Institute combines disciplines such as economics, social policy and law and focuses on key challenges across the lifecourse affecting children, families, older people and people with disabilities.

This is the way to proceed. The EU’s Horizon 2020 Strategy focuses on grand social challenges not silos or cohorts. So in a sense the Lifecourse Institute acts as a multiplier for the kind of work the Centre for Disability Law & Policy is doing.

Again, I would like to thank Atlantic Philanthropies for its active and tangible support in making this a reality.

This is the 4th International Disability Summer School organised by the Centre for Disability Law & Policy.

The first two focused on European disability law and policy and were funded by the European Commission.

Last year’s and this year’s are sponsored by Atlantic Philanthropies – and I acknowledge Brian Kearney-Grieve of Atlantic with us today.

The Summer School is also funded by the SOROS-Open Society Institute which sponsors eight (8) full scholarships for advocates from all over Africa.

It is supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat in London which has nominated participants from Trinidad and Pakistan. The many connections between our Centre and the Commonwealth Secretariat is a symbol of the broader process of re-engagement across our islands and gives hope to others that understanding and reconciliation is possible and does bear tangible fruit.

I am told this is one of the largest – if not the largest Summer Schools of its type in the world.

This year there are over 29 nationalities from China to Zambia. This is as it should be …. since the challenges in implementing the world’s new disability treaty are truly global.

The Summer School is co-directed by:

- Professor Michael Stein of Harvard Law School

- Professor Gerard Quinn of NUI Galway.

I know of the deep links between Harvard and our Centre. I am delighted to acknowledge this wonderful, continuing collaboration.

The Faculty for the Summer School is truly global also. It involves people who were active in drafting the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, as well as leading thought-leaders from around the world.

I would like in particular to acknowledge Professor Theresa Degener (d-egg-ener) from Germany who sits on the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Professor Degener one of the main drafters of the treaty and now helps to oversee the international process of monitoring its implementation.

I understand that the main purpose of the Summer School is to give you … the delegates … the tools to implement the treaty no matter where you live. This is a wonderful example of ‘scholarship in action.’

Before I conclude I would like to

* thank all the contributors and speakers
* acknowledge the work of conference organizers - Professor Quinn and his team
* To the delegates here today, I hope that you have a fruitful and productive Summer School and I look forward to learning more about the outcomes of your deliberations.

And finally I would like to thank President and Mrs Higgins for being with us today.

I now call on Uachtarán na hÉireann – President of Ireland, Michael D. Higgins to address you.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

-ENDS-