

Sally O'Neill and Her Contribution to Trócaire and Central America



Sally O'Neill with the Trócaire team from Central America 2015

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The news that Sally would be retiring from Trócaire this April took us all by surprise. Some of us suspected that this day was drawing close but we never thought it would come so soon. Perhaps we felt this because in reality we did not want this day to come, least of all during this moment of crisis in Central America and with the need to search for new paradigms in the region. We did not want this moment to come because people like Sally, with her talent, skills, commitment and experience, have much to offer during moments such as these. Sally consistently inspires us to sustain our authentic and meaningful commitment to ending poverty and securing justice. This, without a doubt, must continue to be at the centre of Trócaire's mission and its reason for being.

The greatest tribute we can pay to Sally for her many years of work and service in Central America and Trócaire is, without a doubt, by following her example. This means continuing to work with passion, as she has done, towards the construction of a more just and inclusive Central America. This also means working to end poverty and inequality, helping shape a world where the rights of all are respected, especially the poorest, most vulnerable and excluded. Among the numerous lessons and examples that Sally has left us I wish to highlight two.

Firstly, Sally throughout all her years of work and service in Central America knew how to listen to the demands of the poor and to believe in them. She took on their suffering, their needs, their struggles and their hopes as her own. She transformed her work with Trócaire into vocation, giving herself fully to the service of the world's poorest.



Sally O'Neill interviewing beneficiaries in Haiti

One of Sally's greatest concerns throughout these years, I would almost call it an obsession, has been the insistence that the greatest amount possible of Trócaire's funds be used to directly help the poorest, most excluded and most vulnerable people in our countries. Her deep and passionate belief in a more just Central America where poverty and inequality are no longer defining characteristics is why Sally has been such a powerful agent for change on a global scale. In these times of change, when our work tends to focus on 'efficiency and effectiveness', Sally's life and her example offer an invitation to us all to continue to put the struggles of the world's poorest at the centre of our lives and for us to believe passionately in our vocation of service for people who have inherited the most significant burden's that humanity faces today.

Secondly, Sally always dreamed big and developed ambitious plans for her work and Trócaire in Central America. Meanwhile, she always showed her best, drew on all the resources and means at her disposal and through sheer determination made those dreams a reality. Another central concern, or perhaps another obsession, was her insistence that all of us at Trócaire dream big. Sally taught us that we shouldn't be content with just doing our job well and 'doing good', but that we should

make the greatest possible impact to improve the lives of the poor and to change the countries we live in. For Sally, ensuring that our work has the greatest impact possible has not depended exclusively or principally on the quantity of available funding. Instead, this has depended on our conviction, commitment and efforts to work in close cooperation with the poor so that they are the agents of their own change who can demand their rights. This is, without a doubt, another aspect of Sally's tremendous legacy, one which we must continue to pursue even in her absence.



Sally O'Neill and President Higgins during 2013 visit to El Salvador

These abilities to think and dream big and turn dreams into reality are what allowed Sally and Trócaire to make an important contribution to improving the lives of the poorest of the poor and to the struggle for peace and democracy in the region. Of all her contributions over the years I would like to highlight two in particular. First is the contribution of Sally and Trócaire towards the struggles to end the armed conflicts in Central America and to build peace and democracy in the region. Second is the contribution that Sally and Trócaire have made to ensuring that Central America has become an important global actor in terms of social, political, economic and environmental issues.



Sally O'Neill and President Higgins during 2013 visit to El Salvador



Sally O'Neill and President Higgins during 2013 visit to El Salvador



Sally O'Neill, 1973 Guatemala

Regarding the first point, no one in Central America could doubt the crucial role played by the international community, both citizens and governments, in ending the armed conflicts in Central America and in the construction of peace agreements and understandings that have strengthened democracy and the rule of law in our countries. Those of us who know Sally and are familiar with her work know that she and Trócaire played an important and determining role in urging the Irish people and government, as well as other European governments, to assume an active role in the negotiations to end the conflicts in the region and pave the way for a new era of peace.

Regarding the second point, Sally and Trócaire have made, and continue to make, significant efforts so that Central American countries actively participate in diverse international spaces for dialogue and negotiation. The countries of Central America have made important contributions in terms of knowledge and experience relating to addressing some of the most significant problems facing humanity today. Furthermore, Sally and Trócaire have promoted international solidarity with the region so that human rights will continue to be respected, democratisation processes continue to advance, and violence decreases, with the broader goal of reducing poverty and inequality.

I will finish by saying that without Sally, Trócaire will not be the same, at least in Central America. That, however, does not mean that the contribution of Trócaire to a better future for Central America and a more just world will no longer be relevant. The future of Trócaire and its mission to ensure that the poorest and most excluded enjoy a dignified existence will depend on those of us who continue to work for Trócaire. It will depend on our conviction, commitment, effort and ability to put forward strong proposals for change as we carry out our work and Trócaire's mission. It will depend on our ability to resist the luxury of comfort, conformity and the seduction of false promises, which rather than creating a better world, only serve to maintain and deepen the current levels of injustice, poverty and inequality. I have no doubt that if we are determined we can continue to contribute to effecting positive change for Central America and the world. I also have no doubt that although Sally will no longer be working for Trócaire, she will always remain a source of inspiration and support in carrying out our mission.

José Adán Cuadra, Lead Programme Officer, El Salvador



Sally O'Neill, National Police Archives, Guatemala 2014



Sally O'Neill, House of Memory, Guatemala 2014

Private Sector Involvement in Risk Management

Exchange on Corporate Strategies to Address Climate Change: With the support of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), a day-long session was held to discuss corporate strategies to address climate change with the national bodies for corporate social responsibility in Nicaragua and Honduras, UNIRSE and FUNDAHRSE. Experiences with the Business Area Climate Impacts Assessment Tool (BACLIAT) were also shared to allow companies to learn about climate change risks and opportunities for their mitigation.



Dialogue on inclusion of the Private Sector: Effective coordination has been achieved between COPECO, SDC, the Coordination Centre for the Prevention of Natural Disasters in Central America (CEPRENAC) and USAID/ OFDA to define joint strategies for risk management within the private sector. These efforts culminated in a space for "Dialogue towards the Inclusion of the Private Sector in Disaster Risk Reduction".

This dialogue aims to strengthen links between the private sector, SINAGER, and COPECO. A starting point involved sharing the Law governing the National System for Risk Management and the relevant instruments for its implementation. In addition, information was presented to situate the private sector in the context of vulnerability in the Sula Valley, and to raise awareness among the sector of its role in risk prevention and community outreach. This activity was coordinated with the World Bank funded Disaster Risk Management Programme, implemented by COPECO. With this dialogue, the traditional conceptions of risk management were questioned in order to conceive disaster risk reduction as going beyond interventions driven solely by the public sector, communities and aid agencies.

The DIPECHO project in Guatemala has been advancing in the training and coordination of local emergency response teams (COLREDs) in San Marcos, a region that is particularly vulnerable to earthquakes and landslides. The project team has held several workshops in the communities aimed at preparing local residents who have volunteered to form part of the COLREDs to assess damages and needs during emergency situations and to coordinate with regional and local rescue teams. As well as community mapping of risks and evacuations, these workshops also include drills and simulations of emergency situations so that the members of the COLREDs know exactly who is in most danger in their communities and how they need to respond in the event of an emergency.

At national level the DIPECHO team has been working closely with CONRED (National Coordinator for Disaster Reduction) to prepare plans for disaster preparedness and response at municipal level in the Department of San Marcos. The aim is to strengthen communication and coordination between those responsible for responding to emergencies at national, municipal and local level to ensure a rapid and efficient response in the event of an emergency.



The projects are co-financed by the European Commission's Department of Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection which funds relief operations for victims of natural disasters and conflicts outside the European Union. Aid is provided impartially, directly to people in need, without discrimination of their race, ethnic group, religion, gender, age, nationality or political affiliation.

Trócaire's José Adán Cuadra Recieves Honour for Contribution to Civil Society

On November 6, 2014, El Salvador's Lead Programme Officer, José Adán Cuadra was awarded by the partner organization Provida with a plaque to acknowledge Trócaire's historic contributions to strengthening civil society in El Salvador. Jose Adán was also given a medal to acknowledge his specific role in supporting Salvadoran civil society over the years.



José Adán Cuadra receiving honour from Provida

Promoting Fair Trade

Participants in the Big Lottery Funded Project 'Strengthening the Resilience of Poor Rural Families in El Salvador' recently took part in a fair to celebrate El Salvador's National Trade Day, selling fruits, vegetables and other fair trade products. This project seeks to respond to the immediate needs of small farmers to become self-sufficient in their food production and address long-term issues of food security and access to safe drinking water through advocacy at local and national level.



Fair Trade Market, El Salvador

Esther Betzabé Rosales Macá, or Betzy for short, is a 25 year old volunteer with with Trócaire's partner organization PAMI (Care, Mobilisation and Advocacy programme for Children and Adolescents) in Sololá, Guatemala. Betzy had a difficult childhood; her father died when she was little more than a year old and her mother was forced to work all day, every day, to look after Betzy and her three older sisters. When she was eight years old her nephew was born with a serious illness and the family used all their savings to treat his condition. Betzy's family had no money left to pay the school fees or the costs of uniforms and materials. As a result, Betzy was forced to drop out of school and help her family by working.

In 2006 Betzy began participating with PAMI in formulating public policies in her local village Panajachel. With the help of PAMI she managed to win a scholarship so that she could return to school and finally, in 2007, having missed five full years, she enrolled once again in secondary school. She continued volunteering with PAMI to promote children's and women's rights in the local communities of Sololá. At the age of 22 she graduated from a degree in humanities with a specialization in tourism, and she hopes to continue on to study Mayan politics and culture at postgraduate level.

Throughout this time Betzy has been active in volunteering with PAMI to promote the rights of women, children and young people in Guatemala: "Promoting the participation of women and children has been just one of many challenges I have faced as a volunteer, particularly raising awareness about their rights and the importance of participating in decision-making processes, but it is also one of my greatest achievements. I am committed to transforming the reality for the women, children and young people in my community."

PAMI works with Trócaire in supporting children, adolescents and young people to become active citizens who have the knowledge, skills and confidence to participate in public life and decision-making processes.



Participants in youth forum organised by PAMI

Trócaire Partners Visit Ireland Ahead of Universal Periodic Review

Four of Trócaire's Honduran partners travelled to Ireland to carry out advocacy with the Irish Government in relation to the upcoming UN Universal Periodic Review (UPR) of Honduras in Geneva in May 2015. The UPR is a unique opportunity within the UN system where each state's human rights record is scrutinized every four years. Both state and civil society groups are given the chance to report directly to the Human Rights Committee.



Trócaire partners during march in solidarity with Honduran Human Rights Defenders

Juana Esquivel (Fundación San Alonso Rodriguez), Bertha Oliva (Committee of Relatives of Detained and Disappeared People in Honduras), Karen Valladares (National Forum for Migration in Honduras) and Norma Chavez (Alternatives and Opportunities) spent the week of the 23rd of March in Ireland where they had a packed agenda which included meetings with the Department of Foreign Affairs and members of the Parliamentary Committee for Foreign Affairs and public events organised by Trócaire, Frontline Defenders and Peace Brigades International.

The aim of the visit was to influence the recommendations the Irish government will make to the Honduran State on the fulfillment and protection of human rights in Honduras during the UPR and to raise awareness among the Irish population of the human rights situation in Central America's most violent country. Trócaire and partners prepared recommendations for the Irish Government on key human rights issues such as 1) the role of the state in ensuring the enjoyment of human rights for all, 2) the precarious situation of human rights defenders, and 3) the alarming levels of impunity where the vast majority of crimes are never solved.

Trócaire and Electric Aid have successfully installed solar panels for 95 families in the communities of La Bahiona, Las Chinas and Picota in the municipality of El Viejo, Chinandega, Nicaragua. The majority of these communities are far removed from major urban settings and do not benefit from any government services such as road improvements, access to drinking water or electricity. This project has provided these communities with an affordable energy source that will ultimately support local economic activities and strengthen the organizational initiatives of women's groups.

Danelia Altamirano Nuñez is 60 years old and a member of a group of organized women. She lives in the community of Las Chinas and has never had electricity. That was until the Electric Aid provided her home with a solar panel. Danelia and the other women of the community commented that they would have to pay approximately 50 cents each time they wanted to charge their phones, in addition to spending valuable time walking to the nearest village. Sometimes, the people charging their phones would steal their batteries and replace them with old ones or even steal their memory cards.

"The solar panels help protect us," Danelia says. "We're all connected by phone now in the case of an emergency. We're not using candles and kerosene anymore, which is damaging to our health. And we don't have to walk three or four hours to pay to charge our cell phones."

"The extra time lets us do so many things," Danelia says. "We can clean and get things ready in the morning when it's dark. I used to have to cook with a flashlight under my neck, but now I can actually see what I'm doing. It makes a significant difference. The panels are such a blessing." She adds: "If a child in the community gets sick at night, we have light to be able to take care of them properly. And the kids have more time to do their homework. They can't use the excuse anymore that it's too dark to do their work. Now they have light!"



Participants from Electric Aid project, Nicaragua

Oscar Romero to be Canonised in May 2015

By Sally O'Neill

Almost thirty-five years after he was gunned down by a right-wing death squad as he celebrated Mass, Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero moved a step closer to possible sainthood when Pope Francis declared on February 3rd, 2015 that “he was a martyr killed out of hatred for his Catholic faith”. This decree by the first Latin American Pope opens the door for Archbishop Romero to be beatified in May this year.



The news has been greeted with immense joy across Latin America, where many of us already view Archbishop Romero as a saint who gave up his life for justice and human rights during the bitter civil war in El Salvador.

Archbishop Romero was a close friend of Trócaire and was chairman of the board of two partner organisations in San Salvador. I had the privilege of meeting him four times in 1979 and 1980 when I visited El Salvador with delegations from the Dail, RTE and the Irish Bishops Conference. Six weeks before he was killed I met him for lunch with Bishop Casey from Galway and Bishop Murphy from Cork. Two days after his murder, Trócaire received a letter from him acknowledging our grant for the Human Rights Commission that he had set up for the victims of violence.

In 1979, Trócaire began supporting the El Salvador Human Rights Commission, established by Archbishop Oscar Romero and others in response to the killing of 8,000 people. The following year, on 28 March 1980, Romero was assassinated. Trócaire Chairman Bishop Eamonn Casey attended the funeral and narrowly escaped death when the army opened fire on

mourners. Archbishop Romero's murder triggered a bloody civil war that began one of the longest and most dangerous emergency relief programmes in Trócaire's history. Before the Salvadoran Peace Accords were signed in 1992 more than 180 staff members from Trócaire's partners had died or been murdered.

Archbishop Romero is a role model for many Church and non church activists who believe in justice and he inspired many of us to work for social and political change. At long last we can celebrate that his life and death will be recognized. His leadership and support for the poor and his willingness to speak out against violent repression is part of his lasting legacy.



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