

Recd From: Maire M.  
Breakneck

## Oral Hearing/North Mayo

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## Icon

"We are called to assist Earth to heal her wounds and in the process heal our own" **Wangari Maathai** accepting the Nobel Prize for Peace in Oslo, December 11, 2004

(Scientists are only discovering now what Naturalists and Indigenous peoples have known for centuries, even millennia. There are other ways of knowing, intuitive, ecological, as well as scientific)

The largest possible context is required when contemplating the merits or otherwise of a project such as the one proposed at Ballinaboy. I say this because in the absence of a proper context, this Oral Hearing will have failed in its real purpose before it even begins. It will not fulfil its role or its responsibility to this place, this community, our government, and life and place everywhere on this planet. If the taskforce has not caught up with the new understandings concerning the Universe, and Earth within the context of the Universe, understandings available to us for some decades now from the observational sciences, then its members are neither qualified nor competent to undertake this critical task, and make an ethically based judgement on the merits or otherwise of the project in question during these days. Good people who have a distorted view of what's good are behind the continuing abuse of nature. The worldview held by the members of this taskforce, will impact on the outcome of this Oral Hearing. What if the worldview of the taskforce is both dysfunctional and destructive? Wasn't it **Albert Einstein** who said that we cannot fashion durable solutions to today's problems based on the kind of mindsets that gave rise to those problems in the first place? I am deeply concerned about the values underpinning the decision regarding the Corrib gas project made by those who have a worldview that is no longer valid for the world we live in today.

In some indigenous traditions no formal activity is ever validated without first situating it in relation to the 6 directions of the Universe. Let acknowledge where we are: Let us acknowledge this beautiful, fragile, precious planet. And now let us situate this Oral Hearing and its true purpose within the context of the Universe.

Here's what the sacred scriptures of the Judeo-Christian tradition written in the last few thousand years asks us to do:

"Take off your shoes, for the ground on which you walk is holy."

On seeing Earth from space, the astronauts came home stunned with the immensity and beauty of what they had experienced. Especially overwhelming was their view of planet Earth from the regions of the moon, almost 200,000 miles distant.

"My view of our planet was a glimpse of divinity."

"Earth was small, light blue, and so touchingly alone, our home that must be defended like a holy relic."

"It isn't important in which sea or lake you observe a slick of pollution, or in the forests of which country a fire breaks out, or on which continent a hurricane arises. You are standing guard over the whole of our Earth."

"From space I saw Earth - indescribably beautiful with the scars of national boundaries gone."

"When you look out the other way toward the stars you realise it's an awful long way to the next watering hole."

"Nature has been limitlessly kind to us, having helped humankind appear, stand up, and grow stronger. She has generously given us everything she has amassed over billions of years of development. We have grown strong and powerful, yet how have we answered this goodness?"

"Mankind needs height primarily to better know our long suffering Earth, to see what cannot be seen close up. Not just to love her beauty, but also to ensure that we do not bring even the slightest harm to the natural world."

"And then it struck me that we are all children of our Earth. It does not matter what country you look at. We are all Earth's children, and we should treat her as our Mother."

"How dangerous it is to threaten even the smallest part of this gossamer covering, this conserver of life."

"Before I flew I was already aware of how small and vulnerable our planet is; but only when I saw it from space, in all its ineffable beauty and fragility, did I realise that humankind's most urgent task is to cherish and preserve it for future generations"

"And when you come back there's a difference in that world now. There's a difference in that relationship between you and that planet and you and all those other forms of life on that planet, because you've had that kind of experience. It's a difference and it's so precious."

This sensitive experience of the planet leads us further back to appreciation of the 9ByS required for the Universe to bring Earth into existence, and then another 4.6BYs for Earth to shape itself in such splendour. Today, we see Earth at a highly developed phase in its continuing emergence.

Earth is sacred. No one place or no one being of this garden planet is holier than another. Since the natural world is the primary manifestation of the Divine we are standing in the Cathedral of the Divine. This place/planet is awesome, magnificent, majestic, beautiful and revelatory. This place/planet is fragile, vulnerable, precious.

Our ancestors were aware of this reality. They walked barefooted on many pilgrimages throughout the world so that they might never forget the origin of their being, the source of their nourishment and support, the fountain of their delight. They recognised and acknowledged Earth as the primary manifestation of the Divine.

"To be rooted is perhaps the most important but least understood need of the human soul", says Simon Weil. Those who stay in a place long enough, learn that it doesn't really belong to them; rather they belong to it. Those who are conscious of belonging to a place always defend and maintain their roots, their place of origin. They are aware that they are profoundly dependent on the existence of their place in its integrity for every phase of their lives: imaginative, aesthetic, emotional and spiritual. They know that the inner life of the human depends immediately on the outer world of nature. For them, the destruction of place is unthinkable. The soul-loss is unbearable, a direct consequence of loss of wilderness. Place, experienced as place, has the greatest potential for healing. Living in a de-souled place quickly breathes

unease, disease and soul-loss. Love of place in its integrity is a profound duty and privilege for all who profess to be human.

Placed people know the story of their place. They have intimate knowledge of their place, the kind of knowledge that comes from working in it in all kinds of weathers, making a living from it, suffering from its catastrophies, loving its mornings and evenings, valuing it for the profound investment of labour and feeling that they, their parents and grandparents, and all their ancestors have put into it. Placed people know that they must obey the deeper laws of the place, laws that cannot be overridden by any human zoning. They know how to participate in the wildness of the world around them. "Placed people know who they are because they know where they are", Wendell Berry tells us. This is something that Shell or the Government did not know about the people of North Mayo. For Shell and the government the Promised Land is always over the next ridge. But, for placed people, the Promised Land is always under their feet. It follows then surely that a community of placed people cannot be meek and gentle and passive with displaced persons who decide to invade, colonise, and then proceed to desecrate their place, for the sake of financial profit, and for the purpose of supporting an extractive economy. This project is not being proposed for the survival of the people here or anywhere else for that matter. This project is about a relatively few people amassing wealth. It is about the protection of the financial investment world whose economic financial principles no longer work. "We are facing an economic crisis of unprecedented magnitude", Colin Campbell tells us, a leading expert on crude oil geology and on oil depletion. Our economy depends on growth, and growth depends on abundant cheap energy that is no longer there. And of course we all know that an extractive economy is a terminal economy, not to mention its devastating effects on the integral functioning of the planet. The human world as now functioning can only exist for a brief period. The place we call "North Mayo" together with its life community are being sacrificed to the good of progress. The myth of progress has given countries the go-ahead to plunder the natural world for what we so ignorantly call "resources". James Lovelock writes "We are so obsessed with the idea of progress and with the betterment of humanity that .....we are now taking so much that Earth is no longer able to sustain the familiar and comfortable world we have taken for granted. Now Earth is changing, according to its own internal rules, to a state where we are no longer welcome. Humanity wholly unprepared ... faces its greatest trial." "Progress" to be valid, must include the entire Earth in all its components' aspects." To designate human ravaging of the planet as "progress" is an unbearable distortion. If we allow the violation, degradation and destruction of this place to happen, then we might as well allow the people's graveyards, or, cathedrals to be used as sites for the proposed refinery, because no holier temple than this outdoor cathedral has ever been built or consecrated by the human heart. All or nothing is sacred. Regarding this project, our Taoiseach said some weeks ago: "We must move on". But we would like you to know that "Even if you yourself move on in the next few weeks, we will not be following you! We will be staying on here. Living in this place, we know its uniqueness, its fragility and its beauty, and we are working to ensure its long-term health and vitality for future generations."

The main difference between the past and today is that our problems are truly global, James Lovelock tells us. He has pointed out that we are currently trapped in a vicious circle of positive feedback. What happens in one place very soon affects what happens in others. This is what makes global warming so serious and so urgent. We are dangerously ignorant of our own ignorance, and rarely try to see things as a whole. How little we know about the world that is vanishing.

**Earth is a onetime endowment.** We are living on a planet ever coming into being through an irreversible sequence of transformations. We, at this point in time,

are living in the age in which Earth brought forth the greatest flowering of life. I am talking about the period when the trees, flowers, birds, and animals as we know them came into being, that is the last 65 million years. We did not even exist until the major developments of this Era were complete. Yet, within the last 300 years, we, the human inhabitants of Earth, have become a disturbing presence, some would say that we have become a demonic presence. For the first time in the 600 MY story of visible life on Earth, a single species has the power deliberately to alter the chemistry of the planet in a deleterious way. With the coming of increased technology and abundant cheap energy, we have been and are now destroying the very foundations for life to continue. We have so upset the chemical balance of the atmosphere, the soil, and the oceans, so exploited Earth in our use of fossil fuels, that we are devastating the fertility of the planet and extinguishing many species of wildlife. While we are capable of altering the chemistry of the planet, the biology, or the geology of the planet, we do not always know how to put it back together again. We have no way of assessing the total magnitude of this devastation, or of repairing it. We refuse to pay attention. Because of the wonderworld promised us in every aspect of our lives, we quicken the pace, and deny the destruction taking place all around us. We fail to locate ourselves in the larger dimensions of what's happening. We are not simply dealing with disturbance of a human nature. We are experiencing a threatening historical situation, because we are causing the life systems of the planet to tear apart. In our efforts to create an unattainable dream world, we ignore the fact that we are bringing this magnificent era to an end. Without Earth's inherent integrity, life as we know it, life in all of its majestic forms will be severely and irreversibly impoverished.

The discovery of a species is exceptional, and becomes a newspaper headline. The rate of extinction is not exceptional, and is not in the newspapers, because it is business as usual. We are progressively pushing more and more species to the edge of extinction, and we know that *those species are the building blocks of the ecosystems that support life*. Extinction is largely driven by habitat change, by the release of pollution into the environment, by global warming and by the exploitation of species directly, as well as by introductions of animals into lands where they're not native, as well as an expanding and more demanding population. "Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa" the human community must one day confess to the charge of exterminating species after species. Every time we change the balance, or, worse, eliminate a species, we risk ecological collapse. Humanity has stolen Earth's stored away energy and with this forbidden fruit has raped and robbed, committing crime after crime against the community of life. We the grassroots are kept in the dark in the public media about these critical matters. We are invited to look at the bright side only of progress. But, the conditions will never exist again for the return of the species we have exterminated. Neither heaven nor Earth can bring them back. We must never forget that we have changed the very conditions of life through our toxification of the planet, either directly or indirectly through our use of fossil fuels. Why are we not told about the rich and rare gifts being lavished on us by the community of life? Gifts like a stable and secure world at all levels? Gifts like clean food, water, air, and clean energy? How can we continue with our present standard of living knowing we will be handing on such an ever-increasing impoverished planet to our children? This world has already been taken from me by the extravagant and reckless use of Fossil Fuels. Give me back a healthy planet and you give me back a healthy body. Give me back Earth's economy and you give me back an enduring human economy.

In April of the year 1912 the Titanic on her maiden voyage across the Atlantic crashed into an iceberg and went down at sea. Long before the crash those in command had abundant evidence that icebergs lay ahead. The course had been set, however, and no one wished to alter its direction. Confidence in the survival capacities of the ship was unbounded. Already there was a multitude of concerns in carrying out the normal routine of a voyage. What happened to the



"unsinkable" ship is a kind of parable for us since only in the most dire situation do we have the psychic energy needed to examine our way of acting on the scale that is now required. The daily concerns of the passengers needed to be set aside for a more urgent concern for the well-being of the ship itself. Microphase concerns needed to give way to a macrophase issue. In the same way, there is an urgent need to recognise that the planet Earth is threatened in its survival by our present industrial economy. Already the well-being and basic functioning of the planet in its air, its water, its soil and its basic life systems have been so disrupted that illustrious scientists like Peter Raven, Norman Myers, E. O. Wilson, and Paul Ehrlich are telling us that we are killing the planet. It is being subjected to irreversible damage in the major patterns of its functioning. We need to keep in mind that it is the natural ecosystems of Earth are what keep the climate and the composition of the atmosphere and the oceans just right for life, and it's been happening like that for nearly a quarter of the age of the Universe.

And now, as a result of our own activities, we are facing ultimacy. For millennia, humankind has exploited Earth without counting the cost. And now, we are slowly beginning to acknowledge that we have created a planet-sized problem for ourselves. We are destitute of any ethical obligations toward Earth and to the community of life in its totality, so that none of the major institutions can stop what is happening. In the western world there seems to be an unwillingness to accept life under the conditions that life is granted us, a feeling that the pains of life and ultimately death are something that should not be, something that must be defeated at all costs. We favour a humanly constructed wonderworld over the natural wonderworld already available to us. We do not seem to realise that the devastation of the natural world is something more than damage to our physical well-being; it is also soul-damage, a degrading of our imagination, our emotional life, even diminishing of our intellectual life because all these aspects of our inner life need to be activated by our experience of the outer world. E. O. Wilson has concluded that in the end it will all come down to a decision of ethics, how we value the natural world in which we have evolved, and now how we regard our status as individuals.

*Earth, a privileged planet within the solar system, is the immediate context of our existence. Establishing this comprehensive context for our thinking is important in any consideration of human affairs, and particularly crucial when considering large projects of the type and scale of the Corrib gas project. New understandings of the planet, including its geological structure and its functioning, must inform our decisions and guide our activities, if we are to respond to the current planetary crisis. To even begin to fulfil our role in the greater scheme of things, we need first of all to recognise that the life community, the community of all living species, including the human, is the greater reality and the greater value. His Holiness the Dalai Lama said on his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, "All beings have a right to well-being and happiness. We have a duty to ensure their well-being." This new understanding requires human responsibilities as participants, rather than as masters, controllers and owners. The primary concern of the human community here in North Mayo, and throughout the world must be the preservation and enhancement of this comprehensive community, even for the sake of its own survival. This means acknowledging the inherent rights and intrinsic value of all other life forms. It means acknowledging that every living being has its own place and its own role to fulfil within the community of life. It means acknowledging that human rights are relative and limited. The human community does not have absolute rights on this island or anywhere on Earth. It is only when we acknowledge this greater reality that we can take our rightful place within the community of life wherever we live, and thus fulfil our human role within the functioning of the planet we live on. It is very clear that neither Shell nor our Government have any depth of understanding of how Earth functions, and therefore are not aware of their obligations to the planet and its inhabitants.*

If planet Earth is fragile, and therefore vulnerable, and if the comprehensive community is the greater reality and the greater value, then we are obliged to ask questions that may have never been asked before when considering the merits of this project. They very simple yet profound questions:

What do we mean by "North Mayo" in the new context?

North Mayo includes the human community, the larger community of life, their homes and habitats, and the place itself.

How do we understand the word "good" within the context of planet Earth?

That is good which preserves and enhances well-being of the total community of life dwelling here, and of the place itself.

Will the development of the Corrib gas project be good for North Mayo?

By which I mean:

Will the Corrib gas project preserve and enhance the well-being of the local human community, the larger local life community, and the well-being of the place itself here in North Mayo now and in the future?

Or

Will the Corrib gas project diminish or negate the well-being of North Mayo in its totality now and in the future?

Life orientation is that simple. It is also that pervasive! It applies in all institutions and all situations. It is the great illusion of our time that seeks to advance human well-being anywhere on Earth, by plundering the planet in its geological and biological structure and functioning. At the present time we are participating in an unparalleled change in the human-Earth situation. Right here, before our very eyes, Shell is plundering and raping this place. It is what Shell does everywhere, seemingly. Shell raids and runs, raids and runs, raids and runs. It's been the story of its life really, hasn't it? If we participate in any way in the development of the project in this place, we are participating in the alteration of the entire mode of functioning of the planet, because we can only act globally, no matter what we do or where we are. We are not living in the real world, if we think that we can act locally. What happens in each and every place matters.

Planet Earth is seamless, whole, integral ... one thing, but at the same time every part is in its own motion. Everything grows from, is rooted in, the local. The local is everywhere, and is everywhere different. In the local every global process intersects with every other. In the local everything touches, everything pushes, everything leans on everything else. The local is where the global hits the rubber. The local is the global at work. Nothing is isolated, every act is consequential, and all change is global. What's going to happen depends on what all the actors are up to: the other seven billion people, the essentially uncountable plants, the infinitely more numerous bacteria, the as yet incalculable interactions we think about as climate, and every now and then ... an asteroid. We will have an effect on the global atmosphere, but we'll have it because we thought about our situation locally. Our local issue has planetary implications, and therefore obligates a context that has the capacity to inform on a decision that potentially has startling implications for this place, the whole planet, and for the planet's total life community. We ignore this reality at our peril. Walking away from this

project at this point, isn't easy for Shell, or for the Government, because walking away from projects like the Corrib gas project has such wild consequences: everything changes with such decisions. Walking away from this project is walking away from the world the gas facilitates and that facilitates the gas. We need a sustainable retreat, as Earth is changing, according to its own rules, to a state where we are no longer welcome.

*Planet Earth is the primary referent as regards everything on Earth. Planet Earth is primary because Earth is a single, integral, functional, social structure put together in such a way that all the components, living and non-living, need each other. The parts are there for the integration of the whole. Therefore, Earth must be the primary concern of every human being, of every human institution, profession, program and activity. All human institutions will be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing relationship between the human and the natural world, with its plants and animals of both the sea and the land. This relationship needs to be extended to all spheres in their structures and their functioning. If we do not get that right, then we cannot expect any significant remedy for the present distress experienced throughout the planet. We still think that we can run a system that took billions of years to work out the system. Our knowledge is very fragmentary. We need more than the little fragment of time that we anoint as history, for the purpose of assessing what is ethical, and therefore what is good for the whole: past, present and future. Prehistory is a distortion of reality. We need to realise there is no stage, that it's all action, and that every actor speaks. We need to hear what each actor has been saying. We need that story that will bring us back to the origin of everything. We need that story that will educate us, a story that will heal, guide and above all discipline us. Because, we too are Earth. We too need to relate to the air, the water, the soil, and sunlight. If our relationship is not preserved in an integral way with these "elements", then that which supports us will go to pieces. It is imperative to take time out! It is time to listen! It is time to reflect! We need a whole new understanding of Earth and how Earth functions before we even consider projects of the type and scale of the one being addressed here during these days. We may know the microphase consequences of our actions, but not the macrophase consequences. It is a government's responsibility to lead its people towards those activities that are creative rather than destructive. It is the supreme obligation of all citizens to sustain and hand on those creative processes whereby they were themselves brought into being. Our deep gratitude to all those who are striving to preserve and enhance the integrity of planet Earth in their local situation for the sake of their children, and of all children of the future?*

***The Great Commandment for our time, the 21st Century, is to restore, protect and defend the integrity of planet Earth in its deep structure and functioning.***

*Earth exists and can survive only in its integral functioning. Earth cannot survive in fragments any more than any organism can survive in fragments. The impact of our present technologies is beyond what Earth can endure. We are the only species to have turned a blind eye to one of Nature's most basic laws "See or perish". We can no longer ignore Nature's laws. Mitigation of the present ruinous situation, the recycling of materials, the diminishment of consumption, the healing of damaged ecosystems; all this will be in vain if we do these things to make the present industrial systems acceptable. All this must be done, but in order to build a new order of things.*

We can only marvel that scientists generally seem never to have reflected on or explained to the human community why the fossil fuels are buried in the depths

of the planet in the first place. The slightest reflection would reveal that Nature has taken great care to store immense quantities of carbon in the fossil fuel deposits deep within Earth and in the great forests so that the chemistry of the atmosphere, the water, and the soil could be worked out with the proper precision. This needed to be properly understood and respected lest anyone intruded into this delicate balance by extracting and using the fossil fuels, or by cutting down and using the great forests of the planet without consideration of what would happen when these forces would no longer be able to fulfil their role in the integral functioning of the planet. Our microphase wisdom has led us to devastation consequences, and yet we press forward with the devastation, even with climate change at our doorsteps. We only see the microphase consequences of our actions, not the macrophase consequences. The natural world is more sensitive than we have realised. Unaware of what we have done or its order of magnitude, we have thought our achievements to be of enormous benefit for the human process, but we now find that by disturbing the biosystems of the planet at the most basic level of their functioning we have endangered all that makes planet Earth a suitable place for the integral development of human life itself.

Therefore, I recommend that this project not be allowed to proceed in any shape or form by us the grassroots, because any decision that allows, condones, supports, promotes human activities which work against Nature, resulting in the degradation and destruction of the integral functioning of Earth anywhere cannot and must not be accepted.

- We will no longer endure the consequences of FF Extraction: wasteheaps, polluted waters, sterile and eroded soils, forests devastated by clear-cutting, toxic chemicals, radioactive waste, the thin ozone layer, extinction of species: all consequences of the extraction of FFs, and the extravagant use of this energy. The consequences are incalculable.
- Earth brought us into being, sustains us in life, and delights us with its wonders. Earth does not belong to us. We belong to it. We must hold on and use our power to refuse to co-operate, so as to be faithful to the greater value: the greater community, our place and our planetary home.
- Earth governs and regulates, not the human. We are not here to control, domesticate, or, exploit the planet or other life forms. Exploitation as our primary relationship with the planet and its community of life must be abandoned.
- To be allied with the powers of Nature is primary for every significant human endeavour on this island.
- We, the grassroots, are obliged to be faithful to the higher and enduring laws of Nature, over and above the dysfunctional and destructive laws of any State.
- If we fail as members of the comprehensive community of life, Earth will take care by making us no longer welcome.
- It is our responsibility to restore, protect, and defend the integrity of planet Earth in its deep structure and integrity where we live. We must learn a way of life independent of gas/petroleum: Renewables, no toxic residues, no extinctions, No negative disturbance of Ecosystems.
- This project will not defend the integrity of the planet.



- Will this project preserve and enhance the good and the beauty of this place, and the community of life who inhabit this place, and therefore the good of the Planet as a whole?
- This project will not replicate or enhance the work of Nature.
- Natural ecosystems of Earth sustain the climate and chemistry of the planet at a comfortable state for life. We give our thanks and our respect..
- This project will not enhance the lives of all those who live downstream from us.

In conclusion:

The effects of human activity on Earth have become so pervasive and invasive that the survival and health of the Earth community now rest on decisions being made, and actions being taken, by humans. If we do not know who we are, we do not know where we are, and therefore cannot agree where we want to be in relation to this project. The primary cause of this failure is ignorance of our origins. We did not arrive on this planet as aliens. Humanity is part of nature, a species that evolved among other species. The more closely we identify ourselves with the rest of life, the more quickly we will be able to discover the sources of human sensibility and acquire the knowledge on which an enduring ethic, a sense of preferred direction, can be built.

Finally!

## **"Dwelling"**

**By William Riley**

Each of us  
Is responsible  
    To those who dwelled here before us  
    And those who will inherit our decisions.  
What we do now  
Will be recorded  
    Not only in the mind of God  
    But in the bowels of the Earth  
    Where trees invent their roots.  
The Earth is alive  
With the ecstasy of those  
Who dwell forever in a place our spirit knows as home.  
Home is the membrane  
That envelops spirit in the face of character  
    For only within limits is the infinite real  
    And only within boundaries is the Earth whole.  
Boundary marks the gateway between here and there

Without which place is only space ungrounded

And one space the same as any other.

In a world without places

There is no responsibility for yesterday and tomorrow.

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