

**Address by An Cheann Comhairle  
Presentation of Awards for Bravery  
25 November 2011**

**As Chairman of Comhairle na Míre Gaile, I would like to take this opportunity on my behalf, and on behalf of the members of the An Comhairle present – Cathaoirleach of the Seanad – Senator Paddy Burke - and Deputy Commissioner of An Garda Síochána – Nacie Rice, to welcome you all to Farmleigh today for our awards ceremony. On occasions such as this we celebrate, we recognise, and we give thanks, to members of our communities who, through their selfless acts of courage have helped other people. In going to the aid of others at great risk to their own safety, our award winners have brought great pride to themselves and their families and great happiness to the people and the families of those they have helped. In turn, society as a whole benefits and it is right that, as a society, we show our gratitude to them.**

**Unlike most other countries Ireland does not have an honours system. However, in June of 1945, the Minister for Justice of the day told the Oireachtas:**

**“The Government consider it desirable that the State should recognise outstanding bravery in saving or endeavouring to save human life, and they propose to arrange for the grant of medals and certificates in suitable cases.”**

**From this promise, the awards made by Comhairle na Míre Gaile were born.**

**Today, we will present those awards, the only awards made by the Irish State to its citizens, to a courageous group of people.**

**We'd all like to think that, in a moment of danger, we'd act in the right way, do the right thing, the brave thing, no matter the personal danger or sacrifice.**

**Luckily, most of us aren't called upon to act bravely, to make brave decisions, to put our lives at risk to help save others. But the people that we honour today were called upon and were prepared to step forward.**

**The American General Omar Bradley once said: "Bravery is the capacity to perform properly even when scared half to death."**

**I don't know if our recipients were scared half to death, but I do know that they performed properly – they did the right thing, the noble thing, made the brave and difficult decisions in the face of real danger – whether it is plunging into a river to save a drowning person, confronting a dangerous and menacing individual or rescuing people from fire.**

Words like hero or brave or courage can sometimes be over-used, and therefore somewhat devalued in today's soundbite-hungry society. But today's ceremony puts real bravery and selfless courage into its proper context.

When I read the citations and acts of bravery, I am struck by the selfless heroism, the strength of character, the depths of courage and that willingness to step forward, despite the risks, to help their fellow man. Whether it is members of our emergency services who daily risk their lives for us or members of the public caught up in extraordinary circumstances and acting with valour, all of these people deserve to be recognised for their actions and are worthy of our deep appreciation.

When considering all the award recipients today, I was reminded of the words of Nelson Mandela on courage. He said: "I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear."

All of you today here today to receive awards have triumphed over and conquered that natural fear that humans feel in the face of danger and acted in the common good. So, it is fitting that we take time to honour each of you present, and indeed those cannot be present or who have passed away. We are honouring you all for your outstanding bravery and humanity and for the fact that when you came across someone in

**distress you stepped forward from the safe position of spectator to give of yourselves.**

**You have done yourselves, your family, your community and your country proud. Congratulations.**