Shannon LNG has been halted – for now. Let’s build on that win

WILLIAM HEDERMAN
Environmental activist

In 2017 Ireland became one of the first countries in the world to ban hydraulic fracturing, or fracking.

This law was a rare and momentous victory for the environmental movement. Among the many groups that showed solidarity with the Irish anti-fracking movement on the way to achieving this historic ban were campaigners from rural communities in the US that have been harmed by fracking.

They came to Ireland to speak about how fracking was polluting their air, poisoning their water and devastating their environment.

So how is Ireland repaying this gesture? The answer is by trying to build a giant import terminal on the Shannon Estuary in north Kerry that would import fracked gas from the US, thus contributing to the very industry that has ravaged those communities.

Shannon LNG is a private venture, backed by the ominous-sounding New Fortress Energy, a US company owned by Wes Edens, who made his money in sub-prime lending (lending to vulnerable people at high interest rates) and now owns Aston Villa soccer club. However, the project has the full support of Leo Varadkar’s government and is due to be half-funded by EU taxpayers.

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is a new technology that cools and condenses gas, allowing it to be transported across oceans in some of the world’s biggest ships. LNG has helped the fracking industry to turn the US into a net exporter of gas.

The hypocrisy of fracking-free Ireland becoming a buyer of fracked gas from another country may be morally repulsive, but that isn’t even the single biggest problem with Shannon LNG. Nor is it the very real threat to the marine wildlife and tourism on the Shannon Estuary the worst aspect of this project.

The reason I got involved in campaigning against Shannon LNG was as a member of Futureproof Clare – is the climate change implications of the project. "Natural gas" (we call it fossil gas) is still considered by the Irish government and EU to be a "transition fuel", which blatantly ignores scientific evidence. While burning gas does produce less carbon dioxide (CO2) than burning oil, coal or peat, the problem is that the raw gas is mostly methane, which is 86 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than CO2 in the first 20 years after emission.

The science is clear: some methane always leaks during fracking, transport and processing of gas. Putting fracked gas into ships in Texas and then back into pipelines in Ireland would involve even more methane leakage. In fact, an LNG terminal would be more harmful to the climate than a coal-burning power station. That’s why we dubbed Shannon LNG "Ireland’s biggest and most urgent environmental threat".

The good news is that Shannon LNG has been halted – for now. In February the High Court referred to the European Court of Justice an action by Friends of the Irish Environment, one of numerous groups across Europe trying to stop the project. The case was an appeal of An Bord Pleanála’s balking decision in 2018 to extend planning permission for the project.

Con’t on page 2
Putting Children First
How international volunteering perpetuates the institutionalisation of children.

SANDRA BYRNE
Volunteering in Orphanages Working Group

As Comhlámh prepares to launch its campaign asking people to take our “Kids First” pledge to not volunteer in orphanages, Focus takes a look at the evidence of how orphanages are harmful to children.

Over the years many kind and well-intentioned people have volunteered in orphanages. They have done so to help some of the world’s most vulnerable children. However, increasingly it is being recognised that volunteering in orphanages may cause more harm than good and there is now a global movement working to end the practice.

To address this issue, the Volunteering in Orphanages Working Group (OWG) was set up in 2016 by Comhlámh and a number of Volunteer Sending Agencies party to Comhlámh’s Code of Good Practice, who were concerned about the negative effects of institutional care on children and the particularly harmful impact of international volunteering in orphanages. Since then, the OWG has worked to raise awareness of the negative effects of international volunteering in orphanages and to promote and support the transition to family and community-based care.

Contrary to popular belief, most children who live in orphanages are not actually ‘orphans’ but have at least one living parent and extended family members available to care for them. Yet an estimated 8 million children currently live in institutional care worldwide and the numbers are increasing. Research has shown that both volunteering and volunteering have contributed to this growth as orphanages are created to meet the demand from well-meaning tourists, volunteers and donors. Parents are being persuaded, and sometimes forced, to place their child into residential care in the hope that they will get adequate food, a good education and proper healthcare.

Living in an orphanage or institution can significantly impair a child’s development and future life chances. Many do not receive the education and health care promised. Many also experience exploitation and abuse. Growing up in an orphanage from an early age can lead to attachment disorders resulting from the lack of a consistent carer and a continued turnover of staff that mean a child learns not to trust or build relationships.

Volunteering itself can significantly increase these harmful effects of institutionalised care. Many children living in orphanages have been separated from their caregivers and can be extremely distressed. Some may be traumatised and require specialised care. The most often-transient nature of volunteering in orphanages can intensify a child’s feeling of abandonment and loss increasing the risk of attachment disorder. Most volunteers do not have the required skills to meet the needs of very vulnerable children.

Children living in institutions may be extremely vulnerable, not least because many experience ongoing trauma because of separation from their families. Volunteers often do not have the adequate knowledge and professional skills to respond appropriately to their needs. As previously mentioned, growing up in an orphanage from an early age can lead to attachment disorders, resulting from the lack of a consistent carer and a continued turnover of staff that means a child learns not to trust or build relationships. By their very nature, short-term volunteer placements put children at further risk of developing these attachment issues.

As Nigel Cantwell, the international child protection expert, states: “Increasing recourse to unqualified and unvetted short-term volunteers in ‘orphanages’ has had devastating effects: more children living in institutions (corresponding to more children being unreasonably separated from their families), vulnerable children being exposed to various forms of abuse, in contexts where regulations are weak, with norms and minimum standards rarely being met. Furthermore, the constant succession of ‘foreign faces in these institutions fuels attachment disorders, as well as a feeling of serial abandonment among children.’

Institutional care should not be supported by international volunteering. Sending volunteers who are not skilled to work with children in institutional care settings is a child-safeguarding issue and is not in the best interests of the child.

It disrupts children’s attachment and normalises access to vulnerable children. Skilled volunteers can have a role in supporting local partners to build their capacity to meet best practice standards in the transition to deinstitutionalisation but this should also be phased out.

There are many ways that these changes can be driven, and a key one is wider public understanding of both the harm done by volunteering in orphanages, and what can best be done to move from institutional care to family and community-based care for children.

Check out volunteering options that are responsible, responsive and sustainable and result in a positive impact for the host community and/or organisation and the volunteer.

Comhlamh.org >>>>
for information on responsible international volunteering
ROBERT JOHNSTONE
Comhlámh member

‘The Asylum Archive’ by Vukašin Nedeljkovic is a new publication including photographs, essays and a map of all present and past Direct Provision Centres in Ireland. It is based on the ongoing photography and archiving work of activist and artist Vukašin Nedeljkovic and highlights the continued injustices, confinement and incarceration of asylum seekers in Ireland.

Irish people can talk a lot, while at the same time, say nothing at all. Sure you know yourself. We can get so caught up in the rhythms of Irishness, we can brush over what needs to be said, fall into inherited patterns and repeat ourselves without even realising. Sure you know yourself.

At the same time, we can whisper within the walls of our own home in fear of the neighbours overhearing. Reputations can be damaged if overheard words become a part of our conversations. Perhaps it is the Irish State that whispers to asylum seekers in hopes the Irish people don’t hear. Or maybe it is Irish people that whisper to each other, in hopes that if we stay quiet enough, they might go away. Asylum Archive confronts us with this silence.

Anchored by people-less photographs of direct provision centres, and contextualised by essays that weave through an Irish history of “coercive control”, “systematic mistreatment”, and the stories of asylum we tell ourselves that “elicit sympathy and pity from the onlooker”, this collection pulls at the pillars that allow such institutions to stand. By focusing on the mundane buildings and traces of lived experiences of asylum seekers, Irish viewers are not presented with another problem to be swept under the rug. We are presented with the rug.

There are no people to pin prejudices on, no easy narratives to tell. We are forced to confront these blunt images of lifelessness and realise there is life beyond the lens. It’s just that we can’t see it. This framework reflects the limiting lens of Irishness we look through that has continuously left out parts of society we’d rather not see and rather not talk about because they don’t fit with what we deem to be “Irish”.

To be Irish is to be thought of as warm, welcoming and hospitable. That’s the yarn we thread ourselves. But it is a blanket that does not stretch to warm those born outside the bounds of our cotton. We are weavers caught in the pull of our own loom. The threads we sew have stitched to our skin, so that to pull at our blanket, is to be in danger of unravelling ourselves. Asylum Archives quietly holds us in the spaces these stiches were sewn, and asks if this was the intent.

But it is not a question of those who are affected, and those who aren’t. It is showing us we are all affected. It is our “sure you know yourself” culture that allows such systems to stand, and it’s those same systems that re-create the rhythms of such an attitude. This archive does not tell the story of people wanting sympathy, but shows evidence of resistance and solidarity despite the very systems designed to disperse.

It challenges us to do the same; to unweave the threads we’ve been conditioned to sew. It challenges us to stand with the people outside the lens, beyond the bounds of the pages and to talk about what Ireland really is, despite the Irishness that would have whisper it.

The Asylum Archive book is available to buy from The Library Project, Temple Bar, Dublin.
What is Going on in Brazil?

RODRIGO SOUZA
Brazilian Left Front

In January 2019, Brazilians and non-Brazilians in Ireland and around the world were shocked with the election of the country’s new president Jair Bolsonaro. It shows a change in ordinary citizens’ thinking - there is a rise of support for reactionary politics, hate speech and threats against minorities.

Brazilian Left Front (BLF) is a collective of Brazilians living in Ireland that has been trying to understand the unfolding of this period in history - of the rise of far right governments and sentiments globally - not only as a reality unique to Brazil but as a dynamic that is closely linked to how capitalism maintains its power and status quo globally.

The starting point of our analysis, and the lesson we as BLF think needs to be learned, is that social justice and equality in society will never be accomplished through class reconciliation or with the help of the rich, but instead through anti-capitalist action.

With the recent events in global politics, many of us are wondering how it is possible that humanity walks in regressive and self-destructive directions instead of evolving, especially when so many of us are genuinely concerned about social justice and inequality.

Indeed recognition of the need for social justice and a more fair society is increasingly present in modern society, but the means of achieving this is still not clear. Most of those talking about a fair society seem to hardly take into account the damage caused by the current economic system of wealth accumulation, or simply ignore it.

According to Oxfam (2016), eight men own the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of the world. The income of the poorest 10% of people increased by less than $3 a year between 1988 and 2011, while the income of the richest 1% increased 182 times as much. Also, in current numbers, if global GDP is divided by the 7.6 billion people in the world it would equal an annual income of $10,500 per person, around $3,500 per month for a family of 4. Looking at those figures, you begin to understand that there really is no objective reason for the misery of billions of people in the world and it becomes clear that social injustice and inequality are actually projects.

These data are horrific and have very real impacts on people’s lives - while also giving an insight into the current political situation in the world and the interest of the wealthy in maintaining the current status quo. Now more than ever that status quo needs to be challenged so that social justice can be achieved and the destruction of the environment can be stopped.

An analysis of global inequality is also important when trying to understand the current political rise of reactionary and populist far right-wing governments in many countries of the world. These dynamics are not isolated or unique to the social context of any one country, but rather they are a global threat driven by the greed and power of big corporations that continue to profit from people’s misery.

Brazil’s economic base of trade in commodities for example - produced by big agribusiness and fossil fuel companies - has always been an important part of national politics, with outside influence from multinational corporations. The recent discovery of oil reserves on the country’s coast and the subsequent political coup and consequent political destabilization cannot be seen as mere coincidence.

Added to this context, the social democracy projects of Brazil’s left-wing governments have failed to address social inequality at its root - they merely incentivised a change in consumption patterns and were an attempt at class reconciliation. They did not bring about deep or sustainable changes in impoverished people’s material conditions. Today Brazil still has a wealthy class that holds devastating political control and capacity to disseminate propaganda.

The rights and small improvements in social justice of minority groups in recent years are now under threat with Bolsonaro’s election. But the truth is that these rights were never really safeguarded. In reality, rights of minorities have only ever been protected with the permission of the powerful and wealthy. From BLF’s perspective, our struggles - whether for rights of indigenous people or other minority groups in Latin America, the protection of the dignity of immigrants and refugees, the reduction of poverty or an end to environmental destruction - must be underpinned by a consciousness of the roots of such problems.

Individually, the members of our collective act by challenging the current system of over-consumption and raising public awareness of the destructive and exploitative effects of capitalism. We encourage people to understand how capitalism is at the root of many of the problems we see in the word today, including the rise of the far right.

Rodrigo Souza is a member of Brazilian Left Front, a Brazilian migrant collective in Dublin. Keep an eye on social media for BLF events and manifestos.

ASK THE CANDIDATES

Human Rights and Anti-racism

What is your position on the narrowed remit of Operation Sofia, which has brought an end to search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and the end of the Irish Naval Rescue mission?

Are you satisfied that Ireland is compliant with the European Reception Conditions Directive which we opted into in June 2018? Do you believe Ireland meets its European obligations to asylum seekers with regard to the rights to work, housing, and education?

What is your position on the policy of returning people to unsafe countries such as Libya, in breach of international law?

Are you or is your party a signatory of the Enar Anti-racism Protocol 2019?

Trade deals, social justice and Palestine

What is your position on ensuring that trade policy takes account of social and environmental issues, in particular will you work to ensure the EU implements an effective ban on the importation into the EU of goods produced in the illegal settlements in Occupied Palestinian Territories?

What is your position on Investor State Dispute Settlement (ISDS) mechanisms, such as is contained in the proposed EU-Canada trade deal, CETA, that allows corporations to sue governments for any changes they may make to social and environmental regulations?

What position will you take with regard to the re-opening of EU-USA trade talks and in particular will you ensure that such trade talks will not be mandated while the USA is not in compliance with its climate change obligations?

Access to Medicines.

What measures you would take as an MEP to ensure EU investments in medicines Research & Development (R&D) are driven by public health need rather than profit and to ensure the accessibility, availability and affordability of the results of R&D?

What measures you would take as an MEP to advance reform of the intellectual property rights system in the EU in order to ensure a healthy balance between public interest and private profit?

What measures you would take as an MEP to ensure transparency (in R&D, manufacturing, marketing, etc.) in medicines development and commercialisation?

The starting point of our analysis, and the lesson we as BLF think needs to be learned, is that social justice and equality in society will never be accomplished through class reconciliation or with the help of the rich, but instead through anti-capitalist action.

With the recent events in global politics, many of us are wondering how it is possible that humanity walks in regressive and self-destructive directions instead of evolving, especially when so many of us are genuinely concerned about social justice and inequality.

Indeed recognition of the need for social justice and a more fair society is increasingly present in modern society, but the means of achieving this is still not clear. Most of those talking about a fair society seem to hardly take into account the damage caused by the current economic system of wealth accumulation, or simply ignore it.
We work to promote responsible, and sustainable volunteering in solidarity for a just, equitable and development workers working.

Volunteers and Development Workers, our vision is of volunteers volunteering. This leaflet is a guide for people who are going to volunteer overseas in developing countries. It sets out seven principles that aim to encourage responsible, responsive international volunteering.

The Charter is a guide for people who are going to volunteer overseas in developing countries. It sets out seven principles that aim to encourage responsible, responsive international volunteering.

Before You Go
Before going overseas, check out our web portal, Volunteering Options.

We always recommend that potential volunteers take the time to sign up to Comhlámh’s Volunteer Charter. The Charter is a guide for people who are going to volunteer overseas in developing countries. It sets out seven principles that aim to encourage responsible, responsive international volunteering.

We are also increasing the power of social media to link potential volunteers with volunteer opportunities. Use our #VolOps to connect with sending agencies and to find the latest volunteering opportunities.

Make sure the sending agency you are considering volunteering with is a signatory to Comhlámh’s Code of Good Practice for Sending Agencies.

Protecting your social welfare rights while overseas
If you under the decision to work for a volunteer in the Global South, it is important to consider your social insurance record while you are away. Comhlámh can assist you with this through the Volunteer Development Worker (VDW) Scheme, which we administer on behalf of the Department of Social Protection.

Keeping your social insurance record active will ensure you have access to the range of state and young family support services available.

Debriefing
Comhlámh recommends that every returning volunteer and development worker should have access to both personal and operational debriefing. You are entitled to refuse to access a debriefing through your sending agency. Comhlámh can arrange a personal or critical incident debriefing for you.

Careers
Many volunteers have found that appropriate counselling can be helpful in the process of adapting to life in Ireland, as well as in seeing a wider array of taking good care of yourself. We can provide you with general advice and guidance to help you access counselling.

In addition to our web portal, Volunteering Options, we offer a referral service for people to career guidance professionals with experience of the development sector.

Counselling
Counselling professionals can provide information and confidential advice to help you take good care of yourself.

Our Coming Home Book provides a comprehensive guide to all these issues and directs you towards other useful organisations.

Coming Home
Returning home from an overseas placement can be a challenging experience. With highs and lows. Many returnees have found that appropriate counselling can be helpful in the process of adjusting to life in Ireland, as well as in seeing a wider array of taking good care of yourself. We can provide you with general advice and guidance to help you access counselling.

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Career Guidance
If you’re interested in a career in international development, check out our jobs noticeboard or get in touch for some general guidance. We also offer a referral service for career guidance professionals with experience in the development sector.

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Volunteering Options
This leaflet highlights how we can support you before, during and after the volunteering experience, drawing on our 40 years of experience.

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Ireland’s Endless Housing Crisis

The housing crisis in this country is getting worse by the day. Each month, the statistics for the number of people registered as homeless continue to set new records. In March 2019, the latest month for which official figures have been released, was no exception, with 10,305 people recorded as homeless. Children make up over one third of the total number, with 3,821 being recorded as homeless.

Many of these families live in emergency accommodation, private B&Bs and hotels who pocket millions of euro in government funding to provide basic accommodation to homeless families - €47 million in the Dublin City Council area alone in 2017. These families are often subjected to strict rules and regulations dictating every aspect of their behaviour - children are often banned from playing in the hotels. These families lack any security, and there have been multiple instances of people being evicted with no notice over minor disputes with the management.

But the crisis doesn’t affect everyone equally, with migrants often at the forefront. Many Brazilian or Latin American migrants, working precarious service sector jobs, with insecure visa statuses, are also vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous landlords. In the private rental market, landlords in Rent Pressure Zones in the major cities use a number of different loopholes to continue to raise rents by more than the 4% legally allowable - often by evicting tenants on spurious grounds, without giving proper notice, and sometimes with the threat of violence. Newly-arrived migrants, without the knowledge of their rights as tenants, and without the support structure of an established community, find themselves particularly vulnerable.

As a result, slumlordism reminiscent of the tenements of the early 20th century has returned to the inner city, with tenants, many of them migrants, forced by exploitative landlords to sleep on bunk-beds in overcrowded rooms that often constitute a fire hazard. When these buildings do get investigated by the fire brigade and shut down, it is the tenants who are evicted on to the streets without notice, with no meaningful penalties for the landlords who have profited from the overcrowding.

In the face of this crisis, many on the right have tried to scapegoat migrants for the scarcity of housing and for rising rents. Instead, however, the crisis is driven by greedy and unscrupulous landlords, eager to squeeze ever more and more rent from desperate tenants, and by state policies that protect those private profits by refusing to build public housing in the quantity needed to guarantee homes for all who live here.

Into this mix has stepped Dublin Central Housing Action, a self-organized grassroots group of tenants directly affected by the housing crisis. DCHA was founded after the occupation of the Bolt Hostel, a vacant DCC building that was run as a homeless hostel for several weeks in 2015. From a weekly peer-to-peer tenants support group, and a community dinner for those affected by the crisis, this organization has built the capacity to mobilize big numbers of people to stop evictions. And as more and more migrants find themselves at the mercy of their landlords and letting agents, more and more have been joining in the struggle, whether as members of DCHA or other migrant organizing groups such as Brazilian Left Front and MER (Migrants and Ethnic Minorities for Reproductive Justice).

In early summer 2018, DCHA came into confrontation with O’Donnell & Co, a family business that owns a lot of property in the city centre. A row of 7 houses on Summerhill Parade, all overcrowded, with up to six people sharing cramped rooms, were evicted on fire-safety grounds by the company. This became the catalyst for the series of militant direct actions that took place under the Take Back the City banner, with activists from DCHA, as well as other local housing and migrant justice groups, taking occupation of one of the recently-evicted houses and demanding that it, and other vacant properties left idle by speculative landlords be compulsorily purchased and turned into housing for the community.

DCHA continues to work to build tenants power in the north inner city - power to resist evictions, to challenge landlord impunity, and to broaden our definitions of what we can and should expect from our homes. Until the Irish government, which has traditionally opted-out of EU and international treaties recognizing that right to adequate housing as a fundamental human right recognizes its duty to provide for those left behind by a for-profit model of housing, the need for community-based, affected-led organizations such as DCHA and the other groups that make up the Irish Housing Network won’t go away. The demand remains: Housing for All.
Three Documentaries Reviewed

DEEPTHI SURESH
Focus editorial group

Naila and the uprising
An eye opener to the role of women activists in the first Intifada

"We can't be free as women unless we're in a free country. And even if we are free of the occupation, we can't know freedom as long as we are subjugated in our own society." - Sama Aweidah, film subject, Naila and the Uprising

Naila and the Uprising brilliantly chronicles the untold story of the remarkable real-life journey of Naila Ayesh who was a key figure in the First Intifada.

Women are seen confronting Israeli troops in Gaza during the first intifada. After this photo was taken the women were assaulted and dispersed with truncheons and tear gas. [Picture: Robert Croma / maryscullyreports.com]

It is 1987 and Naila finds herself in the painful position of having to choose between love, family and freedom during the uprising in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Rather than choosing she finds a way to embrace all three, joining a clandestine network of women intent on pushing the world to recognise the Palestinian right to self-determination.

Naila and the Uprising is made by the award-winning team, Just Vision, and directed by Julia Bacha. Through the usage of evocative animation, intimate interviews, and exclusive archival footage, the film tells a story that mainstream media missed and history conveniently overlooked - the story of a courageous clandestine women’s movement leading the Palestinians’ struggle for freedom. It brings these courageous women activists, whose contributions and sacrifices changed history, out of anonymity.

The unbending, nonviolent women’s movement foregrounded in this film lets the audience ponder on a much-needed possibility of what happens when women take the lead in the struggle for justice and rights. This was a movement that led to the inception of the peace talks. Naila and the Uprising depicts how women-led civil resistance can stir the masses, put pressure on power-holders, and affect real structural change.

The E-Team
Though they are different personalities, Anna, Ole, Fred and Peter share a fearless spirit and a deep commitment to exposing and halting human rights abuses all over the world.

Filmmakers Ross Kauffman and Katy Chevigny’s film tells the story of four international human rights investigators. However, the movie falls flat in the portrayal of the investigators who appear to live a glamorous, dangerous life. Though they are different personalities, these investigators are made public and awaken human consciousness.

The third investigator is Peter Bouchkaert, a weapons expert who is able to sniff out hidden armaments. He is constantly in touch with intelligence agencies of various countries while in the field. A teaser to his personal life shows how Bouchkaert finds solace while working on his farm. The fourth member, Fred Abrahams, is highly articulate and his courtroom testimony against Slobodan Milosevic is definitely the film’s most riveting moment. The filmmakers have however treated Bouchkaert and Abrahams as supporting players despite their valued contributions.

The E-Team is more on Neistat and Solvang, the subtext being the personal lives of these investigators. However, the movie falls flat in the portrayal of the investigators. The focus is more on Neistat and Solvang, the subtext being the personal lives of these investigators.

City of Joy
Netflix’s documentary cuts to the heart of complexity as victims rebuild their lives

City of Joy, a centre for victims of sexual violence in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, opened its doors in 2011. The centre was created by 2018 Nobel Peace Prize laureate and Congolese obstetrician, Dr. Denis Mukwege and Christine Schuler Deschryver, a Congolese woman devastated by the ongoing violence in her country. The City of Joy is a compound within the city of Bukavu where women stay for six months. The main focus is on healing from physical and psychological trauma. They are also taught skills like self-defense, are cared for and are encouraged to become comfortable with their bodies and to share their stories.

The new Netflix documentary ‘City of Joy’ is directed by Madeleine Gavin and follows the journey of Deschryver and Mukwege to help victims of sexual violence reclaim and rebuild their lives. Playwright Eve Ensler joins in with writing exercises and group talk therapy. The stories of these women are harrowing and the physical and mental damage most of them have endured is unimaginable. At the same time, the resilience of these women is rightly captured in this documentary and will surprise the audience. Gavin is able to highlight the intelligent and direct voices of Mukwege and Deschryver.

City of Joy has not been a fan of white do-gooders who come to Africa and take pictures. In her words “like we are animals in a zoo”. In fact one of the remarkable strengths of “City of Joy” is that the story is not told through the perspective of Eve Ensler. The focus rightly stays on Mukwege and Deschryver and the women at the centre. The landscape is breathtakingly beautiful and aerial shots of thick forests and green fields let the audience take notice of the stark contrast of the stories that are told by the very women of this land.

The documentary looks at the everyday workings of the center as well as the uphill battles faced by both Mukwege and Deschryver and deftly conveys the ways in which City of Joy is as fragile as it can get and fighting against the unspeakable horrific violence just outside its gates. This documentary is truly an example of the power of compassion, hope and support in the face of horrific atrocities.
‘Nothing about us without us!
The Independent Living Movement struggle for disabled people’s rights in Ireland

SARAH FITZGERALD
ILMI secretary

“Independent Living is about equal rights and opportunities; it is about my freedom to choose and my right to make decisions about everything that affects my life. Independent Living is a way of looking at disability and society. Am I disabled because of my impairment or am I disabled by the lack of accessibility within the community I live in?

If the health, employment, education and other services that I need to access, on a daily basis, were fully accessible and inclusive would I still experience the same barriers? Independent Living looks at society and sees me as a key part of it. To participate I need to have access to the range of supports and services that I need to live the independent life that I choose.

In the last number of years, there has been considerable progress in human rights and equality in Ireland. However much yet remains to be achieved. One of the biggest human rights challenges facing Ireland is that of disabled people and building a genuinely inclusive society that respects people’s right to control their lives as equals in a really inclusive society.

The first Irish Center for Independent Living (CIL) was established in 1992 by and for disabled people with the main aim of ensuring that disabled people achieved Independent Living, choice and control over their lives and full participation in society as equal citizens. We have relaunched as Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) to reflect our campaigning and national representative role, promoting the philosophy of independent living and working towards building an inclusive society.

Central to the way we work is to ensure that policy decisions which impact on the lives of disabled people have to be directly influenced by those with a lived experience of disability.

Our vision is an Ireland where disabled peoples have freedom, choice and control over all aspects of their lives and can fully participate in an inclusive society as equals. Independent Living is based on four pillars: Personal Assistance, Housing, Transport and Employment.

ILMI’s role is to collectively empower disabled people to bring about change in how services are delivered to build a genuinely inclusive society. Central to Independent Living is the Personal Assistance Service (PAS).

It is tool that allows us to live independently. The PAS enables us to do all the tasks that we cannot do for ourselves. It provides us with the freedom and flexibility we need to live our lives as we choose. With a PAS, a Personal Assistant (PA) is hired to assist us with a range of day-to-day tasks that we cannot physically do for ourselves. We delegate these tasks to our PAs and in doing so take back control of our lives.

It is important to note that a PA is not a carer. The tasks that we require assistance with can range from personal care to domestic duties to assistance in carrying out paid employment or socialising.

A distinct benefit of PAS is that it reduces our dependence on our family and friends. The confessional relationship that develops between our PAs and us allows us to maintain a private life and our dignity. Essentially for many it is the difference between existing and living.

Over the course of the second half of 2018, Independent Living Movement Ireland will be exploring ways that society can change the conversation on disability and how everyone can challenge outdated medical views of impairment and act in genuine solidarity.

Our recent #IndependentVoices video campaign represents a start in this conversation and we would ask people to look at the 8 disabled activists talking about independent living and collective action.

Independent Living is not about living alone. It is about control, choice, options, freedom and living in an inclusive society. It is about basic freedom to live.

Everyone has a right to that.”

Independent Living Movement Ireland launched its new Strategic Plan in September 2018 and it can be accessed here https://ilmi.ie/key-policy-documents/
The #IndependentVoices videos can be viewed at https://ilmi.ie/cil-video-resources/
Find them on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/ILMIreland/
Twitter @ILMIreland

CAMBODIAN IRISH NETWORK

CambodiaIreland Changemaker Network was officially launched in April and is a mutually beneficial partnership between Cambodian and Irish organisations.

Through the networks’ activities, Cambodian-based NGOs gain access to the skills of Irish educators, masters scholarship opportunities through Irish Aid, and the support of Irish fundraisers and donors.

In return, Irish students and educators get to enhance their understanding of social justice issues, connect with the Sustainable Development Goals in a meaningful way, and play a real role in becoming active global citizens.

Find out more here> http:// cambodiaireland.com