

I want to first welcome everyone who is visiting New York tonight.

I absolutely love Belfast, and I'm always encouraging others to see it for themselves. So I'm very glad we have a chance to show you all the same kind of hospitality – and the same kind of weather – I've always experienced in your city.

I'm also delighted to participate in the first ever New York-New Belfast conference – building new bridges and strengthening the existing relationships between our cities. After all, we are similar in so many ways.

For example, you may have heard there's been a little dispute here in the last few days.

I, along with many like minded New Yorkers, want to have the Empire State Building lit in honor of what would have been Mother Teresa's 100th birthday this August.

Unfortunately, the building owner has refused to honor this great woman. As you can see New Yorkers, just like the Irish, know a thing or two about stubbornness and digging in their heels.

Mairtin, will you find us a suitable building in Belfast to light blue and white for Mother Teresa? Remember Mother Teresa worked with the refugees on the Falls Road in 1969. Get on that will you Mairtin?

In all seriousness, everyone knows New York and Belfast have long been partners in commerce and culture. But I was surprised to learn recently of another interesting connection.

It turns out the first international printing of our own Declaration of Independence appeared in the Belfast Newsletter, just a month after Thomas Jefferson laid down his pen.

It's that kind of near-instantaneous give and take that has characterized the relationships of our great cities. We share much in common – and right now we face common challenges.

But the cities that will weather the toughest economic times will do so because they have great communities – and in my opinion there are no two greater, more creative and unique communities than New York City and Belfast.

I am incredibly optimistic about our shared future, because more and more we see our communities interact and intertwine. Last year Belfast joined New York City Global Partners, which connects our City with 55 leading cities around the world.

This program encourages cities to learn from one another – seeking innovative solutions to common problems in order to advance economic opportunity, democratic values, creative inspiration, best practices, and cultural diversity.

But we didn't stop there. Filmmakers from Northern Ireland presented at the Tribeca film festival this year – and students from New York are currently visiting West Belfast to learn about conflict resolution.

I recently saw a group of Catholic and Protestant children from The Cross Border Orchestra of Ireland perform for thousands of New York City school children. Their message was simple – even when our differences appear overwhelming, music can be a powerful medium to bring us together.

And my office has been in touch with Belfast community organizations to help them make connections in New York City – groups like CineMagic, which plans to bring young students from both sides of the Atlantic to create educational films.

We're here at Fordham University where they have a wonderful Belfast summer exchange program. And

tonight, I'm proud to announce that over the next 12 months we'll work to make sure every major University in New York City follows Fordham's lead and offers a Belfast exchange program. We've already started a conversation with CUNY to ask them to explore this idea.

All of these cultural investments are matched by economic investments as well. Today there is more employment than ever in Belfast by New York based companies like Citigroup and the New York Stock Exchange.

And back in February, when I had to deliver a major policy address on economic development, I reached across the pond for inspiration. I saw the important work of Steve Orr at the Northern Ireland Science Park in the Titanic Quarter of Belfast.

And since there's no better compliment in government than stealing someone else's idea, we're going to be replicating that work here in New York City.

There's a great deal we have to learn from each other when it comes to economic development. Recent challenges have forced both our cities to seek new ways to diversify our economies, and move away from overreliance on traditional industries.

On Friday, we'll be visited at City Hall by a group of young entrepreneurs from Belfast. And I plan to share with them some of the recent steps we've taken to create jobs and opportunities across our five boroughs.

We're working to create an economy of innovation, connecting our brightest minds with the tools they need to turn an invention into a business.

We've created a tax credit to help grow our fledgling biotech industry – and a fund to convert old manufacturing space into workshops that can be used by a new generation of small businesses.

And we're building a shared kitchen incubator out of an abandoned industrial building, to give new food manufacturers a place to grow.

The principle of economic diversity must guide us in the coming years. And here in New York, it echoes the importance of the diversity we have long taken for granted. The key to our success as a city has been found in our distinct neighborhoods, and by embracing our differences.

Sustained peace in the North must also mean a role and a place for everyone.

We see great potential, power and optimism in the communities of Belfast and we'll do all we can to grow grassroots connections between our cities.

I had the great honor of spending some time with President McAleese, who was here just a few weeks ago.

I'm always moved when she says: "Peace is a journey - not a destination."

So I challenge all of us here tonight; let's continue that journey together and make this the decade where we forge rich links between our cities, even stronger than any time in the last century.

Thank you and enjoy the conference.