

**ELISA MASSIMINO INTRODUCTION OF CONGRESSMAN CHRIS
SMITH, AMERICAN IRELAND FUND GALA**
March 12, 2008

Thank you. It's a great honor to be here tonight to introduce a man for whom I have such deep affection and respect.

For 28 years, Chris Smith has been a voice of conscience in the United States Congress, fighting for justice and human rights, in Northern Ireland and around the world. As both his allies and those who find themselves on the other side will tell you – Congressman Smith is a force to be reckoned with. But unlike so many who wield influence in this town, Chris Smith has never been in it for the power or the attention or the personal glory. He is here to fight for the oppressed. He does it with passion and humility, and he pursues it relentlessly.

I have to tell you one story about Congressman Smith. Some years ago, he convened a hearing on the State Department's annual country reports that detail the human rights situations in every country in the world, and I was invited to testify on behalf of Human Rights First. I was still new to Capitol Hill, and it was one of the first times I had ever testified at a hearing. The hearing got started at 10:30 in the morning, and at 4:30 in the afternoon, it was still going strong. By that time, most of the other Members of the committee had left, and we witnesses were starting to fade and look for the bathrooms. But Chairman Smith showed no sign of stopping. He asked us question after insightful question about the human rights conditions in dozens of countries, and pressed us to advise him on what more the United States could be doing to stand with those who were risking their lives in their own countries to advance the cause of freedom and human rights. I turned to a fellow panelist and asked in a whisper whether it was common for congressional hearings to go on for 6 hours without a break. "No," he said. "But this is a Chris Smith hearing – he actually cares about these issues."

Nearly 20 years ago, when Human Rights First began investigating reports about the harassment of defense lawyers in Northern Ireland, we found a courageous and energetic ally in Chris Smith. He convened the first ever congressional hearing on human rights in Northern Ireland, overcoming strenuous objections from our own State Department. Since then has chaired a dozen hearings – on policing, intimidation of lawyers, criminal justice reform and discrimination. He put the issue of human rights in Northern Ireland on the map in the United States Congress. And because there were no such hearings in Northern Ireland, or England, or Ireland, those hearings became a unique public forum for airing these critically important issues.

For those of us in the human rights community, Congressman Smith has been both partner and leader, a hard-working advocate committed to using the power of this great country as a force for good in the world. This has certainly been true with respect to Northern Ireland. The important role played by the United States in the path towards

peace and the particularly close relationship between the United States and the United Kingdom makes it all the more important that the United States continue to encourage its friend and ally to deal openly and justly with the abuses of the past, to create a firm foundation for a peaceful future.

No one in the United States Congress has understood this better, nor played a more important role in pressing the human rights agenda in Northern Ireland, than Congressman Chris Smith. As Chairman for many years of the International Operations and Human Rights Subcommittee, as House Chairman of the Helsinki Commission, and Vice-Chair of the International Relations Committee, Chris Smith has been an independent and principled voice for human rights. His constituency includes not only the good and fortunate people of New Jersey's 4th District, but refugees and victims of human rights abuses around the world who have no other voice. He has been – and continues to be – their voice in Congress, raising their plight and working to make sure that our own government does all it can to stand with them and protect them. He does so not when it's convenient – it seldom is; nor when it's politically advantageous – it seldom is. But he does so consistently and because it is right. Like every true human rights advocate, Chris Smith is in this fight for the long haul.

I congratulate you for your wisdom in honoring him and the example he sets for all of us. Please join me in recognizing a leader in the struggle for human rights – Congressman Chris Smith.