



# Office of the City Clerk

City Hall  
121 N. LaSalle St.  
Room 107  
Chicago, IL 60602  
www.chicityclerk.com

## Legislation Text

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## *Adopted by The City Council of the City of Chicago, Illinois*

***Presented by*** ALDERMEN EDWARD M. BURKE, PATRICK J. O'CONNOR  
AND THOMAS TUNNEY AND MAYOR RAHM EMANUEL ON SEPTEMBER 14, 2016

WHEREAS, The Members of this Chamber are pleased and honored to welcome to Chicago Mary Robinson, the seventh, and first female, President of Ireland; former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights; founder and President of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative; and, most recently, newly-appointed United Nations Special Envoy on El Nino and Climate; and

WHEREAS, Mary Robinson was born in Ballina, County Mayo, Ireland. Her parents, Aubrey de Vere Bourke and Tessa Bourke, were both medical doctors. One of five siblings, she attended Ireland's Mount Anville Secondary School, and studied law at the University of Dublin (Trinity College) and at The Honorable Society of King's Inns, Ireland's oldest School of Law, before accepting a postgraduate fellowship to Harvard University; and

WHEREAS, After completing her legal studies in the United States, Mary Robinson returned to Dublin, where she served for one year as a barrister. In 1969, at age 25, she was appointed Reid Professor of Law at Trinity College. A distinguished constitutional lawyer and renowned supporter of human rights, in 1987, she was elected to the Royal Irish Academy and, from 1987 to 1990, she served as a member of the International Commission of Jurists in Geneva, Switzerland. In 1988, Mary Robinson and her husband Nicholas founded the Irish Centre for European Law at Trinity College. Ten years later, in 1998, Mary Robinson was elected Chancellor of Trinity College; and

WHEREAS, An astute activist and politician, who used the law to effect social change, Mary Robinson was elected in 1969 to the upper house of the Irish Parliament, where she served as a senator for 20 years. A strong proponent of civil rights, and especially for women's rights, Mary Robinson led the fight in Parliament to secure the right of Irish women to sit on juries; to abolish the requirement that all women upon marriage resign from the civil service; to legalize contraception and promote equal economic rights; and to recognize the right of women to divorce and live independently. From 1979 to 1983, she also served on the Dublin City Council, where she successfully resisted the development of Wood Quay, one of Europe's best preserved Viking sites; and

WHEREAS, In 1990, with broad-based support from Ireland's Labour Party, Green Party and Workers' Party, Mary Robinson was elected as Ireland's first woman president, declaring, in her inaugural speech, that: "The stage is set for a new common European home based on respect for human rights, pluralism, tolerance and openness to new ideas"; and

WHEREAS, Widely regarded as a transformative figure for Ireland and for the Irish presidency, Mary Robinson^breathed new life into the role. As President, she worked tirelessly to reform Ireland's prisons, to decriminalize homosexuality, to admit Ireland into the European Economic Community, and to change the face of Anglo-Irish relations by becoming the first serving Irish president to visit the United Kingdom and meet Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace. From her first days in office, Mary Robinson recognized and honored the contributions of millions of Irish emigrants during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, and of their descendants, by burning a lamp in the shape of a candle in the window of the presidential residence, deftly using the symbolism of the Irish diaspora and potato famine to encourage Ireland to support developing nations, and to fight famine and genocide in Somalia, Rwanda and other countries in Africa and around the world; and

WHEREAS, On September 12, 1997, Mary Robinson was named United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, where she reprioritized the office by emphasizing human rights nationally and regionally. Her many accomplishments include becoming the first United Nations High Commissioner to visit China and Tibet; strengthening the monitoring of human rights in conflict areas; connecting climate change, human rights and gender; chairing the Asia Regional Preparatory meeting for the 2001 "World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination and Xenophobia" in Tehran, Iran; and presiding over the 2001 "World Conference Against Rascism" in Durban, South Africa; and

WHEREAS, In 2002, Mary Robinson founded the non-governmental organization Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative in an effort to put human rights standards and the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable at the heart of global governance and policymaking by fostering more equitable international trade and development, strengthening responses to HIV/AIDS in Africa, and shaping more humane migration policies; and

WHEREAS, Since July 18, 2007, when former President of South Africa Nelson Mandela convened a group of world leaders, the Elders Group of World Peacemakers, to contribute their collective wisdom, influence and experience to tackling the world's toughest problems, Mary Robinson has been active in The Elders' work as a forceful advocate for human rights and dignity in Africa and throughout the world; and

WHEREAS, In July of 2009, President Barack Obama awarded Mary Robinson the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian honor bestowed by the United States; and

WHEREAS, Since 2009, Mary Robinson has continued to bring attention to urgent international issues, and to urge citizens and nations to make common cause for justice, as Honorary President of Oxfam International; as Chair of the International Institute for Environment and Development; as founding member and Chair of the Council of Women World Leaders; as Chair of the Board of Global Alliances for Vaccines and Immunization; as a member of the Club of Madrid; as United Nations Special Envoy to the Great Lakes Region of Central Africa; as United Nations Special Envoy for Climate Change; and, most recently, as United Nations Special Envoy on El Nino and Climate; now, therefore,

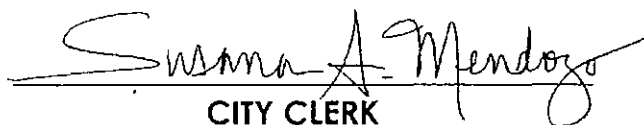
BE IT RESOLVED, That we, the Mayor and Members of the City Council of the City of Chicago, assembled this fourteenth day of September, 2016, do hereby commend Mary Robinson for her lifetime of achievement in the field of human rights; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That, in recognition of Mary Robinson's invaluable contributions to humanity as an agent for change, and for her devotion to ending discrimination, breaking down barriers, uplifting mankind, and setting a standard of excellence to which we all should strive, we wish to bestow upon her Chicago's highest honor, the Medal of Merit; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a suitable copy of this resolution be presented to Mary Robinson as a sign of our respect, admiration and good wishes.



  
MAYOR

  
CITY CLERK