

As I have reflected on the horrors of modern slavery, I have asked the questions an artist asks, which are often disassociated from the political and social realities of these grave issues.

Yet we the artists call for the poetic.

We insist that this is a fundamental and unavoidable human inheritance.

Open to all.

We insist that if only we make our spirit available, the transcendent syllable of the poetic will be with us.

If only for a moment.

This is a direct assertion that the poetic is political and that the freedom to feel and to have an inner life, is a human right.

Slavery comes in many forms but there can be little doubt that all slavery curtails inner life.

The freedom to feel is fragile; it requires care, education, protection and love.

Our fragility is our humanity.

We must defend it for ourselves and for each other.

It is a sad truth that this emotional reality has disappeared from our political discourse.

Our political leaders give us nothing that guides the poetic in us.

Instead they gather the forces of mistrust and use us to promote difference and intolerance.

We must resist.

We must fight slavery of the spirit.

Poetry is humanity.

The real and practical work of revealing and undoing slavery must also be accompanied by the determination to free ourselves – each and everyone of us.

From the slaveries of the spirit.

From the slaveries of society.

From the slaveries of the economy.

As a human family we understand that the suffering of one is the suffering of all.

I hope the award we give today will act as a declaration that it is the fragile in us that we value most highly.