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Relatives to play key role in Easter Rising commemorations

Military parade will be held on Easter Sunday 2016, which falls on March 27th

President to read Proclamation from the steps of the GPO as part of Ireland 2016

RONAN MCGREEVY

Relatives of those who fought in the Easter Rising will be invited to head a parade which will be main event of the Easter Rising centenary commemorations.

A military parade will be held on Easter Sunday 2016, which falls on March 27th. It will be led by relatives of those who participated in the Rising, though some of the relatives boycotted last night's launch claiming they had not been consulted about the programme before it was launched.

After the parade, the Procla-

mation will be read from the steps of the GPO by President Michael D Higgins.

Last night's launch of the 2016 centenary programme at the GPO was disrupted by water protestors who banged on the windows of the building during the speeches.

There are few details yet of the planned programme. It will be called Ireland 2016 and will have five themes: remember, reconcile, imagine, present and celebrate. The programme was kept a secret until last night.

This was despite misgivings from the commemoration com-

mittees set up to advise the Government on how to proceed and from relatives who boycotted the programme launch.

The Rising commemorations will have an international dimension. A documentary on 1916 is being prepared at Notre Dame University.

Plans are being developed for a three-week festival at the Kennedy Centre in Washington DC in May/June 2016. The centre is planning a "Proclaiming Ireland" festival also.

The Irish embassy in Britain will run an academic and cultural programme. The National Concert Hall will run a series of events over seven days during Easter week in 2016.

The Rising commemorations will also have a first World War dimension. Collins Barracks will recreate the conditions that Irish-born soldiers lived in before they trained for the Gallipoli campaign in 1915.

Richmond Barracks, where

the 1916 courts martial took place, will also reflect the fact that it was where Irish soldiers trained on the way to the Somme battlefield.

Sovereign state

Taoiseach Enda Kenny said an Irish sovereign state might have emerged by other means at another time and there was a strong tradition of Irish parliamentary democracy, but "at the same time we will not, and should not be expected to be neutral about the State's own existence".

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht Heather Humphreys said a project team within the department will meet with local organisations to plan a series of commemorations around the country. Committees will be set up in every county to plan the commemoration.

Arts programmes will be launched in schools and a chil-

■ Taoiseach Enda Kenny and former taoiseach Bertie Ahern at the launch of Ireland 2016 events will be held in every county to mark the Rising.

PHOTOGRAPH: AIDAN CRAWLEY

ren's day will be held to commemorate the children who died in the Rising.

Two former taoiseachs were at last night's launch: Liam Cosgrave, whose father was a Rising veteran, and Bertie Ahern.

Mr Ahern said that as part of the 1916 commemorations the British government should return Irish regimental flags laid up in Windsor Castle after the regiments were disbanded in 1922. "I never got the flag back. I gladly acknowledged what the Queen did in the Garden of Remembrance, but it would be nice to get those flags back on the basis that we are doing things in a reconciliation way."