

Good evening everyone; staff, students, members of the wider Galway community. My name is Victoria Chihumura and I'm the Ethnic minorities officer in the Students' Union

We are delighted to be here today at this tree lighting, in such a central part of the campus. We in the Students' Union have worked with the President and his office on this event here today to mark the holiday season. There is something about this time of year that creates a sense of community, one which brings everyone in this institution together at this time of celebration. Our University is a place of community and collaboration, and this event encapsulates that.

Our community reaches far and wide out across the world. This festive season, we want to focus our thoughts on those who are far away from their families and home. In particular those who have come to this country seeking asylum and a better life in this country, who now live in the Direct Provision system, some of them being our own students. We recognise that the holiday season can be a tough time for many, not least refugees. To those people we say you are welcome here, this is a space of learning, of friendship, and of sanctuary.

Every year December comes with all the joys of Christmas. We all know that the true meaning of Christmas isn't the gifts under the tree, the cards in the mail or the turkey dinners with family and friends. Christmas is about sharing love, kindness, being compassionate and showing gratitude. It's about people coming together as a community, as this event is here today. It is a season that brings hope and new beginnings.

On behalf of NUI Galway Students' Union, good luck to everyone who is sitting their exams, have a merry Christmas and a happy new year.