

Hello my name is Claire Mahon and I am speaking to you on behalf of the disability committees both North and South.

Firstly, on behalf of our committees I would like to welcome Patricia to her new post and request her support for our work. We look forward to meeting with her in the near future.

We are delighted to have the opportunity to address congress as this provides an opportunity to create awareness of the committee and remind everyone that the trade movement has a responsibility to speak up for those with a disability whether in the workplace or not.

Mechanisms need to be put in place to ensure that the voices of people with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups are heard around the tables of the Executive Council of Congress and all our trade unions.

The austerity agenda has impacted greatly on the most vulnerable of our society. If you have a disability you are more likely to be disadvantaged and unemployed. We know from our experiences that disabled persons are amongst the most affected by cuts to welfare benefits. We owe it as a society to be proactive in protecting and supporting our colleagues and fellow citizens with disabilities.

There are many examples as to how this can be done, both here on the island of Ireland and in other jurisdictions. There are many innovative programmes underway, one such example from the Trade union perspective both in Northern Ireland and here in the south is the Training of members and officials to be Disability Champions. Disability Champions help to increase our understanding of the difficulties experienced by those with disability in the workplace. Given rising levels of stress and mental ill health affecting people at work, it is more important than ever that Disability Champions are supported to carry out their role and we urge all unions to support existing

Champions and continue to identify and train new disability Champions.

We note that Disability Modules are being developed and will form part of the Workers College offering further educational opportunities to Trade union members. We urge congress to ensure the promotion of these educational opportunities to members and employees. It is essential that there is a focus on ability and a need to grow the participation rates of people with disabilities in our workplaces.

Issues such as;

Lack of and cuts to mobility allowances,

Access to public transport and

Hate crime against persons with disability need to be high on our agendas. Indeed we look forward to working with the National Disability Authority in the South on these and the many other issues affecting those with disability. We eagerly await the launch of the long awaited comprehensive strategy on employment of people with disability.

Whilst our colleagues in the Northern Ireland are delighted to be playing a key role in the development of a new employability strategy with their Department of Employment and Learning. They, together with disabled people's organisations have been lobbying the Northern Ireland Executive to fully implement the disability strategy for Northern Ireland.

We are currently exploring the establishment of a Council of the Isles type meeting for members with disabilities to share initiatives and exchange information.

Seminar:

Our up and coming annual seminar is to be hosted in Waterford on the 15th and 16th of October with its title *"Decent work for People with Disabilities – where to next?"*

Where we hope to bring together interested groups, and hear first-hand the experiences of both employers and employees with disabilities in the workplace. - <http://www.ictu.ie/press/diary/2015/10/15/disability/>

We are also pleased that Minister Aodhan O Riordan has confirmed his attendance at the event.

In Conclusion

Colleagues according to the latest estimates, there are approximately one billion people with disabilities worldwide. Between 785 and 975 million of them are of working age. However, across the world, and here on this island people with disabilities still face discrimination, especially when it comes to accessing equal job opportunities. We must all work to promote an inclusive approach to employment by focusing on a person's competencies, talents and skills for a specific job - It is about Ability and supporting our fellow citizens achieve their potential.

Berni McCrea

It would be remiss of me to finish this address to you without paying tribute to an individual who has given outstanding service to the trade union movement and to the cause of disabled people everywhere.

Berni McCrea has been Chair of the ICTU Disability Committee for many years, probably more years than she cares to remember. This year she has told us that she intends to retire from her work as a trade union activist and step down as chair of the NI committee. In Bernie's years as Chair, she has driven the work of the

Committee with tireless determination, commitment and a great deal of grace.

Berni, has represented the Committee on many important working groups with both NGOs and Government Departments and has brought a clear trade union focus to the table. She has championed the development of the Disability Champion Network and has also forged close links with our Disability Committee in the south, regularly travelling to attend Committee meetings in Dublin. Sharing information with us and guiding us, I am sure that we will be drawing on her expertise and experience for a long time to come.

We thank you Bernie for your excellent work.

Thank you.