

**Address by David Joyce, Worker Delegate, to the  
International Labour Conference 2017**

**Esteemed President,**

It is indeed an honour to address the conference on behalf of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

I would like to welcome the report of the Director General *Work in a Changing Climate: The Green Initiative*.

Thanks to the work of our trade unions, the concept of a Just Transition is firmly on the national agenda in Ireland. Indeed the Irish Minister for Climate Action has welcomed the addition of our voice to the discussion and we look forward to playing a key role in the National Dialogue on Climate Action that he has proposed.

Governments and employers, with workers and their unions, must sit together and commit to protect our future through a Just Transition strategy; a plan which guarantees decent work for all.

The Irish Government has for the very first time taken up a *titulaire* seat on the Governing Body of this house. We welcome their participation and urge them to make full use of this opportunity to fulfil the ILO aims and objectives at home and abroad. As we approach the ILO centenary in 2019 we hope they will play a constructive role in the many initiatives being prepared. In that regard we commend them on the recent Future of Work conference in Dublin to kick off a national dialogue between government, workers and employers in order to better meet the world of work challenges of the next century.

While Ireland has ratified 73 of the 189 ILO Conventions, a significant number of up to date conventions and protocols remain to be ratified. These include the 2014 Protocol to Convention 29 on Forced Labour and we urge them to join those 13 Governments who have ratified this and so help to restore hope and freedom to the millions of people trapped in modern slavery around the world. This would also be a useful instrument in implementing our national Second National Action Plan to Prevent and Combat Human Trafficking in Ireland.

We also urge the Irish Government to engage in a process of social dialogue with trade unions and employers to identify other relevant ILO standards for Ireland's workplaces in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

President, we are emerging from a difficult period in Ireland characterised by austerity and downward pressure on standards in Irish workplaces. This has resulted in a number of high profile industrial disputes in retail, transport and other sectors and indeed some workers are still being victimised for participating in such industrial actions.

Public sector trade unions have just completed a very difficult set of negotiations aimed at accelerating pay recovery for workers whose incomes are significantly lower than they were eight years ago. There are also outstanding issues in relation to the right of trade unions to represent their members as set out in the Wilson Judgement of the European Court of Human Rights.

This time last year we were in the CAS discussing the violation of the collective bargaining rights of freelance workers in the arts, culture and media sectors. I am pleased to report that only two weeks ago, the Competition Amendment Bill passed through our parliament and restored collective bargaining rights to these workers. We also note new legislative proposals to tackle zero hour contracts and precarious work practices; the introduction of a Gender Pay Gap Information Bill 2017, which if made into law, would require organisations with more than 50 employees to publish regular wage surveys aimed at measuring their internal Gender Pay Gaps.

Coupled with the industrial relations amendment act of 2015, the restoration of the Joint Labour Committee structure (which has already led to improvements for workers experiencing low pay and insecure working hours), the reorganisation of our employment rights infrastructure, and, the creation of the Labour Employer Economic Forum, we hope that such initiatives signal a return to the values of respect for people's fundamental rights at work and a genuine process of social dialogue. Indeed, the context of Brexit highlights the compelling case for government, unions and employers to discuss and agree responses to this and other issues of concern.

Finally, I want to note the report on the situation of workers in the occupied Arab territories and the decent work deficits it outlines. Last week marked 50 years since the commencement of the illegal occupation by Israel of the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. Palestinians there live in a brutal military occupation where a shoot-to-kill policy, detention without trial, torture, home demolitions, child arrest, destruction of agricultural land and the theft of swathes of Palestinian land on which to construct homes for illegal Israeli settlers are everyday occurrences. It is our view that this will not change without sanction from the international community.

We urge the Irish Government to recognise the State of Palestine on the basis of the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and to play an active role in bringing an end to the violation of the human rights of the Palestinian people.

Thank you.

**Irish Congress of Trade Unions,  
June 2017**