

DJ ILO speech 2025

President and Vice Presidents of the Conference, Distinguished delegates,

I very much welcome this year's DG report: "Jobs, Rights and Growth: Reinforcing the Connection"

The report offers an in-depth analysis of the evolving relationship between employment, labour rights, and economic growth in today's complex global landscape. It notes that global disillusionment is rising due to precarious work, social inequality and reaffirms that social justice is inseparable from reinforcing the nexus between jobs, rights, and growth.

This week's release of the ITUC Global Rights Index 2025 underscores the importance of such a theme for the DG report. Three out of five global regions saw conditions worsen including my own region, Europe (2.78) hitting their worst score on record, and the biggest decline seen in any region worldwide over the past 10 years.

Ireland has been no exception in this regard. We continue to have a below par legislative framework for collective bargaining and trade unions have been seeking realistic measures to increase the level of collective bargaining in Ireland. The EU Adequate Minimum Wages Directive obliges EU governments to draw up an action plan to increase collective bargaining coverage in their economies to over 80%. Coverage in Ireland is currently estimated at under 35% so there is much work to be done.

In recent years, Government indicated the possibility of positive workers' rights developments. However, under the guise of protecting our competitiveness, they are now taking a wrecking ball to recent wins. The economic uncertainty around Trump's tariffs has also provided cover to break their promises.

These row-backs include on the living wage, paid sick leave, abolishing sub-minimum youth rates, minimum pay rates for employment permits and pension auto-enrolment and are solely the result of Government cowing to intense lobbying from business representatives, which leave the lowest-paid, sick, young, migrant, and retiring workers to carry the cost of buying employers' silence. Such moves have shown them to be an unreliable negotiating partner for Irish workers. They must revisit their decisions or risk doing untold damage to industrial peace in the already uncertain times ahead and disenfranchising many workers and their families and creating a more conducive context for those spreading division - racism, Transphobia and homophobia.

Delegates, let me conclude with some remarks on the DG report on "The Situation of Workers of the Occupied Arab Territories" which assesses the impact of conflict and occupation on Palestinian workers and proposes a path forward. With more than 54,000 killed by Israeli forces in Gaza, including more than 15,000 children, increased Settler violence and demolitions in the West Bank, abandoning of international humanitarian law and blocking of aid leading to a catastrophic situation and starvation in Gaza... words fail me.. and indeed, have become somewhat redundant.

While we welcome the recent Government use of the term "genocide" to describe this horror, it must now be finally backed up by action, including the urgent passing of the Occupied Territories Bill. This must include goods and services and there should be no more delays. Pass the bill before the Summer recess; Palestine can't wait!

This is why today - the International UN Day of Innocent Children Victims of Aggression – thousands of workers across Ireland, North and South, are standing together to observe a moment of reflection

and solidarity and to urge our Governments to end all complicity and to finally sanction Israel. Israel is only able to continue its livestreamed genocide against Palestinians due to the ongoing complicity of states, companies and institutions around the world. As an UNRWA spokesperson said this week, “The scenes that we're seeing on our screens, on our phones, if these are not enough to prompt action from those that have the influence to take action, then we're lost.”

We all have a responsibility to respond to the call from Palestinian Trade Unions to escalate efforts to end this shameful complicity in Israel's illegal occupation, colonial apartheid and genocide.