

INMO President: Martin Harkin-Kelly response to Minister for Health Mr Simon Harris TD – 10th May 2019

An t-aire sláinte, mo chairde agus mo chlann atá cruinnithe inniu, o fud na tire, fáilte romhaibh agus go raibh míle maith agaibh go leir as teacht go dtí an gComhdháil Speisialta Cead Bliain seo.

I want to warmly thank you all for coming to our ADC, including the Minister for Health, who's attendance and kind words we sincerely appreciate.

This 100th year celebration is a once in a life time moment. I am honoured and humbled to be the President in this momentous year.

The crowd of delegates with us today is quite a bit larger than the 20 visionaries at the pivotal first meeting on February 28th, 1919. This February, a hundred years on, the INMO returned to the site of our foundation, the Mansion House, hosted by the Lord Mayor of Dublin, Neal Ring – míle buíochas.

Those of you who know me, know I am direct if nothing else – therefore, at the outset I want to acknowledge our three days of industrial action earlier this year.

I want to put it on the record: it was deeply unfortunate that Ireland's nurses and midwives were left with no other option – having exhausted all procedures – than to go on strike to get action on the recruitment and retention crisis in our health service.

I want to recognise and thank our strike committees, full-time officials, and Executive Members for all their incredible work these past months. We also want to thank the derogation teams of the HSE, who worked with us.

All nurse and midwife representatives should be proud of the professionalism with which they conducted themselves. Their driving concern throughout the strike was care for patients – ensuring safety during what was a difficult dispute and a very busy time in the health service.

They demonstrated the very best in nursing and midwifery – showing that in all weathers and conditions that they are women and men of strength, courage, determination and professionalism.

The turning point in that fight was our mass rally in Dublin on February 8th. Thousands of you marched, joined by friends, family, patients and the public. And we were joined on the day by many other unions in solidarity.

I wish to acknowledge Ms Patricia King, General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, who was there every step of the way. Patricia, thank you for your unwavering support on behalf of Ireland's nurses and midwives.

The union is its members. Its domain has always been to serve and represent nurses and midwives in the workplace. Mark Loughrey's book, launched today, quite rightly acknowledges "*A Century of Service*" which our members have delivered.

Our early founders, Louie Bennet and Marie Mortished, had a radical vision. That vision today continues with Phil Ní Sheaghda.

As with Phil they had the COURAGE to HOPE and fight for what nurses and midwives truly deserved.

They lived in a male-dominated time, in a profession that was almost exclusively female back then.

Our founders and their successors have always been brave, courageous and imaginative, *“ar son na n-altraí”*.

In the famous words of Robert F Kennedy (or perhaps he coined them from GB Shaw):

“There are those who look at things the way they are, and ask why?... I dream of things that never were and ask why not?”

Our founders were in good company, 1919 also saw the first sitting of Dáil Eireann, on January 21st.

Like those first representatives of our nation, the founders of the INMO recognised the importance of deriving their mandate and voice directly from its members. This requirement to elect its representatives has prevailed as a founding principle over the century – the elected Executive, Officers and Presidents.

Many of our surviving Presidents are still actively involved in this organisation and have left their legacies:

Kay Craughwell, - a true advocate for standards in nursing, who always stood to remind ABA or, now, NMBI of their role.

Ann Martin – for her commitment to the Commission, from which we gained the promotional grades.

Ann Cody – whose legacy stems from the '99 strike. She personified fortitude and determination.

Madeline Spiers, Shiela Dickson and Clare Mahon saw us through both the best and worst of times.

And we remember the late Clare Spillane, who oversaw headquarters' move to the Whitworth Building.

Our President's legacies live on and their names are indelibly etched on this chain of office. They are all testament to YOU our members, hailing from the length and breadth of the country: Dublin, Galway, Cork, Kerry, Waterford & Donegal.

All of these Presidents have to display characteristics of strength, toughness and resilience. But, lest we forget, they were all nurses and midwives – professionals for whom these characteristics come naturally.

Nurses and midwives, you are the backbone of our health service and there's no mistaking that! We are the true embodiment of *"When the going gets tough, the tough get going"*. In difficult economic circumstances, in the midst of health service cuts, we are there – working.

Every single day – through our labour, dedication, and skill, we drive for a progressive, caring health service. This is why, Minister, we fought for these Labour Court proposals and will now work to fully implement them – to develop our professions and the future of this health service.

Nurses and midwives offer care, compassion, commitment, communication, courage and competence. When all combine, the health of our patients improves.

On behalf of the INMO, thank you all, for that you do.

Speaking personally, today is a poignant date. It's the 17th anniversary of the death of my beloved sister Kathleen. A talented nurse, when she passed away, patients in her unit wrote a letter thanking her for the care and commitment she gave.

This is no doubt mirrored for all our members who have sadly passed away. To name but a few, Gobnait O'Connell, Clare Spillane and Mary Walsh: they have left their legacies to this organisation. We thank you – you are not forgotten.

In memory of all nurses and midwives who have passed on, I'd ask for a minute's silence.

(A minute's silence)

Ar dheis dé go raibh a n-anamacha.

For the years ahead, I think of our conference theme:

- Reflecting on the Past
- Navigating the Present
- Modelling for the future

Reflecting on the Past

Harry S Truman once said:

"In periods where there is no leadership, society stands still. Progress occurs when courageous, skilful leaders seize the opportunity to change things for the better".

This union has changed so many elements of our working lives. We must never lose sight of that.

Mark's book has articulated this more eloquently than I ever could, with the account of the St Vincent's Hospital Nurses who were dismissed for *"levity"* in 1919, other nurses resigned

in sympathy – these very actions are reminiscent of James Larkin’s maxim, “*an injury to one is the concern of all*”.

Which brings me to the second part of conference theme:

Navigating the Present

Nurses and midwives work in very difficult circumstances. It has long been acknowledged that our health service does not have enough capacity to meet patient needs. Members are forced to work in understaffed, overcrowded, unsafe environments.

This is why our campaign now shifts to ensuring the implementation of these hard-won proposals, which commence the correction of low pay and unsafe staffing levels.

Implementing these proposals means staffing numbers based on patient dependency.

It’s a new model. The crude instrument of setting staffing solely by what budgets allow – regardless of consequence – has to go.

The HSE’s recruitment pause for nurses and midwives – has to go.

The safe staffing framework is agreed. It is government policy.

The debate of “*how many do we need on the ward?*” is over.

It took a strike to get this funding commitment and by god we’re going to hold them to it.

And we’re going to expand it to cover even more services.

Progress was not gained because we asked for it. It was gained because YOU fought for it.

YOU secured a new, higher salary scale for the staff grades – recognising the high level of clinical competence which you already bring to the job

YOU secured increased, expanded allowances – raising the pay of thousands.

YOU secured extra opportunities for RNID nurses and anyone looking at advanced practice.

And YOU secured an independent expert review for pay in the management and related grades.

As the Labour Court directed, that review must take place soon, to allow the outcome form part of the next public service pay agreement.

And let me sound a warning. Many of our members voiced scepticism that the employer would implement these proposals or improve staffing and safety.

Failure to do so, or any attempt by individual employers or managers to worsen conditions, will be met with the resolve this union and workforce has amply demonstrated these past months.

Colleagues, the final part of our conference theme, **modelling for the future**, starts today:

In accepting the Labour Court Recommendations, nurses and midwives have made a choice that sets our future direction. But as no single proposal will resolve all problems, we always look to the future to improve our conditions and our health service.

The INMO will - as part of the ICTU public services committee - require government to honour its commitments in these proposals as part of the next public service agreement.

In addition, we will seek the total unwinding and removal of FEMPI legislation. The government is rightly reversing the cuts in pay across the public sector. This must also include the extra working hours required of nurses and midwives since 2013.

Hours must be understood as being of equal importance to pay. The INMO proudly stands with other low-paid public service workers in this regard.

As we look to the future of our health service, I'd specifically like to welcome Paul Reid, the new Director General of the HSE. We look forward to working with you.

Friends, the next 100 years starts today. We have a new generation of nurses and midwives, many of whom we have heard speak on motions these past days. I want to introduce Roisin O'Connell, an intern and student nurse, in Waterford Institute of Technology, who I saw speak recently at the launch of Nursing Now. She and her generation embody the best of our professions.

FINALLY

Over the last century this organisation has endeavoured to be at the table of power to influence legislation, policy and strategy.

We have always abided by the rules of engagement;

We have always acted with professionalism,

We have always been mindful, respectful and supportive of those who sat at the table with us.

At the table we have always read the menu closely, making choices to benefit our members.

This Union is positioned to only go from strength to strength over the next 100 years with leadership working for you, that is decisive and strategic. For this, again I must thank our leadership team and Executive Council members, to whom we are indebted.

In **conclusion**, I say the following:

We have proven that we are strong when we are united.

We have proven that we are a caring, skilled profession, who put our patients first.

Colleagues, we are nurses.

We are midwives.

We endure through it all.

And of this we should rightly be proud.

“The belief that we have come from somewhere is closely linked with the belief that we are going somewhere”.

What’s left for me to say is bring on the next 100 years.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh go léir.