

9th October, 2020

Commissioner Drew Harris
An Garda Síochána Headquarters
Phoenix Park
Dublin 8
D08 HN3X

Dear Commissioner Harris

The Irish Congress of Trade Unions fully supports the national effort to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic and recognises that exceptional measures have been required to protect individual lives and public health.

The ICTU notes with grave concern the increase in anti-mask and anti-public health measures demonstrations in recent weeks, notably in Dublin.

These aggressive gatherings are organised in defiance of public health guidelines and regulations. The organisers and participants not only refuse to wear masks and appear to flout public health and safety guidelines with impunity but verbally abuse and intimidate citizens who observe COVID-19 guidelines.

Of particular concern to Congress is the consistent intimidation of frontline retail and other workers.

Protest is a fundamental part of our democracy and peaceful demonstration is a long tradition in our society. We regard these protests as an abuse of the right to peaceful protest. Congress has always defended the right to protest and exercised that right responsibly.

In organising public events and demonstrations we have adhered to operational requests from An Garda Síochána, including in relation to routes and assembly points. It does not appear that the standard applies to trade unions and other groups have been applied to the organisers of recent anti-mask demonstrations.

To date, it is our understanding that no one has been charged with organising events in contravention of the coronavirus emergency legislation and regulations introduced at the start of the pandemic in March. This is despite several high-profile public demonstrations and gatherings, including, most recently, three large anti-mask demonstrations in Dublin city centre.

Congress recognises that policing these gathering poses significant challenges and may indeed compromise the health and safety of Garda. However, we are concerned that the organisers of such events appear free to flout health and safety guidelines with impunity.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our concerns and to discuss the future policing of such incidents with a view to safeguarding the health and welfare of our members, their families and our communities.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Patricia King', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Patricia King
General Secretary