



UACHTARÁN NA hÉIREANN
PRESIDENT OF IRELAND

**Message by President Michael D. Higgins
to the Communications Workers' Union Conference**

4-5 May 2022

May I send my very best wishes to all those attending the Communications Workers' Union 11th Biennial Conference, and I am hoping to have the opportunity your conference offers to congratulate Seán McDonagh following his appointment as General Secretary. I am so well aware from my days in Galway, how well Seán has served the Union at every level, including President, before becoming General Secretary. Comhghairdeas, Seán.

Your Conference being a gathering of 300 delegates from all parts of the country, and across all areas of the postal and e-communications sector, is happening at an important time. Your agenda rightly focuses on building a better, more equal and just future for all workers across the wider communications sector, but it will also commemorate and celebrate the role of communication workers in the postal and e-communications industry.

The outstanding efforts of CWU members, throughout the challenges of the pandemic – keeping communities connected, maintaining essential services and supporting important commercial activity – should all be recognised and applauded. May I, as President of Ireland, thank you all for your hard work through such a challenging period of pandemic.

Many of you faced personal tragedy resulting from Covid-19, yet you never lost your sense of public duty, keeping the country connected while many continued to work remotely from their homes during lockdowns, as well as staying in touch with loved ones during long and difficult periods of enforced isolation. Remembering family, loved ones,

colleagues and customers who sadly passed away during the pandemic will serve as a key reminder of the loss we have all felt as the Covid-19 death toll passes 7,000 of our people.

Your conference will rightly celebrate the great work of the CWU and its representatives in keeping workers safe, while they continued to work, and it will acknowledge the positive response and engagement of employers in responding constructively to the CWU representations.

The Communication Workers' Union has a proud record in relation to international solidarity. They were to the forefront in expressing solidarity with trade unionists in Colombia who were the group being most threatened in Colombia, and indeed the Union contributed to my own trip to Chile when it was necessary to confront General Pinochet's Rule. So your record is one that has earned respect at home and abroad.

The trend of rapidly increasing digitalisation of the global economy, galvanised by the pandemic, requires us to ensure that appropriate safeguards are in place to protect those who will be left behind or exploited by such a trend.

We see the adverse impacts of digitalisation manifesting across society, with shops and financial services branches continuing to close, staff being redeployed to back office services or made redundant, and the customer experience ever-diminished, all of this rationalised in the name of efficiency, flexibility, productivity.

Digitalisation can yield positive, shared results. It need not be wholly negative if offered within a social-economic model, ensuring that workers are covered by employment law and collective agreements.

Responding to the pandemic has the potential to usher in new campaigns that address a new era for workers' rights. May I suggest that trade unions such as yours are presented now with an opportunity to ensure that a major change is brought to fruition with regard to workers' rights in Ireland.

This can include advancing crucial policy agendas, such as a move to achieving support for universal basic services and an appropriate living wage, the need for access to an occupational pension, the right to disconnect from work, the right to seek remote working arrangements, new legislation for statutory sick pay arrangements, and, perhaps most importantly, a new approach to collective bargaining and industrial relations giving greater power to trade unions.

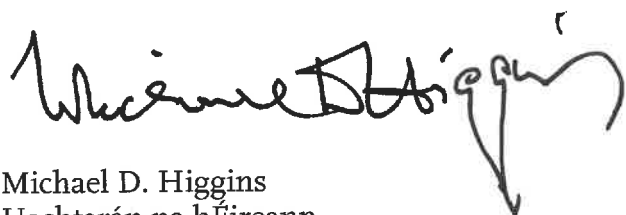
How our society and economy emerges from this pandemic will be vitally important to the future of workers' rights. It is vital, therefore, that we all commit to playing our part in the creation of a society and economy that removes the obstacles standing between so many of our people and their full participation. Let us commit to valuing those heroic workers who have risked their lives and their security to support us through the dark period of pandemic. Let us keep defending their rights as the founders of the trade union movement did more than a century ago.

I believe there never was a more exciting and relevant time to be a part of the trade union movement. I wish you well in your endeavours to create a future of equality, justice and sustainability, one that will carry the trade union's emancipatory imprint.

We must never forget that the rights we have were won by active trade union members, and active trade unionism is their best protection for the future.

I wish your conference every success.

Míle buíochas is beir beannacht.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael D. Higgins". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Michael D. Higgins
Uachtarán na hÉireann
President of Ireland