



**Opening Speech by Chairperson, Ms. Justice Mary Laffoy,**

**at the Sixth Meeting of the Citizens' Assembly**

**The Challenges and Opportunities of an Ageing Population**

**The Grand Hotel, Malahide, 10<sup>th</sup> June 2017**

Good morning everyone and welcome back to the Grand Hotel in Malahide for what is the Sixth meeting of the Citizens' Assembly.

Today we meet to consider the next topic on our work programme – the Challenges and Opportunities of an Ageing Population. The last time we gathered it was to conclude our work on the topic of the Eighth Amendment. I am working on that report and will submit this by the end of June as previously indicated.

I must say how heartened I am to see so many familiar faces here this morning and to feel the energy and collegiality in the room.

However before I go any further I want to take a moment to mark the passing of one of the members of the Assembly, John Connolly from County Cork. John was a very dedicated member, who took his role very seriously and someone who I know had made genuine friends here at the Assembly. He will be sadly missed. I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Secretariat, the members and myself to offer

sincere condolences to John's family. As a mark of respect to John I would ask you all to stand now and join me in a minute's silence.

[Following minutes' silence]

*Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam*

Go raibh mhaith agaibh gach dhuine

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Following the conclusion in April of that very intense phase of our work on the Eighth Amendment, I think it was not beyond the realms of possibility that some members would have withdrawn from the Assembly. Indeed, you have already given so generously of your time that you could have been forgiven for deciding to bow out.

However, I am once again bowled over by the sense of civic duty displayed by the members of this Assembly.

I am truly delighted to report that we have had an overwhelmingly positive response from our members, with all but three members being in a position to remain on as part of the Assembly for the remaining topics. This level of commitment is a continuous source of inspiration to me and I thank you all for your continued presence and service to the State.

To those new members joining us for the first time today, I want to take this opportunity to welcome you, thank you for your participation and to wish you well as we begin our work on this important topic. You join us at the beginning of a new and exciting phase of our work, where we will consider topics as varied as climate change, fixed term parliaments, the manner in which referenda are held, and today's topic: the Challenges and Opportunities of an Ageing Population.

I think it's fair to say that this topic is incredibly broad, wide ranging and affects us all in one way or another. And already, in one way or another, has been the subject of multiple Government policy documents, strategies, and reviews.

I was conscious therefore, that we should focus our efforts and energy on the areas where we can add real value by advancing policy discourse.

In advance of this weekend, I have been extremely fortunate to have had the benefit of a new Expert Advisory Group, which I have formed to advise me on this topic in accordance with the Oireachtas Resolution.

John Garry, Professor of Politics from Queens University Belfast remains as our one constant member of the Expert Group, having also been with us on the Eighth Amendment, and he will remain a member for the other areas of the Assembly's work.

He is joined on this occasion by Rose Anne Kenny, Professor of Medical Gerontology at Trinity College Dublin and Director of the new Mercer's Institute for Successful Ageing.

She is joined by Eamon O'Shea, Personal Professor in the School of Business & Economics in NUI Galway. Eamon was the inaugural Director of the Irish Centre for Social Gerontology (ICSG) at NUI Galway.

Amanda Phelan also joins the group. Mandy is Co-Director of the National Centre for the Protection of Older People in University College Dublin.

Susan Cliff, Deputy Chief Inspector of HIQUA also joins the EAG. Susan has senior regulatory responsibility for older people living in residential care.

Finally, Patricia Rickard-Clarke is a solicitor with a wide range of experience both past and present in relation to the law and older people. She is currently a member of the Council of the Hospice Foundation and a member of its Think Ahead Project Advisory Group of the Forum on End of Life, and the HSE's National Financial Abuse of Older People Working Group. She was formerly a Commissioner of the Law Reform Commission and was the lead Commissioner with regard to the Commission's work on Vulnerable Adults and the Law.

Most of the members of the Expert Group are with us here today and I want to thank them for their attendance and all their work to date.

The Group has met on a number of occasions to consider the work programme for this weekend. First on our order of business was to consider whether a single weekend would be sufficient to allow the topic to receive due consideration.

In considering our options in this regard, I was mindful of the timeline laid down by the Oireachtas for our work; you will recall that the resolution states that we should complete all of our work within one year. This means that all five topics in the work programme should be completed by November this year.

I was also conscious of the considerable time commitment which has already been made by our members and therefore any additional time could only be contemplated if absolutely necessary.

On reflection and in consultation with the Steering Group I concluded that an additional weekend on this topic would be required. I am confident that this will be to the absolute benefit of the members and ultimately to the quality of the recommendations they will make.

#### Focus of this weekend's discussions

I will now turn my attentions to the topic at hand and how we will approach our work this weekend.

As is evident from the agenda for this weekend, I have decided that we will focus our attentions this first weekend on considering long term care

and facilitating independent living in Ireland. There are a number of reasons why we have singled out this topic for special attention. Since beginning our consultations, this aspect has been raised most frequently as requiring further consideration. It was the view of the Expert Group that this area of public policy was most in need of attention and action.

Significantly, this was also the single biggest issue that came through in our submissions process. The submissions process was open from 3 April to 19 May. Some 120 submissions were received and these have all been posted on the Assembly's website. The Secretariat has prepared a summary of the submissions for the members and this will also be made available on the website today.

As we will hear today, responding to the support and care needs of our older population is a complex and challenging topic and it is safe to say that in spite of decades of policy reports and recommendations to Government, much more work is required to adequately facilitate independent living in Ireland.

However, another reason why I selected this issue was that it will allow us to consider the topic of ageing in a wider sense.

All else being equal and all going well, growing old is something which faces us all. But the meaning of ageing is different for different people. For some it will mean retirement and finally having the time to for hobbies and passions.

For others it will mean continuing with work. For some it will mean spending more time with friends and family. In some cases older people will spend that time caring for family members, for others they themselves will be cared for.

For some ageing can mean an opportunity to spend more time in the community, engaging socially and developing new friendship. For others, ageing can mean isolation and loneliness.

Each of these aspects of a person's life can be either inhibited or enhanced by where they are living.

When we age, just like at other times in our lives, our needs are multifaceted.

Long term care is not solely a health or social care matter. It is about so much more than that.

And just because someone is old, does not mean that they do not have a contribution to make, something to say or a role to play.

And so, I would encourage our members today to open your minds and consider the material we are going to discuss today in the broadest possible way. Do not let yourselves be constrained by focussing in a narrow sense on this issue. Place yourselves in the shoes of an older person or consider how you want to live your life as an older person and apply that thinking to your deliberations.

In one of our submissions it was suggested that this topic should be renamed to read “how we support our older people to respond to the challenges and opportunities of their current state of development”. This to me seems like a very thought provoking prism through which to view today’s proceedings.

Tomorrow we hear from the citizens directly on what other aspects of this topic they would like to consider at the July meeting. Once again we must recall that this is an exercise in deliberative democracy and so the views of the members must shape our work programme.

We will now begin hearing from two speakers who will provide us with a statistical and evidence based overview of the shape and structure of Ireland’s ageing population, and what is it like to grow old in Ireland.

We will hear first from Deirdre Cullen, Senior Statistician with the Central Statistics Office with responsibility for the Census.

We will then hear from Dr Diarmuid O’Shea, Consultant Physician in Geriatric Medicine, St Vincent’s Hospital and National Clinical lead for the Older People Programme.

I will now call on Deirdre to begin the weekend’s proceedings.

ENDS