

Address to IVTO General Assembly Meeting held on 11th Sept. 1978 in Busan, South Korea
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Mr. President and members of the general assembly, observers from non-member countries, I am deeply honoured to be addressing the general assembly of the International Organisation for the promotion of Vocational Education and Training. At the outset I would wish to convey to you, Mr. President, and to your committee, my gratitude for affording me this singular distinction.

The main purpose of my address is to confirm on behalf of my Minister, Mr. John Wilson T.D. Minister for Education and in the presence of the assembled delegates, the invitation to hold the 25th International Apprentice Competition in my country, Ireland. This invitation was already conveyed to your secretary-general in a letter from the Secretary General of the Irish Department of Education on April 24th last.

There are many reasons why it gives me great pleasure to be able to re-affirm this invitation to you. As you all know, my country, Ireland, has had a very long association with this organisation and with the International Apprentice Competition. Our delegates first became acquainted with your aims and objectives when they attended a competition in Madrid at the invitation of the Spanish authorities, whom we all acknowledge as the founding fathers of this very valuable international movement. Apprentices from Ireland competed for the first time in 1957 in Madrid. We were honoured to host the competitions in Dublin in 1963. We were deeply disappointed, but at the same time very conscious of the solidarity and support of all our friends in the organisation when in 1975 due to difficulties outside our control, we were unable to undertake the organisation of the competition in Ireland. We are happy now that these difficulties proved to be of a temporary nature and that we shall have the opportunity to welcome you to Ireland in 1979.

In Ireland we are very aware of the value of the activity which your organisation promotes and of the benefits we, as a small nation, derive from our participation. It is not for me to re-iterate your laudable objectives and aims except in the form of expressing the gratitude of my country for what we have received. Our association with this activity has helped us in many ways. It has enabled us to become acquainted with the highest international standards in the craft skills and thereby be in a position to set and assess standards in this area of work, suitable to the development of our young people.

It has assisted us through demonstrating and bringing to our attention the advances in technology and in trade practice and so has contributed to the strengthening of the fabric of vocational education and training in our country. It has inspired confidence and interest in this vitally important form of education.

The status of apprenticeship in education and in society has gained much from the extent to which its importance has been highlighted through the International Apprenticeship Competition and the national selection procedures leading up to it.

The competition has helped to restore a premium on excellence – an objective which is frequently lacking in many branches of our conduct of human and educational affairs. A former Prime Minister of ours once said: "All boats rise with a rising tide". The achievement of excellence in apprenticeship is clearly of value to all apprentices, not merely to those who come out on top. And finally, we are at one with our many friends in this organisation in attaching great importance to the opportunity of bringing together the many people from many nations in an activity of this kind. In particular the young people, the apprentices, who are our future. In the spirit of fair and healthy competition, they share their high hopes, their endeavours, their efforts, their aspirations and even their disappointments with their counterparts from so many other countries. Their common professional interest helps to bridge the gap of cultural difference and provides the basis on which mutual understanding, appreciation and lasting friendships can be cultivated. No young person taking part in the International Youth Skill Olympics will ever be the same again. He will be a larger, a better, a more understanding, a more human person for the experience.

And all this brings me to the main point of my intervention. We plan to hold the 25th International Apprentice Competition in the Regional College, Cork – Ireland, between the dates Sunday, September 2 and Tuesday September 18, 1979. We have already prepared an outline programme which, I presume, you will be discussing in committee session. We would expect to be in a position to offer facilities for competition in the majority of trades which are common to the International Youth Skill Olympics and the final list will be worked out in accordance with the usual practices of your organisations.

Cork is a small city of some 140,000 people situated in the extreme South of the country on the banks of the River Lee, about 15 kilometres from the sea. It is an old city which grew around a monastic settlement established in the 6th century. It is a proud and intimate city; many people describe it as “the largest village in the world”, by which they mean that it has retained the warmth of human contact so characteristic of village life.

We are, very naturally, proud of the surrounding scenery which is an interesting pattern of rich agricultural land, rivers with verdant valleys, a variegated indented coast-line with many beautiful bays and inlets and an adjacency to the hills, which we call mountains, which provide our barrier to the Atlantic gales of the wintertime.

In September, it is early autumn, - harvest season in Cork – temperatures are mild, in the order of 16-20C, and the weather pattern can produce sunshine, cloud and rain, all within a twenty-four-hour period.

The vernacular language of the people is English.

The College, which is the competition centre, is one of eight such Colleges which we have built in Ireland since 1970, to strengthen Vocational Education and Training in the country. Cork too, has its share of modern industry, - chemical, electronic, motor, engineering and shipbuilding and its harbour area has been one of our major centres of industrial growth in the last decade.

I mentioned at the outset that mine is a small country with a population of some three million people. There is nothing of this smallness, however, reflected in the welcome we accord our visitors and the expression “Cead Mile Failte” is a common one in our native Gaelic language – meaning that we measure welcomes in units of one hundred thousand and I can assure you that nothing less will be extended to the delegates and participants in the 25th International Apprentice Competition in 1979.

No doubt the significance of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the competition is on many of our minds as an event which, basically, merits a special commemoration. You have, Mr. President, already discussed this matter informally with me and I would only repeat my assurances that the Irish authorities will co-operate with the general assembly in every possible way to ensure that this historic occasion is appropriately marked.

Finally, I would be most unwilling to forego this opportunity of expressing to the Korean National Committee, the indebtedness, the appreciation, the gratitude of all the Irish delegation for the excellent arrangements, the warm welcome, the unique experience, we are sharing here in Busan.

We will have long and friendly and affectionate memories of Korea and of its people. To you, honourable President and to your fellow assembly members, thank you once again for the honour which you have bestowed on me this afternoon.

Extract from the minutes of the of the Member Assembly meeting held in the Industrial Technical School of Busan on the 11TH September 1978. ANNEX No. 4