

**Remarks by Minister Josepha Madigan, Liberty Hall, Dublin, 21<sup>st</sup> March 2018**

Distinguished guests, colleagues and friends,

Tá mé fíor-shásta bheith libh inniu ag an ócáid tábhachtach seo. My sincere thanks to Siobhán Bourke, Jane Daly and their team at the Irish Theatre Institute, who through their hard work made today's event possible.

Last November in light of the revelations in the Gate Theatre, my predecessor Heather Humphreys met with the leaders of Irish theatre organisations who had co-signed a statement condemning sexual harassment and abuse of power in theatre in Ireland and internationally.

That meeting focused on how the theatre sector could best move forward on the issues that had arisen in Irish theatre.

The resources of my Department were made available to assist the sector in any way we could and since that meeting my Department has supported Siobhán and Jane in their work to set out some practical actions that the theatre sector could take.

***Speak Up and Call It Out*** was born out of these discussions. Today is about the elimination of abuse of power and the safeguarding of health and wellbeing - and the career potential - of those working in the sector. I have stated that I wanted today to be seen as an initiative of the theatre sector, for the theatre sector, that is led by the theatre sector. Hopefully by the end of today you will have agreed a code of conduct that all can abide by.

Abuse of power is not unique to the theatre sector; it occurs in all walks of life but recent events have shone a light on the arts. We rely on the arts, and on theatre in particular, to challenge society and to call out hypocrisy. We know how important that role can be particularly in times of national stress; be it as a result of political tensions or economic crises.

This past year has forced the cultural sector to look inward – and to call out unacceptable behaviour in our world.

I have been taken with the courage of those who have spoken out. It is our duty today to respond to that and to act. Today the sector is taking the lead in addressing an unacceptable culture that needed to be challenged.

This action in Ireland is mirrored around the world. We have seen the initiative in the Royal Court in the UK, in Australia with the Safe Theatres' movement, and in Europe where the artist-led ENGAGEMENT initiative is tackling sexual harassment, sexism and power of abuse in the Belgian arts field.

We can work with our international colleagues to address the gaps and support for people who devote their lives to theatre. These include the areas of production, writing, direction, design, performance, producing, management, marketing and administration from the full time staff to the short term freelance artist and sole trader.

There is a need to ensure that no one in the sector is more protected than any other and that no role in the production of theatre is recognised to be less than any other but that all are equally entitled to the same support, redress and resolution process.

There are gaps in awareness and provision in terms of where people can go:

If you are working within a company structure where procedures and processes are in place then the issue is about that organisation, its governance structures and its commitment to exercise the appropriate measures and processes to address any complaints.

If, on the other hand, freelancers are working on short term one off projects within a non-company structure there may be a lack of both awareness and provision around where people can go to address grievances.

This is one of the anomalies around access to supports that will be discussed today.

I hope this will lead to proposals and ideas about appropriate supports and services which could enhance existing infrastructure around addressing bullying, harassment and the abuse of power. It is important that abuse is not just identified in all its forms (there are different types of abuse) but that the victim knows where to make their complaint

I will be very pleased to work with the Irish Theatre Institute and the Arts Council to follow up any recommendations which are made today in this area.

I am aware that I am speaking to a predominately female audience today, but we know that *bullying*, *harassment* and sexual harassment are not only perpetrated by men in positions of power. It is a fact that recent revelations have been overwhelmingly from women, most notably from those who participated in the Gate review and the 72 signatories of the letter to the Irish Times. This suggests that women are more likely to experience abuse but it may also mean that work needs to be done to provide supports for men to speak up in the knowledge that they too will be heard and receive the supports they also require.

Bullying is unfortunately in every industry and it is not specific to gender, nationality, social background or age. The definitions and descriptions of bullying and harassment which will be discussed throughout the day will make clear how it can be targeted at anyone, by anyone, in any location or circumstance. This needs to be stamped out and consequences applied. I do believe we are at a pivotal moment in time to achieve that goal.

Arts and arts organisations by their very nature lead and reflect societal change. As we work together to ensure people are heard and listened to, we will see that the stories we tell, the work we make, the society we share, begin to change shape for the better. The voice of the excluded, the less powerful, the marginalised, will be amplified and broadcast. Ní neart go cur le chéile.

But as we look forward with hope, it would be remiss of us not to reflect back on the hurt and wrongdoings of the past. Much of it never publicly voiced. This process will not ignore the hurt and damage that has been done to so many people across the sector, women and men, across too many years and in many locations and we must honestly acknowledge that failures occurred. It is simply just not acceptable. This culture cannot be allowed to continue under any circumstances anymore.

Power imbalances impact people's lives, personally and professionally, individually and collectively. It is our shared responsibility to enable and ensure equality of standing for all members of our community.

Theatre is a collaborative art form where people with diverse skills, backgrounds, ages and genders work together to make art that reflects the world around us and the society within which we live.

It is this spirit of collaboration and co-operation that, when harnessed, can drive change.

Let us say today that we will no longer ignore our problems.

Let us work together and take collective responsibility to change behaviour and create a safe, respectful and dignified workplace.

Let us ensure that those who fail to observe these values and practices will be held to account.

To borrow a phrase from across the Atlantic: **TIME'S UP – and to borrow one of my own, it's up now!**

Through a collaboration of artists, organisations, funding agencies, institutions and government departments we will undertake to make change happen. In true theatrical form, we will play the role in which we have been cast and give the best performance we can to make this a safe sector. Together we will encourage the excellent standards of creativity for which Irish theatre is justly famous, and will do so without fear, silence and the abuse of power.

Chilean writer Isabelle Allende said

***"What I fear most is power with impunity. I fear abuse of power, and the power to abuse."***

And of course these are subjects that will be tackled head on today.

Nevertheless, in the spirit of hope which we embrace today, we recall Spanish philosopher Baltasar Gracián who said:

***"The sole advantage of power is that you can do more good"***

I believe that wholeheartedly and fundamentally. Together today we can make the difference.

**Speak Up, Call It Out and Engage!**

**Thank You.**