

Mo geels, mo tribli, mo cara, my friends,

I am honoured to be here today - to be able to accept the invitation to speak, in this historic space, in support of our health. The focus of health however is on the health of culture and heritage, it's impacts on our communities and the consequences of it on our families, especially the young.

I consider this a much needed and essential conversation, for a community that is disconnected from it's historic expressions and belongings, is one that can exist in a state of trauma and great injury, that has wide reaching implications and consequences on belonging, from mental health, self esteem, inter community dialogue, self identity and on and and and on.

When I hear the terms 'culture and heritage', I feel that pull to the elder world, the lands that existed before I, myself, ever did. I too however feel the beating heart of being here now, being among the contemporary people, living current and on-going lives, which host our identities, honouring the echoes of our pasts and holding up the choruses of our futures.

In the personal lives of Travellers, we understand that a connection to the past is essential - as it aids the grounding, contextual, personal, collective, communication to who we are - to who we can and will be.

I of course also acknowledge the difficulty in identifying and sharing our cultural belongings, when so much of the community is in state of ongoing and inter-generational trauma – investing in the protection, preservation and promotion of culture can be seen and interpreted, as a bit of surplus - a point of luxury or additional later consideration, to a people who are being overtly repressed and oppressed by the state, as well as subtle and openly undermined historically by the institutional structures.

It is like when the songs of our foremothers cannot be heard, when their children are without home, shelter, care, and gruber - the noise of an emergency need blunts out the voice that has carried us forward.

This can lead to an external interpretation that the honouring of culture and heritage is an option - rather than a core being of who we are - and *why* we survive.

I'm drawn to mention the many Committees and reports, such as the Key Issues affecting the Traveller Community and the Seanad Public Consultation Committee Report on Travellers Towards a more Equitable Ireland Post-Recognition, which were not lacking in recommendation and needs that if invested in, and honoured, would bring such a transformative - but at the same time - I would draw light to how and when the delivery of these and other poignant recommendations, in unity of the community, they need to be delivered.

In terms of our language - 'Gammon-Cant' - the UNESCO protection and election to the assembly of and its placement among Ireland's National Inventory of Intangible Cultural Heritage is welcomed, but it could be a far more connected engagement for an island wide review, reflection, collection and supported use of this, our language for is an Irish language and part of the spirit of the native tongue.

In terms of our traditional healing - covering customs, cure and curative herbal action - I hope that this will be revive more investment, and exploration, otherwise we rely on students like Ian McDonagh (BT Young Scientist & Technology (STEM) awardee's) to forage forward much needed understandings, who's work show identifiable cost cutting actions for the HSE.

In regards of traditional skill sets, be they among the many such as tinkering, wood work, mason and field-footing, I remain solid among many who would welcome a swift enactment of various apprenticeships - the extension, preservation and protection of traditional skill sets is not only vital act - but one I understand that is not in any way opposed - just needing appropriate resourcing.

Our music, our songs, our musicians, our storytellers of otherwise lost or endangered tales, our tinsmiths and crafters, our weavers and beady-makers, our dreamers and writers, poets and creators – are among the custodians of our culture but also the wider culture of the island – and that needs protection, ensured ringfencing, promotion and extension.

I welcome, especially in recent years the increased opportunities and pathways for Travellers to engage with the art, but we must also be among the decision makers of the process and be seen as authentic stakeholder – extending the employment avenues for people to work in state and strategic providers of heritage and culture is essential, otherwise we run the risk of relying on only a handful of resourced people, to support the custodianship of over 50K peoples diverse and multifold belonging and heritage – which provides an ongoing risk to self-identity, belonging, education and core health of being.

Trauma informed undertakings would not only be very much welcomed by the community, but are essential if we are to engage as widely as possible.

Creation of resources, such as the Minceiri Archives, a collection of voices, experiences, insights, opinions and lives lived by our elders are among the needed tool kits for not only promotion of the health of our cultural connections, but educational resources and information that undermines discriminatory mindsets and practices – without such tools, we give additional passage to the structures and those within it, that do harm to us all.

Events such as Mishlor, the national festival of nomads, that draws together nomadic people across the globe, to a yearly event in Galway, should be more than just an annual event – honouring the paths we come from, and travel with and by, can be reduced to tokenism, if we do not continue to expand them – we are Travellers every day, not just on days like Traveller Pride Week, where we get to show case our strengths and vibrancy, but every day – and I do believe that in order to tip the scales back towards a healthier community, we need to ensure that the honouring, celebration, connective aspects of our beautiful culture and heritage needs to continue to be underpinned in the work of the state, it's agencies and funded structures, not as a potential add on, but a core aspect of the needed work.

Ensuring Traveller specific positions, permanent roles within the creative, cultural and heritage sector will aid the journey towards a better understanding of our cultural inheritance but also ensure that the places, spaces and communities can be seen as active and authentic agents of change and belonging.

An elevation of our contribution to the fabric of the arts and heritage of this island within the structural mindset and strategic deliveries would, do much for mental health sensitives, bring opportunities for increase employment, increased personal and family resources, be an additional means of nurturing positive outcomes, educational resources and honour our ancestors.

The state I hope will continue to expand the safeguarding of our heritage, create additional security for our health. An increased state investment would all for us not only to survive but prosper.

Thank you.