

First of all, I wish to congratulate the Filipino Irish Society of County Donegal headed by Mary Grace Alegarme for organizing a reunion for the 30 nurses for celebrating 20 years of service today. To be recognized by INMO, Donegal County Council and the Philippine Consulate for your service is a great honour.

We often underestimate the critical role nurses play. We sometimes take nurses for granted, but you guys do not deal with commodities, but human lives. You have a calling to which you responded. Health is always a priority. Everything starts with it. We cannot work or play without it. Other issues take lesser importance.

Nurses must be saluted because you are the most critical workers anywhere in the world. Your job is of paramount importance to the fabric and well-being of any society.

The importance of nurses has been further highlighted by the global health crisis caused by the coronavirus which has seen you giving an arm and a leg, and even your own lives in trying to literally save the world. Many nurses have lost their lives in the line of duty and have made sacrifices that have cost them and their families and loved ones dearly in order to save and preserve lives.

An enormous amount of responsibility is placed on your shoulders as you make decisions daily in matters of life and death.

Due to the interconnected nature of our modern existence, we are all affected by the help and care nurses administer.

A nurse who helps save a family member's life impacts anyone as well as his or her family member.

Without nurses, medicine would cease to exist and that would have a grave impact on everyone.

The kind of care and attention you give to your work is exceptional. You give the best to those left in your care. Wards, particularly intensive care and high dependency units are always a hive of activity as you do your utmost to save lives and ensure patients' needs are taken care of. Some of you literally do not sleep, as you attend to matters at hand. Watching you at work gives a true picture of the selfless nature of your work. Nurses are generally side-stepped in our order of importance, but your work is vital.

Some may dismiss you as just being a nurse, emanating from a presumed position of superiority, but you are confronted by the most dire of circumstances.

You face some of the most excruciating moments one could ever come face-to-face with, but you continue to work, regardless.

The patients themselves could be problematic, the visitors too may pose challenges of their own, the doctors need precise reports and all this needs to be handled all at the same time. But you all do what needs to be done with grace and professionalism.

Because of Covid-19 restrictions, there are limits to hospital visitors, understandably done to protect the patients and the visitors themselves. But that alone is a battle as many relatives would want to see the hospitalised.

Your passion is admirable. We applaud you for your efforts. For working under the most challenging of circumstances but you still do your work diligently.

It requires patience, industry, understanding, empathy, belief and a high degree of commitment to the cause.

You have to be given the credit and support you fully deserve and at times we take your contribution to society for granted without acknowledging the extent of your importance and relevance to society. Hats off to all nurses in this room as you are selfless warriors and bravehearts fighting every second to save lives all over the world. One cannot fathom a world without nurses. There may not be much of a world to talk about in the first place if it were not for your presence. You are taking so much risk to ensure other people's health and safety. From working long, gruelling shifts without adequate protective gear, the mental strain that you may be going through is immense. By operating under severe resource constraints, you are bearing the brunt of a hostile and uncertain environment.

Considering the enormity of what you frontline warriors are going through, the only solace we can deliver at this critical juncture is by showering our love, respect and good wishes for your wellbeing, as well for as their family members.

It becomes a mandatory responsibility of the government and those safe at home to feel and assess the seriousness of the growing stigma that the healthcare workers are encountering with each passing day. There are reports of health workers developing symptoms of depression, anxiety, insomnia, and distress. The risk of infection, understaffing problems, and many other issues instill stress and anxiety.

What makes you even more inspiring and admirable is the fact that you live in this kind of work environment in another country. Ireland, your second home for the past 20 years. On top of the challenges in your job, you have to cope with a foreign culture. But guess what? Filipinos are

resilient and hardworking. Give them a difficult task and they reap and return rewards and good work 100 times more than what is expected. That's how we are, that's why we are known to be one of the best workers in the world.

Every time I meet a foreigner, they would always ask if I were a nurse and there is always an amusing reaction when I say I am not. Today, I honestly wish I were, because Filipino nurses are the most in demand professionals all over the world.

You are our frontline warriors and, and let us not only respect your contributions but also ensure that your safety and dignity are protected too.

All frontline warriors deserve love, respect, praise and good wishes. Today, we shower our deep gratitude to all 24 of 30 nurses in this room, working relentlessly. Here is to 20 more years of rock solid nursing in Ireland. Let us clap for all clap for:

MARY GRACE ALEGARME

LALAINA GO QUIAMBAO

MARIA LIRA GERVACIO SARIÑO

JOCELYN E. JOSE

CECILIA AGUDA BUDIONGAN

EVA PAÑA

JEANNETTE V. TAMAYO

ELLA GUTIERREZ

LEAH M. MALAPAD

GREGORIO VICTORINO

LANYCEL PENIERO ZELINKA

MARY DOBSON

MELNER L. PEÑAREDONDO

MARIO PASCUAL Jr.

MARY FLOR SARTORIO

HONERLI PINULAN

MELODY MACADANGDANG

DORIFE RAAGAS

MARIA SHIELA FORTEZA

JUVY LASTIMOSA

ROSELLE ALVIOLA

ALARISE GOMEZ

LAURA BORROMEO MARZAN

RHEE POSTRERO

EVANGELINE BUYOC VILLANUEVA

NELISA T. MANAPSAL

GINA RIOS FERNANDEZ