Speech of Mary Fitzpatrick, 78th Fianna Fáil Ard Fhéis

A Cairde,

Ireland has endured a deeply difficult decade.

The recovery we are experiencing is not down to government policy as Fine Gael spin would have you believe.

It is due to the hard work and sacrifice of Irish people.

We all made sacrifices to secure our communities, but communities need homes.

Homes are where families share life’s ups and downs, cook a meal, do homework, watch the soaps or just catch a breath.

Six years of Fine Gael led Governments has culminated in the worst housing and homelessness crises in the history of this state.

From when Fine Geal took office in 2011, every action they have taken has made the housing situation worse.

They cut the capital budget and funding for social housing.

They abolished Affordable housing.

They failed to put manners on the banks and vulture funds who they allowed repossess family homes.

Their policies have driven massive rent increases and unaffordable house prices.

Successive Government Ministers have used the housing crises to raise their profile in pursuit of their own personal advancement.

But what is most unforgivable is that they have repeatedly sought to deflect from the problem.

They have spun announcement after announcement.

Each trip to Montrose promised more than the previous and the crises has worsened each time.

Instead of investing in homes Fine Gael has invested in homelessness.

To the point where today there are more than 3,000 children “living” in emergency homeless accommodation, far too many in my own community in Dublin Central.

What must any of those homeless children think when they hear Fine Gael talk about a “republic of opportunity”.

Does Fine Gael offer them the opportunity to have a place to call home, No

To do homework after school, NO

To sit together and enjoy a family meal, No

The psychological and emotional impact of homelessness is immense and will be felt for years to come.

On top of the 1,000s of men, women and children trying to cope in emergency homelessness accommodation there are 1,000s more on the social housing list with no secure home, dependent on the kindness of family and friends, sofa surfing or renting in often overpriced and insecure accommodation.

They are all at risk of homelessness.

These numbers do not include those people, the Taoiseach refers to as middle-income workers, who get up early, work late and pay taxes.

Young teachers, developers, nurses, gardaí, plumbers, designers, electricians all of them are struggling to rent a home in Dublin never mind own home due to Fine Geals failure to invest in affordable housing.

Where I live in Dublin Central the state owns acres of vacant lands suitable for housing, sites like O’Devaney Gardens and Dominic Street, yet the only developments progressed in Dublin Central since Fine Gael took office are hotels, office space, student accommodation and homeless facilities.

All developments are welcome but zero affordable homes, zero family homes, zero starter homes in the worst housing crises in the history of the state?

Any one of the 1,000s of homeless children could tell Fine Gael what’s wrong with their policy.

Since the 1930s and even in the worst of times Fianna Fáil has had the ambition and the moral conviction to drive forward with housing projects that transformed our cities.

In my own constituency from Ballybough to Ballymun, East Wall to Oxmantown Fianna Fáil built homes.

We build homes because as republicans we know that for everyone to have equal opportunity everyone must have a place to call home.

We are no longer living in the worst of times and Fine Gaels track record on housing is morally, socially and economically negligent.

All Fine Gael has managed to achieve is a series of PR launches.

The only solution to the housing crises is to invest in homes.

Building social and affordable homes is the answer to tackling homelessness.

Delegates Fianna Fáil can take pride in our national achievements and the shared sense of common decency that binds us together.

The homeless crisis demands a real national response by delivering homes, not making announcements.

Our absolute priority is to get homes delivered for the thousands of families who are desperate for our help.

Enough already with the announcements, the press briefings and the trips to Montrose.

It is time for action.