

Submission to Public Consultation on International Security Policy

- The Civil Engagement Group of Seanad Éireann – Senators Alice-Mary Higgins, Lynn Ruane, Frances Black and Eileen Flynn

Note:

While we have followed to a certain degree the questions specified in the online portal, we have, where necessary, utilised a different format in order to reflect our views on the Forum itself and the wider questions regarding Ireland's international security policy.

Part 1: The Consultative Forum:

The constituting of the Consultative Forum itself was not sufficiently broad enough to reflect the views of Irish society as a whole and represents an unfortunate departure from the recent innovations in deliberative democracy represented by Citizen Assemblies.

We note that gender equality was severely lacking among those invited to speak and that, in what was a very narrow-minded decision, perspectives from the Global South were entirely absent. The lack of perspectives from Africa, Latin America or the Middle East – regions which have the essential lived experience to understand the full impact of Western military alliances was extremely short-sighted and led to discussions surrounding 'interests' rather than values and human rights. The constitution of the panels was also unfairly skewed towards those either opposed to Ireland's current policy of neutrality or those who seek to dilute it. Those with expertise on peacebuilding, arms control and humanitarian work were a significant minority on the panels and discussion of these crucial issues was stymied by attempts to give space to outdated discourses of big power politics. The fact that barely any discussion of the climate crisis – the largest and most urgent collective threat to our security – took place completely undermines the Forum's intention to inform future debate or policy. We are also disappointed that no Travellers were on the panels, nor do we know if any were invited to speak or even consulted about the Forum. There was also a notable lack of any individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds on the panels or even in the audience. Another key omission was the absence of any engagement with or analysis of the role of social class in conflict or engagement with questions regarding the disproportionate burden of conflict on working class people. The absence of working-class voices on the panel and in the audience compounded this issue.

The demographics of the audience was also extremely problematic with a head count on the morning of the 27th in Dublin Castle suggesting a male female divide of 79% to 21% (approximately) in attendance, while the programme for the Forum itself did not include the gender dynamics of conflict as a topic. The audience was also mainly white and of an older age demographic. The gender disparity both in the audience and on the panels is particularly stark given Ireland's commitment to UN Resolution 1325. It goes against Ireland's own 2018 document Women, Peace and Security Ireland's third National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions 2019 – 2024, which states that:

‘Our engagement in discussions on peace, security, conflict prevention, disarmament and peacebuilding will recognise not only the rights and needs of women and girls and their important roles as leaders, but also addresses the gender norms and inequalities that underpin violence, inequality and conflict. **This includes empowering women and girls to equitably and meaningfully participate in peace and security discussions, and supporting their protection and recovery from all conflict-related harms.** This is in line with our overarching focus on reaching the furthest behind first.’

The Forum failed to live up to this commitment.

The conducting of the Forum itself did not represent an open debate on international security policy with each topic dominated by the selected panel of speakers rather than the views of the audience. The mechanisms used for audience participation (the Slido app) meant that, in many cases, questions asked were the ones which received the most support from the room – thus any views not representing the majority view (which we have already highlighted was extremely skewed and problematic) was rarely heard. We would further note that members of the audience (including elected representatives) who were known to have genuine issues with the constitution of the Forum were overlooked by moderators.

The absence of fact-checking or meaningful intervention by any of the moderators to counter misinformation was also striking. One panellist made a claim that “the USA has never tried to influence Ireland’s policy towards Palestine” – an obviously false claim – but there was no opportunity for those in the audience members to rebut that claim and at no point did a moderator intervene to question or interrogate sweeping statements of dubious reliability.

We note that in the recent Citizen’s Assembly on Biodiversity Loss and the ongoing Citizen’s Assembly on Drug Use, there was a real effort to engage a diverse and representative group from across Ireland and we will briefly outline the methodology used below:

- Biodiversity Loss

Informed by the experience of previous assemblies and international best practice, the Government and the Houses of the Oireachtas mandated two important changes to how members were selected. These changes were designed to improve the diversity of Assembly membership and ensure that it was as broadly representative as possible of the general public. The changes introduced entailed:

- (i) broadening the eligibility criteria, and
- (ii) adopting an improved recruitment method, in line with international best practice, with reference in particular to the OECD Recommendation on Open Government, the OECD Good Practice Principles for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision Making and countries with extensive experience of citizens’ assemblies, including Canada and Australia.

In order to ensure that the Citizens’ Assembly on Biodiversity Loss was optimally representative of wider society, **eligibility was broadened to allow any adult resident in the**

State to potentially become a member of the Assembly. This had the effect of including people who were not Irish citizens and others who for whatever reason were not enrolled on the electoral register.

For the first time, **the recruitment process was based on written invitations to randomly selected households.** This differed from the methodology used by previous assemblies, which relied on polling companies conducting door-to-door interviews to select members.

A total of 20,000 households in the State received a postal invitation from Taoiseach Micheál Martin T.D. to nominate one adult from that household to apply to become a member.

The sample of households that received invitations was randomly generated from the GeoDirectory database of households, which is the most comprehensive available database of households in the country.

The final selection of public members of the Assembly was based on a stratified random selection of 99 members of the public, using six demographic variables:

Gender • Age • Location • Occupational status (proxy indicator for socio-economic status and disability) • Language (proxy indicator of nationality)

- **Generated a high response** rate to invitations issued (>10%), including through providing multiple response channels (online, telephone and postal).
- **Gathered key demographic information** (gender, age group and location) to support a robust stratified random selection process.
- **Gathered secondary demographic indicators** (language, employment status and occupation) to optimise diversity among the membership.
- **Broadened eligibility criteria** to include any adult living in the State.
- **Issued initial invitations** to a large cohort of households (20,000)

This methodology is what should have been used in order to make it an engaged and representative discussion rather than a room stacked with those who seek to dilute our international security policy based on international law and human rights. The actual conducting of Citizen Assemblies is also a nuanced process which seeks to centre voices of ordinary people in decision making through engagement in evidence-based policy concepts.

For the reasons we have outlined below, we do not accept that the Forum represents a credible exercise in participatory democracy but rather a top-down closed venue in which ideas were not properly explored and debate was limited to non-existent. Any proposed policies which emerge the Forum will therefore lack any form of legitimacy as there has been no real public discussion in which a broad section of Irish society have been able to articulate their vision for international security policy. We hope that in their report the Chair will acknowledge these failures and address them.

Part 2: Threats to Security:

Much of the recent discussion on the threats to Ireland has lacked focus on the greatest threat to our collective security which is the climate and biodiversity crisis. This is unfortunate given Ireland's progressive record on this issue – both in terms of our role in negotiating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and our work to pass a resolution in our most recent term on the United Nations Security Council which would have been a step in establishing a framework for climate and security at UN level. This record has been severely undermined by the Government's increasingly binary focus on security as an us and them or big power gameplaying issue.

Conflict is a key driver of climate breakdown and biodiversity loss. In November 2022, the Conflict and Environment Observatory and Scientists for Global Responsibility published a report which found that the total military carbon footprint is approximately 5.5% of global emissions and that if the world's militaries were a country, this figure would mean they have the fourth largest national carbon footprint in the world. Armed conflict also drives emissions and biodiversity loss. For example, conflict drives fuel use, explosive weapons create debris leading to pollution, explosive remnants of war can restrict access to agricultural land and pollute soils and water sources with metals and toxic energetic materials, many conventional weapons have toxic constituents, others such as depleted uranium are also radioactive and incendiary weapons such as white phosphorous are not only toxic but can also damage habitats through fire.

A large amount of discourse on this subject by those who seek to dilute and undermine our neutrality has talked about the need to be realistic about our security. We should be extremely clear that planetary boundaries are the realest thing there is and in the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC) Sixth Assessment Report in 2022, they warned that **“global warming, reaching 1.5°C in the near-term, would cause unavoidable increases in multiple climate hazards and present multiple risks to ecosystems and humans (very high confidence). The level of risk will depend on concurrent near-term trends in vulnerability, exposure, level of socioeconomic development and adaptation (high confidence).”** This is the greatest threat to human security there is, and Ireland needs to centre climate action, SDG implementation, peacebuilding and diplomacy in our international security policy.

Poverty is also a key driver of global conflict and is itself driven by conflict. Former UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon previously noted that: “Evidence abounds. Nine of the 10 countries with the lowest Human Development Indicators have experienced conflict in the last 20 years. Countries facing stark inequality and weak institutions are at increased risk of conflict. Poorly distributed wealth and a lack of sufficient jobs, opportunities and freedoms, particularly for a large youth population, can also increase the risk of instability.” Poverty is worsened by conflict and persistent conflict leads to persistent poverty and the undermining of social cohesion. Research has also indicated that conflict has a key role in the spread of disease with one study undertaken across 43 African countries between 1997 and 2005 demonstrating the role of conflict in the spread of HIV/AIDS.¹ Renewed focus on

¹ Iqbal, Z. and Zorn, C. 2010, “Violent Conflict and the Spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa”, *The Journal of Politics*, Vol. 71, No. 1, pp. 149 – 162

conflict resolution taking place in tandem with poverty reduction and reduction of healthcare inequalities should be a priority and is one example where reasserting our positive neutrality in a multilateral way can lead to greater human security and wellbeing.

The growing attacks on peacebuilding, diplomacy, multilateralism and international law also represents a key threat to Ireland's security especially given that these are the tools we have successfully used in the past in order to assert positive neutrality for the collective good in international affairs. Militarism and the prioritisation of military alliances over humanitarian work is a severe threat to our international security and our ability to act in a manner consistent with our neutrality which prioritises peacebuilding, human rights and international law. We particularly note that attempts to erode our neutrality – and the principles which underpin it – through participation in initiatives such as the Permanent Structured Cooperation on Security and Defence (PESCO) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) Partnership for Peace threatens our ability to engage positively and constructively in international affairs and conflict resolution. It is noteworthy that in the lengthy PESCO notification to the Council of the European Union in 2017 that peace, peacekeeping and human rights are not mentioned once. Ireland's own security and our ability to work multilaterally for collective human and planetary security has long been rooted our engagement through organisations founded on the principles of human rights, diplomacy and humanitarianism and attacks on these institutions – or their role in our engagement in international affairs – represents a key threat to our own security and our ability to work multilaterally for peace, disarmament and human rights.

Increasingly those sought to serve on the frontlines of conflict are young people from working class backgrounds and increasing militarisation will also serve to further disadvantage and alienate those from working class backgrounds. Research from Cardiff University, using Cameron Government policy in the UK as a case study, showed that the army was presented and championed by the UK Government as a good option for early school-leavers from working class backgrounds as a way to somehow better themselves. The negative impacts of such an approach cannot be overstated. The research cites figures showing that soldiers who joined the Army at age 16 after leaving school were approximately 50% more likely to die as a consequence of deployment to Afghanistan than those who enlisted as adults.² Militarisation and moving away from a model of peacekeeping founded in the UN Charter and underpinned by multilateralism may serve to further harden class inequalities and will lead to the deaths of young working class people.

Part 3: Capabilities to Respond to Threats:

We do not believe that Ireland currently has the capability to respond to threats to our planetary security or threats to multilateralism and rules based international law. We need to invest in peacebuilding and diplomacy, rather than militarisation and there needs to be a renewed focus on strengthening diplomatic relations across the world – particularly with

² Basham, V. 2016, "Raising an army: the geopolitics of militarizing the lives of working-class boys in an age of austerity", *International Political Sociology*, 10 (3) , pp. 258-274

Global South countries who are at the frontline of the climate and biodiversity crisis. We also believe that much work needs to be undertaken and expanded on regarding SDG implementation and the fulfilment of UN resolution 1325. Building capacity for peacebuilding, humanitarian work, SDG implementation and development of gender equality in peace negotiations and conflict resolution must be prioritised over further militarisation and erosion of multilateralism.

We would also note the most important component of our Defence Forces' capability is personnel and that within the Defence Forces much work must be undertaken to resolve the issues raised in the Report of the Independent Review Group on Dignity and Equality Issues in the Defence Forces. The Report found that "Women are viewed as occupying a low status in the Defence Forces. Gender and particular hypermasculinities are strong organising forces in the culture. This is reflected throughout this Review, not only in individuals' lived experience as described to us, but also in the various forms of independent analysis undertaken. The problems that exist will not go away without immediate and significant steps being taken to address them." The harassment, discrimination and sexual violence within the organisation must be ended and this needs to be a primary focus of the organisation. It is unfortunate that at the Forum in Dublin Castle the issue only arose once – from a question asked by an audience member – and only one person on the panel – themselves part of the Defence Forces – sought to address it.

Improvement in pay and conditions is also something which needs urgent work, and we would further note that previous evidence has suggested that the move away from humanitarian search and rescue work within the Irish Naval Service has severely impacted retention of personnel.³ Recruitment and retention is fundamental to our capability and it improvement of dignity, equality and respect, pay and conditions and ensuring that personnel are carrying out meaningful humanitarian work are key elements of improving our capability to work for peace and human rights.

Part 4: Neutrality:

As we have previously stated we believe that Ireland's engagement with PESCO and the NATO Partnership for Peace represents an unfortunate departure from international engagement founded on principles of peace, diplomacy and multilateralism. The side-lining of the United Nations and other multilateral institutions – as well as the role of international law -- is something which Ireland must not stand idly by and watch but is something we should actively work to stop through diplomacy and peacebuilding. Ireland has been and can be a really strong voice on international law, including where there are terrible breaches of international law as we've seen with Russian's illegal invasion and occupation of Ukraine or indeed breaches of international law that may have to be tried in the future as war crimes.

³ [Naval Service and sailors lament ending of Operation Sophia – The Irish Times](#)

Our credibility as champions of international law is greatly strengthened by our status as a neutral nation, and willingness to promote these same principles everywhere in the world wherever those laws are being breached without fear or favour.

One example, where Ireland did have a good record on international humanitarian work is the previously mentioned work of the Irish Naval Service on search and rescue in the Mediterranean. Irish ships have rescued and saved the lives of over 16,800 people, whereas an EU operation with six or ten ships saved approximately 34,000 people. With one ship operating at a time, the Naval Service rescued 50% of the number of people rescued by all Operation Sophia ships combined. The priority of the Irish ships was humanitarian search and rescue with the result that they were five or six times more effective than the EU mission. Moving away from one aspect of our positive neutrality, the Irish Government in 2017 entered the EU Operation Sophia which resulted in the redeployment of Irish Naval Service vessels from primarily humanitarian search and rescue operations to primarily security and interception operations. This resulted in the number of people rescued by the Irish Naval Service falling from 8,592 in 2015 to 1,888 in 2018 and in 2019 search and rescue ended completely. We should be reengaging with this vital work on a bilateral basis and should by a voice among European nations – more concerned with keeping people outside Europe than saving lives – for human rights, search and rescue and humanitarian work. Our neutrality enables us to have this independent voice.

Another powerful contribution Ireland has made to the world is our leadership on disarmament. We were the first country to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty and Ireland negotiated the global ban on cluster munitions. When we see rightful condemnation of the recent use of cluster munitions, it is important to remember that before Ireland negotiated the global ban on cluster munitions these brutal and indiscriminate weapons were commonplace and used widely. Our neutrality was crucial to achieving that ban. Another reason Ireland has had a strong impact as a small nation in the world has been our reputation as a voice for peace and our understanding that peace is more than the absence of war. Peace is something that takes years of work, takes the building of trust, it takes trusted actors to act in a neutral way to support that process.

For Ireland to contribute and be a force for good in Europe and the wider world, on human rights, international law, peace, disarmament or humanitarian support, our neutrality is key. It's what gives us credibility and strength.

Regarding the Triple Lock, there should be no moves to remove or dilute it. UN mandates give legitimacy to peace keeping and crisis management missions. The Department of Foreign Affairs' website celebrates Ireland as "being the only nation to have a continuous presence on UN and UN-mandated peace support operations since 1958". As we have previously stated the eroding of the UN is dangerous and attempts to undermine the Triple Lock form part of a dilution of multilateralism. Irish peacekeepers have done extraordinary work and a UN mandate is what gives our peacekeeping missions their legitimacy in the areas to which they are deployed. Countries close to – or belonging to – military alliances are not in the same position to and do not have the ability to commit to peacekeeping in the way in which Ireland – as a neutral country – with the Triple Lock can. We should also reflect

upon the fact that the UN was founded by those who had gone experienced the death and destruction of the Second World War. The preamble of the UN Charter states:

“WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom,”

This commitment and determination to save succeeding generations of the scourge of war is something Ireland must champion and that we must ourselves recommit to in a world of escalating violence, deprivation and global inequality.

Our neutrality is our greatest strength and asset, and it is doubtful that Ireland would have received the support of Global South countries in our bid for a seat on the UN Security Council if we had have been a member of a military alliance and the recent attempts to dilute our neutrality and engage us in closer military cooperation based on the interests of Western countries will undermine our relationships with these countries going forward. The Irish public have consistently shown their support for neutrality in poll after poll. We must be a voice for peace, human rights, humanitarianism, multilateralism and international law – principles which should underpin our positive vision of neutrality and how we utilise it in international affairs.