

Consultative Forum on International Security Policy

World Beyond War (Irish Chapter)

Submission

Ireland's armed forces, Army, Naval Service and Air Corps have given over 100 years of public service to this neutral island nation on the edge of Europe. The Defence Forces have been mandated by the democratic institutions of the State and by the democratic will of the people as expressed through our democratically elected leaders. In any democracy the public good is best served when its citizenry is at the centre of the debate on what constitutes that public good. Democratic accountability extends beyond public representation and in that context the Irish Chapter of World Beyond War welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the Consultative Forum on International Security Policy.

International Context

As a small neutral country, Ireland's global reach and influence is immense. When in September 1923 the Irish Free State joined the League of Nations led by Minister for External Affairs Desmond FitzGerald and President of the Executive Council, WT Cosgrave, it was a singular mark of commitment by this fledgling state to the equality of nations and its willingness to contribute to peace and security throughout the world. That commitment was further underscored on the establishment of the United Nations and Ireland's subsequent membership in 1955.

Commenting on the warm reception Ireland received from Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld in 1955, Ireland's representative at the UN, Consul General Jack Conway reported to the Irish government that 'most of the members and particularly the Arab-Asiatic and Latin American groups expected us to play an important part in the activities of the United Nations'. These were parts of the world with which Ireland would not have had a longstanding relationship. In a very real sense Ireland had diplomatically arrived. Its place in the nation states

of the world was assured as one among equals. Ireland became the 63rd member of the United Nations.

In the first address by an Irish government Minister to the General Assembly of the United Nations, External Affairs Minister Liam Cosgrave urged member states to “renewed efforts under Divine Providence to adjust our differences - the differences that divide the free world - by rational negotiation”.¹ We repeat: ‘rational negotiation’.

From the outset, Ireland played a significant role within the United Nations and in the promotion of international peace. Ireland is the only nation to have an unbroken record of service to UN peacekeeping since 1958. Since then, Irish peacekeepers have served in more than 20 peacekeeping operations around the world. And since the first Irish mission to the Congo in 1960, 87 soldiers and one Garda sergeant have died while serving with the United Nations. Speaking at an Irish Chapter of World Beyond War webinar (2021) former Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations, Irishman Denis Halliday said:

*Ireland has the most outstanding record for peacekeeping worldwide. Ever since the days of The Congo, our peacekeepers have got this extraordinary reputation for integrity and decency and doing a good job. No other country enjoys that.*²

In the lead-up to Ireland’s election to the current Security Council (2021-2023), President Michael D. Higgins, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar, Former Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney, former President Mary Robinson and Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason all spoke about Ireland’s understanding of and empathy with other smaller nations and former colonized countries.

¹ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/the-truth-about-liam-cosgrave-s-alleged-gaffe-at-the-un-1.2878079>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERji4o1cISI&t=2639s> Accessed 18 February 2021.

“Ireland can be a shining light in a very dark world”, Taoiseach Varadkar stated.³

One of the key questions we urge the Forum to consider is in what way can Ireland be that ‘shining light in the world’?

In his address at the Trócaire Óscar Romero Awards ceremony, Dr. Mike Ryan of the World Health Organisation warned against the enormous waste of global defence investment urging nations to radically change the mindset that centres on imagined threats from other nations and in its place, he pleaded with heads of governments across the world to instead invest in what actually threatens people - climate crisis, poverty and pandemics.

We are prepared to invest trillions, trillions of dollars every year of people’s money in the defence of an army that may never come across a border and we have invested almost nothing in the microbes that have brought our civilisation to its knees over the last year. And I think we should think about that. Where are we putting our money? In defence? Defending ourselves against foreign armies or defending ourselves against viruses? And I think we really have to re-think what we mean by sustainable financing for health security in this case.

*If we make our communities secure, if we make our health systems secure, resilient, then we will do better the next time a pandemic hits us.*⁴

European Context

In the 1957 Treaty of Rome, the foundation document of the European Union, the first six signatories, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, and The Netherlands committed each of their countries to collectively ‘confirm the solidarity *which binds Europe and overseas countries* (our emphasis) and desiring to ensure the development of their prosperity, in accordance with the

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtDq-rSYmQE>

⁴ <https://vimeo.com/513437415> Accessed on 1 March 2021

principles of the Charter of the United Nations'.⁵ With our shared fate very much in the balance, that sense of solidarity is needed now more than ever. The old order has been ruptured. Old certainties, insofar as they ever existed, have been overtaken leaving the Earth and its inhabitants, the very biosphere, vulnerable and defenceless. "There is no doubt the skies are closing in", the Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe warns. "Caught in the stranglehold of injustice and inequality, much of the world is threatened by a great chokehold".⁶

Confronted with such dire predictions, the extermination of life as we once knew it, the geopoliticking, jockeying for power and might, the fortification of borders, the vicious partitioning of the globe, all constitute crimes against humanity. For the Earth belongs not to one but to the universal community of earthly inhabitants, human and other.

To seek to ringfence one part of the planet is doomed to failure. To pretend that we can exist without each other is to be blind to the reality of our interconnectedness. To hoist the drawbridges at this time of catastrophic suffering is to deny our own innate humanity. To talk about further arming ourselves against the displaced, the disfavoured, the disenfranchised, the denied, the disconnected and the dehumanized is a grotesque act of betrayal and one, we suggest, finds no favour with the Irish people.

As a consequence, we suggest that the vast majority of Irish people were and are offended by and radically opposed to European Commission President Jean Claude Juncker's 2016 statement.

To guarantee our collective security, we must invest in the common development of technologies and equipment of strategic importance -

⁵

https://www.cvce.eu/en/obj/treaty_establishing_the_european_economic_community_rome_25_march_1957-en-cca6ba28-0bf3-4ce6-8a76-6b0b3252696e.html Accessed 6 March 2021

⁶ <https://critinq.wordpress.com/2020/04/13/the-universal-right-to-breathe/> Accessed 6 March 2021

*from land, air, sea and space capabilities to cyber security. It requires more cooperation between Member States and greater pooling of national resources. If Europe does not take care of its own security, nobody else will do it for us. A strong, competitive and innovative defence industrial base is what will give us strategic autonomy.*⁷

Such militarization of Europe cannot and will not, not now, not in the past, and not in the future, guarantee our collective security. The issue is not the future of Europe. It's the future of the Earth. What's at issue is not mutual destruction, mutual exclusion, mutual 'othering' but the solidarity which binds Europe and overseas countries, and the desire to ensure the development of their prosperity.

Domestic Context

As with all public bodies, the Irish Defence Forces are funded in their entirety by the taxes of the citizens of Ireland. The funding from the exchequer and its disbursement within the Defence Forces are matters of public concern. According to the Annual Report on Public Debt in Ireland 2020⁸ public debt stood at an estimated €226 billion at the end of last year, up from €203.4 in 2019. To put this into perspective, this is equivalent to €43,100 for every person resident in the State, a figure which is amongst the highest in the developed world.

The Role of the Defence Forces in Ireland

This role of the Irish Defence Forces in Irish society raises not only critical economic questions but fundamental philosophical, sociological and ethical questions as well, questions that confront all defence forces throughout the world. These questions relate to the nature of the State, sovereignty,

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_16_4088 Accessed 6 March 2021

⁸ Department of Finance ANNUAL REPORT ON PUBLIC DEBT IN IRELAND 2022 - Summary February 2023. Government of Ireland Publications. Dublin.

citizenship, human rights, peace, security and global justice. Given the power vested in defence forces worldwide, the centrality of these issues cannot be underestimated. These issues go to the heart of this submission.

The *raison d'être* of the Irish Defence Forces is 'to defend the State against armed aggression'.⁹ Since its foundation, this State has never experienced foreign aggression with the exception of the 1974 Dublin and Monaghan bombings, events that occurred coterminous with the conflict in the North of Ireland rather than from an external aggressor. Given Ireland's size, its neutrality, its non-aligned status, the likelihood of Ireland being attacked by a foreign aggressor is close to zero. "Ireland has never invaded any other land, never sought to enslave or occupy. We come in peace and we stand for peace", Justice Minister Frances Fitzgerald told a gathering of new citizens in Ireland in 2011.¹⁰

International law differentiates between people and territory. "First, there must be a people; second, there must be a territory; third, there must be a government; and, fourth, there must be capacity to enter into relations with other States of the world".¹¹ The sequencing is telling. First there must be a people.

Arising from the above understanding of the State, the role of the Irish Defence Forces is to defend the interests of the people of Ireland and by extension given our shared humanity and international obligations, the people whose lives are threatened by, amongst other forces, the military industrial complex.

Ireland can be that 'shining light in a very dark world'. It can continue its distinguished record as an international peacekeeper where 'rational

⁹ <https://www.military.ie/en/what-we-do/#anchor-1> Accessed 18 February 2021.

¹⁰ <https://www.thejournal.ie/citizenship-ceremony-2-1898241-Jan2015/> Accessed 18 February 2021.

¹¹ <https://mckinneylaw.iu.edu/iiclr/pdf/vol12p25.pdf>

negotiation' is given precedence over armed conflict. In doing so, the Irish government can be confident of its mandate and the support of the vast majority of the Irish people.

Central to that mandate is support for Ireland's longstanding commitment to neutrality. Neutrality is not a cowardly policy¹² stated former Taoiseach Eamon de Valera. Generations of Irish political leaders, Daniel O'Connell, Wolfe Tone, James Connolly, Hanna Sheehy Skeffington among others advocated Irish neutrality concomitant with Irish independence. O'Connell's internationally-acclaimed life and work, for which he earned the admiration of Frederick Douglass among others, sought to eradicate racism and militarism - the two main components at the heart of 19th century imperialism. Sheehy-Skeffington's commitment to women's equality, social justice and international solidarity never wavered in a lifetime of feminist activism spanning two world wars. Any effort to compromise Irish neutrality defies the principles on which the women and men who sacrificed so much for the nation we have today. That longstanding commitment precludes Ireland from making commitments to military alliances.

Thereby we:

1. Urge the Irish government to state and re-state to its European partners its unequivocal support for Irish neutrality.
2. Are deeply concerned at the manner in which the Consultative Forum is currently structured.
3. Concerned at the design In design of the Consultative Forum as a vehicle 'to build public understanding and generate discussions on the link between the State's foreign, security, and defence policies', the government is undertaking a consultative process that seeks approval for

¹² <https://www.pai.ie/201711irish-neutrality/> Accessed 18 February 2021.

a pre-determined outcome, for an *a priori* policy position. This in our view is wholly undemocratic and how authoritarian states operate.

4. Believe that the construction of threats outlined are confined to cyber, hybrid, disinformation and threats to critical infrastructure limit rather than open up the work of the Forum. No reference is made to much more substantial threats emanating from climate change (see Dr. Mike Ryan above), predatory capitalism, the military industrial complex, inequality, racism, violence against women and children amongst other threats to life on the planet. We fundamentally disagree with the construction of threat in the framing of this Consultative Forum.
5. Are of the view that by excluding what the Minister calls ‘the binary issue of neutrality and NATO membership’, the Forum is excluding the clear rejection of NATO membership or of any association with NATO as well as the unequivocal endorsement of Irish neutrality as a key component of Irish foreign policy. In the above context, we do not believe that it is possible for the Forum The Forum’s work to be conducted in an ‘open, inclusive, and consultative’ manner.
6. Find it inexplicable that in establishing the Forum, the Minister identified ‘the changed geopolitical context and wider threat environment in Europe (which) calls for consideration of the State’s approach to international security issues’. We reject the Eurocentric approach inherent in the Minister’s contextualisation. The threats that are currently engulfing the world do not stop at Europe’s borders. To limit the threats to Europe’s borders fundamentally conflicts with this country’s aspirations to be ‘a shining light to the world’ and to the commitments made to the Global South in the lead-in to Ireland’s most recent membership of the UN Security Council.
7. Welcome the Minister’s commitment within the Forum to ‘an open, informed, respectful’ discussion and hope that the Minister follows

through on that. However, we do not have any confidence that ‘evidence-based discussion’ will feature any discordant evidence that threatens what we perceive to be a pre-determined outcome.

8. Cognisant of the recent experience of Public Consultation: Commission on the Defence Forces, of which at the time we expressed our deep misgivings, we repeat as follows one of the recommendations we submitted to that process. (1) ‘Given the current vulnerability of the Irish economy and given the opportunity costs involved in any exchequer decision, where expenditure in one area results in a diminution of expenditure in another and given that the people of this State are not likely to experience armed aggression, any increase in the defence budget should only be directed at improving the income and lives of members of the Defence Forces’. (2) The government needs to resist any pressure from outside state forces to further invest in military hardware such as large transport military aircraft, or a large multi-role naval ship, or squadrons of tanks and fighter jets. There is no indication that the people of Ireland support such expenditure. To do so would be to undermine the democratic mandate of the Defence Forces.

9.

Finally, we wish to assert the following:

1. Ireland’s membership of PESCO Permanent Structured Cooperation Organization with its ‘full spectrum force package’¹³ has no democratic mandate and runs counter to the very ethos ‘empathy, respect for human rights, dignity, multilateralism, freedom and commitment to peace’¹⁴ that successive political leaders have so consistently advocated.
2. Ireland has resisted NATO-led pressure to join NATO. Yet, some 226 Irish troops have served in the country over the past fifteen years in NATO-led

¹³ [https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/permanent-structured-cooperation-\(PESCO\)](https://eda.europa.eu/what-we-do/EU-defence-initiatives/permanent-structured-cooperation-(PESCO))
Accessed 18 February 2020

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtDq-rSYmQE> Accessed 18 February 2020

missions in Afghanistan.¹⁵ There is no democratic mandate for Ireland's involvement in a NATO-led force. No further engagement with NATO forces by an Irish government should be sanctioned by any Irish government.

The Chairperson

On the composition of the Forum we wish to state that we do not have confidence in Louise Richardson to act in an even-handed and impartial manner. Terrorism is Ms Richardson's fields 'specialism'. Not human rights. Not peace studies. Not Justice. We are of the view that her field will skew the interrogation of witnesses and will lead to a militaristic-orientated final report.

We are deeply concerned at her role at the Carnegie Corporation of New York whose founder's primary aim is 'to benefit the people of the United States'.¹⁶

Among her many accolades she is credited in her Wikipedia page with 'her expertise helped to shield Harvard from criticism'.¹⁷

Her book *What Terrorists Want: Understanding the Enemy, Containing the Threat*, Richardson's alliterative and reductionist 'revenge renown and reaction' treatise ought to have, at a minimum, set the alarm bells ringing. Not surprisingly, Chapter 2 headlines 'Zealots, Assassins, and Thugs' does not include those who imperiled the world and its peoples with their wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and in many other countries across the world."

That the Irish government would select such a person for such an important task simply beggars belief and fundamentally undermines the whole consultative process.

¹⁵ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/ireland/irish-news/defence-force-troops-return-from-afghanistan-1.2571846> Accessed 18 February 2021

¹⁶ <https://www.carnegie.org/about/>

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louise_Richardson

Our Call

We call on the Irish government to respect its commitment to be that 'shining light in that dark world', one that eschews militant adventurism, one that points to another way of ensuring global peace and security, one that challenges the might of the voraciously aggressive military-industrial complex, one that is true to the soul of, not just Irish people, but the lost lives of millions of people across the globe whose lives were and are blighted by war and true too to the souls of all of those whose lives were brutally and callously ended by an insidious and insatiable industry of death.

Peadar King for and on behalf of World beyond War (Irish Chapter)

However, on the issue of serious consideration we are not confident. Our absence of confidence is rooted on the manner in which the Consultative Forum is framed. Furthermore we do not have confidence of the 'independent chair' to act independently and on the selection of the independent chair.

Our position is as follows:

Speaking at the launch of the Forum, the Tánaiste, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister for Defence, Micheál Martin TD, stated that the Forum 'will also provide an opportunity to examine the experiences and policy choices of other partners in responding to the new security environment in Europe'.

In prioritizing the 'new security environment in Europe' Minister Martin ignores the manifold security concerns of people fleeing war, persecution and the ravages of climate change across Africa, Asia and Latin America. This Eurocentric view of security runs counter to the claims of international solidarity with the Global South as expressed by President Michael D. Higgins and Taoiseach Leo