

United Kingdom

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Dear Dr Maurice Manning

I am writing in relation to the Working Group on Seanad Reform specifically in relation to how the Seanad can be used to engage with and empower the diaspora.

While an accurate calculation of the numbers of Irish born citizens living outside of Ireland is difficult a recent UN report in 2013 reported on the numbers in the 5 most popular destinations put the numbers of Irish-born people living in these countries at 677,246<sup>i</sup>. This is a substantial number of people constituting about 14% of the total number of people alive who were born in Ireland. While many if not most of these people take an interest in the general well-being of the Irish state, by and large they are immune to the effects of domestic policy undertaken in Ireland.

However this does mean that they are immune to the all effects of policy undertaken by the Irish government. Specifically policy undertaken by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs still affects members of the Irish community living abroad to the same extent as Irish people still living in Ireland. As Irish passport holders, policies that will alter the rights given by the passport are of grave concern. Examples of such policies would be:

- 1: Changes in diplomatic relations that affect the numbers of countries where visa-free or visa on arrival access programs exist.
- 2: Changes in diplomatic relations that alter the right to work in foreign countries.
- 3: Policies that are detrimental to the standing of Irish people living in individual countries.
- 4: Policies that involve changes in funding to government backed Irish charities, societies and GAA clubs which cater for the needs of Irish abroad.
5. Closure of Embassies and Consulates.

Therefore it would seem worthwhile for the commission to consider if the Seanad could have a role in giving Irish-born citizens living abroad a voice in specifically matters pertaining to Foreign Affairs.

This could take the form of the election of members of the Seanad by Irish-born citizens, to a Diaspora panel. Over 100 nations in the world give some measure of voting rights to their citizens living abroad. As there is no provision in the constitution for the election of additional members of the Seanad, these elections will not be binding and considered merely consolatory. It will be at the discretion of the Taoiseach of the Day to appoint these members from the Taoiseach nominated allocation. The numbers of elected members and the geographical composition of the constituencies is something to be considered. However a possible composition of six members from the UK and rest of Europe, two from the Americas, one from Australasia and one from the Middle East and Africa would seem adequate.

An addition proposal would be for one of these six to be appointed Minister for State for the Diaspora under the Department for Foreign Affairs. Which one of these to be selected will be at the discretion of the Taoiseach. This would allow for the diaspora to have a key voice in the policy formation in the Department, and help ensure that their voice is heard on issues that are of direct consequence to their lives. Thank you consider of my proposal.

Yours Sincerely

Dr Simon Tuohy

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<sup>i</sup> <http://esa.un.org/MigGMGProfiles/indicators/files/Ireland.pdf>