



**Statement by the  
Minister with Responsibility for Defence,  
Mr. Paul Kehoe T.D.,  
on the Motion before the Select Committee on  
Foreign Affairs & Trade and Defence  
seeking approval for  
the Report to Dáil Éireann regarding service by the Defence Forces with  
the United Nations in 2016**

**8 March, 2018**

Chairman, Members,

I am pleased to report to this Committee on Irish Defence Forces participation in United Nations missions in 2016. The report for 2016 was laid before Dáil Éireann on 5 October 2017. The following Motion has been placed on the Order Paper for Dáil Éireann and has been referred to this Committee:

“That Dáil Éireann approves the report by the Minister for Defence regarding service by the Defence Forces with the United Nations in 2016, copies of which were laid before Dáil Éireann on 5 October 2017, in accordance with Section 13 of the Defence (Amendment) Act, 2006”.

In commending the motion, I will shortly outline some of the key aspects of Ireland’s involvement with the UN in 2016.

Ireland’s commitment to supporting the UN on international peace and security issues has been demonstrated through continuous participation in UN peacekeeping missions since 1958. Participation in overseas peacekeeping missions is a key element of Ireland’s foreign policy and has been an important dimension in meeting Ireland’s international obligations as a member of the UN and the EU.

At present, there are some 586 members of the Permanent Defence Force serving in missions overseas. Irish troops are deployed in UN led and UN mandated missions in Africa, Europe and the Middle East.

Ireland's main commitments during 2016 were to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights.

The UNIFIL mission continues to represent Ireland's largest overseas deployment. At the request of the United Nations, a contingent of Defence Forces personnel deployed to UNIFIL in mid 2011. Ireland has served as part of a joint Battalion comprising Irish and Finnish troops since June 2012. Since May 2015, the Finnish contingent has included an Estonian Platoon of some 40 personnel.

Command of the joint Battalion has rotated between Ireland and Finland, by agreement. Ireland has been in command of the joint Battalion since November 2016.

Partnership with other like-minded States has become an increasing element of our overseas peacekeeping operations. Working with other like-minded States is critical to overcoming the new and ever emerging challenges we face. Together, we can provide support for fragile states and work to prevent conflict from escalating. Also, in the absence of partners, the range and nature of overseas operations which Ireland could undertake in support of international peace and security would be notably curtailed.

There were two rotations of Irish personnel during 2016 comprising the 53<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Group in May and the 109<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion in November 2016. At 31 December 2016 there were 379 Irish personnel serving with the mission.

An Irish officer, Major General Michael Beary, took up the post of Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL in July 2016. At the request of the UN, his appointment has been extended until July 2018. His appointment to this prestigious post is a tribute to the fine reputation of Irish peacekeepers over the years and to the skills and attributes that they bring to the job. It is also a tribute to the professional competence, experience and integrity of Major General Beary himself.

The United Nations Security Council has extended the mandate of UNIFIL until 31 August 2018.

Ireland's second largest overseas deployment in 2016 was to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights. The Defence Forces contribution to UNDOF in 2016 comprised the 52nd Infantry Group and the 54<sup>th</sup> Infantry Group, each with approximately 130 personnel. The Infantry Group operated in the role of a Quick Reaction Force on standby to assist with on-going operations within the UNDOF Area of Responsibility.

At the request of the UN, Brigadier General Anthony Hanlon, was extended in his appointment as Deputy Force Commander UNDOF until 21 May 2016.

The security situation in UNDOF's area of operations is continually reviewed by the UN and the Defence Forces. The continued presence of the UNDOF mission remains an important element in ensuring stability on the Golan Heights and in the Middle East region generally, despite the ongoing conflict in the region. It should be noted that the role of UNDOF is one of being observers in relation to the Separation Agreement between Israel and Syria. It is not a peacekeeping or peace enforcement mission. Its continued presence is supported and welcomed by both Syria and Israel.

Ireland continued to contribute Military observers and staff to various United Nations missions throughout the year under review. The main mission in this regard is UNTSO. Twelve (12) Irish personnel were deployed to this mission in 2016, including Colonel Eamon Caulfield as Deputy Chief of Staff of UNTSO.

Ireland increased the contingent of personnel deployed to the EU training Mission in Mali to eighteen (18) during 2016. The objective of this mission is to improve the capacity of the Malian Armed Forces to maintain security in Mali and restore the authority of the Malian Government. Ireland has participated in EUTM Mali since the mission was launched in 2013. Ireland's contribution to the mission has been

further increased and, currently, twenty (20) Irish Defence Forces personnel are deployed to EUTM Mali.

Other missions in which Defence Forces personnel were deployed in 2016 were the EU led mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR) with seven (7) personnel; the NATO-led international security presence in Kosovo (KFOR) with twelve (12) personnel; and the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan with seven (7) personnel. Ireland withdrew from RSM in March 2016.

In addition, during 2016, a small number of Defence Forces officers continued to serve with MINURSO, the UN mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, MONUSCO, the UN Stabilisation mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and UNOCI, the UN operation in Cote d'Ivoire.

I had the opportunity to travel to Mali in October 2016 to meet with Irish personnel serving with the EUTM Mali mission. The Taoiseach and I visited UNIFIL in December 2017 and next week I will be travelling to both UNIFIL, UNTSO and UNDOF. Such visits are a valuable opportunity to be briefed on the situation and the challenges facing the respective mission areas. It's also an opportunity to thank the members of the Defence Forces for the incredible work they are doing in overseas missions.

During 2016 and again in 2017, I met with fellow Defence Ministers to discuss contributions to peace support operations and UN commitments

to progress peacekeeping reform. These summits provide an opportunity to consider the evolution of UN peacekeeping as we face new and more complex security and peacekeeping challenges across the globe.

A central tenet of Irish foreign policy is support for the multilateral system of collective security represented by the United Nations. In this regard, Ireland has taken seriously its obligation under the United Nations charter to make available to the Security Council; armed forces, assistance and facilities, in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security. The current contribution of some 586 personnel to overseas missions is a very significant contribution in the context of the resources available for Defence. This figure will increase further in 2018 with the planned consecutive deployments this year of two Naval Service ships as part of Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean. In 2018, in the region of 650 personnel will be deployed to overseas missions.

As a longstanding contributor to UN peacekeeping missions globally, we are very aware of the challenging nature of the missions we assign to our personnel. The UN is in the process of reforming its peacekeeping operations with a view to becoming more effective and cost efficient and being more transparent and accountable in its decisions. In this connection, the promotion of a strong gender perspective is a key element in all our peacekeeping operations and is an important part of improving the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations.

UN peacekeeping continues to be one of the most flexible and effective tools available to the international community in responding to crises around the world. Any reforms that create the conditions for successful peacekeeping operations and thereby produce tangible improvements in the lives of the people under protection in mission areas are to be welcomed.

Operational experience in peace support operations is essential for the ongoing development of the Defence Forces. However, it is important to acknowledge that participation in peace support missions comes at a personal cost for individuals who must be away from families and friends for extended periods of time in unfamiliar and difficult environments. Without their commitment and dedication Ireland's strong tradition of service overseas, under the auspices of the United Nations, would not be possible.

Since 1958 over 65,000 Defence Forces personnel have served on overseas missions. This year also marks significant anniversaries in relation to our UN peacekeeping role – it will be the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Irish participation in UN peacekeeping missions and it will be the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our first deployment to Lebanon as part of the UNIFIL mission. This is an opportune time for me to acknowledge the significant contribution that they have made to UN peacekeeping operations over the years.

I commend the motion to the Committee.

**Thank you.**

**ENDS.**