

**Remarks by Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason  
Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations**

**Meeting of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence**

17 December 2020

07.30 New York time (12.30 in Dublin)

Chair,

Deputies, Senators, Members of the Committee,

It is my pleasure to join you virtually in my capacity as Ireland's Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York.

1. I very much look forward to discussing Ireland's priorities and preparations for our upcoming term on the United Nations Security Council, and hope that today is the first of many such encounters.
2. After a long and hard fought Security Council campaign, we were thrilled to be elected on 17<sup>th</sup> June. We take our seat in just 15 days time - so we are at full throttle now in our preparations. I know that you recently had the opportunity to engage with Minister Coveney and he briefed on the key principles that will underpin our approach on the Security Council:
  - I. building peace;
  - II. strengthening conflict prevention; and
  - III. ensuring accountability.
3. As the Minister said, these principles '*are at the heart of Irish foreign policy*'. Our commitment to them will be consistent and determined on the Security Council. Simply put, we will remain our recognisable selves, true to our principles and values, anchored in our traditional commitments to disarmament, human rights and international law. Those principles encouraged two thirds of the 193 UN Member

States at the UN to vote confidence in us on election day. I see that as a vote of trust in Ireland's trademark foreign policies.

4. Chair, the Council has nothing less than the ambition to '*maintain international peace and security*'. This is a challenged international environment where global superpowers like the US and China have uneasy relations. Tensions, indeed open-conflict, rage variously across Africa, Middle East and even closer to home in Europe. Often, these are exacerbated by a changing climate. We know that the two years ahead will test us. Multilateralism itself is challenged. We will be steering a course through choppy waters.
5. So where are we now in our preparations? Our dedicated Security Council team is assembled in Dublin and in New York. This is a once in a generation project, so we have assembled a team of some of our most talented diplomats bringing a wide range of expertise and great energy to this endeavour. I myself have already laid the groundwork here in NY with Security Council members, the UN Secretary General, and his staff in the UN Secretariat. I have also been working here with civil society organisations, and with many Ambassadors from other countries. Today, I am looking forward to listening to you, to hearing your thoughts on how Ireland can contribute at the Council table. I keep saying that we will not be at that table to make up the numbers. We want to make a difference.
6. As the Ambassador dealing with the coalface of our work at the Council day-by-day, negotiation by negotiation, I thought it might be best today to initially highlight a few of what Minister Coveney calls the '*weighty briefs*'. Early in our tenure, we will be expected to work on these, to offer leadership on them. However, I should also add that the Security Council has a huge agenda – more than two dozen country situations officially and many thematic areas of focus - so frankly we are preparing for all eventualities.
7. Let me start with an issue that is a particular focus of the Council; **Syria**. One of the positive actions the Security Council has taken has been to try to ease human suffering on the ground. This is done through what is known as the **Syria Humanitarian** resolution. Security Council authorisation is the means by which

humanitarian actors – those delivering food, medicines and shelter- can provide cross-border assistance into North-Western Syria. Right now, we see thousands of Syrians facing into another bleak winter and their tenth year of conflict. We plan to do everything we can to ensure that life-saving humanitarian assistance can continue to be delivered to the millions of internally displaced persons in North-Western Syria throughout our term on the Council and for as long as that support is needed. The ongoing need for humanitarian aid, both to those Syrians internally displaced within the country and to those who have had to take refuge in neighbouring countries, of course underlines the urgency of the UN led political process aimed at resolving this conflict. We fully support the efforts of UN Special Envoy Geir Pederson who I spoke to just the other day. Progress, however, is painfully slow.

8. I mentioned at the start that the dynamics at the Security Council are less than optimal. This year it took three months to get agreement in the Council to endorse a call by the UNSG for a global ceasefire in Covid times. Shameful in my view. Clearly, the approach of the new American administration will be a key factor in shaping the dynamics at the Security Council next year. I am looking forward to working with Ambassador designate Linda Thomas Greenfield who is a professional diplomat with long experience.
9. One key area we will watch very carefully will be **Iran**, and the future of the JCPOA nuclear deal, in the context of possible US re-engagement. With elections in Tehran to follow the change of administration in the White House, it is likely to be a critical year and a difficult year for the Iran Nuclear deal. The window for both sides to re-engage is narrowing. As an EU country, Ireland will of course do everything it can at the Security Council to preserve the JCPOA agreement. We see the JCPOA a major diplomatic achievement and the best way to keep Iran's nuclear ambitions in check, and to help bring peace to the region. Our long history of support for nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation allows us to play an impartial but principled role in the Council's role on this issue.
10. As we address the ongoing headline tensions and conflicts, we will also be working at more subterranean levels, looking at root causes of conflict and its impacts. One area we know well is hunger - the biggest driver of **Hunger** is now conflict which is

undermining food security in some of the most vulnerable regions of the world. The alarm bells about risks of famine are ringing in Yemen, South Sudan and elsewhere. Next year, the UN will host a major food systems Summit in September, the same month in which Ireland will be the President of the Security Council. We will draw the clear link between food systems, food security, and conflict.

11. The truth is there are many other files which I expect to be top of my in-tray on 1 January, too many for me to cover in these brief opening remarks. The majority of the country situations on the agenda of the Security Council are in Africa and we will be active in leading work in the Security Council's engagement in the West Africa region, and the troubled Sahel. In **Sudan**, the UN is in the midst of a complex transition from a peacekeeping mission (UNAMID) to a political mission named UNITAMS. As the UN adjusts to this new reality, we need to be careful that the protection of civilians in Sudan is maintained.
12. Ireland also of course comes to the Security Council table with a well-respected and longstanding position of support for a negotiated two-state solution on the **Middle East Peace Process**. The Presidency of the Security Council will be held in January by an Arab State: Tunisia. My expectation is that, not least in light of recent developments in the region, we can expect a full debate on the Palestinian situation in our first weeks at the table. The Tunisians are also expected to focus on cooperation with the League of Arab States which is active in a range of theatres across the Middle East region. Of course, we are already watching developments on the ground every day. Just last month, for example, in New York we joined with other EU Members of the Security Council to publically call for Israel to reverse the decision to open a tender for illegal settlement construction in the highly sensitive area of Givat Hamatos. I can only hope that over our two-year tenure we see more signs for optimism, than I can attest to today.
13. The Irish Government rightly puts **Women, peace and security front and centre in its foreign and development policies**. I served for two years as the Chair of the UN's Commission on the Status of the Women, the principal global intergovernmental body exclusively dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women. The story of women's involvement in the peace process in Northern Ireland resonates widely in

the corridors of the United Nations. For peace to be sustainable, women must be at the table, meaningfully involved in decision-making. Famously, UN Security Council resolution 1325 on WPS is the most translated ever and the annual debate always the most oversubscribed. We are looking forward to playing a central role on this issue, as Germany (who leaves the Council in December) has just done. There is a lot of unfinished business. The implementation of the WPS agenda including in ongoing peace processes, such as in Afghanistan for just one example, is where we need to focus.

14. I have not had time to get into depth on some of the crises in **Europe** which the Security Council looks at – Belarus, Nagorno Karabakh, or in **Latin America** where a meeting on Colombia, for example, is expected in January.
15. Just as we will be working full tilt in New York, the whole Department, both at HQ and across all our Embassies abroad, will be pulling together to ensure that we are effective, credible and impactful members of the Council, just as we aim to be in all our foreign policy actions, whether at the EU, the UN or in our bilateral relations. Minister Coveney is of course already engaged in extensive consultations with his counterparts in countries that are members of the Council, countries who themselves are undergoing conflict and are regularly discussed at the Council and more broadly across the UN membership.
16. Of course, I cannot finish Chairman without also mentioning the extraordinary service of the men and women of Óglaigh na hÉireann and An Garda Síochána. Our reputation at the United Nations is built on our record of **peacekeeping**, on their extraordinary service in the cause of peace. Today Irish women and men wear blue helmets in 7 UN Peacekeeping missions from the Golan Heights where Brigadier General Maureen O'Brien is Deputy Force Commander of UNDOF, to UNIFIL in Lebanon, UNTSO in the Middle East, Western Sahara, Mali, and the DRC. The important point about our tenure will be that the mandates of these peacekeeping missions are shaped, negotiated, discussed and adopted by the Security Council. In Cyprus, where the Gardaí are deployed, the renewal of the mandate of UNFICYP will be negotiated in our first month on the Council. For the next two years, we are at that table with a real opportunity to make a difference, to build on our experience as a

peacekeeping nation to help shape the mandates of peacekeeping missions to make them more fit for purpose.

17. Chair, thank you again for the opportunity to brief the Committee today. I am looking forward to your comments and questions.

