



An Roinn Cosanta
Department of Defence

**Statement by Minister for Defence, Mr. Simon Coveney T.D., at the Oireachtas
Dáil Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and Defence, seeking approval for
the Report to Dáil Éireann regarding service by the Defence Forces with the
United Nations in 2019**

30 March, 2021

Chairman, Members of the Committee,

I am pleased to report to the Committee on Irish Defence Forces participation in United Nations missions in 2019. This report was laid before Dáil Éireann on 6 March 2020.

The following Motion was 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 2019, a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 6 March 2020, 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 2019.

Irish troops were first deployed on UN peacekeeping operations in 1958 and since then, not a single day has passed without Irish participation in UN peace support operations. This is a unique record and one of which we can all be proud.

Irish Defence Forces personnel have served in peace support missions all over the world in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America, completing over 70,000 tours of duty.

This commitment to international peacekeeping is a very practical expression of the values, which we hold dear as a nation, and of our commitment to the UN, to international peace and security and to multilateralism.

As of 5 January, 2021, there are some 586 Defence Forces personnel serving overseas in 10 different missions around the world. Ireland has a Battalion in UNIFIL and also a Company Group in the UNDOF mission on the Golan Heights. We also have other significant postings in the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans.

For all these Irish men and women of the Irish Defence Forces deployed on these operations, service with the United Nations is rightly regarded as a noble and important contribution in supporting Ireland's place in the world and our international and foreign policy objectives.

Commitments during 2019

Ireland's main commitments during 2019 were to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights.

UNIFIL

The UNIFIL mission was Ireland's largest overseas deployment during 2019. Due to other National commitments both Finland and Estonia withdrew from the Irish-Finnish Battalion, UNIFIL, in November 2018.

As an interim measure, Ireland assumed the full duties and responsibilities of the Irish Battalion and continued in this role up to November 2019 contributing some 450 troops during that period.

In November 2019, following an agreement with Poland to come on board as a key partner in this UN peacekeeping operation, Ireland reduced its contribution of troops in UNIFIL to 340 personnel with Poland providing some 220 personnel to a joint IrishPolBatt battalion. Hungarian personnel also deployed as part of the Polish contingent.

The Irish Defence Forces have had an ongoing relationship with Armed Forces of Malta since 2009, providing both cadet and officer training. In 2019, nine Armed Forces Malta personnel also deployed as part of the IrishPolBatt Battalion.

The UNIFIL mission in Lebanon continues to represent Ireland's largest overseas peace support deployment.

UNDOF

Ireland's second largest overseas deployment in 2019 was to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights. The Defence Forces contribution to UNDOF comprised approximately 137 personnel in 2019.

In September 2019, the United Nations appointed Acting Brigadier General Maureen O'Brien to the post of Deputy Force Commander UNDOF. Maureen O'Brien is the first female to achieve this rank in the Defence Forces - and is the highest ranking officer from the Defence Forces to serve in this mission. Additionally, she assumed the role of Acting Force Commander for the period October 2019 to July 2020, following the untimely passing of Force Commander Major General Francis Vib-Sanziri of Ghana in April 2019.

We are very fortunate indeed to have Brigadier General Maureen O'Brien serving as Deputy Force Commander of UNDOF.

She brings extensive command and peacekeeping experience to the post.

Since its establishment in 1974, UNDOF has been a successful mission in supporting the efforts of the international community both in the Golan Heights and in the Middle East region.

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 and is supported and welcomed by both Syria and Israel.

United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)

Government and Dáil approval was received in June 2019 for the deployment of a contingent of the Permanent Defence Forces to participate in MINUSMA, the UN led mission in MALI. The deployment of 13 personnel to the mission, primarily drawn from the Army Ranger Wing, took place in September 2019.

All deployed personnel are currently embedded within a larger Germany company and are carrying out assigned tasks in accordance with the mission mandate.

MINUSMA was established on 25 April 2013 by UN Security Council Resolution 2100 to stabilise the country after the Tuareg rebellion (2012).

The role of the mission is to ensure security, stabilization and protection of civilians; supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation; and assisting the reestablishment of State authority, the rebuilding of the security sector, and the promotion and protection of human rights in Mali.

UNTSO, MINURSO and MONUSCO

The Defence Forces deployments to UNTSO, MINURSO and MONUSCO are primarily in staff or military observer roles. These appointments give Ireland additional reach and also provide visibility and information on the ongoing security situations in these important and volatile regions.

Ireland continued to contribute Military observers and staff to various United Nations missions such as the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO) throughout 2019.

In addition a small number of Defence Forces officers continued to serve with MINURSO, the UN mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara, and MONUSCO, the UN Stabilisation mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Other UN Mandated missions

The UN has come to increasingly rely on regional organisations including the African Union, the EU and NATO to provide forces to implement and support UN Security Council Resolutions. In 2019, the Defence Forces were deployed in a number of such UN mandated missions.

EUTM Mali

Ireland has participated in the EU Training Mission in Mali (EUTM Mali) since the mission was launched in 2013. During 2019, twenty (20) Irish Defence Forces personnel were deployed to EUTM Mali.

The objective of the mission is to train and mentor the Malian Armed Forces to improve their military capacity and their effectiveness in guaranteeing the country's territorial integrity. The mission aims include reforming the chain of command in areas of training, logistics and military policy to ensure obedience to the civilian authority and the re-structuring and training of units of the Malian Armed Forces.

EUTM Mali is recognised by the UN as an essential partner in the reconstruction of the Malian State and the main instrument for the reconstruction of its armed forces in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions.

Other missions

Other UN Mandated missions in which Defence Forces personnel were deployed in 2019 and are still serving are the EU led mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR) with 5 personnel and the NATO-led international security presence in Kosovo (KFOR) with 13 personnel.

Overseas service

I commend all our Defence Forces men and women for their commitment and dedication to overseas service, without which, Ireland's strong tradition of peacekeeping under the auspices of the United Nations, would not be possible.

Our ability to protect the health and safety of our personnel is of paramount concern at this time. Ongoing threat assessments are carried out in mission areas and we continually review both personal equipment and force assets, to ensure that Defence Forces personnel are appropriately equipped to fulfil their roles and stay safe.

We should not forget that participation in all these peace support, crisis management, training and monitoring missions comes at a personal cost for individuals who must be away from families and friends for extended periods of time.

Ireland has a strong tradition of principled engagement on development, humanitarian assistance, disarmament, human rights and peacekeeping. These values underpin our commitment to partnership with the UN and its Member States.

This year, as a member of the UN Security Council, we will work with the UN in taking forward its goals and apply ourselves in an open, honest and competent way to the work facing the Council. We will endeavour to serve the wider good and continue our support for the UN and the multilateral system.

I commend the motion to the Committee.
Thank you.

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