



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 Reports to Dáil Éireann regarding service by the Defence
Forces with the United Nations in 2020 and 2021**

30 June, 2022

Chairman, Members of the Committee,

I am pleased to report to the Committee on Irish Defence Forces participation in United Nations missions in 2020 and 2021. These reports were laid before Dáil Éireann on 21 June 2021 and 30 March 2022, respectively.

The following Motions were placed on the Order Paper for Dáil Éireann and have 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 2020, a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 21 June 2021, in accordance with Section 13 of the Defence (Amendment) Act, 2006”.

“That Dáil Éireann approves the report by the Minister for Defence regarding service by the Defence Forces with the United Nations in 2021, a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 30 March 2022, in accordance with Section 13 of the Defence (Amendment) Act, 2006”.

In commending the motions, I will briefly outline some of the key aspects of Ireland’s involvement with the UN in 2020 and 2021.

Commitments during 2020 and 2021

There are currently some 546 Defence Forces personnel serving overseas in nine different missions around the world. During 2020 and 2021, notwithstanding the significant challenges presented by COVID-19, our Defence Forces personnel deployed as usual to UN-led and UN authorised missions.

The exceptional circumstances of the pandemic required rotating troops to quarantine in military installations for a two-week period immediately prior to their departure and again on arrival in the mission area.

UNIFIL

The UNIFIL mission in Lebanon, where we partner with Polish, Hungarian and Maltese troops with Ireland as lead nation, represents Ireland's largest overseas peace support deployment.

I have had the opportunity to visit our troops in Lebanon twice in the last six months, most recently just last month when I accompanied the Taoiseach on a visit to the UNIFIL mission to mark the UN's Day for International Peacekeepers. The valuable contribution that the mission and our Irish troops are making to international peace and security in the Middle East was very evident.

UNDOF

Ireland's second largest overseas deployment was to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights.

A contingent of the Permanent Defence Force has been deployed to UNDOF since 2013 and the presence of the mission remains an important element in ensuring the continuing ceasefire between Israel and Syria and in the wider Middle East Region.

United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)

Last year, the Government approved the continued provision of up to 14 Defence Forces personnel, drawn primarily from the Army Ranger Wing, to participate in MINUSMA, the United Nations led operation in Mali, up until 30 September 2022.

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

Having originally deployed for a period of two years, which was subsequently extended for a third year, our participation in this mission will conclude later this year.

UNTSO, MONUSCO and MINURSO

UNTSO, MONUSCO (Democratic Republic of Congo) and MINURSO (Western Sahara) are primarily staff or military observer missions, with Ireland personnel providing a valuable role in monitoring ceasefires and avoiding any escalation in these important but volatile regions.

Following a review of overseas deployments in 2021, a decision was taken to withdraw the two Defence Forces' personnel deployed to MINURSO, the UN mission in Western Sahara, and end Ireland's involvement in this mission. The withdrawal of these personnel arose from a need to consolidate operational deployments in the context of additional commitments to peacekeeping entered into by Ireland in recent years.

Other UN Mandated missions - EUTM Mali, EUFOR, KFOR

Other UN Mandated Missions in which Defence Forces personnel were deployed in 2020 and 2021 include the EU mission to train the Malian Armed Forces in Mali, known as EUTM Mali, the EU led mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR) and the NATO-led international security presence in Kosovo (KFOR).

Security Council

Ireland is now into its second year on the Security Council. While membership of the Security Council is an honour, it also brings with it great responsibility. Since January 2021, we have engaged actively across the Council's broad agenda and played a constructive role, bringing pragmatism and principle to the Council table, not least during our Presidency of the Council last September.

In September 2021, I presided over the unanimous adoption of a UN Security Council Resolution spearheaded by Ireland on peacekeeping. UNSCR 2594 was the first UNSC resolution devoted to the transition from peacekeeping to peacebuilding.

Between now and the end of our term, we will continue to play a constructive and thoughtful role and support the vital work of promoting international peace and security.

Conclusion

I would like to take this opportunity to again, commend the members of the Defence Forces for their commitment to overseas service and to thank them for their significant contribution to UN peacekeeping.

I know you will agree with me when I say that our Defence Forces personnel serving on such missions to date have built up an outstanding reputation as committed, conscientious, professional and humane peacekeepers. Without their loyal and continuing support, Ireland's strong tradition of service overseas, under the auspices of the United Nations, would not be possible.

I commend the motions to the Committee.

Thank you.

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