

Written Answers.

The following are questions tabled by Members for written response and the ministerial replies as received on the day from the Departments [unrevised].

Questions Nos. 1 to 10, inclusive, answered orally.

Human Rights Issues

11. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the recently released Human Rights Watch report which accuses the Burmese Government of crimes against humanity and not doing enough to stop ethnic violence in the country; and if he has discussed this issue with his European counterparts. [23223/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am aware of the report released by Human Rights Watch on 22 April concerning the ongoing situation in Rakhine State - also known as Arakan State - in Myanmar/Burma. I am deeply concerned by the reports of grave human rights violations, including allegations of crimes against humanity and ethnic cleansing. While the reform process in Myanmar/Burma has been moving in the right direction, and key members of the Government of Myanmar/Burma have expressed their commitment to the path of democracy, Ireland and its EU partners recognise that Myanmar/Burma still faces complex challenges, including in the areas of human rights and democratisation, economic development, peace and reconciliation.

On 21 March 2013, the UN Human Rights Council, of which Ireland is currently a member, adopted resolution 22/14 on the situation of human rights in Myanmar. The Irish Presidency of the European Union played a key role in the drafting and negotiation of the EU-led resolution, which expresses particular concern about the Rohingya minority in Rakhine/Arakan State and persisting inter-communal tension. The resolution urges the Government of Myanmar/Burma to take action to protect the human rights of the Rohingya, and to repeal and/or amend laws that deny the Rohingya the right to birth registration, the ability to marry and freedom of movement, including equal access to citizenship. The resolution also calls upon the Government to ensure that those responsible for violence in Rakhine/Arakan State are held to account and urges it to grant safe, timely, full and unhindered humanitarian access to all persons in need and to facilitate the voluntary return of individuals to their original communities. The resolution also extends for one year the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Myanmar.

On 29 April, the Government of Myanmar/Burma released the report of an independent commission, tasked by the President of Myanmar, U Thein Sein, in mid-2012, with uncovering the root causes of sectarian violence in Rakhine/Arakan State. I welcome the various commitments made by the President since the release of the Commission's report, including a commitment to take all necessary actions to ensure the basic human rights of Muslims in Rakhine/

Arakan State, to uphold the rights to freedom of religion and freedom of speech and to address the humanitarian situation.

As the Deputy is aware, on 22 April 2013, at a meeting of the Foreign Affairs Council, the EU decided to lift all sanctions on Myanmar/Burma, with the exception of the arms embargo and an embargo on equipment which might be used for internal oppression. This decision was taken in the light of the broader political and economic reforms that have been taking place in Myanmar/Burma since 2011 as part of the process of democratisation, and further to the Council's decision to suspend sanctions in April 2012.

In conjunction with the decision to lift sanctions, there was also a discussion at the Foreign Affairs Council on areas where further progress by Myanmar/Burma is expected, including issues related to ethnic conflict. Furthermore, the EU is providing development assistance amounting to €75m to Myanmar/Burma, including a €19m humanitarian programme, which largely responds to needs arising from ethnic violence and extremism.

Looking to the future, it is critical that the international community's engagement with, and support to, Myanmar/Burma is carefully and comprehensively structured. Ireland will continue to monitor developments in Rakhine/Arakan State, including at the Human Rights Council.

Foreign Conflicts

12. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the recent arrest of eight young Basque political activists in Donostia San Sebastián and the consequences these political arrests could have on the peace process there and if he will raise the issue with the Spanish Government. [23215/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I have closely followed developments in relation to the Basque Country, including the outcome of the San Sebastian Conference in October 2011 and the subsequent declaration by ETA on 20 October 2011 that the organisation had "decided on the definitive cessation of its armed activity". As I have said previously, the Government supports any development that could lead to definitive peace in the Basque Country. The matter the Deputy is referring to relates to the arrest on 19 April of eight people in San Sebastian. Six of the individuals in question were arrested as a result of their conviction by the Supreme Court on 9 April of membership of an illegal armed organisation. A further two people were arrested for resisting the police during protests aimed at preventing the arrests of the six people convicted by the Supreme Court. It would not be appropriate for me to comment on these arrests nor to speculate on the possible impact that they might have.

Foreign Conflicts

13. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the bombing of targets in Damascus, Syria on 5 May 2013 by Israel's air force; if he is concerned about this military attack and the possible consequences; and if he has discussed the issue with his European counterparts. [23219/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I would refer the Deputy to my reply to the earlier Priority Question on this topic. Further to that reply, I would add that Israel has not confirmed it was involved in an attack on a target or targets in Syria, but this is widely believed. While we do not have a full and precise account,

reports suggest, as they did in relation to an earlier episode in January, that a convoy delivering advanced weapons including missiles to Hezbollah in Lebanon was attacked. The missiles were said to have been supplied originally by Iran. A Syrian army base on the outskirts of Damascus seems also to have been hit: this is said to have been a staging or storage area for Hezbollah weapons, and may also have had a role in chemical weapons research or production for Syria.

There are reports, from serious sources but again unconfirmed, that Israel has passed a message to Syria that it is not intervening in the Syrian conflict, but acting solely to prevent weapons reaching Hezbollah. Significant numbers of Hezbollah fighters are in turn reported fighting on the side of the Assad regime in Syria.

The growing complexity and danger of escalation of these events to engulf the wider region is clear, and I would expect that this will feature in discussion at the Foreign Affairs Council on 27 May which I will attend.

Middle East Peace Process

14. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions, if any, he has had with Commissioner Ashton or at the European Union Foreign Affairs Council in relation to the Israeli/Palestine conflict; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23194/13]

86. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the Middle East peace process continues to remain in focus at EU and or UN level; the extent, if any, to which progress can be reported in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23618/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 14 and 86 together.

I have had regular discussions with High Commissioner Ashton and with my European Union colleagues at the Foreign Affairs Council in relation to the Israeli/Palestine conflict and the Middle East Peace Process. To date this year, the Middle East Peace Process has been discussed at both the January and February Councils and at the informal Ministerial meeting which I co-hosted in Dublin in March. It is expected that this issue will again be discussed at the next Foreign Affairs Council meeting in May, although the agenda for this meeting has not yet been finalised.

Recent discussions have focused in particular on prospects for reviving the peace process following the elections in Israel and re-engagement by the new US Administration. The EU has always recognised that it would be very difficult to restart negotiations on the Middle East without the active engagement of the United States. We are therefore anxious to give all the support we can to renewed involvement by the US. The US Secretary of State, John Kerry, is treating the peace process as a personal priority and has made several visits to the region. President Obama's decision to visit Israel in March, at the start of his second term, was also very welcome. His clear outreach to Israeli public opinion will hopefully help to add momentum to the process. I conveyed to Secretary Kerry the strong encouragement of the EU and discussed the prospects for making progress at a meeting which I had with him in Washington on 18 March, just before he left for Israel.

While the resumption of talks is a key priority, the EU has also become increasingly concerned that the relentless expansion of the Israeli settlement programme is fast approaching a point where it will be physically impossible to construct a viable Palestinian state on the

ground. The EU has therefore pressed for changes in these policies and for action on a range of practical issues on the ground which are inhibiting the prospects for a viable peace process.

Foreign Conflicts

15. **Deputy Peadar Tóibín** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the suspected use of chemical weapons by Government and opposition forces in Syria; and if he has discussed this with his European counterparts. [23227/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am aware of the allegations that chemical weapons have been used in Syria. Any use of chemical weapons would have appalling humanitarian consequences, is clearly contrary to international legal norms and must be utterly condemned. Initial information that chemical weapons may have been used in Syria came to light last December, and additional allegations emerged in March. British, French, US and Turkish intelligence sources have indicated that material they have recovered indicates the possible use of the nerve agent sarin. At the moment, the available evidence is neither categorical, nor can it give a clear picture of who used the gas, as allegations have been made against both the Syrian authorities and opposition forces. What is clear is that an extremely worrying picture is emerging.

The European Union has repeatedly called on the Syrian authorities never to use its chemical weapons and to store them securely pending destruction under independent verification. We have made the same calls in a national capacity. At the recent Review Conference of the Chemical Weapons Convention, which took place only last month, the EU again expressed its grave concern at the allegations. The 188 States Party to the Convention agreed that ‘the use of chemical weapons by anyone under any circumstances would be reprehensible and completely contrary to the legal norms and standards of the international community’. Regrettably, Syria is not a party to this Convention but it is bound by the 1925 Geneva Protocol which prohibits the use of chemical weapons.

The EU has also written to the United Nations Secretary-General to insist that the investigation into allegations of use of chemical weapons in Syria which he is attempting to establish have unfettered access within Syria and that it must be comprehensive and investigate all serious allegations. While discussions on the subject are ongoing in New York, it has not proven possible so far for the investigation team to commence its work as the Syrian authorities have refused to agree to the Terms of Reference requested by the Secretary-General. The most recent information to emerge from Syria clearly makes it all the more urgent that this investigation be allowed to proceed without delay. I call on the Syrian authorities to agree the Terms of Reference immediately to enable the investigation to begin its important work.

Cross-Border Projects

16. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the proposals, if any, he has to have further discussions with Members of the Northern Ireland Executive or with the Northern Ireland Secretary of State in relation to the need to finalise the funding provision for construction of the Narrow Water Bridge; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23200/13]

44. **Deputy Seamus Kirk** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had any recent discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland or Members of the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to the need to progress to construction stage the

Narrow Water Bridge project; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23199/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 16 and 44 together.

The Government strongly supports the INTEREG IVA Narrow Water Bridge project. The bridge would open up the cross-border Cooley, Mournes, and Gullion region to many more visitors, making it much easier for residents, businesses and tourists to travel and to interconnect.

As well as the long-term tourism and infrastructural benefits that the bridge would undoubtedly bring to the area, there would also be a very valuable economic spin-off during the construction phase of the project, with a boost to employment.

I am conscious that concerns have been expressed about the delay in giving the project final approval. I and my colleagues in government have relayed these concerns to our colleagues in the Northern Ireland executive. I discussed the issue with First Minister Peter Robinson, on the occasion of the NSMC Institutional meeting in Belfast on 29 April last.

I was pleased to note that at a meeting of the Special EU Programmes Body (SEUPB) on 10 May last, which was chaired by the Northern Ireland Minister for Finance and Personnel, Sammy Wilson MP MLA, Ministers noted that it was important that the small number of projects still outstanding must be approved in a timely manner by the accountable Departments, so as to ensure that they can be implemented within the relevant EU deadline.

The project is currently going through the Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) Accountable Department approval process. DFP has indicated that it is fully aware of the high level of interest in the project, that it is conscious of the urgent timelines involved, and that it is working to complete all necessary processes as quickly as possible.

The Government is keeping this matter under very close consideration.

Question No. 17 answered with Question No. 10.

Middle East Peace Process

18. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the injuries sustained by a person (details supplied) who was wounded by a rubber-coated steel bullet fired by the Israeli military while he filmed a protest in Palestine; and if he has raised the case with the Israeli Government.. [23218/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am aware of the case to which the Deputy refers. The Irish Embassy in Tel Aviv has carefully monitored this case, and has been in contact with the person in question on a number of occasions. The Embassy is handling the case in accordance with the wishes expressed by the person.

Foreign Conflicts

19. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the recent upsurge in violence in Nigeria between the Government and Boko Haram; and if he has discussed this issue with his European counterparts. [23231/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Government, along with our EU partners, shares the widespread concern about the security situation in Nigeria, including the ongoing campaign of violence by the group, Boko Haram. We monitor developments in Nigeria closely through our Ambassador and his staff in Abuja, in close consultation with EU and other international partners. We have consistently condemned the violence in Nigeria, and the acts of terror Boko Haram have been perpetrating.

The EU also maintains a strong dialogue with the Nigerian authorities on the political and security situation and on issues related to the Nigerian Government's response to terrorism. Indeed, Minister of State Joe Costello is today representing the European Union at the EU-Nigeria Ministerial Dialogue meeting, a regular forum for high-level exchange between the EU and Nigeria on issues of mutual interest and concern. The political and security situation in will be discussed, as well as economic and development issues and shared regional and global challenges.

The position of Ireland and the European Union is clear. We support the Nigerian authorities in their efforts to confront terrorism and bring those responsible to justice while maintaining the rule of law and observing and protecting human rights for all citizens of the country. The armed group Boko Haram must end their campaign of violence, lay down their weapons and pursue any policies or grievances they have through peaceful means and dialogue.

In April, the President of Nigeria established a 'Committee on Dialogue and Peaceful Resolution of Security Challenges in the North'. It has been tasked with considering a 60-day timeframe for dialogue with members of Boko Haram and disarmament. More recently, it appears that this timeframe has been extended to 90 days.

The EU will continue to support equitable and inclusive social and economic development in Nigeria, with special emphasis on addressing the root causes of marginalisation and conflict.

Middle East Peace Process

20. **Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the recently released UNCTAD report entitled *The Palestinian Economy in East Jerusalem: Enduring Annexation, Isolation and Disintegration*; which found that Israeli segregation policies have ensured that 82% of Palestinian children in east Jerusalem are living in poverty; and if he has discussed it with his European counterparts. [23230/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Palestinian community in East Jerusalem experience many of the personal and economic difficulties which are suffered by their compatriots elsewhere in the West Bank.

In addition, however, they experience complications and problems due to Israel's insistence that their home has been annexed to Israel while they have become not citizens of Israel but residents, whose residency status can be threatened in a number of ways. The Israeli and Palestinian populations of Jerusalem are treated very differently in administrative and legal terms. Israeli Government policy is explicitly aimed at reducing the Palestinian proportion of the population, leading in practice to measures which make life difficult for Palestinians and put them under pressure to leave and move elsewhere in the Occupied Territory. UNCTAD, the UN Conference on Trade and Development, has just published (9 May) a report on "The Palestinian Economy in East Jerusalem". This substantial report, which my Department is studying with interest, will, I believe, be very helpful in supporting the case made by Ireland for some time

that it is necessary to focus on the many practical difficulties which affect the lives of Palestinians and which are aimed – I regret to say deliberately – at pressurising them into abandoning their existing communities. The report details the very small proportion of state and municipal revenues spent proportionately in Palestinian communities in Jerusalem in welfare, education and health and the movement and other restrictions which greatly hinder daily life and economic activity for Palestinians. The Deputy correctly notes that a major result of this situation is a markedly higher level of poverty, including among children, in the Palestinian community. To extract just one indicator among many, it is reported that spending on education in Jewish communities in West Jerusalem is more than four times higher *per capita* than in Palestinian areas of East Jerusalem.

These are issues which Ireland has already been pressing, particularly at EU level, and I am sure that this important report will feed usefully into those discussions.

Investment in Agriculture Conference

21. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide details about what was discussed at the Investing in Agriculture for Nutrition event in Washington, that was co-hosted by Minister for Development and Trade, Joe Costello. [23220/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): Good nutrition and food security are important pathways out of poverty. If investments in agriculture are designed to enhance nutrition outcomes, we can help stop the devastating and irreversible consequences of under-nutrition on child development and we can increase the economic potential of nations. It is estimated that eliminating under-nutrition in very young children could add up to 11 per cent to GDP growth in countries in Africa.

My Department hosted a major international conference on hunger-nutrition-climate justice, in partnership with the Mary Robinson Foundation-Climate Justice, on 15-16 April in Dublin Castle. A significant proportion of those who participated in the conference were representatives of local communities from the developing world who are most affected by these linked challenges. During that conference I heard from smallholder farmers who shared their experiences of trying to grow diverse and nutritious food in a world impacted by climate change. I committed to bringing their messages to international policy discussions.

To that end I hosted an event with my Canadian counterpart on ‘Investing in Agriculture for Nutrition’ during the Spring Meetings of the World Bank in Washington DC on 19 April.

The event brought together key policy makers within the World Bank, along with the President of the Global Development Programme at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the President of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

The discussions highlighted the courses of action that could help to incentivise efforts to leverage agricultural investment to improve nutrition. I shared the key messages from the Dublin conference, including in particular, the importance of empowering poor households and communities to engage in decision making. I strongly advocated that our response to these global challenges must be based on the needs and views of the people most directly involved.

I was delighted that Ireland and Canada were able to partner together in this way to advance the importance of allocating resources for nutrition and leveraging investments in other sectors, particularly agriculture. I was impressed by the progress that has been made by the World Bank in shaping its policies to be more nutrition focussed. This approach is key to achieving better

nutritional outcomes. It will not just help children to grow and develop to their full potential, but with a better nourished workforce, developing countries will be able to further their own economic growth and development.

Human Rights Issues

22. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views regarding the findings of a distinguished legal research and advocacy panel from the Constitution Project that the United States had practised torture on prisoners. [23100/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The report to which the Deputy refers is a detailed document of more than 600 pages, produced by an organisation that aims to influence policy in the United States.

The report's conclusion that certain actions conducted under the authority of the United States Government were contrary to international humanitarian law and human rights law is fully consistent with the views of successive Irish Governments, as well as with those of our partners in the European Union.

The Deputy will be aware that in 2006 the US military, in its Field Manual, prohibited the use of a number of interrogation techniques, including waterboarding and sexual humiliation. In early 2009, by an Executive Order, President Obama required all US Government agencies to implement this Field Manual.

Foreign Conflicts

23. **Deputy Seán Ó Fearghail** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will outline any discussions he has had with his EU counterparts and other Foreign Ministers with regard to military action in Mali; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23184/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Mali has been the subject of ongoing discussion by EU Foreign Ministers since March 2012 when there was an army coup and armed groups seized control of the north of the country. The situation was discussed most recently at the Foreign Affairs Council which I attended in Brussels on 11 March. In February the Council adopted comprehensive Conclusions which reaffirmed the EU's support for international efforts to support stabilisation and counter the threat of terrorism in Mali, including the French-led Operation Serval and the African-led International Support Mission in Mali (AFISMA). The Council also discussed the establishment and launch of an EU Training Mission in Mali, which is now working to support the strengthening and reform of the Malian army, including through important training in the area of human rights. Ireland is contributing six trainers and two HQ personnel for the EU Training Mission. The EU recognises that the situation in Mali cannot be addressed by military means alone. The Council has emphasised the importance of progress on the political track and especially the implementation of the transition roadmap which has been agreed by the Malian Government and Parliament. We have underlined in particular the preparations for free and fair elections scheduled to take place in the coming months, implementation of a meaningful national dialogue and reconciliation process, and the need to ensure full respect for human rights for all of Mali's citizens.

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ment and Parliament. We have underlined in particular the preparations for free and fair elections scheduled to take place in the coming months, implementation of a meaningful national dialogue and reconciliation process, and the need to ensure full respect for human rights for all of Mali's citizens. All of these issues were discussed in detail yesterday, 15 May, at a major international Donor Conference on Mali, jointly hosted by the EU and France in Brussels. Ireland was represented at the conference by the Minister of State for Trade and Development, Mr. Joe Costello T.D., who reiterated the Government's support for the EU's comprehensive approach in Mali. He also noted our support for the series of UN Security Council Resolutions on the situation in Mali, including Resolution 2100, adopted on 25 April, which authorises the establishment of the new UN Peacekeeping Operation for Mali, MINUSMA. It will take over from AFISMA on 1 July. The UN Mission has been given a mandate to use all necessary means to carry out its tasks, which include the stabilisation of key population centres and the re-establishment of State authority throughout the country; support for the implementation of the transitional roadmap, and the promotion and protection of human rights. MINUSMA will comprise 11,200 troops and 1,440 police.

At the conference yesterday, Minister of State Costello announced that Ireland will provide a further €2.5 million to respond to continuing humanitarian needs and to support the recovery of Mali. Already in 2013, Ireland has provided humanitarian assistance of over €1.8 million. Last year, the Government provided €1.35 million for relief in Mali and €9.25 million for the humanitarian crisis across the Sahel region.

Foreign Conflicts

24. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the most recent discussions held at EU Foreign Affairs Council in relation to the ongoing conflict in the Congo; if funding has been allocated this year for humanitarian aid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23206/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The continuing crisis in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) is discussed regularly at all levels within the EU, including at meetings of the Foreign Affairs Council.

I have joined with our EU partners in welcoming the recent progress in efforts to secure a durable solution to the crisis in the DRC. In particular, I have strongly welcomed the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement for the DRC and the Region, which was concluded in Addis Ababa on 24 February. The adoption of the Agreement was welcomed on behalf of the EU in a joint statement by High Representative Catherine Ashton and Development Commissioner, Andris Piebalgs, which called on all sides to continue negotiating in good faith and to refrain from violence. This important regional Agreement was reached by the Government of the DRC and ten neighbouring and regional countries. The co-guarantors of the Agreement are the African Union, the Southern African Development Community, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the United Nations.

In the UN Secretary General's own words, a lasting solution in the DRC must have a number of essential elements. It must be anchored in the political will of the leaders of all countries in the region. It must address the structural causes fuelling instability in the DRC itself. It must respect the sovereignty, territorial integrity and legitimate concerns and interests of all concerned countries. It also demands the commitment and long-term support of the international community. Lasting peace can only be secured in the DRC if the Agreement is implemented in full and the opportunity it presents is now grasped by all parties involved.

I have welcomed the appointment of Mary Robinson by the UN Secretary General as his Special Envoy for the region, to support the implementation of the Agreement. I have assured her of the full support of Government, and of the European Union. The Secretary General is also proposing the establishment of an Intervention Brigade to address security aspects of the crisis more comprehensively.

Ireland is also responding to the appalling humanitarian consequences of the crisis in the DRC. Since 2009, the Government has provided €42.8 million for the victims of this humanitarian crisis. Last year, we provided over €10 Million in emergency and longer-term development funding to the DRC. In April, I announced a further €3.8 million in funding for UN agencies and NGOs working in the DRC. Of this €3.8 million, some €2 million has been channelled through the Common Humanitarian Fund for the DRC. This is a multi-donor pooled funding mechanism under the direction of the Humanitarian Coordinator for the DRC. It provides quick and flexible funding to UN humanitarian agencies and international and national NGOs on the basis of the needs on the ground. The UN's Humanitarian Action Plan for the DRC for 2013 provides overall strategic guidance for the Common Humanitarian Fund in order to enable aid organisations to reach nearly 4 million people with urgently-needed food, water, shelter, health-care and education.

The remaining €1.8 million is being provided to Irish Aid NGO partners working in the DRC. €450,000 is being provided to Christian Aid, €450,000 to Concern, €300,000 to Trócaire and €580,000 to Oxfam (€580,000). It will be used to provide emergency food, water, health and protection to some of the most vulnerable people in the DRC.

Question No. 25 answered with Question No. 10.

International Summits

26. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will be represented at the pre G8 Hunger Summit on the 8 June 2013 in London, and at the Tax, Trade and Transparency Summit on the 15 June; and if so, whether the representative will commit to adopting policy positions at these summits which help tackle the negative impacts of tax evasion and avoidance, land grabs, and biofuel production on developing countries. [23221/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): Fighting global hunger is a priority for Ireland's International Development Programme. Under-nutrition is an often silent element of hunger which has devastating consequences. Over four in ten children under the age of five in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are undernourished. Under-nutrition not only puts these children at greater risk of infection and death, but it also stops them reaching their full potential in school and ultimately achieving economic success and productivity. In the context of its G8 Presidency, the British Government, in partnership with the Government of Brazil and the Children's Investment Fund Foundation (CIFF), will host a 'Day of International Action' entitled 'Nutrition for Growth: Beating Hunger through Business and Science' on 8 June 2013 in London.

Ireland is a core partner on this initiative and I am pleased that the Taoiseach will attend this event at the invitation of British Prime Minister David Cameron. It will build on the Olympic Hunger Summit held at Downing Street in August 2012 in which the Taoiseach participated. Ireland will continue its strong international advocacy and action on the importance of investment to address under-nutrition and to harness support for low income countries to address this challenge.

I also welcome the opportunity to have dialogue on tax transparency in the forthcoming agenda of the G8 Summit. Efficient and fair tax systems in developing countries are essential for sustainable growth, poverty reduction and the provision of basic services. They are also vital for the promotion of good governance and for ensuring social cohesion. Tax avoidance and evasion, therefore, present a major issue for developing countries seeking to drive their own development.

Ireland is playing a strong role at national level and in global efforts to increase revenue generation and tackle tax avoidance and evasion in developing countries. The brokering by Ireland of an agreement in the EU for the revision of the EU transparency and accounting directives, which when passed into legislation will improve transparency among EU multinational companies involved in extractive and logging industries in developing countries, is one recent example of this.

Ireland's new Policy for International Development, *One World, One Future*, firmly commits to supporting developing countries to raise their own domestic revenue in ways that are more efficient, fairer and better promote good governance and equitable development. In the Policy, the Government commits to advancing efforts to combat tax evasion, illicit financial flows and capital flight that are stripping developing countries of badly needed resources for the provision of basic services and the tackling of poverty.

Ireland recognises that given the integrated nature of today's global financial and economic systems, many of the challenges in this area can only be overcome through international co-operation. Bringing together as it does some of the world's major economic powers, the Tax, Trade and Transparency Summit on June 15 is therefore a very welcome initiative. Ireland, through the European Union's participation in this Summit, will push for ambitious steps to be taken on these matters.

Ministerial Travel

27. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide further details of his recent four day trade mission to Turkey; his visit to Syrian refugee camps in Turkey; and if he discussed with the Turkish Government their dialogue with the PKK and attempts at creating a peace process. [23225/13]

58. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if, in view of the his recent visit to Turkey, he believes that the PKK's historic ceasefire will have a positive impact on the political and security environment of that country, and create conditions for meaningful dialogue between the two sides. [23238/13]

65. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the details of his recent trade mission to Turkey; his views in relation to Turkey's application for membership of the European Union; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23104/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 27, 58, and 65 together.

First, I wish to take this opportunity to express my horror at the explosion of two bombs in Reyhanli, a town in Turkey close to the Syrian border, on Saturday 11 May, in which at least 46 people have died. On behalf of the Irish Government I have sent a message to the Turkish government via our embassy in Ankara expressing our condolences to the families of the innocent civilians killed and our sympathies to the injured. We express our solidarity with the people and government of Turkey, who have generously extended protection to hundreds of thousands

of refugees from the crisis in Syria.

I visited Turkey from 7 to 10 April 2013. This visit had a number of aspects, including a bilateral trade mission, political discussions on our bilateral relations with Turkey and Turkey's EU accession process, given Ireland's role as current Presidency of the Council of Ministers of the European Union. I led the trade mission of 24 Enterprise Ireland companies, held discussions with Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu and Minister for EU Affairs, Mr. Egemen Bağış. I also met President Gül, the Minister for the Economy, the Minister for Science and Technology and the Minister for Energy. In addition, I visited Syrian refugee camps hosted by the Turkish Government in Gaziantep in south eastern Turkey.

Dealing first with the trade mission, contracts of over €30 million for Enterprise Ireland client companies were announced. Enterprise Ireland's market strategy in Turkey is focused in particular on energy and environmental services, pharmaceuticals, ICT, financial services, education and engineering sectors. Companies from all these sectors were represented on the mission. I also undertook a range of meetings with prominent business people and business organisations in Ankara and Istanbul, including TIM (the Turkish Exporters Assembly) which signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Irish Exporters Association. Trade between Turkey and Ireland has grown by 20% over the past three years and exports by EI client companies to Turkey grew by 9% in 2012. In all it was a very productive visit and laid the groundwork for even greater trade engagement between Ireland and Turkey in the future.

I discussed Turkey's EU accession process with Ministers Davutoğlu and Bağış and with President Gül. Ireland has long been supportive of Turkish EU membership and one of our priorities is to reinvigorate the accession process during our Presidency. Work is progressing in this area and we hope to be in a position to open a negotiating Chapter (Chapter 22 – Regional policy and co-ordination of structural instruments) in June. Appreciation was expressed by my interlocutors for the Irish Presidency's efforts in this regard but so too was some frustration at the slow pace of Turkey's accession progress. I urged that implementation by Turkey of the Ankara Protocol would create new momentum for the accession process and provide the opportunity to unblock a number of areas currently stalled.

Foreign Minister Davutoğlu also briefed me on the Kurdish issue and talks with the PKK. The government is optimistic, but cautious. The announcement on 21 March that PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan has called a ceasefire is most welcome and represents an opportunity to build on the ongoing talks towards a durable and democratic settlement. These are very welcome developments and I took the opportunity to wish the Government well in its efforts.

On 8 April I visited refugee camps for Syrians at Nizet near Gaziantep. Turkey was the first neighbour of Syria to formally respond to the influx of Syrian refugees. It maintains an open border policy for those fleeing the conflict and it has been praised for the level of humanitarian assistance it has provided. I commended my interlocutors for the efforts of the Turkish people and on the occasion of my visit announced a further Irish contribution of €1 million in humanitarian assistance for Syrians, specifically targeted for Turkey. This comprises €500,000 to the International Federation of the Red Cross and €500,000 to the UNHCR and it brings Irish assistance for the humanitarian crisis in Syria to €8,150,000 to date.

Passport Applications

28. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his plans to review the passport application process for dual citizenship holders in order that his Department will keep statistics on the number of applications for passports by

citizens who also hold a non-Irish passport and the number of non-Irish passports held by Irish citizens; if this issue has been raised at EU level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23101/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Passport Service does not require that an applicant for an Irish passport, as part of the regular application process, provide details of any foreign passports held. Therefore, information on the number of Irish passport holders that hold passports of other states is not available. There is no prohibition under Irish law on Irish citizens holding the passport of another State. There are currently no plans to request such information.

International Conferences

29. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide more details of what was discussed at the Somalia Conference which was held in London and attended by Minister for Development and Trade Joe Costello; and if there are any immediate plans for Ireland to increase our support to Somalia. [23217/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): I represented Ireland at the Somalia Conference in London on 7 May which was attended by representatives of more than 50 countries and international organisations. The conference discussed a wide range of issues relating to ongoing efforts to consolidate lasting peace and stability in Somalia after twenty years of conflict and lawlessness.

Significant progress has been made on consolidating peace and stability in Somalia, but continuing and immense challenges are faced by the new Government.

In London last week, the Somali President, Ahmed Sheikh Mohamoud, and his Ministers presented to the international community their ‘Six Pillar Policy’ – a plan which outlines immediate national priorities. These were discussed and generally endorsed, and many participants at the Conference indicated ways in which they will provide support to Somalia in helping to deliver on these plans and targets.

A significant focus of attention was on the security situation. This is appropriate given the continuing threat from Al Shabaab terrorists which has been all too graphically illustrated by recent deadly and cowardly attacks in Mogadishu and elsewhere. Ireland is making an important contribution to efforts to improve the security situation in the country through providing the Commander and a significant contingent of personnel for the EU Training Mission in Somalia, which is building the capacity of the Somali National Security Forces to enable them to take over responsibility for security and law and order.

There was also emphasis on the need for help in areas such as justice, policing, financial management and prevention of sexual violence.

A Communiqué was issued at the conclusion of the meeting which covers the issues discussed in detail. I have arranged for a copy to be sent by my Department to the Deputy.

In my intervention at the London conference, I stressed the need for continued attention to be paid to the humanitarian needs of those affected by the conflict, including internally displaced persons and refugees in neighbouring countries, notably Kenya. Ireland has contributed more than €41 million to efforts to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Somalia and the region, and we are committed to continuing to provide support and help in this area.

We have also indicated, in the context of our new Policy on International Development, One World, One Future which we launched earlier this month, and which has a strengthened focus on fragile states, that Ireland will examine other opportunities for assisting Somalia's recovery in the period ahead.

A further important international conference on Somalia, with particular focus on ways of supporting its economic and social development in the context of the Busan New Deal on Fragile States, will be hosted by the European Union in Brussels later this year.

International Relations

30. **Deputy Brian Stanley** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has sent a message of congratulations to Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro on his recent election victory; and if he is concerned over the recent statements and actions of the Venezuelan opposition, which threaten to undermine Venezuela's democracy. [23237/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I have been following events in Venezuela since the closely contested presidential elections of 14 April last. I regret heightened tensions as manifested by trenchant comments from across the political spectrum as well as incidents of violence which have resulted in loss of life and injuries. In this regard, I welcome the statement issued by the South American region's leaders at their Summit in Peru on 19 April last in which they called for dialogue and a climate of tolerance, as well as noting Nicolas Maduro's election as President. I share the concern of EU High Representative, Catherine Ashton at the growing polarisation of Venezuelan society. I join with EU High Representative in calling upon all parties to engage in peaceful dialogue and to reject violence. I encourage all parties to engage constructively in the promotion of good governance and transparency.

On the occasion of the inauguration of Nicolas Maduro as President, the President of Ireland conveyed a message of congratulations and best wishes to him and to the people of Venezuela and expressed the hope that relations between our two countries will deepen in the period ahead.

Foreign Conflicts

31. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the recent statements from the Russia and American Governments in which they agreed to work together to end the Syrian conflict and host an international conference on the issue in search of peace; and his views on whether this is a positive step. [23226/13]

45. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent of any progress made through the aegis of the EU or UN towards achieving some consensus on the situation in Syria with particular reference to achieving a common approach with the objective of a cessation of hostilities and some provision to alleviate the appalling hardship and human rights abuses arising from the war; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23346/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 31 and 45 together.

More than two years after it first erupted, the conflict in Syria continues to be one of the

greatest challenges confronting the international community. The dimensions of the crisis are truly daunting. An estimated 80,000 people have lost their lives; one-third of Syrians have either fled the country, are internally displaced or are otherwise in need of assistance; and there is an ever increasing threat to regional stability, as exemplified by the bomb explosion in Reyhanli in south Turkey on 12 May, which killed 46 people and injured hundreds.

Despite the level of destruction and violence, Ireland and its EU partners remain fully convinced that a political solution alone can bring about an end to the hostilities and lead the way towards a peaceful transition to democracy.

Since his appointment in August 2012 and in extremely challenging circumstances, the UN/ League of Arab States Special Envoy, Ladhkar Brahimi, has shown great resolve in working to achieve these objectives. Ireland and its EU partners have expressed full support for his efforts, notably his search for a formula for transition based on last year's Geneva Communiqué and providing for a transitional Government leading to free elections in Syria.

The role of the international community in seeking a political settlement to the crisis, in particular through the UN Security Council, is crucial. I therefore warmly welcome the agreement reached by the US and Russia, following bilateral discussions in Moscow last week involving Secretary of State Kerry, President Putin and Foreign Minister Lavrov, to work together on an International Conference on Syria which would be held before the end of the month. UN Secretary General Ban and Special Envoy Brahimi have also welcomed this development. I urge the Syrian opposition to seize the opportunity offered by the US-Russia proposal and to engage fully in a process of dialogue aimed at ending the violence and starting a transition towards a genuine democratic dispensation in Syria.

It also remains necessary to ensure that the many crimes and human rights abuses committed throughout the conflict do not go unpunished. Ireland has been very much to the fore, both at the EU and international levels, in calling for all perpetrators to be held accountable for the war crimes and serious human rights violations they have committed, including through referral to the International Criminal Court. Ireland has now agreed, along with 18 other EU member states, to co-sponsor a UN General Assembly resolution on Syria, due for adoption on 15 May, which addresses the current appalling situation in Syria and urges the need to ensure accountability.

Ireland and the EU will remain fully occupied at all levels of our international engagement in securing the earliest cessation of violence in Syria and in providing the Syrian population with the aid and care they need and the hope that their nightmare will soon end.

Good Friday Agreement

32. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the details of his discussions with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with Members of the Northern Ireland Executive in relation to the implementation of outstanding provisions in the Good Friday Agreement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23187/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Government remains committed to the full implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and associated agreements and this is a regular subject for discussion in my meetings with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and with the First and Deputy First Minister. I discussed these issues most recently on the 29th April 2013 when I visited Belfast for discussions with Secretary of State Villiers and the First Minister and Deputy First Minister. During these meet-

ings we also discussed the urgent need to make progress on building a shared and reconciled society in Northern Ireland. I am pleased to note that there has been some progress on this matter since our discussions, with the announcement by First and Deputy First Minister last week that they will be publishing a strategy on building a reconciled and united community in Northern Ireland in the coming weeks.

During my most recent visit I also co-hosted an event to mark the 15th Anniversary of the Good Friday Agreement in the Metropolitan Arts Centre in Belfast. The event featured around 60 teenagers born at the time of the Good Friday Agreement along with representatives of civil society and was an opportunity to underline the importance to their future of full implementation of the Agreement.

International Relations

33. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if Commissioner Ashton reported to the EU Foreign Affairs Council in relation to negotiations concerning Iran; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23213/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): At the Foreign Affairs Council on 23 April, High Representative Ashton reported briefly to Ministers on the conduct of the latest round of talks between the E3+3 group and Iran, which took place in Almaty on 5-6 April. Further information was conveyed separately at official level by the EAS and by E3 representatives. Prior to that meeting, I had underlined the pressing need for Iran to respond seriously to the proposals put earlier by the E3+3. Regrettably, the reports from Almaty all indicate that once again the Iranian side talked around the issues, engaging with some specifics but failing to address the key issues. It would appear that once again the Iranian delegation was not authorised to engage in serious discussion or to work towards a compromise understanding and agreement. If this continues to be the case, there will be no basis on which to sustain a credible political process. This will no doubt be exploited by those who argue for a military solution to this issue, a position to which Ireland is strongly opposed. I call on the Iranian authorities to reconsider their course of action and to show as a matter of urgency that they are willing to work towards a compromise diplomatic solution to this issue.

International Trade

34. **Deputy Billy Kelleher** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the plans he has to increase trade between Ireland and Mongolia following the recent visit of Minister of State, Costello; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23189/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Minister of State with responsibility for trade and development Joe Costello, TD, visited Mongolia from 28 to 29 April, becoming the first Irish Minister to visit the country. During the visit, Minister Costello represented Ireland at the seventh Ministerial Conference of the Community of Democracies. He also had a series of bilateral engagements, including meeting the Foreign Minister of Mongolia, Luvsanvandan Bold, Irish business people resident in Ulaanbaatar, representatives of a number of Mongolian Government Ministries and a leading mobile internet and telephony company which utilises the services of an Irish technology company. During his meetings, the Minister of State outlined the Irish Government's work to restore fiscal sustainability, return the country to economic growth and provide employment and training opportunities. He pointed to the key role of exports in driving Ireland's growth and prosperity and said

the Government was working hard to facilitate and encourage trade and investment links with countries such as Mongolia.

Both sides stressed the importance of developing trade links and said they were particularly keen to work in areas such as agriculture and agri-services, pharmaceuticals, education and financial services. The Minister of State said he would welcome a trade visit from Mongolia and added that the Irish embassy in Beijing and the Enterprise Ireland office there would engage in further follow-up work on areas of interest.

Deputy Costello also visited a project in Ulaanbaatar run by the Christina Noble Children's Foundation, which provides accommodation and support for vulnerable children and noted that Mongolia still faces many developmental challenges.

Diplomatic Service

35. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the proposals, if any, he has to review the Diplomatic Service; if there are proposals to open new consulates/embassies in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23204/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Ireland's diplomatic network includes 56 embassies, seven multilateral missions and ten consulates general and other offices overseas. In addition to their country of primary accreditation, many ambassadors are also accredited to additional countries on a non-resident basis which enhances the cost-effectiveness of our external representation. Our missions abroad perform a wide range of functions in pursuit of Ireland's foreign policy interests. These include representing and advancing Government policies with other States and in international organisations, in particular the EU and the UN; economic and cultural promotion; frontline consular and passport services to Irish citizens overseas; engaging with Irish communities and harnessing the resource they offer in assisting economic recovery; and programme management, particularly in Irish Aid priority countries.

The scale and deployment of our diplomatic network is considered by the Government on an ongoing basis. Any decision to adjust the State's external representation by closing, opening or relocating missions will have regard to national priorities and available resources.

Trade Missions

36. **Deputy Michael P. Kitt** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the trade missions he has planned for the remainder of 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23191/13]

62. **Deputy Derek Keating** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the recent trade missions that he has undertaken on behalf of the State; the benefits of these and the outcomes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23103/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 36 and 62 together.

Trade missions are an important element of the Government's Trade, Tourism and Investment Strategy, which recognises the valuable role they play in developing and creating new trade, tourism and investment opportunities for Ireland. Ultimately, the contracts won and

contacts made during trade missions lead to job creation and long-term economic benefits for Ireland.

In 2012, Enterprise Ireland Ministerial trade missions, organised with the active support of my Department's Embassy network and involving EI client companies, secured over €200 million in new and additional contracts for Irish businesses. Ultimately, the contracts won and contacts made during trade missions lead to job creation and long-term economic benefits for Ireland. In 2012, Enterprise Ireland Ministerial trade missions, organised with the active support of my Department's Embassy network and involving EI client companies, secured over €200 million in new and additional contracts for Irish businesses.

Trade promotion and economic messaging are, of course, key elements in many other Ministerial visits abroad and this was particularly so during the recent St. Patrick's Day period. I travelled to Atlanta, New Orleans and Washington DC to promote Ireland's economic and political interests in the US. The centrepiece of my programme in Atlanta was an 'Invest in Ireland' Business Leaders Forum organised by the IDA in conjunction with our Consulate General. This event targeted both existing IDA clients and potential new investors. I also held separate meetings with a number of major US and Irish companies operating in the Atlanta area. The programme for New Orleans included further business networking, political and cultural events. My programme for Washington DC included meetings with President Obama and Secretary of State Kerry, and a number of high level political meetings during which the proposed Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and Ireland's economic recovery were among the items discussed.

Most recently, I undertook a four-day Enterprise Ireland trade mission to Turkey from 7 to 10 April, which was organised in close co-operation with my Department and the Embassy of Ireland in Ankara, during which contracts of over €30 million were agreed. During the mission, I held a range of meetings with prominent business people and business organisations in Ankara and Istanbul, including the Turkish Exporters Assembly (TIM) which signed a memorandum of understanding with the Irish Exporters Association. In addition, I met with the President of Turkey, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for European Affairs, the Minister for the Economy, the Minister for Science and Technology and the Minister for Energy. Government to Government contacts are highly valued in Turkey when doing business and such meetings provided vital support to Irish companies, in terms of establishing their credibility and gaining access to the business community at the appropriate levels.

Looking forward to the second half of the year, I will continue to actively promote Ireland's economic interests overseas wherever possible, whether at targeted events and trade missions organised by Enterprise Ireland with the support of the Embassy network or in the course of broader bilateral visits.

Humanitarian Aid

37. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the steps he has taken to address inadequate international response to commitments humanitarian; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23181/13]

84. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which commitment entered into in respect of aid have been honoured, wholly or partially, with particular reference to areas of civil conflict or natural disasters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23616/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): I propose to take Questions Nos. 37 and 84 together.

Significant progress has been made in recent years to improve the scale and effectiveness of the response of the international community to major disasters and humanitarian crises. This has included the provision by Ireland and other donors of predictable emergency response funding. However, disasters on the scale of the earthquake in Haiti, the famine in the Horn of Africa and, more recently, the conflict in Syria continue to challenge the humanitarian system. For such crises, international pledging conferences are often considered necessary in order to generate additional donor funding.

Two months after the January 2010 Haiti earthquake, an international donor conference was held in New York, at which US \$4.5 billion worth of assistance was pledged by the international community in response to the crisis. UN figures indicate that, by the end of 2012, just \$2.38 billion of this had actually been disbursed. For our part, we have worked hard to meet the Government's commitments to the people of Haiti. Ireland pledged €13 million at the Haiti Donor Conference in March 2010 and, by the end of 2012, had honoured this commitment, with support totalling almost €14 million.

Similarly, at a Ministerial mini-summit in New York in September 2011, An Tánaiste pledged that €10 million in humanitarian assistance would be made available to help the poorest and most vulnerable in the Horn of Africa before the end of 2012. I am happy to report that this pledge has also been met, with almost €12 million in funding provided by December 2012. To date in 2013, I have approved almost €6 million for continued humanitarian assistance to this region.

Most recently, at the High-Level International Humanitarian Pledging Conference for Syria in January 2013, I announced a commitment of €4.7 million to support the provision of humanitarian assistance in Syria and its neighbouring countries. Since I made that pledge, Ireland has already surpassed our commitment, with funding of €5.7 million having been provided to date this year. Ireland, as one of the founding members of the Good Humanitarian Donorship (GHD) initiative, takes seriously our commitment to act as a responsible and accountable donor. Equally, we are committed to the full implementation of the European Consensus on Humanitarian Aid, which clearly articulates the EU and its Member States' commitment to ensuring that humanitarian aid pledges are transformed into commitments and disbursements in a timely way, and are clearly linked to the assessment of needs. As Presidency of the European Union during the first half of 2013, we will continue to press our fellow EU Member States to live up to their commitments under the Consensus.

In order to promote the importance of ensuring that donor aid pledges are credible, achievable, and properly monitored, the OECD has published a 'Recommendation on Good Pledging Practice'. This comprises a set of principles relating to pledging practice for financial undertakings to developing countries. The Recommendation is designed to serve as a benchmark to help OECD Member States frame future aid pledges in terms that are clear, practical, realistic, and capable of being monitored. Ireland strongly supports this OECD initiative and will continue to use all appropriate fora to urge our fellow donors to ensure that they meet their humanitarian commitments in full.

Treatment of Prisoners

38. **Deputy Jonathan O'Brien** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture

and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment's (CPT) report into prison conditions between 31 May to 13 June 2011 in Spain, which was released on 30 April 2013; which found that some Basque political prisoners were subject to mistreatment and torture in Spanish prisons; and if he will raise the issue with the Spanish Government. [23239/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Council of Europe's European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) conducts periodic visits to places of detention in each Member State. On 30 April, the Committee published the report of a visit it undertook to Spain between 31 May and 13 June 2011 to review prison and detention conditions in the country. The detailed response of the Spanish Government to the CPT report was also published at the same time. The visit was the sixth such one to Spain. It involved, at central level, meetings with the Minister of the Interior and representatives of law enforcement, prison services and the courts as well as visits to police centres, Guardia Civil centres, prison establishments and detention centres. It also included similar meetings and visits to establishments under the control of the Autonomous Regional Government of Catalonia and visits to the General Headquarters and Police Academy of the Autonomous Regional Government of the Basque Country. The report notes that the CPT delegation received excellent cooperation from the Spanish authorities throughout the visit.

Good Friday Agreement

39. **Deputy Niall Collins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the progress that has been made to date following discussions regarding the need to progress the Bill of Rights in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23207/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Government remains firmly committed to ensuring the full and effective implementation of the Good Friday and St. Andrew's Agreements. In contacts with the British government, we will continue to stress the importance of implementation of all aspects of the Agreements, including of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland which takes account of the separate and specific context of Northern Ireland. I will also continue to urge all the parties in the Assembly to engage in constructive discussion with a view to reaching agreement on the substance of a Bill of Rights. A Bill of Rights drawn up by agreement between the main parties of the Assembly could set out precisely and formally the rights upon which a shared society for Northern Ireland can be based. Some of the contentious issues around parades, flags and identities have at their heart rights issues and a Bill of Rights is the key to dissolving the obstacles to progress on these issues. As I said in a speech in Belfast last year 'Human rights and equality are fundamental to building a stable future for the island of Ireland. They are necessary for a solid, unshakeable, foundation for a lasting peace. A clear expression of these rights in a formal Bill of Rights can act as a touchstone.'

I believe that all parties in this house will share my frustration at the lack of progress on a Bill of Rights and I will continue to engage actively with the British government and the Northern Ireland Executive on this issue.

Overseas Development Issues

40. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has considered the UN report Making the most of Africa's Commodities; his views on the

future economic development of Africa and Irish Aid's role in supporting it; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23179/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The recent report compiled by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union, 'Making the most of Africa's Commodities: Industrialization for Growth, Jobs and Economic Transformation', places a spotlight on Africa's gradual emergence as a global economic power. The report highlights how the continent should take advantage of this opportunity through a commodity-based industrialization strategy, leveraging Africa's abundant resources, high commodity prices, large youth populations and the changing global production process.

These opportunities, and how Ireland can support them, are very much to the fore in the Government's recently launched Policy for International Development: One World, One Future. The Policy recognises the emergence of renewed confidence in developing countries, as they generate more of their own revenues, and open up further to the world. This is particularly true in Africa, which is and will remain the focus of the Government's official aid programme. Our aim, and the aim of our Key Partner Countries, is to reduce the dependency on aid and to empower governments and communities to address poverty and drive their own development.

One of the three major goals in the Policy for International Development, therefore, is Sustainable Development and Inclusive Economic Growth. With this, we intend to increase our focus on trade and development and, in line with the Government's Africa Strategy, to better link development cooperation with the political and trade dimensions of our engagement in Africa. In doing so, we seek to contribute to increased trade and investment, private sector development, increased employment and enhanced human well-being.

The Government very much welcomes the UN and African Union report. The implementation of industrial and other development policies to promote value addition and economic transformation and to reduce dependence on producing and exporting unprocessed commodities; the implementation of appropriate development planning frameworks and effective industrial policies; the removal of bottlenecks, the boosting of skills and capacity; and the promotion of regional and global integration, are all important recommendations from the report. If implemented, these recommendations will go a long way towards ensuring that Africa will no longer be a bystander to its own destiny addressing youth unemployment, poverty and gender disparities, and the other challenges faced by that continent.

In our aid programme's engagement on economic growth, we too have a particular focus on those who are being left behind ensuring that development efforts target those most excluded, deliberately addressing the inequalities people face. Because if economic growth and industrialisation is to be sustained, it needs to be inclusive and it needs to tackle the root causes of poverty and vulnerability, thereby enabling developing countries to fully exploit their true potential and ensure development for all.

We are also very conscious of the fact that efficient and fair tax systems in developing countries are essential for sustainable growth, poverty reduction and the provision of basic services. Tax avoidance and evasion present a major issue for developing countries seeking to drive their own development. Ireland is playing a strong role in global efforts to increase revenue generation and tackle tax avoidance and evasion in developing countries. The brokering by Ireland of an agreement in the EU for the revision of the EU transparency and accounting directives, which when passed into legislation will improve transparency among EU multinational companies involved in extractive and logging industries in developing countries, is one recent example of this.

Over the coming years, as we implement Ireland's new Policy for International Development, we look forward to partnering with African Government's to deliver on the economic and trade opportunities identified in the very timely report by the UN Economic Commission for Africa and the African Union.

EU Development

41. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he has engaged with his EU colleagues with a view to redefining a modern vision for Europe with particular reference to the need for solidarity, unity of purpose and mutual respect; if the experience of Europe over the past four years has identified particular or specific weaknesses needing attention the attendance to which in turn could have a major impact of confidence building and stability, politically, socially, fiscally and economically; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23347/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Europe has faced an unprecedented economic challenge in recent years, with serious economic and social consequences. The Government has been engaged intensively with colleagues to meet these challenges and to get to grips with the consequences. As the themes of the Irish Presidency suggest, the first task for the Union was to restore stability, as a necessary precondition for tackling the twin issues of jobs and growth. At the core of this were the steps taken to underpin the security of and confidence in the euro. Mechanisms to provide support to Member States were put in place - initially on a temporary footing - the EFSF and the EFSM; subsequently a permanent support mechanism in the form of the ESM.

Economic governance was significantly strengthened, including through the legislative "six-pack" and "two pack", the latter agreed under our Presidency; the European Semester process; and the Stability Treaty. We are in the process of examining steps that we need to take to further strengthen Economic and Monetary Union, and are agreed that a significant means of doing this is through a more integrated financial framework, or banking union. Last December, the European Council set an ambitious timetable for this work, and, as Presidency, we are working hard to ensure that commitments are fulfilled and deadlines met.

In March, the Irish Presidency reached provisional agreement with the European Parliament on the Single Supervisory Mechanism (SSM). At the Informal ECOFIN meeting in Dublin, political agreement on the SSM was reached and the texts were legally adopted by Coreper on 18 April. We also secured agreement on the Capital Requirements Directive (CRD IV), will see the risk profile of the European banking system reduced over time.

It is clear, however, that unemployment, especially among the young, remains a very real challenge that must be met. In this regard, I very much welcome the commitment to a dedicated €6 billion to this task as part of the new Financial Framework on which the Government is seeking to reach agreement with the Parliament. As Presidency, we have also secured agreement on the youth guarantee which will ensure that every person under 25 without a job receives a meaningful offer of work, training or education.

We also need to focus our attention on generating growth. The Commission's forecasts for the Union are not encouraging and we need to deploy every tool at our disposal. The European Council adopted the Compact for Jobs and Growth in June last year. As Presidency, we are working with partners to ensure that it is delivered.

There can be no doubt that the crisis has placed considerable economic and social strain on

people across the Union, and that this has been reflected in political outcomes in some Member States. This is something that we cannot ignore, and that must drive us to redouble our efforts to ensure economic recovery and the return of confidence. The Government will continue to insist that Europe's future must be built on the values that have served it so well to date, including solidarity, unity of purpose and mutual respect.

European Council Meetings

42. **Deputy Willie O'Dea** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if the series of constitutional changes initiated by the Hungarian Prime Minister were discussed at the European Union Foreign Affairs Council; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23210/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I can confirm to the Deputy that the issue he has referred to was not discussed at the EU Foreign Affairs Council nor, indeed, could such an issue be expected to be discussed in a forum focussed on EU external relations questions.

Northern Ireland Marching Season

43. **Deputy Michael Colreavy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has discussed the security threats that the upcoming marching season will bring, with the Northern Ireland Executive and the British Government; and if he has any concerns that the PSNI could be stretched and under resourced over this period because of the unprecedented demands that come with the G8 summit taking place in County Fermanagh. [23234/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The overall situation in Northern Ireland forms a key element in all of my regular discussions with the British government and with the Northern Ireland Executive. I can confirm that both issues formed part of my bilateral discussions with the Secretary State for Northern Ireland, Theresa Villiers MP on 29 April in Belfast. They also featured in the joint meeting which the Secretary of State and I had with Northern Ireland's First Minister Peter Robinson and with the Deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness later that day at Stormont Castle. In these meetings I expressed the Irish government's concerns about the current situation as we faced into the summer. I underlined our view that it is essential that the determinations of the Parades Commission are fully respected and that the Parades Commission and the Police Service of Northern Ireland receive full support from everyone. I am concerned at reports that the Police face a very challenging situation this marching season and that the rule of law will be tested, in similar ways to the recent illegal street protests. These protests have strained community relations in Belfast and throughout Northern Ireland and have damaged Northern Ireland's international reputation.

We all look forward to a successful G8 Summit in Fermanagh in June as one way of countering recent negative publicity. It is an historic opportunity to underline what has been achieved and might yet be achieved in Northern Ireland as we press on with the implementation of the Good Friday Agreement and the unfinished business of reconciliation in this country.

Question No. 44 answered with Question No. 16.

Question No. 45 answered with Question No. 31.

Human Rights Issues

46. **Deputy Mary Lou McDonald** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the fact that the UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, Juan Mendez, who was due to visit Bahrain from May 8 - 15, had his trip cancelled by the Bahraini Government; if he is concerned by this development; and if he has raised it with the Bahraini Government. [23229/13]

59. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to a recently released report by the US State Department which detailed human rights abuses in Bahrain; the recent arrest of prominent human rights defender Naji Fateel on 2 May ; and if he has discussed these issues with his European counterparts. [23232/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 46 and 59 together.

The human rights environment in Bahrain continues to be of serious concern, particularly with regard to the ongoing reports and allegations of arbitrary arrest, torture and detention of human rights activists. I fully understand the disappointment expressed by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on torture, Juan Méndez, in relation to the decision taken by the Government of Bahrain to postpone his visit to the country, which was scheduled to take place from 8 to 15 May 2013. According to the Special Rapporteur, this is the second time that his visit has been postponed at very short notice.

The Bahrain Government has stated that the proposed visit could be damaging to the ongoing National Dialogue process taking place between the Government and opposition parties. However, I believe that his visit would in fact have been timely given the ongoing concerns which have been expressed in relation to the possible ill-treatment of prisoners in Bahrain. An independent assessment of the situation would have contributed positively to the National Dialogue process and strengthened trust among the parties that the Government is truly committed to taking steps to promote a culture of transparency and respect for human rights in Bahrain.

In this case and in all others, Ireland strongly supports the office of the Special Rapporteur on torture and maintains that the independent mandate of his office must be fully respected by all countries. We believe that the Government of Bahrain should honour the commitments made to the United Nations Universal Periodic Review process in September 2012, among which was the acceptance of a recommendation to welcome a visit by the Special Rapporteur.

The US State Department's 2012 country report on Bahrain, released in April of this year, is a useful and detailed contribution to the international community's assessment of the human rights environment within that country. The report outlines a number of very serious concerns reported in 2012, including allegations of torture in both official government detention centres and unofficial sites. It also details the lack of due process in trials of political and human rights activists, with some resulting in harsh sentences.

Arbitrary arrest is also one of the issues outlined in the State Department report and in this context the arrest of human rights defender, Mr. Naji Fateel, at his home in north-west Bahrain on 2 May, is of serious concern. Mr. Fateel is a board member of the Bahrain Youth Society for Human Rights, and a blogger who has been active in reporting human rights violations in Bahrain. Mr. Fateel attended the Front Line Defenders 2010 Dublin Platform. According to the latest reports received, on 5 May he was transferred to the Dry Dock prison in Bahrain. It is alleged that he is suffering from several injuries received due to torture while he was in detention.

On 9 May, he was charged with the establishment of a group for the purpose of disabling the constitution under article 6 of the Terrorism Act. The prosecutor has ordered sixty days further imprisonment pending investigation. I call on the Bahrain government to ensure Mr. Fateel's human rights are fully respected during his detention.

I have repeatedly called on the Government of Bahrain to demonstrate its commitment to upholding human rights and to implement in full the recommendations of the Bahraini International Commission of Inquiry. I have ensured that Ireland's concerns on human rights issues in Bahrain have been conveyed regularly to the Bahraini authorities and I will continue to do so. Officials in my Department make clear our concerns to the Bahraini Ambassador in London as required; and Ireland's Ambassador in Riyadh, who is accredited to Bahrain, has raised human rights issues directly with the authorities there on every appropriate occasion, including most recently with the Foreign Minister while the Ambassador was in Bahrain over the St. Patrick's Day period.

At EU level, High Representative Ashton and senior EU officials have regularly conveyed to the Bahraini authorities the EU's concerns about the human rights situation in Bahrain. I fully support the High Representative's readiness to provide, if requested, EU support for the resumed national dialogue process.

Humanitarian Aid

47. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide further details on the three year Strategic Partnership Agreement that the Government recently signed with the UN World Food Programme. [23222/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): On 15 April 2013, I joined my colleague, the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Mr. Simon Coveney, T.D., in signing a three-year Strategic Partnership Agreement with the World Food Programme (WFP) on the occasion of the WFP Executive Director's visit to Dublin to participate in the Hunger-Nutrition-Climate Justice Conference.

The WFP is the world's largest humanitarian agency fighting hunger worldwide and, on average, provides food assistance to more than 90 million people in 70 countries every year. Ireland has consistently been one of the WFP's most generous donors and key partners, being the twenty-fourth highest contributor of 133 donors from 2009 to date. Ireland's total support to WFP in 2012 amounted to approximately €14 million. Of this, just under €10 million was provided by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, with the remainder being provided for specific humanitarian emergencies by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, through the Irish Aid programme. In 2012, Irish Aid funding was provided for WFP's emergency activities in Chad, Syria and the Sahel, as well as for the operation of the UN Humanitarian Air Service, which is managed by the WFP.

The Strategic Partnership Agreement with the WFP is a non-legally binding statement of mutual commitment to shared principles and strategic objectives in addressing the issue of global food insecurity. Through the Agreement, the Government has committed itself to supporting WFP in order to reduce hunger and under-nutrition, save lives and livelihoods in humanitarian emergencies, and strengthen the capacity of countries to invest in disaster preparedness and prevention.

Under the Agreement, the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine has committed to the provision of an annual contribution of €7 million to the WFP over a three-year period.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, through the Irish Aid programme, also provides the WFP with additional contributions on the basis of humanitarian need. Under this Agreement, we will continue to consider additional contributions on a case-by-case basis, in view of humanitarian needs identified and funding available.

In this context, to date this year, I have already approved €2.25 million in humanitarian funding for the WFP this year. This includes contributions to the WFP's emergency food assistance programmes in Syria and Mali, as well as the global operations of the UN Humanitarian Air Service.

Passport Applications

48. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will provide an update on his previous proposal for the introduction of an automatic reminder service that would notify people when their passport is due to expire in view of the large numbers of people who have difficulty travelling after discovering that their passport is out of date; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23102/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): A passport reminder service is available on the Passport Service website *www.passport.ie*. The reminder service sends an e-mail, to those who have registered three months before a passport is due to expire. Registration is simple and merely requires those interested to record their name, e-mail address and the expiry date of the passport. It is possible to register a number of different passports (e.g. all members of a family) using the one e-mail address with the reminder e-mail detailing which passport registered is about to expire. The reminder e-mail also provides details of how to renew the passport, where to obtain passport application forms, etc.

Human Rights Issues

49. **Deputy Gerry Adams** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the recent decision by the UN Security Council to adopt Resolution 2099, which extends the peacekeeping mandate in Western Sahara MINURSO for one more year and if he believes there should be a human rights monitoring and a reporting element for MINURSO.; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23216/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I welcome the extension of the mandate of the MINURSO Mission in Western Sahara, in the context of the key role being played by the UN in the efforts to bring about political dialogue between Morocco and the *Polisario* in Western Sahara. We have consistently supported for some time the proposal that there should be a specific human rights monitoring and reporting element forming part of the MINURSO mandate. This would allow MINURSO to report on the human rights situation not only within Western Sahara itself but also within the refugee camps situated in Tindouf, Algeria. I therefore very much welcomed the fact that, in his most recent report to the Security Council on the mission, Secretary-General Ban drew attention to the need for “independent, impartial, comprehensive and sustained monitoring of the human rights situations in both Western Sahara and the [refugee] camps”.

I understand that Secretary General Ban's report and recommendations were extensively discussed within the Security Council prior to the adoption of Resolution 2099 last month which extended MINURSO's mandate for a further 12 months. I regret that it did not prove possible on this occasion for the members of Security Council to agree to include a specific

human rights monitoring element within the MINURSO mandate, in response to the Secretary General's clear encouragement for such a provision. I would hope that renewed consideration can be given to the inclusion of such a human rights component when the MINURSO mandate next comes up for renewal.

Teachers' Remuneration

50. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the actions taken by his Department to ensure that Irish teachers facilitating the sitting of the Leaving Certificate examination in Malta by students from Libya are paid for their work; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23186/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I refer the Deputy to my reply to Question No. 98 of 15 May 2013, which was as follows:

"I understand that the teachers' dispute with the ISM in Tripoli has been ongoing for some time. The case, however, has only been brought to the attention of my Department in the past week. The issue is currently being handled by the Department of Education and Science and the State Examinations Commission, which has been in direct contact with the ISM in Tripoli regarding the unpaid monies. Officials from my Department have also been in touch with the SEC regarding the matter and to offer whatever assistance may be considered helpful."

Northern Ireland Issues

51. **Deputy Joe Higgins** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will report on his interaction with the Northern Ireland Executive. [22454/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am involved in ongoing and frequent North-South engagement, with extensive contact with the Northern Ireland Executive. The Irish Government has no better or stronger relationship than we do with the Northern Ireland Executive. I met with the First and deputy First Ministers in Belfast on the 29th of April where we discussed a range of economic and political and security issues. My colleagues in Government and I are committed to working with the Northern Ireland Executive and continue to meet regularly with our Northern counterparts, including in the various North South Ministerial Council (NSMC) formats. In the past year Irish Government Ministers have met with their Northern Ireland counterparts in the various formats of the NSMC on over 50 occasions and that despite the pressures of the EU Presidency.

Northern Executive Ministers have also been invited to a wide range of EU Presidency events. This has facilitated engagement between Irish Government Ministers and their Northern counterparts on matters of shared interest.

Overseas Development Issues

52. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to the decision of the Tanzanian Government to order thousands of Masai tribes persons to leave their traditional grazing lands to make way for what the Government says will be a conservation site; the negative effects this could have on the Masai community and the delicate ecosystem; and if he has raised it with the Tanzanian Government [23228/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): Tanzania is one of the nine key partner countries for the Government's development cooperation programme, where we have a commitment to long term strategic assistance. The issue of land rights for pastoralist communities in Tanzania, such as the Maasai, is a complex one, which I take very seriously. I am aware of the specific land conflict referred to by the Deputy. It has remained unresolved for many years. Our Embassy in Tanzania, working with other EU Member States and UN agencies, is monitoring the situation closely and continues to raise the need for all parties, including the Government and the local community, to deal with the issue through open dialogue and constructive engagement.

Ireland has made a significant contribution to development and the fight against poverty in Tanzania. In the past decade Tanzania has recorded important improvements in human development, as measured by the UN Human Development Index. This progress, which has been made with Irish support and support from other donors, is a strong example of the success of international development assistance when delivered in partnership with a developing country Government. However, positive development results and respect for human rights must go hand in hand. Ireland remains strongly committed to helping build good governance and the rights of the most vulnerable in Tanzania and elsewhere. This will remain a clear priority area for the Government's development policy, and our development assistance programme.

Question No. 53 answered with Question No. 10.

Human Rights Issues

54. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if his attention has been drawn to media reports highlighting incidences where refugees and migrants from Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia have been kidnapped in the Sinai peninsula whereupon they frequently suffer enforced labour, rape and organ harvesting; if he has communicated his concerns to the Egyptian ambassador on this matter; if he is persuing this matter at EU level; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23107/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I am aware of concerns regarding the current security situation in the Sinai and of various media reports about the alleged kidnapping of migrants as well as possible exploitation, forced labour and organ trafficking. It is necessary to acknowledge that there is ongoing uncertainty as to the veracity of these reports and whether they fully and accurately reflect the situation on the ground. This is not least due to prevailing insecurity in the peninsula and the difficulties involved for local authorities in effectively monitoring all movements of persons and goods through the area. Notwithstanding this, the Government takes these reports seriously, as do our EU partners, and we have raised them with the Egyptian authorities. Our Embassy in Cairo, along with the missions of other EU member States, has recently conveyed to the Egyptian Foreign Ministry concerns about the fate of migrants passing through the Sinai. We will continue to raise the issue at European level and locally, together with other interested countries.

Question No. 55 answered with Question No. 10.

Human Rights Issues

56. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the

action he proposes to take in relation to the detention of a person (details supplied) for three years without charge, in relation to the High Court's overruling of the application to take their case to the Supreme Court. [23099/13]

60. Deputy Caoimhghín Ó Caoláin asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has had any recent meetings with the British Government to discuss the continued imprisonment of persons (details supplied); and if so will he provide details of these meetings. [23236/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 56 and 60 together.

I am very aware of the cases to which the Deputies refer and my officials monitor these and other cases very closely. The first individual was released by the British authorities under licence in 1992. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland revoked that licence in April 2010 and the individual has as a result been in custody for over three years. I understand that the Parole Commissioners are due to begin a second review of this case. In addition, this case has been the subject of complex legal proceedings. My officials have raised the recent developments in this case with the British side and will report to me shortly.

In the second case, the individual referred to has been detained for over two years since 13 May 2011, also following the revocation of a life licence by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Genuine concerns have repeatedly been raised about several aspects of this case by members of the Oireachtas including with regard to the legality of the individual's current imprisonment and the conditions in which the individual is being detained. I have raised these very frankly with the British Government including during my meeting with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Teresa Villiers, in Belfast on 29 April. The Parole Commissioners are currently reviewing this case and their decision is awaited.

Foreign Conflicts

57. Deputy Sandra McLellan asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he has plans to provide further assistance to Syrian refugees who have fled to neighbouring countries considering the poor conditions they are living in and the strained resources of these countries, and the potential for political instability, particularly in Lebanon. [23233/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The conflict in Syria has persisted now for more than two years and has created a humanitarian catastrophe of staggering proportions. There are in excess of 6.8 million Syrians requiring immediate assistance inside the country, over 4million of whom have been internally displaced. Widespread and indiscriminate violence has resulted in an estimated 80,000 deaths and has forced whole communities to flee for sanctuary in neighbouring countries, including Iraq, Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon. Many thousands more are gathering in border areas inside Syria planning risky crossings as the civil war continues to claim more lives. The latest figures from the UN refugee agency, UNHCR, indicate that almost 1.5 million refugees have now been forced to leave Syria, almost half of whom are children. As the influx continues, Governments and host populations across the region are facing serious strains on their health and education systems, housing and other services. Over three quarters of all refugees are living amongst host communities and the continuing ability of these communities to support new arrivals is limited. My own visit to al-Zaatari refugee camp in northern Jordan in 2012 and the Tánaiste's visit to Nizip refugee camp in southern Turkey in April this year highlighted the extent of the humanitarian challenge and the dangers posed to international peace and security by this continuing

crisis.

As the Deputy notes, the unfolding conflict has the potential to have a significant impact on the situation in Lebanon, as a neighbouring country with close links to Syria and a history of political instability and conflict. The EU Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 22 April, which the Tánaiste attended, looked at how the EU could enhance its support to Lebanon in order to avoid its fragile stability being further undermined. Together with our European partners, we will continue to support Prime Minister Salam and his Government as they respond to the refugee influx and work to prevent sectarian violence and civil conflict being triggered in Lebanon as a result of the Syrian situation.

Ireland has responded generously to the crisis in Syria and its neighbouring countries, and to date has provided over €8.15 million in assistance through partners such as WFP, UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). A significant proportion of this support has also been allocated to the UNHCR which is leading the international response to the refugee crisis through the Regional Refugee Response Plan. However, this UN supported plan has only received approximately 55% of the US\$1 billion requested to meet the needs of the burgeoning refugee population. It is somewhat disappointing that commitments made by the international community to assist these vulnerable groups remain unfulfilled and we are doing all we can to ensure that other States follow our example in meeting such promises in full and without delay.

The Government will remain in close contact with its Embassies in the region, UN agencies and NGO partners on the ground to closely monitor the ongoing situation in Syria and its neighbouring countries. We stand ready to consider further support in light of our own resources and in consultation with our partners on the ground. We will remain fully supportive of all efforts to promote the earliest possible political settlement, and of efforts to ensure full accountability for the many war crimes and human rights violations committed since the conflict erupted.

Question No. 58 answered with Question No. 27.

Question No. 59 answered with Question No. 46.

Question No. 60 answered with Question No. 56.

Question No. 61 answered with Question No. 10.

Question No. 62 answered with Question No. 36.

Human Rights Issues

63. **Deputy Mick Wallace** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the action he has taken to date to encourage the United States administration to close Guantanamo Bay; his views on the ongoing hunger strike in the prison; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23348/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Ireland has repeatedly called for the closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention centre, urging that those detained there be either brought to trial or released as soon as possible. I discussed this issue with Hillary Clinton when she was US Secretary of State. It is also mentioned regularly in discussions between Irish and US officials and between the EU and the US. In 2009, as the Deputy will be aware, President Obama pledged to close the Guantanamo detention centre. I am conscious that his efforts to do so have to date been frustrated by the absence of the necessary agreement on the part of the US Congress. I welcome the President's continuing political

commitment to close Guantanamo, including a recent statement he made on this issue. I can assure the Deputy that we will continue to press for urgent closure of the detention centre. As regards the current hunger strike at Guantanamo, my Department is monitoring developments closely. I hope that the immediate situation will be handled on a basis which ensures full respect for the human rights of the detainees and which avoids loss of life. As for the wider issues which are the subject of this protest action, I was greatly heartened by President Obama's strong reaffirmation last week that he will renew his efforts to secure closure of the centre.

Overseas Development Aid Oversight

64. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he proposes to change the auditing system pertaining to overseas development aid such as having auditing carried out under the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23211/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): My Department has in place rigorous accounting and audit controls that recognise the various types of risk inherent in delivering a large scale and multi faceted overseas aid programme in difficult and challenging environments. As is required for all Government Departments, my Department has in place an internal audit function with appropriately trained personnel, which operates in accordance with a written charter - in line with international auditing standards - which is approved by the Accounting Officer. This is confirmed in the Statement on Internal Financial Control which is annexed to the annual Appropriation Accounts for this Department. This is confirmed in the Statement on Internal Financial Control which is annexed to the annual Appropriation Accounts for this Department. The internal audit function has responsibility for overseeing the audit of the Overseas Aid budget in my Department and employs a risk-based approach in determining its work plan. The work plan is approved by the Secretary General and overseen by the independent Audit Committee who review annually the policies and work programme of the Internal Audit function. In line with good practice, internal audit approaches and work programmes within my Department are continuously reviewed and updated as the risk environment evolves.

The audit function of my Department is suitably staffed with qualified accountants at HQ and in Irish Aid missions and all staff have relevant experience in the delivery of aid programmes overseas. In common with all other Government Departments the annual appropriation accounts of my Department are audited and reported on by the Comptroller and Auditor General. Overall I am satisfied that the internal audit function is appropriate and working to the highest standards and do not propose to change the auditing system at this time.

Question No. 65 answered with Question No. 27.

Question No. 66 answered with Question No. 10.

Overseas Development Issues

67. **Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade his views on the apparent contradiction between policies to promote bio-fuels, on one hand, and hunger alleviation goals, on the other, in view of the concerns linking the increased demand for bio-fuels and the increase in food prices; his views on the European Commission's proposal to limit the use of crop based bio-fuels in transport by 2020 to 5%; if he will include this issue on the agenda of the upcoming hunger summit; and if he will make a statement on the

matter. [23105/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): I share concerns that biofuel production, unless properly regulated, can have a negative impact on food production, and on food prices. The scale of the challenge of fighting global poverty and providing nutritious food for a growing population, in the context of a changing climate, was highlighted at the international Conference on Hunger Nutrition and Climate Justice which we organised in Dublin last month. My colleague, the Minister for Communications, Energy and Natural Resources, takes the lead on Government policy in relation to biofuels and EU policy on biofuels, including the European Commission's proposal to limit the use of crop-based biofuels in transport to 5% by 2020.

The EU Renewable Energy Directive of 2009 requires that, by 2020, 10% of transport fuels should come from renewable sources. The Directive also provided that the ongoing effects of its implementation be monitored by the European Commission. Following a number of studies on the Directive's effects, in October 2012 the Commission published a proposal to amend the Renewable Energy Directive and the Fuel Quality Directive. The Commission included a proposal that the 10% quota be reduced to 5%. The proposal for a reduction to 5%, in conjunction with the incentives for advanced (next-generation) biofuels, signals the desire of the Commission to move towards the use of advanced biofuels made from feedstocks which do not compete with the production of food.

While Member States agree that the issue must be addressed, it is an extremely complex matter, and there is no agreement yet on the appropriateness of a 5% cap. The issue is currently being progressed at an ad hoc working group of the EU Energy and Environment Councils, with the objective of producing a progress report for the meetings of the Energy and Environment Councils in June 2013. The fight to end extreme hunger is, and will remain, a key priority for Ireland's international development programme, which is managed by Irish Aid in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. We take a comprehensive approach in addressing the issue of hunger, including issues of good governance in respect of land use.

In the context of its G8 Presidency, the British Government is co-organising an important international meeting on hunger and nutrition in London on 8 June, on the theme 'Nutrition for Growth: Beating Hunger through Business and Science'. Ireland is a core partner in this initiative and the Taoiseach will participate, at the invitation of the British Prime Minister. The event will build on the Olympic Hunger Summit held at Downing Street in August 2012, which the Taoiseach also attended. The forthcoming event in London will focus specifically on undernutrition, an often silent element of hunger which has devastating consequences. Over 40% of children under the age of five in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa are undernourished, putting them at greater risk of infection and death, and seriously limiting their ability to reach their full potential in school and in their countries and communities. I am determined that Ireland will continue our strong international advocacy and action to address hunger and undernutrition. In London, we will focus particularly on supporting efforts to harness public and private investment which will assist low income countries to address the challenge of undernutrition.

Human Rights Issues

68. **Deputy Seán Crowe** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade in view of the recently released One World, One Future: Ireland's Policy for International Development report and its commitment to promoting decent work as a human right, and in view of recent tragedies, is he concerned about the working conditions, and the fire and building safety of garment factories in Bangladesh. [23224/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): On behalf of the Irish Government, I wish to express my deepest sympathy to the Government and people of Bangladesh on the tragic loss of life suffered following the collapse of a garment factory in Dhaka. Ireland's diplomatic relations with Bangladesh are maintained through our Embassy to India in New Delhi and the Embassy of Bangladesh in London accredited to Ireland. I share the concern of Ireland's UN and EU partners regarding the current state of labour conditions in Bangladesh. Ireland's commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights is a fundamental feature of our foreign policy. Under Ireland's new policy for International Development – One World, One Future, we are committed to ensuring that economic development is compatible with human rights, including the right to decent work. Our engagement in this area will be informed by, among other international standards, the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. In this regard, Irish Aid currently provides assistance to International Labour Organisation's (ILO) '*Decent Work Agenda*' through a partnership programme that covers the four year period 2012-2015.

In a statement issued on 30 April by High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Catherine Ashton, and Commissioner for Trade, Karl de Gucht, the EU called upon the authorities in Bangladesh to act immediately to ensure that factories across the country comply with international labour standards including International Labour Organisations (ILO) conventions. On 29 April 2013, Bangladesh underwent a 'Universal Periodic Review' of the human rights situation in the country. During this review Ireland recommended that Bangladesh ensure widespread, unannounced and rigorous factory inspections. Where breaches in Bangladesh's Labour Act (2006) occur, those responsible should be held accountable in a manner sufficient to ensure deterrence. Ireland's recommendations were accepted by Bangladesh.

I welcome recent efforts by the Government of Bangladesh to reform labour laws in response to this tragedy and urge that further reforms, as recommended in the Universal Periodic Review, are implemented without delay. Ireland, as a member of the EU, is willing to assist the authorities in Bangladesh to meet international standards and will continue to urge European and international companies operating in Bangladesh to follow internationally recognised Corporate Social Responsibility Guidelines and promote better health and safety standards.

Ministerial Meetings

69. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the discussions he had with members of the Elders on a recent visit to Dublin; the discussions he had with former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, former President of the United States of America, Jimmy Carter and others regarding their objectives; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23418/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I had the opportunity to have a wide ranging and constructive discussion with members of the Elders group when they visited Dublin last Friday 10 May. The Elders are independent leaders using their collective experience and influence for peace, justice and human rights worldwide. The Elders' visit to Dublin followed the organisation's twice yearly meeting, held at Mount Juliet on the 8 and 9 May, to review their work programme and plan future activities. On their visit to Dublin the Elders held two roundtables – a closed roundtable discussion with a group of young people from Northern Ireland at the Institute of International and European Affairs (IIEA), and a private roundtable with NGOs, European diplomats and staff from my department at Iveagh House, held under Chatham House rules, to explore Europe's role in reviving the Middle East peace process and the two-state solution. I addressed the roundtable held at Iveagh House on

Middle East issues, which was hosted by President Jimmy Carter, Mary Robinson and Fernando Henrique Cardoso. Trócaire and Christian Aid also participated in the discussions. Gro Harlem Brundtland chaired the roundtable at the IIEA on Northern Ireland issues which was attended by Martti Ahtisaari and by Ela Bhatt also. The Elders listened to the particular challenges facing young people in Northern Ireland and encouraged the young people to work together and to take a lead in building a peaceful, inclusive and culturally vibrant society in Northern Ireland.

Later I hosted a lunch with the Elders – Jimmy Carter, Mary Robinson, Martti Ahtisaari, Ela Bhatt, and Gro Harlem Brundtland, where we discussed a range of issues that are of mutual concern, in particular the Middle East peace process and the possibility of the EU introducing clear labelling of products made in Israeli settlements, which are illegal under international law, to protect prospects for a Palestine state living side by side with Israel. Other issues we discussed included the current situation in Syria; Northern Ireland and the challenges of building a reconciled and shared society for all communities; development issues and the recent Hunger, Nutrition and Climate Change Conference that Mary Robinson and I co-hosted; and the Great Lakes Region (as Mary Robinson was recently appointed as UN Special Envoy for the Great Lakes Region of Africa). At the lunch the Elders also briefed me on the outcome and lessons learned from both roundtables and the Elders peace-building activities, while I outlined to the Elders Ireland's foreign policy objectives and the progress we have so far made in our Presidency programme, in particular on the area of development.

Ministerial Meetings

70. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the details of the discussions he has had with António Guterres, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees since coming into office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23420/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) plays a critical role in ensuring humanitarian access to alleviate the suffering of millions of displaced people. The agency is mandated to lead and co-ordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. It strives to ensure that everyone can exercise the right to seek asylum and find safe refuge in another State, with the option to return home voluntarily, integrate locally or to resettle in a third country. It also has a mandate to help stateless people. Ireland works closely with the UNHCR, and last year the Government provided €8.4 million for the protection of refugees in Syria, Jordan, Chad, the Sahel, Somalia and elsewhere. This year we have already provided €8.6 million to UNHCR in core funding and emergency funding for refugees from Syria.

In this context I was particularly pleased to have the opportunity to meet with High Commissioner Guterres when he visited Ireland in October 2012 in advance of Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the European Union. We discussed the escalating conflict in Syria and its impact on UNHCR's work, including in Jordan where Minister of State Joe Costello T.D. had recently visited the Za'atari refugee camp.

Apart from the humanitarian crisis which dominated the headlines at the time I also raised the issue of the many so called "forgotten crises" from Chad, DRC, Mali and Somalia. I briefed Mr Guterres on Ireland's funding for these crises while assuring him that we would continue to highlight this issue in international fora. I also shared with Mr Guterres my own personal impressions following my visit to Somalia in July 2012, during which I had the opportunity to see for myself the valuable work that UNHCR is doing on the ground. I also briefed Mr. Guterres

on our plans for Ireland's EU Presidency. We discussed our work to forge stronger links between the development and humanitarian agendas of the EU, as well as our role in coordinating EU positions for the international meeting on the Millennium Development Goals, to be held at the UN in September 2013.

Passport Applications

71. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if a passport issued to a minor (details supplied) in County Mayo has been withdrawn or cancelled by the passport office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23469/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The Passport Service remains in contact with both guardians of the child in relation to this matter.

Illegal Israeli Imports

72. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will outline the preparatory work carried out to date in relation to the introduction of labelling requirements and boycotting of products from illegal Israeli settlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23499/13]

73. **Deputy Brendan Smith** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade if he will outline the most recent discussions at European Union Foreign Affairs Council in relation to the labelling and boycotting of products from illegal Israeli settlements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23500/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I propose to take Questions Nos. 72 and 73 together.

Settlements in Occupied Palestinian Territory are not in Israel, and clearly therefore produce from settlements should not be labelled as Israeli produce. In addition, many consumers would wish to be able to distinguish between produce from Israel, from Palestinian producers, and from Israeli settlements, and to make their own decisions as to what they wish to purchase. Indeed, I believe that some consumers may be avoiding produce from Israel because at present they are not confident that this does not include settlement goods. A move to distinguish goods from settlements would also send a strong political signal regarding the highly damaging impact of continuing settlement expansion.

In February EU High Representative Ashton wrote to Foreign Ministers, and committed herself to preparing EU-wide guidelines that would strengthen implementation of EU consumer legislation and ensure its consistency with EU foreign policy objectives. Along with twelve of my EU colleagues I wrote back to her to commend this action and offer our full support. Work is now ongoing at official level in the EU, at this stage primarily between the EAS and the Commission, and it is expected that the EU will develop guidelines on place of origin labelling for products from settlements entering the EU market which ensure that consumers can be fully informed about the origin of such products.

Domestically, I have written to a number of Ministers whose responsibilities have a bearing on the labelling issue, so that we can feed in properly to the consideration at EU level. In due course, if satisfactory action at EU level is not possible, I will discuss with those Ministers the possibility of issuing national guidelines to the same effect. Clearly however a solution at EU

level would be better. Separately, I have stated that Ireland could support a ban at EU level on settlement products entering the EU market at all, but that this is not a practical prospect for the moment. I have elaborated on this aspect in earlier responses to Deputies. Finally, it is important also to clarify that these actions relate solely to products of illegal Israeli settlements. I am not considering, and do not support, any action against products from Israel itself.

Humanitarian Aid

74. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade Ireland's contribution, financially or in terms of resource commitment or otherwise to the donor conference for development in Mali that was held on 15 May 2013 in Brussels; if Ireland took the initiative to participate in the meeting; if Ireland was invited by either the European Union or France to participate; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23546/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The situation in Mali remains high priority for the international community, including the European Union. It has been discussed at a series of international and EU meetings over recent months. Ireland has played a significant role in these talks in our capacity as EU Presidency, including in discussions which I chaired at the meeting of EU Development Ministers in Dublin in February. Ireland was invited by the co-hosts, the EU and the French Government, to attend the International Donors Conference for Development in Mali which took place in Brussels yesterday. I represented the Government at the meeting.

Ireland is committed to continuing to respond to humanitarian needs in Mali and the wider region. In 2012, the Government provided €9.25 million for relief efforts in the Sahel region, through Irish and international NGO partners. We announced a further €1.8 million in Irish Aid funding earlier this year, for those worst affected by the crisis in Mali, including assistance to displaced people and refugees. At the Conference in Brussels yesterday, I announced a further €2.5 million in humanitarian and recovery funding for Mali over the two-year period ahead.

Foreign Conflicts

75. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to seek cessation of hostilities in Syria combined with humanitarian assistance with particular reference to the large number of refugees arising from the conflict; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23607/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): The conflict in Syria continues to be one of the greatest challenges confronting the international community at present. After more than two years of relentless destruction and violence, and with an estimated 80,000 people having lost their lives, it is clearer than ever that only a political solution can bring about an end to the hostilities and facilitate a peaceful transition to democracy. Since his appointment in August 2012, the UN/League of Arab States Special Envoy Lakhdar Brahimi has shown great resolve in working to achieve these objectives. The international community has consistently expressed its full support for his efforts, notably his search for a formula for transition based on last year's Geneva Communiqué and providing for a transitional Government leading to free elections in Syria.

The role of the international community in seeking a political settlement to the crisis, in particular through the UN Security Council, remains essential. I therefore warmly welcome the agreement reached by the US and Russia on 7 May to host an International Conference on

Syria which would be held before the end of the month. UN Secretary General Ban and Special Envoy Brahimi have also welcomed this development. I urge both sides to the conflict to seize the opportunity offered by the US-Russia proposal and to engage fully in a process of dialogue aimed at ending the violence and starting a transition towards a genuine democratic dispensation in Syria.

It remains essential not to lose sight of the dreadful humanitarian crisis that is unfolding as a result of the conflict in Syria; we are now faced with a truly alarming situation, with almost 1.5 million refugees and over 6.8 million within Syria in need of assistance. I was able myself to witness the impact of this appalling conflict on ordinary civilians and children when I visited a refugee camp at Nizip on the Turkish-Syrian border in early April. The crisis is placing particular pressure on neighbouring countries which are required to host large numbers of refugees. It is important that the international community continues to provide financial and political support to these countries in order to prevent a further deterioration of the humanitarian and security situation.

In response to the various calls for support and help, Ireland has generously contributed more than €8 million to this humanitarian crisis, including a €1 million contribution to the UN-led humanitarian effort which I announced during my recent visit to Turkey. Total EU assistance to date currently stands at well in excess of €600 million. Ireland will continue to take an active role at all levels of our engagement in working to bring about the earliest possible cessation of violence in Syria and ensuring that all those in need, in or outside Syria, can be given the aid they require.

Humanitarian Aid

76. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to focus on humanitarian and other issues in the Great Lakes region of Africa; if adequate resources are available to adequately address the problems; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23608/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) continues to face one of the most complex and enduring humanitarian crises in the world. After decades of war, instability and poor governance the humanitarian needs facing the country are enormous. Ongoing conflict, human rights violations and gender-based violence in the east of the country continue to displace hundreds of thousands of people internally and across borders into Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda. The challenges facing the DRC require the support of the international community not just in terms of traditional humanitarian interventions but also longer term strategies which aim to build the lasting capacity and increase the ability of communities to withstand future shocks. Furthermore, the situation demands the attention and political support of the United Nations and regional actors.

In this regard, I have in recent weeks voiced Ireland's strong support for the appointment by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of Mary Robinson as his Special Envoy to oversee the implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement and the leadership offered by the United Nation in this renewed effort to break the cycle of violence in eastern DRC. I also recognise the constructive role the European Union is playing in the region. The EU is working through political and diplomatic engagement and development cooperation programmes, in support of implementation of the Peace, Security and Cooperation Framework Agreement and the strengthening of the UN peace-keeping force MONUSCO. The European Commission (DG ECHO) provided almost €61 million in humanitarian aid to DRC in 2012,

with a further €12.7 million provided to the Great Lakes region and in support of Congolese refugees. Current plans foresee at least €54 million being provided in 2013. As Presidency of the European Union, Ireland has consistently worked to ensure a strong EU position on the DRC and to highlight the need for humanitarian organisations in eastern DRC to have access to those displaced and in need of assistance.

Ireland is a significant humanitarian donor to the DRC. In 2012 alone, Ireland provided over €10 million in emergency and longer-term development funding to the country. Some €6.9 million of this funding was allocated to the Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) for DRC, a UN-administered fund which is allocated to projects by the resident UN Humanitarian Coordinator, with an additional €3 million provided to Christian Aid, Concern, Trócaire and Oxfam. So far in 2013, Ireland has provided €3.8 million in funding, with much of this directed at the provision of emergency food, water, health and protection to vulnerable groups in eastern DRC.

In addition to this direct humanitarian assistance and our work as EU Presidency, Ireland also continues to monitor the human rights situation in the DRC closely and will continue to use our membership of the Human Rights Council to raise issues of concern with regards human rights abuses and violations as appropriate. In this regard, we look forward to raising these issues when the Human Rights Council next discusses DRC in September 2013.

European Union Membership

77. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which he and his colleagues within the EU have managed to focus on a situation that may arise in the event of Britain leaving the European Union; if it is recognised that the future decision by the UK might yet become a self-fulfilling prophecy with permanent damage to EU solidarity; if other likeminded Member States have been identified in this context; the extent to which the EU intends to address any such situation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23609/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): It is clear that the on-going debate in the UK about its membership of the European Union is a live one, and that it is set to continue for some time. It will have consequences for us all in the EU – most of all for the United Kingdom which must be allowed to reach the decision that it deems best for its own interests, but also for other Member States, especially Ireland, depending on how events unfold. I have made clear, many times, my strong preference for the United Kingdom continuing to play a full and active part in the Union into the future. Not only do I believe that this is the best outcome for Ireland; but I also believe that it is the best outcome for the UK and for the wider European Union. While many have commented in and on the debate underway, the question has not arisen in a formal way in the European Union. While many have commented in and on the debate underway, the question has not arisen in a formal way in the European Union.

The Treaty of Lisbon for the first time included a provision – Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union – which explicitly provides for circumstances in which a Member State might seek to withdraw from the Union, and which sets out the procedures that would be followed in such a case. While the provision is a new one, it was always considered implicit in the Treaties, the Union has never been one of duress. It is only when a Member State makes such an application that the issue would fall for formal consideration.

Article 50 has not been invoked to date, and I very much hope that this will remain the case. Both nationally, and as Presidency, the Government's priority is ensuring that the Union is

properly equipped to deal with the complex and exceptional economic challenges that confront the Union. We will continue to work with like-minded partners, including the UK, to achieve the Union our citizens want – a recovered Union back to the path of economic growth and job creation; and based on the values that have served it well, including solidarity, democracy and mutual respect.

Colombian Peace Process

78. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to support the peace process in Colombia with particular reference to the need to achieve specific targets by autumn; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23610/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I strongly support the Colombian peace process and hope that the ongoing negotiations will bring an end to the long conflict there that has caused much suffering. From the outset, the peace talks have received strong support from the European Union and the wider international community. In the latest joint communiqué from the peace talks in Havana, published on 3rd May, the delegations noted progress achieved on a number of areas under discussion and also reiterated their appreciation to Cuba, Norway, Venezuela and Chile. These countries are, at the request of the parties to the talks, playing a helpful role as facilitators to the process. The European Union continues to follow closely the progress of negotiations, and has declared its readiness to provide support for activities that promote peace, truth, justice, reparation and reconciliation.

Ireland supports fully this approach, and stands ready within available means to share our experiences, if invited to do so by the parties to the process. I had the opportunity to meet with Colombia's President Santos last January on the margins of the EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean countries) Summit in Chile and I assured him of Ireland's support for the negotiations. President Santos told me of his interest in our own peace process and said that the Colombian process has already incorporated some useful lessons from it. In the course of our conversation, we spoke also of the visit to Colombia by the delegation from Northern Ireland last year and President Santos recalled the useful discussions that had taken place during that visit. I told President Santos that Ireland understands very well the challenges as well as the opportunities represented by this peace process and I expressed the hope that a successful outcome can be reached in the talks underway.

Human Rights Issues

79. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the ten locations worldwide in respect of which the greatest human rights violations continue to be reported; the extent to which the international community continue to address these issues; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23611/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Neither Ireland nor, as far as I am aware, the European Union or the United Nations maintains a list of locations in regard to the greatest human rights violations as requested by the Deputy.

Human rights concerns remain central to our foreign policy. Together with our EU partners, Ireland closely monitors the human rights situations in many countries throughout the world. We do this on the basis of information obtained from a variety of sources including both official channels and non-governmental/civil society organisations. Where and when the situation

warrants, we make known our concerns about human rights violations to the Governments in question. We do this bilaterally, through the EU or via the positions we take at the UN General Assembly and in the UN Human Rights Council, of which we are a member for the period 2013 to 2015.

We support the use of the full UN human rights machinery in responding to human rights abuses. This includes support for the role of UN Human Rights Treaty Monitoring Bodies, Special Procedure Mandate Holders and for the convening, where appropriate, of Special Sessions of the UN Human Rights Council. The EU regularly makes statements at these bodies on the human rights situations in individual countries and Ireland is fully associated with these statements. The EU also introduces or supports resolutions dealing with specific countries.

Since March 2006, when the UN Human Rights Council was formed, Ireland has engaged proactively with the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) mechanism initiated by the Council. The UPR mechanism allows for the review of the domestic human rights records of all 193 UN Member States approximately every four and a half years, based on human rights obligations under UN human rights and other instruments. Any UN Member State can take part in the interactive dialogue (i.e. the actual examination of the State under review) and submit written questions in advance. Ireland was itself examined under the UPR process on 6 October 2011. The process enables UN Member States to raise issues, some of which would have been identified by members of the public and civil society, and to make recommendations about the protection and promotion of human rights in the State concerned. Ireland has engaged fully with the UPR process and welcomes the open and constructive dialogue associated with it. We have also made numerous interventions during the UPR examination of other states, raising issues of concern such as gender-based violence, freedom of expression, religious freedom, freedom of assembly and the protection of human rights defenders within the State under review.

The EU has adopted Common Positions on certain countries, which attach priority to promoting human rights, democracy, good governance and the rule of law. In addition, the EU conducts human rights dialogues with a number of countries and also raises human rights concerns as part of political dialogue meetings. In June 2012 the EU adopted a Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy.

Ireland and its EU partners have been strong and consistent supporters of the International Criminal Court, recognising it as an essential means of combating impunity for the most serious violations of international humanitarian law and human rights law. The Court's Prosecutor has opened investigations into a number of country situations and we will continue to monitor this work closely.

Ireland has also consistently taken the lead in negotiating resolutions at the United Nations General Assembly and in the Human Rights Council, of which we are a member for the period 2013 to 2015, on the promotion and protection of human rights defenders, as well as on the implementation of EU Guidelines in relation to human rights defenders in third countries, the aim being to ensure that the latter can operate in an environment free from hindrance and insecurity.

Mindful that the risk of human rights violations is greater where political, economic and administrative systems are weak, the Government's development cooperation programme, Irish Aid, supports concrete actions designed to promote human rights, including strengthening government systems and in-country human rights institutions (in particular through legal training). Legal aid programmes targeted at victims of human rights abuses are also supported. Irish Aid, the aid programme operated by my Department, has a specific focus on governance in several programme countries. The Government will continue to avail of all the above-mentioned mechanisms and instruments with a view to highlighting violations of human rights and further-

ing their protection.

European Court of Human Rights Judgments

80. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the current position in the aftermath of any recent court decisions in the case of a person (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23612/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): I assume the Deputy is referring to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) judgement on 30 April 2013 that the former Prime Minister of Ukraine, Ms. Yulia Tymoshenko, had been unlawfully detained. High Representative Catherine Ashton and Commissioner Stefan Füle issued a joint statement in response to this judgement, which urged the Ukrainian authorities to reconsider Ms Tymoshenko's detention and to implement fully all judgments of the ECHR. The statement also encouraged the Ukrainian authorities to work closely with the European Parliament's monitoring mission to Ukraine headed by former president of the European Parliament Cox and former president of Poland Kwaśniewski with a view to redressing the effects of the current situation and removing outstanding concerns regarding selective justice in Ukraine. I fully support this statement. The EU maintains its position, as set out in the Conclusions of the 10 December 2012 Foreign Affairs Council and in the joint statement of the EU-Ukraine Summit of 25 February 2013, that Ukraine must address the issue of 'selective justice' in a determined manner. In this context, the release last month of former Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko and another imprisoned former Minister represents an important step by the Ukrainian authorities towards addressing the concern about selective justice that the EU has repeatedly expressed. Ukraine must address this issue convincingly if progress is to be made towards signature of the Association Agreement at the Eastern Partnership Summit in Vilnius in November. We would very much like to see further steps taken that would make signature of the Association Agreement possible.

EU Enlargement

81. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which progress continues in respect of EU enlargement; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23613/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): Enlargement is a priority for the Irish Presidency, and we are working to facilitate progress for all candidates and prospective candidates. Enlargement is a conditional process: prospective member states must themselves achieve progress on reforms in order to move forward on their EU paths. There have been a number of developments in enlargement policy during our Presidency. The Commission and EEAS have issued positive reports on Serbia and Kosovo, following the agreement reached at the Belgrade Pristina Dialogue on the sensitive issue of Serbs in the north of Kosovo. It is hoped this development may lead to Council decisions in June on the opening of accession negotiations with Serbia and the opening of negotiations of Stabilisation and Association Agreement negotiations with Kosovo. However, progress on the implementation of the Belgrade Pristina Dialogue Agreement will be important between now and June. The Commission also published its report on the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in April. It was relatively positive on reforms, good neighbourly relations and on efforts regarding the 'name issue' with Greece. However it also noted the negative effects of two months of political crisis following events on 24 December 2012, which resulted in the forcible removal

of opposition MPs from Parliament. It remains to be seen whether enough progress has been achieved for the Council to agree to open accession negotiations. The Irish Presidency stands ready to facilitate this, should the Council so decide.

The final Commission monitoring report on Croatia, issued on 26 March, was positive. Ratifications of the Croatian Accession Treaty by Member States are on track, and we expect to see Croatia accede to the European Union as planned on 1 July. We are hopeful of being able to open a negotiation Chapter (Chapter 22 on Regional policy) with Turkey during our Presidency. However, this will depend on the efforts of Turkey and the EU Member States to facilitate progress.

Negotiations with Montenegro are at an early stage. A Chapter was opened last month and we may be able open another in June. We are also working to progress the important Rule of Law Chapters (23 and 24), which are central to the pace of Montenegro's accession process.

Iceland is already well advanced in the accession negotiations. The previous Icelandic government took a decision to slow down the accession negotiations ahead of elections on 27 April. At present negotiations are underway to form a new coalition. Until they are concluded it is not known for certain what way the negotiations with Iceland will proceed.

For Albania, the Council stands ready to consider granting official candidate status when the Commission reports that necessary progress has been achieved. However progress has been limited in recent months in the run up to elections in June, and so we would not anticipate a Council decision on Albania during our Presidency.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is now lagging behind its neighbours on reforms, and this is an issue of real concern. The Bosnian government and political leaders must make real and sustained progress in order to realise the country's EU perspective. What is required is clearly laid out in the December Council Conclusions, and in the June 2012 roadmap agreed by the Commission and Bosnia and Herzegovina's leaders.

Human Rights Issues

82. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to focus on the situation in the Horn of Africa with particular reference to conflict and human rights abuses; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23614/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): The situation in the Horn of Africa continues to be a serious concern for the international community, including the European Union. The EU is continuing to implement vigorously its comprehensive Strategy for the Horn of Africa which was adopted in 2011 and which covers the entire region including the situations in Somalia, Sudan and South Sudan, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Kenya and other countries of the region. It addresses all dimensions on the different crises in the region including conflict, underdevelopment, and issues related to governance and human rights.

The EU is also implementing significant humanitarian and recovery programmes to respond to the food security crisis and the impact of conflict in the region, including its 'Supporting the Horn of Africa's Resilience' (SHARE) initiative, which was born out of the 2011 Horn of Africa food crisis, and which aims to promote resilience for vulnerable communities in the region.

The situation in Somalia continues to be a major focus of international attention. I repre-

sented Ireland at the Somalia Conference in London on 7 May which was attended by representatives of more than 50 countries and international organisations. The Conference discussed a wide range of issues relating to ongoing efforts to consolidate lasting peace and stability in Somalia after twenty years of conflict and lawlessness.

Ireland is making an important contribution to efforts to improve the security situation in Somalia through providing the Commander and a significant contingent of personnel for the EU Training Mission in Somalia, which is building the capacity of the Somali National Security Forces to enable them to take over responsibility for security and law and order. Ireland has contributed more than €41 million to efforts to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Somalia and the region, and we are committed to continuing to provide support and help in this area. We have also indicated, in the context of our new Policy on International Development, 'One World, One Future', which we launched earlier this month, and which has a strengthened focus on fragile states, that Ireland will examine other opportunities for assisting Somalia's recovery in the period ahead. A further important international Conference on Somalia, with particular focus on ways of supporting its economic and social development in the context of the Busan New Deal on Fragile States, will be hosted by the European Union in Brussels later this year.

Child Soldiers

83. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community continues to focus on the use of child soldiers in various conflicts in Africa and elsewhere; if any particular initiative has been taken to address the issue; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23615/13]

89. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community is in a position to discourage the recruitment of child soldiers in the various conflict zones worldwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23621/13]

90. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which the international community has identified countries in which child soldiers are used in conflict; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23623/13]

91. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which Ireland's influence at UN Human Rights Council level has engaged in the discouragement of the use of child soldiers and human rights abuses in the various conflict zones worldwide; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23624/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): I propose to take Questions Nos. 83 and 89 to 91 together.

The recruitment and use of child soldiers continues to be a serious problem and a matter of grave concern to Ireland and indeed the international community. The involvement of child soldiers has been reported in most recent armed conflicts and in almost every region of the world over the last two decades. Each year, the United Nations Secretary-General issues a report on children and armed conflict which lists all armed groups – both state and non-state – that recruit and use children. The most recent list includes 52 state and non-state armed groups operating across three continents. It is estimated that up to 300,000 children continue to be involved in more than 30 conflicts worldwide, including, notably, in a number of internal and regional conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa.

Against this background, international legal efforts to curb the practice of using children in armed conflict have been stepped up significantly. In 1996, the UN General Assembly voted to establish the post of Special-Representative of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict, tasked to serve as an independent advocate for the protection and well-being of boys and girls affected by armed conflict. In 1999, the UN Security Council passed its first Resolution highlighting the impact of armed conflict on children and condemning violations carried out in that context. With the adoption of nine Resolutions and several Presidential statements since then, the Security Council has developed important tools to strengthen child protection and to promote compliance with international standards.

The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict (OPAC) was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 25 May 2000 and entered into force in 2002. It is considered the core international human rights treaty on child soldiers: It lays out clear standards relating to the recruitment and use of under-18s by state armed forces as well as non-state armed groups which, if fully implemented, provide a strong foundation for long-term prevention of unlawful recruitment and use of children, and for assisting those who have already become involved in armed conflict.

Ireland has engaged on this issue in various ways including, crucially, through the core work of our aid programme in addressing poverty and under-development – major root causes of this problem. Ireland has also supported more targeted and specific interventions from supporting agencies such as UNICEF and the International Criminal Court, to designing interventions in our bilateral programmes that address the needs of children affected by conflict.

We remain deeply committed to addressing this issue, as has been recently reflected in Ireland's new Policy for International Development, 'One World, One Future', where we have pledged to increase our engagement on the issue of child soldiers and children in armed conflict. We are actively examining options for strengthened action in this area. We are also actively exploring ways in which we can use our membership at the UN Human Rights Council to support ongoing international efforts on this important issue.

Question No. 84 answered with Question No. 37.

Humanitarian Aid

85. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the degree to which he and his EU-UN colleagues endeavour to ensure that aid intended for specific objectives actually goes to those for whom it was intended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23617/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Joe Costello): As Minister of State with responsibility for Ireland's Official Development Assistance, I am very conscious of the need to ensure that our development assistance is used to achieve its intended objectives. In our new Policy for International Development: One World, One Future, in line with the Government's commitments to Public Service Reform, we renew our strong focus on openness, transparency and accountability. All programmes considered for funding assistance are rigorously appraised using clear criteria, including efficiency in the use of resources, cost effectiveness and sustainability of intended impact. All partners in receipt of aid funds are obligated to report regularly on the results being achieved as a consequence of this support. At the most fundamental level our aid must make a real difference in the lives of the poor and must assist in building essential service delivery systems and capacity for the future.

We work closely with the UN and EU in conducting joint appraisals, ensuring clear and measurable targets for our aid are agreed and that the achievement of these is monitored in a systematic and transparent manner. Programmes in receipt of funding through the Irish Aid programme are subject to regular internal and external monitoring to ensure that the intended objectives and goals are being achieved. They are evaluated and audited by independent experts as well as by my Department's Evaluation and Audit Unit. The Unit's work is regularly reviewed by the independent Audit Committee of my Department.

I believe that our 'zero tolerance' for any misuse or misappropriation of aid funding is recognised and respected. In the event of any fraudulent use of Irish Aid funding, such as happened last year in Uganda, it is our policy to demand a full refund of monies disbursed and to pursue the perpetrators through the police and court system.

Question No. 86 answered with Question No. 14.

Undocumented Irish in the USA

87. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which contact has been made with undocumented Irish in the US with particular reference to the need to regularisation; the extent of progress in relation to such matters; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23619/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): A resolution of the situation facing the undocumented Irish in the United States has been and remains a priority for the Government in ongoing contacts with the US Administration and Congress. The Government have also attached great importance to providing for future flows of migration between Ireland and the United States through the extension of the so called E3 visa scheme to include Irish citizens.

In this context, we very much welcome the publication last month of the US Senate's *Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Bill* which provides for reform of the US immigration system.

The comprehensive draft legislation, which was drafted over several months by a bipartisan group of eight US Senators, includes provisions that would legalise the status of thousands of undocumented Irish people and provide a path to permanent residency. It also provides for future flows of legal migration between Ireland and the US.

The Bill is a very positive development. Its provisions, if adopted, would help to end the great hardship and uncertainty faced by undocumented Irish in the US and their families here in Ireland. The inclusion of a new provision to allow several thousand Irish citizens to legally avail of employment opportunities in the US every year is also particularly welcome.

Both of these issues were a key focus of the ongoing contacts undertaken by the Taoiseach and me with political leaders in the US, particularly during our visit to Washington D.C. over St. Patrick's Day when we discussed the prospects for progress with Ireland's key friends on Capitol Hill and in the Administration. The Government has maintained close contact since publication of the Bill with the key players through our Embassy in Washington.

It is important to recall that the overall issues involved are complex and sensitive ones within the US political system and that much further debate is likely to be required before the

final shape of any overall legislation becomes clear.

I would like to reiterate my appreciation for the active support we continue to receive from a number of Irish community organisations, including the Irish Lobby for Immigration Reform, the Chicago Celts and the Ancient Order of Hibernians.

EU Presidency Issues

88. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade the extent to which Ireland's EU Presidency has succeeded in addressing the most pressing issues in the course of its term of office; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23620/13]

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Eamon Gilmore): In preparing for Ireland's Presidency of the Council of the EU, the Government sought to focus the agenda on the most urgent issues facing Europe today; promoting stability, stimulating sustainable economic growth and creating jobs in Europe.

During its first four and a half months in office, steady progress has been made on the Presidency's policy objectives. In the remaining seven weeks of the Presidency the Government will further intensify its efforts to drive its Presidency programme forward and to deliver strong and tangible results for the EU and its citizens. Fighting unemployment and the causes of joblessness, particularly among young Europeans, has been one of the most pressing priorities of the Irish Presidency.

We were pleased to have secured agreement in February on the Youth Guarantee programme. The decision reached at the February European Council on a €6bn fund to tackle youth unemployment in the worst-affected regions in the EU was also significant. The Presidency will continue to make progress on initiatives such as the Erasmus for All programme aimed at ensuring that all citizens, but particularly young people, have access to the skills and education to equip them for today's job market. As Presidency, Ireland also identified the research and innovation sector as an area with strong growth potential and we are working hard on initiatives such as the Horizon 2020 funding programme and the European Research Area to support future growth and employment in this fast-growing sector.

The Irish Presidency also placed a strong emphasis on measures aimed at strengthening and modernising the Single Market to deliver growth and job creation. The agreement secured on the Accounting Directive and the Union Customs Code will contribute to reducing the administrative burden on businesses, in particular SMEs. The Re-Use of Public Sector Information agreement that the Presidency brokered in April also offers strong potential to spur growth and support the creation of new jobs in Europe. The Unified Patent Court (UPC) agreement will not just help business by providing a one-stop shop for registering and protecting patents within the EU, but will also contribute to driving growth in the digital Single Market. Our ongoing work in driving forward policy on key issues including e-identification regulation and the data protection package is proceeding well. The Presidency will host the Digital Agenda Assembly in Dublin in June which we hope will contribute to the development of this critical sector of the Irish and European economies.

The Irish Presidency is also working to advance the EU's external trade agenda with third countries in order to open new markets for Europe's exporters and to create jobs. Good progress is being made in trade negotiations with a number of countries in Asia. One of our top priorities in the trade area remains securing a mandate for the start of negotiations on a Trade

and Investment Partnership with the US given the very great potential for growth and job creation that such an agreement could generate on both sides of the Atlantic. This will remain a key focus for the remainder of the Presidency.

The Irish Presidency is also attaching major importance to measures which promote stability and confidence in Europe's economy. In parallel with its focus on growth and jobs, we have placed a strong emphasis on restoring health to the EU's banking system to support future growth, protect tax-payers and avoid past mistakes. Good progress has been made on advancing the Banking Union package of legislation, with agreements secured by the Presidency on the Capital Requirements Directive IV and Single Supervisory Mechanism. We are now working on other elements of the Banking Union, in particular the Banking Resolution and Recovery proposal. The Presidency has also secured agreement in other areas including on proposals such as the Mortgage Credit Directive and the "Two Pack" legislation which improves budgetary surveillance and coordination in the euro area.

Following the decision taken at the European Council last February on the EU's future financing, the Taoiseach and I have met on a number of occasions with the President of the European Parliament (EP) to address the issues preventing the Parliament from giving its approval to the proposed Multiannual Financial Framework for the period 2014 to 2020. Ireland considers that timely agreement on the budget is critical given the implications for EU initiatives which support the creation of employment, economic growth and social cohesion in Europe. The Taoiseach and I met EP President Schulz and Commission President Barroso in Brussels on 6 May, and I am pleased that our discussions formed the basis of further negotiations on resolving outstanding differences which I attended earlier this week. The Presidency remains open and fully committed to working with all partners to secure a deal on the budget to ensure that it is put to work at the earliest opportunity to support employment and growth in Europe.

The Presidency has also brokered agreements on a wide range of other issues including protecting citizens from serious cross-border threats to health, strengthening provisions on water quality in the EU, improving the safety of workers in offshore oil and gas prospection and protecting workers in contact with electromagnetic fields. And we look forward to delivering more agreements over the coming weeks.

The Government has invested a great deal in this Presidency, because we believe that Ireland's future and its future interests in Europe are best served by being an active and constructive Member State. Building on the progress made to date, every member of Government will work over the coming weeks to deliver results that contribute to a better Europe.

Questions Nos. 89 to 91, inclusive, answered with Question No. 83.

NAMA Debtors

92. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance if he will ensure that a person (details supplied) is prevented from buying back their loans at a discount from National Asset Management Agency, in view of the fact that they have refused to deliver on their responsibilities to remediate homes in their developments which have pyrite and other building defects; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23404/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by NAMA that it is precluded from discussing matters relating to particular debtors by virtue of Sections 99 and 202 of the NAMA Act. However I would like to refer the Deputy to Section 172 of the NAMA Act 2009 which sets out the Limitations on certain dealings in land, etc.

Banking Sector Issues

93. **Deputy Stephen S. Donnelly** asked the Minister for Finance the legal basis for the statement that holders of bonds in banks be ranked *pari passu* with depositors in the event of insolvency of a bank; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23386/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The legal position is that in the absence of a subordination agreement, where a financial institution is being wound up the principle that applies is *pari passu*. This means that holders of bonds in banks have equal ranking with depositors to be repaid in the event of insolvency of the financial institution. So, where there is a shortfall in assets all unsecured creditors are entitled to an equal dividend. The principle of creditor equality is also enshrined in the Credit Institutions Winding Up Directive 2001/17/EC.

In the context of a company that is continuing in business as a going concern the principle of *pari passu* does not apply although the effect is similar. Where a company has debts, they are liable to pay those debts and each debtor has an equal right to be repaid whether that person's debt arises on foot of a bond or a deposit. In either case the terms of the repayment will obviously be determined by the instrument creating or evidencing the debt - repayable on demand or at a certain future time. I would add that the principle of equal entitlement to be repaid their debts as amongst unsecured creditors is subject to the absence of one of them being obliged by contract to be postponed in favour of another.

It must also be remembered that eligible depositors who suffer a loss in the event of a financial institution being wound up insolvent are entitled to compensation under the Deposit Guarantee Scheme. The Deposit Guarantee Scheme covers all retail deposits with all credit institutions authorised in Ireland (including credit unions) up to a maximum of 100,000 euro per qualifying depositor per institution.

Financial Services Ombudsman Issues

94. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Finance his plans to review section 57 CL (1) of the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland Act 2004, to facilitate those with small claims having the right to appeal a decision of the Financial Services Ombudsman without the expense of going to the High Court. [23387/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Firstly, I must point out that the Financial Services Ombudsman is independent in the performance of his statutory functions.

The Financial Services Ombudsman's Bureau was established under the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority of Ireland Act, 2004. The legislation provides for an independent, impartial investigation and resolution of disputes between consumers and Financial Service Providers.

The Financial Services Ombudsman was set up to adjudicate on unresolved disputes between complainants and financial service providers in an independent and impartial manner. Prior to the establishment of the Financial Services Ombudsman complaints from consumers of insurance and credit institutions were handled by two voluntary ombudsman schemes. The "McDowell Report" in 1999 recommended the establishment of a single statutory ombudsman scheme for all financial services provided by regulated entities, to operate independently of the Single Regulatory Authority and to operate as a "one – stop – shop" for regulated entities and their customers.

The Financial Services Ombudsman is an out of court redress body that is free to the complainant.

If a consumer has made a formal complaint to the financial institution in question and if not satisfied with the reply they can contact the Financial Services Ombudsman in relation to the matter. The Financial Services Ombudsman investigates, in an impartial and independent manner, complaints from individual customers and small businesses who have unresolved disputes with financial service providers who are either regulated by the Central Bank or are subject to the terms of the Consumer Credit Act 1995. All personal customers, unincorporated bodies, charities, clubs, partnerships, trusts, and limited companies with a turnover of €3,000,000 or less can complain to the Ombudsman.

The Financial Services Ombudsman has the power to award compensation of up to a maximum of €250,000 or €26,000 annuity where a complaint is upheld. The decisions of the Financial Services Ombudsman are binding on both parties subject only to an appeal by either the complainant or the financial service provider to the High Court.

I have at present no plans to recommend to Government a review of section 57CL(1) of the Central Bank and Financial Services Authority Act 2004.

Property Taxation Collection

95. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if there are any common sense ways of paying the property tax for those unemployed and on social welfare and-or disability benefits. [23401/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As I have previously informed the House on a number of occasions, for individuals on low incomes the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides for a system of deferral arrangements for owner-occupiers. A person whose only income source is from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) qualifies for deferral. A person who qualifies for full deferral can opt to defer 100% of the LPT liability. A person who qualifies for part deferral can opt to defer 50% of the liability and must pay the balance of LPT. Interest will be charged on LPT amounts deferred at a rate of 4% per annum. Full details of all deferral options are outlined in the Guidelines on Deferral or Part Deferral of Local Property Tax, which are available on Revenue's website, www.revenue.ie.

The simplest and most straightforward way for some DSP payment recipients to pay their LPT liability is through deduction at source from certain payments that they receive from the Department. The relevant payments are: State Pension (Contributory); State Pension (Non-Contributory); Widow/widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Contributory Pension; Widow/widower's or Surviving Civil Partner's Non-Contributory Pension; State Pension (Transition); One Parent Family Payment; Invalidity Pension; Carer's Allowance; Disability Allowance; and Blind Pension.

There are no fees or charges associated with deduction at source and the property owner simply indicates their payment preference on the online LPT Return form. It should be noted that Section 92(2) of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) provides that the LPT deduction may not reduce the net scheme payment below the Supplementary Welfare Allowance (SWA) rate, which is currently €186 per week.

For someone who is temporarily unemployed the deferral option may be the most appropriate approach pending a change in his or her circumstances. It may suit them to pay the tax in cash through one of the three approved payment service providers who are An Post TaxPay,

Payzone and Omnivend. A transaction fee will be charged by the service providers concerned. Alternatively, the liable person can use direct debit through a bank or credit union to make equal monthly payments of their LPT liability. The financial institution involved may charge a transaction fee for this option. Details of the full range of payment options are available on Revenue's website, www.revenue.ie.

Property Taxation Exemptions

96. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if there are any exemptions from the local property tax for persons who suffered severe flood damage over the years; and if the Revenue Commissioners will examine this matter. [23409/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): There are no specific exemptions from LPT for householders who suffered flood damage. However, LPT is a self-assessed tax so it is a matter for the property owner to calculate the tax due based on his or her assessment of the market value of the property. Issues such as a potential liability to flooding would be one of the factors that a property owner would take into account in valuing their property. Where a property owner makes a valuation in an honest and reasonable manner, that valuation will not be challenged by Revenue in accordance with its normal Customer Service Charter.

Tax Reliefs Availability

97. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide specific details on the liability formula for local property tax for homeowners who have carried out remedial works to provide for the physical disability of a resident or residents of the house in question; if he is satisfied that all possible scenarios which may arise under this category will be catered for without adversely discriminating based on the nature of the disability or disabilities in question; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23415/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I assume that the Deputy is referring to the relief available under section 15A of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 (as amended) for properties adapted for use by disabled persons. At the outset I would like to clarify that this relief only applies where the adaptation work increases the market value of the property. I would also refer the Deputy to my detailed reply to a similar Question No. 231 on 16th April. The Deputy has requested that all possible scenarios that may arise under this relief will be catered for without adversely discriminating based on the nature of the disability or disabilities in question. The relief under section 15A of the 2012 Act is provided to a person who has a disability within the meaning of section 2 of the Disability Act 2005. Under section 2 of the 2005 Act, disability means a substantial restriction in the capacity of the person to carry on a profession, business or occupation in the State or to participate in social or cultural life in the State by reason of an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment. I am satisfied, therefore, that the LPT legislation provides for the widest possible application of the relief.

Section 15A of the 2012 Act provides for a reduction in the market value of a residential property that has been adapted for occupation by a disabled person where the adaptation has been grant-aided or approved for grant aid, by a local authority. The person with the disability must occupy the property as his or her sole or main residence after the adaptation is completed. The reduction in value is limited to the lesser of the chargeable value attributable to the adaptation work carried out on the property and the maximum grant payable under the relevant local

authority scheme.

I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that where adaptation work has increased the chargeable value of a property, the liable person determines the reduction in the chargeable value of the property and calculates the revised chargeable value and decides which valuation band is relevant to the property. He or she should include the appropriate valuation band on his or her LPT Return, select a payment preference, and submit the return to Revenue. No supporting documentation is required to be submitted with the Return.

It should also be noted that the impact of such adaptations on a property may decrease its value which may in turn impact on the LPT liability.

VAT Information Exchange System

98. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Finance the number of companies that make returns using the connect direct facility to submit VAT information exchange system returns; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23422/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by the Revenue Commissioners that there are currently 6 companies who submit VIES (VAT Information Exchange System) returns using the Connect Direct facility. There are circa 10,000 registered VIES traders and the vast majority submit their returns using ROS, the Revenue Online system. Due to a technical limitation, the ROS system cannot cater for returns that contain more than 6,000 line items. Customers whose VIES returns exceed this limit are termed Large Filers and submit their returns via the Connect Direct secure upload facility.

Property Taxation Collection

99. **Deputy John Halligan** asked the Minister for Finance the number of property tax return forms that have been received by the Revenue Commissioners; of those return forms received, the number that have chosen the deferral option; of those return forms received, the number have been left blank with an attackthetax sticker attached; and lastly if he will please confirm the number of the return forms received that have been filed by landlords and local authorities; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23465/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that in excess of 700,000 Local Property Tax (LPT) Returns have been successfully filed to date. As the Deputy will appreciate, with returns being filed on a constant basis, the Commissioners' focus is on processing the returns, dealing with correspondence, telephone calls and payment processing. It would not be practical or particularly useful for the Revenue Commissioners to carry out detailed analysis on the returns, including the type requested by the Deputy, until after the filing date on 28 May 2013. In regard to any forms that are returned blank, Revenue has confirmed to me that it will pursue the estimated liabilities in these cases, as part of the LPT compliance programme and that the individuals involved may be liable to interest, penalties and enforcement costs in addition to the estimated amount.

Finally, as the Deputy may be aware, under section 7 of the Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Act 2013, local authorities will have until 1 January 2014 to pay their 2013 LPT on any properties which they are liable to pay the tax. Accordingly, Revenue is in discussions with local authorities to put in place a practical approach to LPT Return filing for properties where they are the liable person.

Mortgage Arrears Rate

100. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide an update in tabular form of a breakdown of the number of mortgages in arrears according to the entire sum owed (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23494/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised that the Central Bank does not publish statistical data on arrears broken down by the entire sum owed. However, the most recent Central Bank published mortgage arrears and repossession statistics, which is for the end of December 2012, contains information on the total outstanding sums owed in relation to mortgages in arrears, as well as details on the aggregate value of arrears owed.

<http://www.centralbank.ie/press-area/press-releases/Pages/ResidentialMortgageArrearsandRepossessionsStatisticsQ42012.aspx>

National Pensions Reserve Fund Investments

101. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance when the National Pensions Reserve Fund will commence investment in the small and medium enterprise fund managed by Blue Bay Asset Management; when he expects loan draw down from the fund to commence; the amount of funds the NPRF will commit to the fund in 2013; the approximate amount of jobs the fund can support; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23502/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA), as Manager of the National Pensions Reserve Fund (NPRF), has advised that a Letter of Intent was signed on 8 January 2013 in respect of the SME Credit Fund to be managed by BlueBay Asset Management. This fund aims to make loans of between €5 million and €50 million to borrowers that are established companies, with a strong credit profile and demonstrable ability to support sensible debt levels, and will not be mandated to lend to companies in distress. The SME Credit Fund may also seek to acquire existing loans from other institutions, where those loans are scheduled to mature in the near term and where the existing lender intends to exit the lending market in Ireland. The NPRF commitment will be €175 million to €325 million depending on the quantum of capital raised from Irish and international investors. The SME Credit Fund expects to have a portfolio of 25-30 investments once capital has been deployed.

The NTMA is currently finalising documentation with BlueBay and BlueBay is marketing the Fund to prospective investors both in Ireland and overseas. It is expected that the Fund will close and be launched by the middle of the year. The rate of drawdown will depend on the rate at which Bluebay is able to make loan investments. BlueBay is currently developing a pipeline of potential loan transactions.

Details of individual investments made by the NPRF are commercially sensitive and, as a commercial investor, the NPRF is subject to confidentiality provisions in the various fund formation agreements. The NPRF intends to publish a report regarding the investments made under the Strategic Investment Fund programme in July and January each year, commencing in July 2013. Future announcements in respect of any material developments in relation to the SME Credit Fund will be made available on the NPRF website.

National Treasury Management Agency Bond Issues

102. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if the National Treasury Management Agency plans to publish a debt issuance strategy; if this is a requirement for Ireland to be eligible for outright monetary transactions; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23503/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): Over the course of 2012 and to date in 2013 the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) has been actively engaged with the bond and treasury bill markets. In January 2013 the NTMA sold €2.5 billion of the existing bond maturing in 2017 at a yield of 3.32%, the first such syndicated deal for three years. In March 2013 the NTMA sold €5 billion of a new 10 year bond, maturing in 2023, at a yield of 4.15%. These two bond sales alone account for over three quarters of the NTMA's working plan to issue €10 billion in long-term debt during 2013. In parallel, the NTMA has continued with a regular schedule of treasury bill auctions in 2013 and saw the annualised yield demanded by investors for the three month maturity fall to 0.195% in April.

The NTMA has indicated to investors and the market generally that it will continue with regular treasury bill auctions this year and, in that regard, it has already set out its specific plans for Quarter 2 of 2013. The NTMA has also engaged with the market in relation to a return to regular bond auctions during 2013 subject to market conditions, with the specific details to be announced at a later date.

The new legislation on economic governance of the euro area, the so-called Two Pack, is expected to come into force on 30 May 2013. Under this legislation the State is required to provide quarterly and annual estimates of its debt issuance to the EU Commission but only after it is no longer in a macroeconomic adjustment programme.

The Governing Council of the ECB made a decision to establish the Outright Monetary Transaction (OMT) scheme on 2nd August 2012, and issued a press statement on 6th September 2012 which outlined its technical features. This press statement sets out that a necessary condition for OMT is strict and effective conditionality attached to an appropriate European Financial Stability Facility/European Stability Mechanism (EFSF/ESM) programme. Such programmes can take the form of a full EFSF/ESM macroeconomic adjustment programme or a precautionary programme (Enhanced Conditions Credit Line), provided that they include the possibility of EFSF/ESM primary market purchases. The ECB has also stated that OMT may also be considered for Member States currently under a macroeconomic adjustment programme "when they will be regaining bond market access". The ECB press statement also notes that the ECB's Governing Council will decide on the start, continuation and suspension of OMT, following a thorough assessment, in full discretion and acting in accordance with its monetary policy mandate. The decision on whether to grant OMT or otherwise in any particular case is therefore a matter for the ECB.

EU-IMF Programme of Support Issues

103. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will provide further detail on a note to the stability programme update (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23504/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): In order to improve analysis of the fiscal statistics provided by my Department and in the spirit of transparency, the Stability Programme Update includes, in table A1.3, a comparison of the receipts and expenditures in the current table with the most recent table produced at Budget time. In table A1.3, note 4 refers to the reclassification of an item from 'other expenditure, to 'social payments'.

Before 2012, voluntary secondary schools were classified outside the general government sector. In September 2012 the CSO agreed with Eurostat to reclassify the non-fee paying voluntary secondary schools from non-profit institutions serving households (NPISH, S.15) to general government (S.13) with retrospective effect.

Although, this reclassification has little effect on the general government balance, the payment to non-fee paying voluntary secondary schools which was previously classified as a transfer payment (from the 'other' category) is now classified as compensation of employees and intermediate consumption.

Initially the switch between categories was made from the 'social payments' category. It was subsequently deemed more appropriate to switch from the 'other' category. It is the transposition between these two categories that the note 4 of table A1.3 refers.

The reduction in the 'other' expenditure category is offset by increased expenditure under ELG and derivative guarantees.

It is important to state that this the action simply transposes an item from one type of transfer payment to another type of transfer payment. It has no effect on the balance. Nor does it affect the future or historic time series aligned to the new Government Finance Statistics tables produced by the CSO, as the effect is true for the whole time series.

Property Taxation Administration

104. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on the property tax (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23505/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As I outlined in my speech to this House on Budget Day and subsequently throughout the passage of the Finance (Local Property Tax) Act 2012 through the Oireachtas, from 1 January 2015 local authorities will have discretion to vary the rate by 15% above or below the national central rate. This is not new information, it was made clear when the legislation was first published. It is preferable that local councillors have a specific electoral mandate to vary the rate, which will be possible following the local elections in 2014.

The Government sees the necessary introduction of the LPT as an opportunity for very real political reform at Local Government level. The LPT will provide a stable funding base for the local authority sector, incorporating appropriate elements of local authority responsibility. Providing local authorities with significant responsibility for raising local revenue has the potential to increase the level of oversight of local authority operations by the electors and thereby strengthen democracy at local level. This will strongly reinforce local democratic decision-making and will encourage greater efficiency by local authorities on behalf of their electorates.

For the purposes of Local Property Tax (LPT), the initial property valuations for the valuation date of 1 May 2013, will be valid up to and including 2016. The next valuation date will be 1 November 2016 which will cover the period 2017 to 2019.

The national central rate of LPT is 0.18% for properties valued up to €1 million with the liability calculated based on the mid-point of the appropriate band. The national central rates for properties valued over €1 million are 0.18% on the first €1 million and 0.25% on the excess value over €1 million with no banding applied. The Government has committed not to amend these rates for the lifetime of this Government.

Mortgage Applications Approvals

105. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Finance his views on loans (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23506/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I note the Deputy's concerns regarding the checks being made by the banks prior to granting credit to individuals. Affordability is the key test in terms of meeting mortgage commitments and against the current backdrop of high levels of mortgage arrears, prudential policy by the financial institutions has led to more extensive analysis of present and prospective ability of by individuals and businesses to meet with credit commitments. It is not in the interest of the banks or the individual for finance to be provided unless the individual has the capacity to meet the interest payments and repay the sum borrowed, however credit policy would be expected to take account of the ability to repay against a backdrop of evolving circumstances. The interaction which the Government has with the banks is governed by the Relationship Frameworks, precluding the State from intervening in the day-to-day operations of the banks or their management decisions including with respect to pricing and lending decisions. These frameworks are published on my Department's website at <http://banking.finance.gov.ie/presentations-and-latest-documents/>.

EU Directives

106. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Finance the discussions he had with his counterparts at the 14 May ECOFIN meeting in Brussels regarding the bail-in tool; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23545/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): At the ECOFIN meeting on 14th May Finance Ministers discussed a range of items including the proposal for a bank recovery and resolution directive ("BRRD"). The BRRD proposal aims to introduce an effective recovery and resolution framework for credit institutions and investment firms at national level to ensure minimum harmonisation at EU level. The proposal provides for three stages of crisis prevention and management - a preventative stage, an early intervention stage, and a resolution stage. Part of the resolution stage seeks *inter alia* to establish a hierarchy of bail-inable claims that would apply in a resolution context. The discussion on 14th May focused on the design of the bail-in tool which would enable resolution authorities to write down or convert into equity the claims of shareholders and creditors of institutions that are failing or likely to fail. Recent developments have highlighted the political importance of finding a common understanding on the scope and functioning of this tool and, in particular how uninsured deposits over €100,000 should be dealt with in bail-in.

I am glad to report that the discussion provided the Presidency with sufficient clarity on the position of Member States to enable us to press ahead with our efforts to achieve agreement on this file. In particular I noted convergence on a number of points:

- agreement among Member States that deposits under €100,000 must be fully guaranteed;
- considerable support for depositor preference for uninsured deposits i.e. they would be the last category to be bailed-in;
- general agreement on a broad scope for bail-in, with a limited list of defined exclusions;
- general agreement that the level of loss absorbing capacity of an institution must be set at a level to match the scope of exclusions.

The objective of the Irish Presidency in placing this item on the May ECOFIN agenda was to try to achieve a sensible compromise on this key issue which would help to unlock discussion on other areas of the BRRD notably the financing element. I am proposing to bring the BRRD dossier back to the ECOFIN on 21st June with a view to reaching a Council agreement.

However the Deputy will appreciate that much depends on the willingness of all Member States to compromise on what are complex and difficult issues. For the Irish Presidency's part we will continue to afford top priority to the legislative files relating to Banking Union, including the BRRD, in line with the conclusions of the European Council which set out a time frame and series of steps for achieving this.

Property Taxation Administration

107. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Finance the fraud prevention measures that are in place at the local property tax call centre in view of the alleged debit and credit card fraud allegations; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23548/13]

111. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance the steps that have been taken to establish the events which led to attempted unauthorised use of data belonging to customers who contacted Revenue's local property tax helpline; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23569/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 107 and 111 together.

I am advised by Revenue that the issue to which the Deputies refer was first brought to its attention late on Thursday night, 9 May 2013. The issue concerned people who filed and paid via telephone through the LPT Helpline and who used credit or debit cards as the payment method. In total, the details of 11 credit/debit cards were improperly obtained by an unauthorised employee of the company that operates the LPT Helpline on behalf of Revenue, and attempts were then made to use some of them for personal benefit. The incident did not impact on anybody who filed and paid via computer, nor did it affect any of the other available payment options for Local Property Tax (LPT).

I know that Revenue is extremely concerned about the incident and has, and continues to be, in contact with the company concerned. I fully support the strong response and prompt action taken by the Commissioners. I am informed that the matter is now in the hands of the Gardai and in the circumstances it would not be appropriate to comment further on that aspect of the matter.

In regard to security, the company that operates the Helpline was able to very quickly identify the person responsible for the inappropriate access because it has very sophisticated call management and recording systems available to log all calls. On concluding its investigation the company, which is both ISO and PCI accredited, assured Revenue that the incident was an isolated matter relating to a single individual. It was not related to any technology or systems breach and was not related to the secure on-line payments system for LPT.

When Revenue extended the facility to file and pay on-line, via the LPT Helpline, special arrangements were put in place with the company in line with best practice, including setting up a filing team which is located in a "clean" and secure environment, with additional monitoring features, who do not have access to mobile phones or any other facility to record personal or payment details. The person in question was not a member of this team, and had no authority to request any payment details from customers.

Since the incident also constituted a data protection breach, Revenue reported it to the Data Protection Commissioner on Friday, and is continuing to liaise with that Office.

Revenue has asked me to reassure the public that payment of tax by either credit or debit card is completely secure, and that in the unlikely event of any illegal access, the card owner will not suffer any loss.

EU Treaties

108. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Finance if European Union treaty change is necessary, thus triggering a referendum here, in order to legally create a single EU bailout agency and rescue fund; if he or his officials discussed this treaty change matter with the German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble or his German officials either on the 14 May ECOFIN meeting in Brussels or beforehand; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23549/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As Presidency, we are working to progress the ambitious agenda on Banking Union set by the European Council in December.

We have achieved agreement on the Single Supervisory Mechanism – a very significant step forward. We have also achieved agreement on the Capital Requirements Directive IV, which aims to strengthen the capital requirements for banks and the overall effectiveness of regulation for the sector and enhance financial stability.

We are working on the Bank Recovery and Resolution Directive and on the Deposit Guarantee Scheme Directive as the essential next steps, with a view to agreement by June of this year, as envisaged by the European Council. Once this has been agreed, the European Commission is expected to submit a proposal for a single resolution authority shortly thereafter, which will build on the work now underway.

The broad position of the Ecofin is that the building blocks for Banking Union should be put in place as soon as possible. This is a sensible approach and our work is helping to advance Banking Union in as speedy a manner as possible.

Following the Declaration by Member States at the Informal Ecofin in April, the Commissioner for Internal Market and Services, Michel Barnier, stated that treaty change is not a precondition for banking union, but if there were changes to the treaty later on these could be used to strengthen aspects of the banking union later on. This is the basis on which we are all working. My understanding in relation to what the German Finance Minister has said must be seen in this context.

Finally, as we move into the final weeks of our Presidency we will continue to afford top priority to the legislative files relating to Banking Union, including the BRRD, in line with the conclusions of the European Council which set out a time frame and series of steps for achieving this.

Property Taxation Administration

109. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Finance if he will outline his response to correspondence (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23552/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I am advised by Revenue that the per-

son in question was linked to two properties on the Register. The LPT Branch has removed the person's name as the owner of the second property and issued a paper Return to him. However, if this was not received in time to meet the deadline of 7 May for filing a paper LPT Return, the person in question should file the LPT Return for his property by either going onto its website at www.revenue.ie and selecting "Login into LPT online" or calling the LPT Helpline at 1890 200 255 where he may speak to an official who will file the Return online on his behalf.

In addition, it would be appreciated if the person in question or his father could contact the LPT Helpline by phone on 1890 200 255, email at lpt@revenue.ie or in writing to the LPT Branch, PO Box 1, Limerick, to provide details of the liable person in respect of the second property (name and PPSN) and quote the details of the property (address and property ID if available).

Money Advice and Budgeting Service Issues

110. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Finance if he will confirm recent reports that the Central Bank is considering using a British debt charity to assist with the restructuring of debt for those in financial difficulty; if the Central Bank of Ireland has given due consideration to using the excellent service provided by Money Advice and Budgeting Service in this regard; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23565/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): The Central Bank has announced its intention to operate a pilot scheme for the restructuring of secured and unsecured distressed consumer debt across multiple lenders. The aim of the pilot framework is to achieve sustainable and fair outcomes without the need for the borrower to enter the full insolvency process. It is focused on enhancing cooperation between lenders of secured and unsecured debt in order to resolve distressed debt at an early stage.

The framework produced by the Central Bank establishes a series of principles to be applied in debt restructuring solutions for borrowers. In particular it outlines a 'Resolution Waterfall' which sets out a series of debt affordability scenarios. Treatments will be applied to the borrower's debts in order to establish the most appropriate, affordable modification that sets the borrower on a sustainable footing for the remaining period of the loans.

The framework will be implemented on a pilot basis by participating lenders using a representative sample of 750 borrowers who are experiencing significant financial difficulty repaying the mortgage on the family home and who have other unsecured debt. The pilot scheme will run for three months from the end of June and will conclude with a thorough review of all results to evaluate the effectiveness of the framework in dealing with such cases and to determine next steps.

The Central Bank has advised that it has been agreed among the lender participants to use an independent third party service provider as the most appropriate way to engage with borrowers, whose consent to participate will be sought. I am informed by the Central Bank that discussions are underway to determine the most appropriate provider and that no decision has yet been made. However I understand that an important consideration for the Central Bank, due to the short timelines involved, is the ability of the provider to provide an effective and efficient service at short notice.

To be eligible for the Framework, a borrower must be co-operating with his lenders, as defined in the Code of Conduct on Mortgage Arrears (CCMA). It will apply to borrowers experiencing financial difficulty but who have taken reasonable steps to maximise income and

curtail expenditure. All existing protections afforded by the Central Bank's Consumer Protection Code and the CCMA will continue to apply to participating borrowers. The Framework will not include borrowers with buy-to-let or business related debts.

Question No. 111 answered with Question No. 107.

Bank Interest Rates

112. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if representations have been made by commercial banks urging him to request that An Post reduce its deposit interest rates; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23570/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As I indicated to the Deputy in a PQ reply in January of this year, officials of my Department regularly engage with the commercial banks on a wide range of issues, including the cost of funding.

The NTMA is responsible for the State Savings schemes which includes Savings Certificates, Savings Bonds, Prize Bonds, the National Solidarity Bond and Instalment Savings, as well as the Deposit Accounts such as the Ordinary Deposit Account and the Deposit Account Plus which are managed on behalf of the NTMA by An Post. The NTMA keeps the suite of State Savings products and the interest rates paid on them under constant review to ensure that the products remain competitive and attractive to retail investors, while balancing the funding requirements and financing costs of the State.

In December 2012, my Department received a submission from the NTMA, for my approval, to reduce the interest rates on State Savings products (including deposit interest rates), thereby lowering the cost of funding for the State for new funds. I approved the new rates proposed in the light of trends in interest rates in the domestic market generally.

State Savings Value

113. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will set out in tabular form the total amount of funds held in deposit accounts at An Post at the end of each year from 2008 to 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23571/13]

114. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Finance if he will set out in tabular form the total amount of funds held in An Post saving certificates and savings bonds at the end of each year from 2008 to 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23572/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): I propose to take Questions Nos. 113 and 114 together.

State Savings is the brand name used by the National Treasury Management Agency (NTMA) to describe the range of savings products offered by the State to personal savers. An Post is an agent of the NTMA in respect of the sale of the State Savings product range which includes Savings Bonds, Savings Certificates, Instalments Savings, National Solidarity Bonds, Prize Bonds and Deposit Accounts.

An Post does not retain or manage any State Savings, all of which vest in the Minister for Finance. Accordingly, State Savings are not included in the financial statements of An Post.

The NTMA has advised that the level of outstanding Savings Bonds, Savings Certificates

and Deposit Accounts in the years 2008 to 2012 are as follows.

€m AMOUNT OUTSTANDING AT END:

| State Savings Product | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012* |
|-----------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Savings Bonds | 1,952 | 2,761 | 4,239 | 4,782 | 5,568 |
| Savings Certificates | 2,533 | 3,104 | 3,957 | 4,233 | 4,791 |
| Deposit Accounts | 1,771 | 1,892 | 2,342 | 2,518 | 2,774 |

*2012 figures are provisional, unaudited figures.

Property Taxation Collection

115. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Finance if he will consider extending the deadline for property tax returns in view of the fact the many persons who do not have the option to file online have not yet received their forms; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23636/13]

Minister for Finance (Deputy Michael Noonan): As I have indicated to the House on a number of occasions, most recently in my reply to Parliamentary Questions Nos. 87 (20652/13) and 92 (20686/13) on 1 May, liable persons who have not yet received an LPT Return from Revenue must still self-assess the amount of LPT due, complete and file their LPT Return by the relevant deadline and pay the tax due. In my previous replies I also indicated that the logistics of ensuring that the chosen payment option can be activated in good time for the July payment date determines the closing date for paper return filing of 7 May 2013. The e-filing closing date of 28 May 2013 is the *de facto* extension to this date.

While the due date for filing paper LPT returns has now passed, a number of options are available to property owners for filing their returns electronically by the 28 May filing deadline. Depending on the customer's requirements, one of the following options will address their particular needs.

- For property owners for whom e-filing is not practical, I am informed by the Revenue Commissioners that the legislation provides that another person may file an LPT Return online on their behalf.

- Property owners can also visit their local Revenue office where computers and assistance to file online will be available.

- A further option includes contacting the LPT helpline on 1890 200 255 (mobile phone users can contact the helpline on 01 702 3049) to file a Return online.

Where, due to recent publicity about the attempted mis-use of credit card details, a property owner does not wish to give their credit or debit card details over the phone, if they own a single property, they can file online through the LPT helpline and opt to make their payment through deduction at source from their salary, occupational pension or pension from the Department of Social Protection, by cheque or in cash to one of three service providers. It should also be noted that the credit card holder will not be held liable where the card is used without their proper authorisation.

Given the range of options that have been made available by Revenue to assist people experiencing any difficulty in meeting their LPT obligations, and the fact that owners of residential properties have already filed in excess of 700,000 returns and utilised the different payment options, I am very satisfied with the current arrangements that Revenue has in place and the communication of these arrangements to the public.

Therefore, I do not propose, nor is it practicable given the logistics involved, to extend the closing date or nor do I consider that any changes to Revenue's procedures are required in the run-up to the online LPT Return filing date.

FÁS Training Programmes

116. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether work training opportunities, for those who do not access third level education should be provided to sufferers from narcolepsy; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23534/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): FÁS Training Programmes are open to all unemployed individuals. In relation to determining the eligibility of unemployed individuals to participate in FÁS Training Programmes this is generally a matter for the Department of Social Protection.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

117. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether continuing educational supports at primary and secondary level, following consultation assessment to include special needs assistant resource hours, facilities to nap and so on help during exams, exam concessions, home tuition and so on additional funding for grinds and so on should be made available to make up for missed school hours for sufferers of the unique narcolepsy disorder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23535/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I wish to advise the Deputy that my Department has provided information to schools in relation to the condition of Narcolepsy and to provide guidance to schools on the accommodations which can be made in schools to assist such children. I can also advise that a number of meetings have taken place between officials at my Department along with those from the Department of Health, with representatives from SOUND (Sufferers of Unique Narcolepsy Disorder) to consider the educational supports which may be provided for such children and the criteria for accessing such supports, based on the assessed individual needs of children. The range of supports which may be provided for children who are suffering from serious medical conditions such as Narcolepsy, based on assessment, include:

- Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support, for children who have a medical condition such that they require access to care support in order to be able to attend school;

- Home Tuition support which can provide a compensatory educational service to children who have had major disruption to their attendance at school due their medical condition;

- Schools may provide additional Learning Support/Resource Teaching assistance in school;

- Special arrangements for State Examinations.

The educational supports required in each instance are considered on the basis of the as-

sessed needs of the children. Arrangements are made with the State Exam Commission each year, to address issues in relation to the reasonable accommodations which can be made for children with narcolepsy taking state exams each year, in conjunction with the children's schools.

State Examinations Issues

118. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will consider withholding the results of leaving certificate exams for students of a foreign based school (details supplied) until the wages of 17 Irish teachers have been paid; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23372/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The International School of Martyrs (ISM) is a private educational institution located in Tripoli, Libya. The Irish Leaving Certificate examination is offered each year to candidates in the school. The role of the State Examinations Commission (SEC) is to provide examinations to candidates who have been entered for either the Junior or Leaving Certificate and in this regard I am informed by the SEC that it engages with the ISM school authorities on the delivery of the Leaving Certificate examinations for students from the school. For the purpose of the examination system ISM candidates are bound by the same rules and programmes as all other pupils taking the examinations, pay their examination fees to the State Examinations Commission (SEC) and sit their examinations under the same conditions.

Teachers working at ISM are directly recruited and engaged as employees of that school. Their terms and conditions are private contractual matters between themselves and the school authorities. Neither the SEC nor my Department has a role in relation to internal management or contractual issues between school employees and their employers.

Student Grant Scheme Applications

119. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will expedite a student grant application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23380/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that requested documentation was not furnished within the timeframe set out in a communication with the applicant. The applicant referred to by the Deputy was issued with a decision on the 11/4/2013 advising him that he was deemed ineligible to receive a grant. If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to the appeals officer in SUSI. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grant Appeals Board. The relevant appeal form will be available on request from SUSI.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

120. **Deputy Michael Lowry** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will review the decision made by Student Universal Support Ireland to refuse grant aid to a person (details supplied) in County Tipperary; if he will clarify the position where a person has commenced

but not completed a level 6/7 FETAC course and is now returning to undertake a level 8 course; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23382/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that the grant application of the student referred to by the Deputy for the 2012/13 academic year was refused. SUSI has confirmed that it issued a letter 30th April 2013 indicating that under the scheme, students who have previously attended, but not completed a course of study are required to complete an equivalent period of study on an approved course before being eligible to be considered for a grant. Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down in writing by SUSI and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grant Appeals Board. The relevant appeal form will be available on request from SUSI.

School Staffing

121. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address the concerns of a parent (details supplied) whose child is a student at a school in County Donegal that will undergo staffing changes in the 2013-14 academic year and if he will write to the parent regarding the matter. [23385/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): As part of the Budget 2012 decisions, the number of pupils required to gain and retain a classroom teaching post in small primary schools is being gradually increased between September 2012 and September 2014. During this period the pupil threshold for a 2-classroom school is being increased to 20 pupils. In these extremely challenging times, all public servants are being asked to deliver our public services on a reduced level of resources and teachers in small schools cannot be immune from this requirement. The phasing of these measures can provide the schools concerned with time to consider the potential for amalgamation with other schools where this is feasible. If amalgamations do take place, they will be voluntary and follow decisions taken by local communities and not by the Department.

The Government recognises that small schools are an important part of the social fabric of rural communities and my Department has expanded the existing appeals process so that it is accessible to the small schools that are affected by the budget measure. In this regard small schools will not lose their classroom post if they are projecting sustainable increased enrolments in September 2013 that would be sufficient to allow them to retain their existing classroom posts over the longer term.

The detailed arrangements in relation to the appeals process are set in the Department's Staffing Circular 0013/2013. The Appeals Board operates independently of the Department and its decision is final. The responsibility for day to day management of schools is at local school level. Schools are required to take all reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of pupils and to participate in supervising pupils when the pupils are on the school premises, during school time and/or on school activities.

In accordance with the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 1989, it is the responsibility of individual school management authorities to have a safety statement in place in their schools. The Statement should identify potential hazards, assess the risks to health and safety and put appropriate provision in place to safeguard the safety and health of employees and pupils. The Safety Statement should be reviewed on a regular basis.

In 2002, my Department agreed arrangements for the provision of funding for supervision in respect of mid-morning and lunch-time breaks which are set out in Circular 21/02. Specific arrangements apply in the case of small schools, i.e. 1, 2 and 3 teacher schools. In such schools, each teacher may claim payment for up to 37 hours per school year for the provision of supervision services. Payment for further hours of supervision, up to a maximum of 122 hours per school year, is made by grant to the Board of Management of the school. Some or all of the 122 hours may be undertaken by an external supervisor appointed by the school. For example, if the teacher(s) in the school opt out of the supervision scheme, all 122 hours can be undertaken by an external supervisor.

In Ireland, given the number of relatively small schools that have four teachers or fewer, multi-grade classes are the norm in the majority of our primary schools. This is reflected in the centrally-devised Primary School Curriculum (1999) which articulates a progressive and developmental learning experience for our pupils. General guidance and advice for teachers are provided in National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) curriculum documents, and assessment guidelines etc. that are applicable to all primary schools.

The Primary School Curriculum (1999), which is child-centred rather than subject-centred, also allows for flexibility in timetabling and teaching methods. It emphasises that children should experience a variety of classroom organisational frameworks. While these include individual learning and whole-class teaching, the curriculum particularly encourages collaborative learning through pair work and group work as appropriate to the specific learning contexts and goals. Within multi-grade classes, teachers may use a range of models for grouping pupils, including mixed-ability grouping. Integration and differentiation are also key approaches in the primary curriculum. The organisation of teaching and learning through integrated themes can be highly motivating and satisfying for children and are particularly useful in multi-class situations.

Further Education and Training Programmes Eligibility

122. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will address concerns that are set out in a submission (details supplied) which relates to the Further Education and Training Boards Bill [23395/13]

126. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he is considering broadening the definition of the Further Education and Training Boards Bill to include community education. [23459/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): I propose to take Questions Nos. 122 and 126 together.

I recognise that further education and training as it is currently delivered covers a broad spectrum that ranges from basic adult literacy and numeracy courses to courses that are certified at level 6 and above on the National Framework of Qualifications. It also spans the generations of learners from adult learners to early school leavers. It is delivered in formal classroom settings and in less formal settings based in the community. It is essentially a flexible form of education that can meet the diverse needs of learners in the most appropriate setting. Since the publication of the Bill a number of concerns have been raised regarding the definition of further education and training and the matter is being dealt with in the context of the passage of the Bill.

123. **Deputy Tom Hayes** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the reason a school (details supplied) in County Tipperary has not received sanction to operate a PLC course for the 2013/2014 academic year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23398/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Skills (Deputy Ciarán Cannon): Approval to participate in the Post Leaving Certificate (PLC) programme is granted on an annual basis following an application process. Each application is examined by my Department on its own merits, taking into account current and previous allocations, current and previous demand and uptake and the overall number of places available. There are currently 32,688 approved PLC places available nationwide. Providers are required to inform the Further Education Section of my Department of any PLC places that have not been taken up by the middle of September each year in order that these unused places can be reallocated given the high demand for places.

The school referred to by the deputy has been operating PLC courses over a number of years and had sanction for 24 PLC places. While approval was given to run a PLC course in each of the years 2011/2012 and 2012/2013 the school did not enrol any PLC learners in either of these years and did not inform my Department that it was not using these places. The application process for the 2013/2014 academic year has recently concluded and places have been allocated for the next academic year. This school has not received sanction for any PLC places. However, a range of PLC courses are available in the area which may be accessed by school leavers from this school.

State Examinations Issues

124. **Deputy Dan Neville** asked the Minister for Education and Skills the position regarding the leaving certificate in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Limerick; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23402/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The State Examinations Commission has statutory responsibility for operational matters relating to the certificate examinations. In view of this I have forwarded your query to the State Examinations Commission for direct reply to you.

Student Grant Scheme Eligibility

125. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if a course (details supplied) will be eligible for funding under the student grant scheme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23445/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Under the terms of the student grant scheme, grant assistance is awarded to students who meet the prescribed conditions of funding including those which relate to nationality, residency, approved course, previous academic attainment and means. Under my Department's student grant scheme, eligible candidates may receive funding provided they are attending an approved course at an approved institution. An approved course is defined as a full-time undergraduate course of at least two years duration, or a full-time postgraduate course of not less than one year duration pursued in an approved institution. Students who are attending undergraduate courses in an EU Member State, can apply for a maintenance grant in respect of an approved course which is being pursued in an approved institution. I understand that the duration of the course referred to by the Deputy is a one year undergraduate course, which means it does not meet the definition of an

approved course for student grant purposes as defined in the scheme.

Question No. 126 answered with Question No. 122.

Special Educational Needs Services Provision

127. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when the National Council for Special Education was first asked by him to provide policy advice with particular reference to children with Down's syndrome who have a mild intellectual disability; when he expects to be in receipt of the this report; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23473/13]

130. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether children with Downs syndrome should be provided with a maximum number of individual resource teaching hours per week - currently four hours 15 minutes; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23529/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I propose to take Questions Nos. 127 and 130 together.

The Deputy will be aware of this Government's ongoing commitment to ensuring that all children with special educational needs, including children with Down's syndrome, can have access to an education appropriate to their needs. The policy of my Department is to secure the maximum possible level of inclusion of students with special educational needs in mainstream primary and post-primary schools, or where a special school or special class placement may be required to ensure such placements are provided for.

Pupils with Down's syndrome attending mainstream schools may receive additional teaching support in primary schools, either under the terms of the General Allocation Model (GAM) of teaching supports, if the pupil's educational psychological assessment places the pupil in the mild general learning disability/high incidence disability category, or through an allocation of individual additional resource teaching hours which are allocated by the National Council for Special Education (NCSE), if the child is assessed as being within the low incidence category of special need, as defined by my Department's Circular Sp Ed 02/05.

Pupils with Down's syndrome may be allocated resources under the category of mild general learning disability, or under the categories of moderate general learning difficulty or Assessed Syndrome, in conjunction with another Low Incidence disability. There is not presently a distinct disability category of Down's syndrome for resource allocation purposes. I wish to advise the Deputy that the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) has a formal role under the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, 2004 in advising me in relation to any matter relating to the education of children and others with disabilities.

My Department initially asked the NCSE in November 2011 to consider the issue of whether Down's syndrome should be reclassified as a low incidence disability in all instances, regardless of assessed cognitive ability. In 2012 the NCSE were asked to provide comprehensive advice on how the educational system currently places and supports children with special educational needs in schools. As part of this process it was agreed that the NCSE would include the advice on the Down's syndrome. The NCSE's comprehensive policy advice on how the education system can best support children with special educational needs is currently in preparation and is expected shortly. It is my intention that the significant resources to support children with Special Educational Needs are deployed to ensure the best possible outcomes for students. The advice will be a key input into achieving this goal.

Higher Education Institutions Staff

128. **Deputy Martin Ferris** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether it is appropriate and in the best interests of the Institute of Technology of Tralee, County Kerry in respect of a person (details supplied) to remain in their position; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23486/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I understand that the outcome of the investigation into an allegation of plagiarism against the person in question was that following an appeal, the Examination Assessments and Appeals Committee (EAAC) of the Institute found that the degree was not obtained in an unjustified or fraudulent manner and that the graduate was not guilty of plagiarism, as defined in the Institute's regulations. The EAAC further concluded that in light of the deficiencies in the thesis which had been identified, it is appropriate that corrections be made to the thesis by way of the insertion of a corrigenda notification in the official copy of the thesis. The management of academic affairs are a matter for the Institute concerned and I understand that this allegation was investigated according to the appropriate procedures governing such matters.

Special Educational Needs Expenditure

129. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if he will provide an update on an application for funding from a special needs unit at a school (details supplied) in County Kildare; if he will expedite a decision on same as the end of the school year approaches and plans are being made for next year; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23525/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The Special Education Unit (SNU) at the school referred to by the Deputy was not equipped at the time of its construction as the type of Unit to be established at the school was not known at that time. The school in question, which was delivered through the Public Private Partnership process, has since been allocated funding of €6,500 for one special class and €7,000 to purchase equipment for the school's Multi Sensory Room. This level of funding accords with my Department's current guidelines for funding SNUs and is provided to all primary and post-primary schools irrespective of the method used to deliver the school.

In addition, grant aid is available to all schools to fund the purchase of special items of furniture for special needs pupils. The scheme applies for all special needs pupils. Schools must apply directly to my Department for support and applications must be supported with a report from a professional who assessed the pupil in question. Only furniture approved by my Department can be funded. My Department does not currently have an application for furniture or equipment for the Special Needs Unit at the school to which the Deputy refers.

Question No. 130 answered with Question No. 127.

Grant Payments

131. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Education and Skills his views on whether a special education grant should be given for third level education to cover costs for sufferers of the unique narcolepsy disorder; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[23537/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): I can confirm for the Deputy that the Fund for Students with Disabilities provides support for students with disabilities, including those with narcolepsy, so that students can participate fully in further and higher education.

The Fund for Students with Disabilities is managed by the HEA on behalf of my Department. Typical supports for which funding is approved include assistive technology, academic or learning support and personal assistants. Students do not apply directly to the Fund; rather, funding is allocated to the institution on the student's behalf based on an assessment of the particular needs of the student.

The Student Assistance Fund is also available to third-level institutions to assist students in exceptional financial need.

The Disability Access Route (D.A.R.E) to education is a college and university admissions scheme which offers places on a reduced points basis to school leavers with disabilities. The scheme is operated by a number of higher education institutions. Admissions to the institutions under this programme are regulated by the institutions themselves. Further details are available at www.accesscollege.ie.

Additional information on the student grant, the Student Assistance Fund and the Fund for Students with Disabilities can be found at www.studentfinance.ie.

Schools Building Projects Status

132. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Education and Skills when stage 2B of the process in relation to the building of a new school (details supplied) will be complete; the reason for the delay with this stage of the project; when it is intended to go to tender with this school; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23563/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The major building project for the school referred to by the Deputy is at an advanced stage of architectural planning. The Department is in receipt of the Stage 2(b) submission from the Design Team.

Following a review of the submission the Design Team were requested to review significant cost overruns. This work included the carrying out of additional site surveys.

An addendum to the report was recently received from the Design Team and is under review by my Department. Once this review is complete my Department will be in contact with the Design Team and the school authority regarding the further progression of the project.

Special Educational Needs Staffing

133. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if special needs teaching arrangements will be made available in the case the child of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23582/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): The National Council for Special Education (NCSE), through its network of local Special Educational Needs Organisers (SENOS), is responsible for processing applications from primary and post primary schools for

special educational needs supports, including resource teaching and Special Needs Assistant (SNA) support. The NCSE operates within my Department's criteria in allocating such support.

All schools were advised to apply to the NCSE for resource teaching and SNA support for the 2013/14 school year by 15th March 2013. The NCSE are currently processing these applications and schools will be notified by SENOs of their resource teaching and SNA allocation for 2013/14 in advance of the coming school year, based on the number of valid applications received.

All schools have the names and contact details of their local SENO. Parents may also contact their local SENO directly to discuss their child's special educational needs, using the contact details available on www.ncse.ie.

Higher Education Grants Eligibility Criteria

134. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Education and Skills if the refusal of application for higher education grant will be reviewed in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23583/13]

Minister for Education and Skills (Deputy Ruairí Quinn): Officials in my Department have confirmed with Student Universal Support Ireland that, in the case of the student referred to by the Deputy, a grant has been refused and a letter outlining the position issued on the 9th May, 2013.

If an individual applicant considers that she/he has been unjustly refused a student grant, she/he may appeal, in the first instance, to SUSI.

Where an individual applicant has had an appeal turned down, in writing, by SUSI, and remains of the view that the scheme has not been interpreted correctly in his/her case, an appeal form outlining the position may be submitted by the applicant to the independent Student Grants Appeals Board.

State Property

135. **Deputy Róisín Shortall** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide an update on the future use of Whitehall Garda station, Dublin, and the details of timelines and so on; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23384/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): In line with the Office of Public Works policy relating to the issue of surplus State Property, the first stage is to determine if another State Body has use for the asset.

A feasibility study is currently underway to examine the potential for two State Agencies to utilise the property. It is anticipated that this property will be in effective State use by the end of the year.

Office of Public Works Projects

136. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will outline recent developments regarding works to take place this year at Kilmacurragh House and

Botanic Gardens in County Wicklow; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23432/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): Work in relation to the provision of new tea rooms at Kilmacurragh is progressing satisfactorily and a planning application will be submitted to Wicklow County Council shortly. It is expected that, following a tender competition, work will commence on site later this year with completion early in 2014.

Office of Public Works Expenditure

137. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if his Department incurred additional costs in 2012 for a site (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23434/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): Each year, prior to the Visitor Season on Skellig Michael, the Office of Public Works (OPW) carries out routine maintenance tasks on the Island to ensure that any damage to the Monument is assessed, any debris of winter storms is cleared away, the Island is made safe for workers and visitors and that the OPW accommodation on the island is readied for season use. In certain years, more work is required than normal.

The accommodation on Skellig Michael is designed for use by OPW maintenance and works staff, Guides, visiting personnel from other Agencies and bodies and occasional parties visiting for research or other sanctioned purposes. The relevant apportionment of the cost of this accommodation between the various users is not feasible.

The cost of essential pre-season works in 2012 was €10,523.54. This was higher than normal as a number of equipment and infrastructure items were also replaced.

Office of Public Works Projects

138. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the reason the guide season at an Office of Public Work site (details supplied) in County Kerry was extended; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23435/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The season at the site in question, Gallarus Oratory, has not been extended. The site was open to guided visitors from 31st May to 29th August in 2012 and the 2013 season will run from 30th May to 28th August. The opening and closing dates of Skellig Michael for visitors in 2013 will be 17th May to 30th September. In relation to extending the season at Skellig Michael, attempts have been made in previous years to extend the season into October. This has not proven to be successful due to weather conditions while also incurring the considerable costs associated with having a substantially extended visitor season.

As is normal, the effective operational date for Skellig Michael is required to be approx 2 to 3 weeks in advance of the public opening with Office of Public Works staff travelling to the island early, weather permitting. This is so that the site can be prepared to receive visitors and significant Health and Safety preparations for the season carried out. In particular, the site is fully assessed after the winter, any hazards cleared from the steps and other public areas and any necessary minor repairs carried out. Given these requirements it is not possible to present the site to the public any earlier than 17th May.

Office of Public Works Expenditure

139. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the level of expenditure budgeted for in 2013 in respect of an item (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23436/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The Office of Public Works has provided for a budget of €17,000 approx. in respect of guide services at Gallarus Oratory, Co. Kerry, in 2013.

Office of Public Works Projects

140. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he plans to approve a community project proposal (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23437/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): I am delighted to inform you that I yesterday launched an initiative called ‘Friends of Irish Heritage’, inviting submissions from local and community groups and local authorities that have an interest in becoming involved in our built heritage. This is an ongoing development from last year’s Community Involvement Initiative and I am again asking communities to come forward with their ideas to the Commissioners of Public Works about how to present their local sites in this, the year of the Gathering. Proposals from groups that did not proceed last year, such as the proposal in question, are more than welcome and I anticipate that many groups will have worked to recast proposals and overcome obstacles to the progression of the projects. I believe that the group in question have not communicated with the Commissioners since September 2012 and I encourage them to renew contact with my officials as soon as possible.

Office of Public Works Expenditure

141. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the overall cost of the Office of Public Works guides in 2012; if he will provide a breakdown of the costs per site; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23438/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The overall cost of providing a guide service in 2012 was €9,451,723.27 and the Table below details the costs per site.

| SITE | GUIDE COSTS |
|---------------------|-------------|
| Ardfert Cathedral | €50,577.57 |
| Athenry Castle | €67,657.49 |
| Aughnanure Castle | €75,485.23 |
| Ballyhack Castle | €13,532.28 |
| Barryscourt Castle | €43,880.25 |
| Battle of the Boyne | €314,427.46 |
| Botanic Gardens | €223,822.14 |
| Boyle Abbey | €37,326.03 |
| Brú na Boinne | €495,247.03 |
| Cahir Castle | €254,681.90 |

| SITE | GUIDE COSTS |
|------------------------------|-------------|
| Carrowmore Magalithic centre | €88,387.45 |
| Casino Marino | €71,612.12 |
| Castletown House | €217,707.23 |
| Céide Fields | €164,032.92 |
| Charlesfort | €207,005.00 |
| Clonmacnoise | €292,936.82 |
| Corlea Bog | €64,104.10 |
| Derrynane House | €59,652.58 |
| Desmond Castle | €54,768.29 |
| Desmond Hall | €32,195.06 |
| Donegal Castle | €135,390.54 |
| Dublin Castle | €701,068.71 |
| Dún Aonghusa | €219,319.16 |
| Dungarvan Castle | €35,674.25 |
| Dunmore Cave | €195,539.65 |
| Emo Court | €70,366.27 |
| Ennis Friary | €80,623.95 |
| Farmleigh | €79,565.65 |
| Ferns Castle | €50,662.16 |
| Gallarus | €18,525.11 |
| Glebe House & Gallery | €128,631.14 |
| Glendalough Centre | €289,343.89 |
| Hill of Tara | €39,374.28 |
| Inaculin-Garnish | €27,401.82 |
| Ionad/Bhlascaoid Mhóir | €89,771.42 |
| Jerpoint Abbey | €146,943.24 |
| JFK Arboretum | €54,658.61 |
| Kilkenny Castle | €568,464.96 |
| Kilmacurragh | €22,642.86 |
| Kilmainham Gaol | €537,541.59 |
| Knowth Passage Tomb | €131,340.22 |
| Listowel Castle | €24,631.57 |
| Loughcrew | €27,052.93 |
| Mainguard | €70,875.32 |
| Maynooth Castle | €22,122.53 |
| Newgrange | €289,107.70 |
| New Mills Corn & Flax Mills | €30,541.63 |
| Old Melifont | €54,865.37 |
| Ormond Castle | €64,411.57 |
| Parke's Castle | €75,024.24 |
| Pearse Museum & St. Enda's | €197,549.60 |
| Phoenix Park Visitor Centre | €154,247.25 |
| Portumna Castle | €105,792.83 |
| Rathfarnham Castle | €305,769.79 |

| SITE | GUIDE COSTS |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| Reginald's Tower | €90,999.66 |
| Rock Of Cashel | €510,001.98 |
| Roscrea Castle Grounds | €95,282.13 |
| Ross Castle | €202,780.04 |
| Scattery Island | €16,025.25 |
| Skellig Michael | €129,793.47 |
| Sligo Abbey | €65,013.28 |
| St. Audeons | €67,982.91 |
| St. Mary's Abbey | €15,931.76 |
| St. Mary's Gowran | €20,559.70 |
| Swiss Cottage | €118,920.27 |
| Teach an Phiarsaigh | €25,628.44 |
| Tintern Abbey | €45,428.64 |
| Trim Castle | €158,662.22 |
| Misc. sites* | €14,832.76 |
| TOTAL | €9,451,723.27 |

*This figure refers to a number of non site-specific invoices for small amounts. It was not possible to provide the breakdown per site for this figure within the time frame.

Proposed Legislation

142. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the current legislative position regarding communications and privilege for papers, emails and documents sent, received and held by Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas prior to the enactment of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges and Procedures) Bill; the change he envisages in this area after the enactment of the legislation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23483/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Government, at its meeting on 14 May 2013, approved the publication of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges and Procedures) Bill 2013. The Bill provides for a statutory qualified privilege for private papers of Members and official documents of the Houses. These provisions are intended to apply in all circumstances and are not restricted to inquiries carried out under the Bill. The Bill also provides for a qualified privilege for confidential communication from members of the public to Members of the Oireachtas.

Proposed Legislation

143. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the method that will be used to conduct a banking inquiry as per the proposed Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges and Procedures) Bill; the way it will be decided which Oireachtas Committee is responsible for such inquiry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23542/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): The Government, at its meeting on 14 May 2013, approved the publication of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges and Procedures) Bill 2013. The Bill establishes a comprehensive

statutory underpinning for the Oireachtas to conduct inquiries within the current constitutional framework.

The Houses of the Oireachtas (Inquiries, Privileges and Procedures) Bill 2013 envisages a central role for the Oireachtas in both initiating and conducting a parliamentary inquiry. Under the Bill, responsibility is assigned exclusively to the Houses of the Oireachtas to determine the requirement for a formal inquiry, the terms of reference of that inquiry, the appropriate committee to conduct an inquiry and the procedural and organisational aspects of the inquiry.

Office of Public Works Properties

144. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform the source of stonework belonging to the Office of Public Works, left on Coillte land near Tintern Abbey, County Wexford; if a record has been kept of the source of this stone, its age and previous location; if a scientific analysis was carried out on the stone work to establish when it was used as a building material and for what purpose; the length of time it has been stored on Coillte land, the details of the protocols that cover this arrangement; if any of the stone has been used on other National Monuments and if it was did the National Museum approve of such dispersal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23558/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brian Hayes): The stone referred to lies in an area owned by Coillte and has been stored there with its agreement since late 2010.

As neighbours with whom the Office of Public Works (OPW) maintains good working relationships, Coillte agreed to allow the OPW to store stone designated for future work on sites in the Wexford region on its land, as storing it on the National Monument property itself would be difficult and detract from visitor amenity. The arrangement is an informal one with no costs involved and is not subject to any written protocols.

The stone is unrelated to Tintern Abbey itself and was drawn from the OPW's store of stone in the National Monuments Depot in Kilkenny. This in turn, comes from a number of different sources, all unrelated to any National Monument.

No scientific analysis was carried out. This was not required as the OPW is aware of the provenance of the material. None of the stone came from any National Monument in state care. The National Museum has no function in relation to the material.

Public Sector Staff Remuneration

145. **Deputy Peter Mathews** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform his plans in respect of public sector pay agreements (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23574/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): Ireland is committed to reducing its general government deficit to less than 3% by 2015. To meet this commitment the Medium Term Fiscal Statement published in November 2012 indicated that, in addition to the overall consolidation of €3.5 billion required for 2013, an additional €3.1 billion in savings and revenue raising measures must be identified for 2014 and €2 billion in 2015. If the public service pay and pensions bill at 36% of spending is to make a proportionate contribution to the additional expenditure reduction currently identified as necessary for the next 3 years

based on current economic forecasts, it will require a further reduction of some €1 billion in the cost of the pay and pensions bill. To conform to our budgetary targets and continue on our path to economic recovery we need to make payroll savings of €300m this year and €1bn by 2015. The Government remains committed to achieving the required savings through negotiation and agreement.

National Procurement Service Framework Agreements

146. **Deputy Thomas Pringle** asked the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform if he will provide a copy of the impact assessment on local jobs in relation to the public procurement (frameworks agreements) circular 06/12 (details supplied). [23628/13]

Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform (Deputy Brendan Howlin): I understand that the issue of the impact of Circular 6/12: Public Procurement (Framework Agreements) for the procurement of goods and services on local jobs was raised by the Deputy with my colleague Minister of State Brian Hayes TD on 23 January 2013 (PQ 3220/13 refers). You may recall that Minister Hayes did not indicate that an impact assessment had been carried out but noted that the impact on local jobs had been carefully considered and that very substantial dialogue with representatives of the small and medium enterprise (SME) sector had taken place before the introduction of the circular.

The key purpose of Circular 6/12 is to enable the State to do more with less by aggregating procurement to secure better value for money. It is also worth noting that such aggregation arrangements can be implemented in a manner that achieves value for money with a minimal negative impact, or indeed a positive impact, on SMEs. When Circular 06/12 was being drafted the decision was made to include the existing national contracts that applied across the majority of the public sector as commonly purchased goods and services. While a number of the categories of goods and services mandated under the Circular are suited to single supplier national arrangements, these need not be accepted as the norm. The greater use, where appropriate, of multi-supplier frameworks can address local supplier issues while also ensuring on-going cost competitiveness of the framework itself. Such multi-supplier frameworks may also offer SMEs the opportunity to participate in national level contracts, thereby offering valuable reference work when competing for public procurement contracts in other jurisdictions.

The National Procurement Service (NPS) has developed tender documentation to encourage the participation of SMEs. For example, the contract for office supplies was divided into three individual lots for Stationery, ICT Consumables and Paper. SMEs that believed the scope of the competitions were beyond their technical or business capacities were encouraged to explore the possibilities of forming relationships with other SMEs or with larger enterprises. Through such relationships they could participate and contribute to the successful implementation of any contracts that resulted from these competitions and therefore increase their social and economic benefits.

Larger enterprises were also encouraged to consider the practical ways that SMEs could be included in their proposals to maximise the social and economic benefits of the contracts that result from these tenders. For example, the indigenous company, which won the Stationery contract, with an estimated value of €10m per annum, is sourcing up to 60% of their products using 136 local agents and manufacturers.

In order to encourage greater SME participation the NPS, over the past three years, has conducted a targeted programme of education for suppliers who wish to learn more about doing business with the Irish Public Service. This programme consists of seminars, workshops and

large scale ‘meet the buyer’ events hosted nationwide. To date the NPS has facilitated workshops and presented at seminars to over 4,500 SMEs nationwide. Parallel with these events the NPS also works closely with business representative bodies such as ISME and IBEC to provide briefings for their members.

Whilst the government want better value for money for our substantial procurement spend we also want Irish SMEs, where necessary, to form alliances and networks to ensure they can tender on a competitive basis for this work.

Trade Relations

147. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the extent to which EU/US and EU/Japan trade agreements will benefit this country; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23622/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): The overarching theme of the Irish Presidency is the contribution of trade to growth, jobs and economic recovery; consequently I attach great importance to promoting the EU’s external trade agenda for the benefit of Irish exporters.

Trade policy is an essential component of the EU’s growth compact. Expanding trade is also essential to job creation: About 30 million jobs in the EU depend on sales to the rest of the world, an increase of 10 million jobs since 1995. On average, each additional €1 billion of exports supports between 8,000 and 15,000 additional jobs across the EU. Research in Ireland by Forfas suggests that over 4 jobs are sustained by indigenous companies for every €1 million in exports.

Trade Negotiations underway or planned could boost EU GDP by more than 2% or €250bn -equivalent to the size of the Austrian or Danish economy — and support an increase of more than 2 million jobs related to trade across the EU. Ireland will continue to target the markets where there are FTAs or where FTAs are in prospect to avail of the opportunities they present.

In its report, issued in February this year, the EU-US High Level Working Group on Jobs and Growth concluded that a comprehensive agreement addressing a broad range of bilateral trade and investment issues, including regulatory issues, and contributing to the development of global rules, would provide the most significant mutual benefit for both parties. An ambitious and comprehensive transatlantic trade and investment partnership (TTIP) could benefit the EU economy by as much as €119 billion per year and the US by up to €95 billion. [For a family of four in the EU, that would translate on average to an extra €545 in disposable income annually.] Consequently it recommended an ambitious approach to negotiating a trade and investment agreement between the two biggest parties in the transatlantic marketplace.

The EU Council is considering a negotiating mandate that will set the parameters in which the EU Commission will seek to negotiate a TTIP. The Irish Presidency has prioritised securing agreement from EU member states on the final negotiating mandate. My Department is working intensively to achieve this at the Trade Council on June 14. The US is a traditional yet strong market for Ireland. In 2011 Ireland exported €27 billion worth of Goods and Services to the US making the US our second largest export market, while total trade with the US was over €58 billion.

A comprehensive agreement with the US will remove virtually all tariffs and significantly reduce over time important regulatory and technical barriers to trade. These changes would reduce the cost of Irish exports to US consumers as well as reducing or eliminating the cost and

administrative burden on firms having to meet two sets of regulatory and compliance requirements. An agreement with the US will also make it easier and cheaper to sell services to the US as well as new opportunities in gaining access to the huge US public procurement market. As negotiations with the US have not yet started and as it will be some time before initial offers are exchanged it is not possible at this stage to establish precise detail about the economic impact on the economy.

EU-Japan

The Japanese market for Irish goods and services presents many opportunities for Irish companies. In 2012 we exported over €2 billion in goods to Japan, an increase of 20% on 2011. Trade with Japan is significant and that economy is our 11th largest export market.

Negotiations on a free trade agreement between the EU and Japan were launched on 25 March 2013. The aim is for a comprehensive agreement in goods, services and investment eliminating tariffs, non-tariff barriers and covering other trade-related issues, such as public procurement, regulatory issues, competition and sustainable development.

Analysis is underway on the economic benefits of a trade agreement with Japan. As negotiations have only commenced in the past few weeks, certainty about the impact on the Irish economy will become clearer when initial offers are exchanged possibly next year.

Departmental Agencies Expenditure

148. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation his views on the level of expenditure spent on consultants and contractors at a national state agency (details supplied), in particular that more than €200,000 has reportedly been spent on efficiency consultants and where retired senior managers have repeatedly been brought back as highly paid consultants. [23520/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): Procurement issues are a day-to-day matter for the National Standards Authority of Ireland (NSAI).

However, I have been advised by the NSAI that its procurement policy complies with competitive tendering requirements, as outlined in the Public Procurement Guidelines Competitive Process (2004), State Bodies Guidelines and EU Regulations. NSAI use sub-contractors on a limited basis to address capacity and skills gaps, which may arise as part of their contracted Certification activities.

As previously outlined in response to PQ No 97 (Ref: 7664/13) on 13 February 2013, over the past five years, a total of 14 staff members (including 1 senior manager), who were qualified Certification Officers, have retired from NSAI.

Five of these Certification Officers (including the senior manager), were subsequently placed through an open tendering process, on a panel of 28 subcontractors NSAI use to carry out Certification duties, as required. In 2012, these 5 former employees were sub-contracted to undertake certification activities at a total cost of €86,990.

This outsourcing arrangement is in line with the Principles set down in the Appendix to Chapter 1 of the Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 (Croke Park Agreement) relating to Service Delivery Options. All matters in relation to Public Service Pension Abatement rules are also adhered to.

The staff numbers of NSAI have reduced from 200 in 2008, to 154 at the end of 2012, a 23% reduction, with a further 11% anticipated under the current Employment Control Framework (ECF). A tender for a call down of LEAN Business Training and Consultancy services has just been completed by NSAI covering the period 2013 – 2015 to streamline processes and enable the organisation cope with the magnitude of these staff reductions. No money to date has been spent on this streamlining project.

Registered Employment Agreements

149. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation the implications of the recent Supreme Court ruling on registered employment agreements for workers who were subject to such agreements; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23573/13]

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation (Deputy Richard Bruton): In the judgement delivered on 9 May last in McGowan and others v The Labour Court, Ireland and the Attorney General, the Supreme Court held that Part III of the Industrial Relations Act 1946 was invalid having regard to Article 15.2.1 of the Constitution.

That Article provides, in effect, that the exclusive power to make laws is vested in the Oireachtas. The Supreme Court took the view that Registered Employment Agreements are instruments having the status of laws made by private individuals subject only to a limited power of veto by a subordinate body. While the Constitution allows for the limited delegation of law making functions, the provisions of the 1946 Act went beyond what is permissible under the Constitution.

The effect of this decision is to invalidate the registration of employment agreements previously registered under Part III of the 1946 Act. In consequence the Labour Court no longer has jurisdiction to enforce, interpret or otherwise apply these agreements. As a result, all such agreements no longer have any application beyond the subscribing parties and are not enforceable in law.

However, existing contractual rights of workers in sectors covered by Registered Employment Agreements are unaffected by the ruling. Contractual rights can be altered only by agreement between the parties involved.

There were 6 existing sectorial REAs registered or varied by the Labour Court in recent years: two in the Construction Sector and one each covering Electrical Contracting, Printing, Overhead Powerline Contractors and Dublin Drapery, Footwear and Allied Trades. It is estimated that between 70,000 and 80,000 workers were covered by these sectorial agreements. In addition, there were over 50 employment agreements covering individual enterprises that had been registered by the Court under the 1946 Act.

The striking down of the REAs means that new employees in these sectors can now be hired at a rate agreeable between workers and their employers. This is subject only to the provisions of the National Minimum Wage Act, 2000.

From the parties' perspective, the primary objective of REAs is to provide them with a sense of certainty around terms and conditions that will apply when the employer is tendering for and working through contracts and to have in place agreed grievance and industrial peace provisions. The agreements also have the effect of ensuring that the industry terms and conditions are recognised and maintained. In addition, the existence of these legally backed agreements is recognised under European Union law and ensures, in accordance with the Posted Workers Directive, that contractors from outside the jurisdiction, who may be using employees from lower

wage economies, do not obtain an advantage over local contractors in terms of wage costs.

This is a significant judgment that requires careful consideration having regard also to the amendments to the 1946 Act contained in the 2012 Industrial Relations Act.

The Attorney General has been asked to supply advice on any potential implications of the judgment for the 1946 Act as amended by the 2012 Industrial Relations Act.

Disability Allowance Appeals

150. **Deputy Sean Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection if all the necessary information has been submitted in order to finalise a decision on disability allowance in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Laois; when a decision will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23391/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an Appeals Officer, having fully considered all the evidence, including that adduced at the oral hearing, disallowed the appeal of the person concerned. The person concerned has been notified of this decision.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Invalidity Pension Appeals

151. **Deputy Michael McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding an invalidity pension appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork. [23397/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 16 January 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by or on behalf of the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. These papers were received in the Social Welfare Appeals Office on the 15 April 2013 and the case will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Treatment Benefit Scheme Applications

152. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a hearing grant in respect of a person (details supplied). [23410/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Eligibility to the treatment benefit scheme is based on the person concerned having paid the required number of pay related social insurance contributions (PRSI). Qualifying conditions vary depending on the person's age,

someone aged under 21 years requires a minimum of 39 PRSI contributions paid at Class A, E, H, or P. According to the Department's records, the person concerned has not paid any PRSI contributions to date and therefore does not qualify for the benefit. If the person concerned has a medical card, his local HSE office will be able to advise him of his entitlements under their scheme.

Social Welfare Appeals Delays

153. **Deputy Catherine Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection her plans to review processes in her Department in situations where an appeal against a refusal is accepted and registered with the appeals office and where there is often a long delay in the appeals office receiving the file from the relevant scheme department, in some cases leading to excessive delays in the ability of the appeals office to decide the case in a timely manner, in some cases decisions can exceed a full year (details supplied); if she will she outline the process involved and identify the part of that process is causing the delay or delays in sending the files to the appeals office; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23411/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department is committed to delivering the best possible service to its customers and works to ensure that claims and appeals are processed in the most efficient and expeditious way possible, having regard to the eligibility conditions that apply to each scheme.

There have been significant improvements in work practices across all schemes during the past year, specifically in the illness related schemes which underwent major service delivery modernisation projects. In addition major process improvement projects have been completed with significant improvements in processing times and the elimination of backlogs in many scheme areas.

As a consequence of the very high number of decisions made in the last year, there has been a corresponding substantial increase in the number of appeals being received. This had put pressure on the administration of appeals and resulted in some delays which are regrettable. This is being addressed and will be cleared in the next number of months. In addition, delays did develop in the processing of medical assessments and reviews due to a combination of factors including the increased workload for medical assessors and the reduced number of medical assessors due to retirements. The Department has addressed this issue by recently running a competition to establish a new panel of medical assessors. To date six Medical Assessors have been appointed from this panel, three of whom took up duty in November 2012 and a further three in March of this year. It is expected that a further four medical assessors will be appointed from the panel in the near future.

I place great emphasis on ensuring that all appeals are processed in a timely manner but the length of time from when an appeal against a refusal is accepted and registered with the appeals office to where the appeals office receives the file from the relevant scheme area varies. Depending on the case quite a few activities must occur before the file can be finalised for submission to the appeals office, including time spent in the scheme area for comment by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal put forward by the appellant, and any further investigation, examination or assessment by the Department's Inspectors and Medical Assessors that is deemed necessary. Because of its quasi-judicial nature, the processing of appeals takes time and reflects the fact that, by definition, the appeal process cannot be a quick one.

In relation to the specific case highlighted I can confirm that the Department received a Carer's Allowance application from the person in question on the 23rd of February 2012. The

person concerned was refused carers allowance on the grounds that the care recipient is not so disabled as to require full time care and attention as prescribed in regulations. He was notified of this decision, the reason for it, and of his right of review or appeal on the 8th of August 2012. The applicant subsequently appealed this decision and sent in further medical evidence on the 31st of August 2012. This medical evidence was scanned on 22nd of September 2012 and a review of the medical evidence was completed by a Medical Assessor on the 7th of January 2013. The additional information did not alter the opinion of the medical assessor, the deciding officer saw no grounds to change the original decision and the file was submitted to the Social Welfare Appeals Office on the 18th of January 2013. An Appeals Officer upheld the original decision to disallow the application and the appeal was disallowed on the 16th of April 2013. Following the receipt of further medical evidence, the file was subsequently recalled by the Social Welfare Appeals Office and was returned to them on 30th of April 2013. The file is currently with an Appeals Officer since the 3rd of May 2013.

Questions Nos. 154 and 155 withdrawn.

Supplementary Welfare Allowance Payments

156. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will provide a county breakdown of the number of person's who availed of the religious ceremonies grant over the last five years; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23447/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Under the supplementary welfare allowance (SWA) scheme, the Department may make a single exceptional needs payment (ENP) to help meet essential, once-off and unforeseen expenditure which a person could not reasonably be expected to meet out of their weekly income. There is no automatic entitlement to a payment. The Government has provided €47.6 million for the ENP scheme in 2013.

For 2013, the Department has recommended that payment of the allowance specifically in respect of religious ceremonies will cease. Applications can continue to be made under the scheme for assistance with child clothing. This measure will ensure that the ENP scheme will continue to respond to specific needs and not to the occasion.

ENP's statistics in respect of religious ceremonies are not available on a county basis. Detail of ENPs paid during the past five years for religious ceremonies is provided in the tabular statement.

Tabular Statement

ENP Statistics on Religious Ceremonies 2008 to 2012

| Year | Number of Payments | Amount |
|------|--------------------|--------|
| 2008 | 9,180 | €2.5m |
| 2009 | 10,660 | €2.9m |
| 2010 | 12,660 | €3.3m |
| 2011 | 13,970 | €3.4m |
| 2012 | 12,460 | €1.5m |

Carer's Allowance Appeals

157. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision on a

carer's allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare will issue; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23448/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 15th March 2013. The person concerned was afforded an opportunity of setting out the complete and up to date grounds of their appeal. For this purpose, a form SWAO1 was issued to her on 15th March 2013. This form was returned to this office on the 8th May 2013 and in accordance with the statutory requirements the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal are being sought. When received, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Question No. 158 withdrawn.

Disability Allowance Appeals

159. **Deputy Tom Fleming** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a disability allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Cork; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23455/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The weekly rate of disability allowance payment depends on the amount of weekly means assessed. The legislative provisions regarding disability allowance state that means will be assessed from all income which the claimant or claimant's spouse may reasonably expect to receive during the year following the date of their claim with certain exceptions. Maintenance payments made to a former spouse/partner are not included in these exceptions.

Following a review of the person's disability allowance claim in September 2011 the person was assessed with weekly means of €9.92 derived from his earnings from insurable employment. He was awarded a reduced rate disability allowance with effect from 5 October 2011.

The person subsequently appealed the decision to reduce his rate of disability allowance. On 6 February 2013, the Social Welfare Appeals Office informed him that his appeal was partially allowed. The Appeals Office assessed the person with weekly means of €3.00 derived from his earnings. His weekly rate of disability allowance will now be revised in line with the Appeals Officer's decision and the person will be notified shortly of this decision.

Mortgage Arrears Proposals

160. **Deputy Eoghan Murphy** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she is considering extending the mortgage arrears information and advice service to include financial brokers. [23460/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Mortgage Arrears Information and Advice Service was established to provide a comprehensive and coordinated approach to assist people in mortgage distress.

The approach differentiates between mortgage information and mortgage advice. The first two elements involve the enhancement of the website www.keepingyourhome.ie and the establishment of a Mortgage Arrears Information Helpline within the Citizens Information Board both of which focus on the provision of comprehensive mortgage arrears information in particular to people in arrears or pre-arrears.

The third element of the service is the provision of independent financial advice to mortgage holders who are being presented with long term mortgage resolution proposals by their lenders. This advice is provided by a panel of accountants drawn from members of the main accountancy institutes in Ireland who have agreed to participate and support this independent service. This panel is available on a county by county basis on the website www.keepingyourhome.ie.

When a lender is proposing longer-term mortgage resolutions, the lender advises the borrower to obtain independent financial advice on the proposed arrangement and that, if the borrower wishes to avail of this option, that the lender will pay €250 to an accountant of the borrower's choosing for the provision of this advice.

The advisory framework has commenced with practising accountants because they already operate within a regulatory regime which includes qualitative oversight by their regulating bodies and in these circumstances it was possible to establish the advisory framework for people with mortgage distress within a relatively short timeframe.

There is nothing to inhibit other financial intermediaries from continuing to give advice on mortgages as required by borrowers. The advisory framework is being monitored on an ongoing basis and a full review of the service will be undertaken in June 2013. The review will be undertaken to ensure that it is meeting its objectives and will encompass all aspects of the service including if participation is extended to other interested parties, the criteria that would be required in terms of relevant qualifications, experience, independence, professional indemnity insurance, etc. All interested organisations will have an opportunity to input to the review of the service.

Employment Support Services

161. **Deputy Mattie McGrath** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the Tús scheme; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23464/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In 2013, the Employee's PRSI-Free Allowance of €127 per week was abolished for all workers. Participants on work placement and similar schemes earning €352 or more per week are now subject to PRSI at a rate of 4%. Employment on Tús is insurable under the Social Welfare Acts for all social welfare benefits and pensions. Tús participants are insured at Class A8/A9 PRSI, which gives them a paid contribution for each week, as with other Class A workers. The Budget changes which apply to PRSI have impacted on all employees who are paying an A class PRSI contribution, including those on Tús.

Question No. 162 withdrawn.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

163. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Social Protection if her atten-

tion has been drawn to the case of a person (details supplied) who was diagnosed with a very serious illness and was admitted to hospital on 5 February and discharged on 12 April and was not paid their jobseeker's allowance if she will have their payments reinstated. [23472/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): One of the conditions to receive a jobseeker's payment is that an individual must be capable of, available for and genuinely seeking work. That is, a person must be available for work in respect of each day for which s/he declares that s/he is unemployed.

In this case, the person's claim was stopped when he entered hospital as it was decided he was not capable of, available for and genuinely seeking work. While in hospital, the person received an exceptional needs payment of €100 to meet the cost of personal necessities and arrangements were made to continue the payment of his rent supplement payment. The person is currently receiving a weekly supplementary welfare allowance payment while awaiting the outcome of an illness benefit claim.

Illness Benefit Eligibility

164. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection if narcolepsy can be recognised as a disability as requested by SOUND to ensure that its members cannot be discriminated against in the work place and that they are entitled to a disability allowance in the event that they are dismissed, given that their diminished ability to work prevents them from adequately supporting themselves in the future; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23479/13]

165. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection if narcolepsy can be recognised as a disability as requested by SOUND to ensure that its members cannot be discriminated against in the work place and whether they are entitled to a disability allowance in the event that they are dismissed; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23481/13]

167. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Social Protection her views on whether rapid access to carer's allowance and domiciliary care allowance should be granted for those parents have had to give up or reduce employment hours to become carers for their child or children suffering from narcolepsy; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23539/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I propose to take Questions Nos. 164, 165 and 167 together.

I wish to reassure the Deputy that narcolepsy is recognised as a clinical entity. However, eligibility on medical conditions, for any illness-related benefit/allowance will depend on the severity and expected duration of the condition, and in the case of carers the care requirements. All applications are assessed on a claim-by-claim basis.

Disability Allowance Applications Waiting Times

166. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the current average waiting times for a decision on an application for disability allowance to be made by her Department; the number of applicants currently waiting for a decision on applications submitted for disability allowance. [23507/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): There are approximately 6,800 ap-

plications for disability allowance awaiting decision of which some 5,800 are new applications. Of the 5,800 new claims awaiting decision 600 have been actioned and are awaiting further information before a decision can be made.

A recent analysis of the applications pending decision indicated that approximately 60% of them had been waiting for a decision for less than 12 weeks.

Following the completion of a major service delivery modernisation programme a plan is now in operation to reduce the backlog, including the assignment of additional staff and it is anticipated that the full backlog will be actioned by the end of the second quarter of this year.

It should be noted that the processing time for individual disability allowance claims can vary depending on the complexity of the claimant's circumstances and the information they provide. In addition, a request for a review or an appeal by a person adds to length of time taken to deal with the claim.

Question No. 167 answered with Question No. 164.

Illness Benefit Appeals

168. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a decision will issue on an illness benefit appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23553/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Payment of illness benefit to the person concerned was disallowed by a Deciding Officer of the Department of Social Protection, following an examination by a Medical Assessor of the Department, who expressed the opinion that she was capable of work.

An appeal was registered on the 3 April 2013 and the Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that, in accordance with statutory requirements, the Department was asked for the documentation in the case and the Deciding Officer's comments on the grounds of the appeal. In that context, an examination by another Medical Assessor will be carried out. The person concerned will be notified when arrangements for the examination have been completed.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Domiciliary Care Allowance Appeals

169. **Deputy Pat Breen** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding a domiciliary allowance appeal in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Clare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23554/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I am advised by the Social Welfare Appeals Office that an oral hearing of the appeal of the person concerned took place on 10th May 2013 and the Appeals Officer is now considering the appeal in the light of all the evidence submitted, including that adduced at the hearing. The person concerned will be notified of the Appeals Officer's decision when the appeal has been determined.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Pro-

tection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Employment Support Services

170. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Social Protection the reason a person (details supplied) in County Galway cannot remain on the Tús programme for another year; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23562/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The purpose of Tús is the provision of quality work for those who are unemployed in order to break the cycle of unemployment and to improve a person's opportunities in returning to the labour market. The 12-month duration on Tús is designed to ensure that the benefits of these work placements are offered to the greatest number of those eligible. I consider the existing 12-month period on Tús to be adequate to meet the objectives of the initiative whilst also ensuring that as many unemployed people as possible are able to benefit from the initiative. There are no circumstances under which a person's term on Tús can be extended.

Question No. 171 withdrawn.

Unemployment Statistics

172. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Social Protection further to a report commissioned from the Economic and Social Research Institute by her Department entitled *Work and Poverty in Ireland: An Analysis of the Central Statistics Office Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2004-2010* and published jointly in 2012; her views on this report highlighting that the rate of joblessness at household level here was very high by European standards even during the boom years prior to the recent recession; and if this requires structural reforms of the social welfare system to remedy the situation. [23577/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The report - *Work and Poverty in Ireland: An analysis of the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions 2004-2010* - was jointly published by the Department and the Economic and Social Research Institute in 2012. Its findings were discussed with national and European stakeholders at a conference last December. The purpose of the study is to provide new insights into the relationship between work, unemployment and poverty, which has assumed greater importance with the economic recession and the subsequent rise in unemployment.

A particular focus of the study was on the EU concept of jobless households, defined as households where the total time allocated to work by working age adults is less than 20 per cent. The study found that the population aged 0 to 59 in jobless households rose from 13 per cent in 2005 to 22 per cent in 2010, which is twice the EU average. The high proportion of the population in jobless households reveals a structural problem that predates the current recession, though it has been exacerbated by the rise in unemployment. The severity of the problem in Ireland reflects a number of factors, namely, a higher percentage of the adult population who are not economically active; a greater likelihood that jobless adults live with other jobless adults, and a higher proportion of children living with adults in jobless households. Such households, in effect, contain adults who are furthest from the labour market and who generally have a strong pattern of educational and social class disadvantages. Furthermore, children in jobless households are at risk of inter-generational poverty.

The main policy conclusion from this study is that the number of jobless households is a key factor in determining overall levels of poverty and social exclusion. Social transfers play a key role in reducing the at-risk-of-poverty rate among jobless households and, compared to other EU countries, are considerably more effective in reducing poverty. Despite this, jobless households still experience higher levels of basic deprivation and consistent poverty and account for two-thirds of the total population in consistent poverty.

To address the issue, the Government, as part of the national social target to reduce consistent poverty to 4 per cent by 2016 and to 2 per cent or less by 2020, has agreed to set a sub-target to reduce the share of jobless households in consistent poverty. The key to ensuring that the target will be addressed is an active labour market policy. A Programme for Government priority for 2013 is to make sure that economic recovery does not bypass jobless households, by enhancing the Pathways to Work strategy to ensure new jobs go to people on the Live Register. The Government is implementing a number of actions which will have a positive impact on jobless households including (i) the new integrated employment and support service (Intreo); (ii) streamlining and restructuring of working age supports; (iii) improving labour market measures to assist those furthest from the labour market, in particular the long-term unemployed; and (iv) an area-based response to child poverty.

Social Welfare Offices

173. **Deputy Damien English** asked the Minister for Social Protection the number of Intreo offices that are currently operational; the number that she or her Department plan to open in the future; when these will be opened; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23578/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Pathways to Work document states that the introduction of the new Intreo service is a multi-annual project with all Department Local Offices upgraded to full Intreo offices by the end of 2014.

The delivery of the Intreo service comprises a number of elements. the main elements being:

- i. The integration of the various welfare decision making processes to speed up decision making and minimise recourse to supplementary welfare payments.
- ii. The implementation of a systematic activation process based on profiling of clients
- iii. The delivery of a ‘one-stop-shop’ service from an integrated office location.

The first ten Intreo offices, with all elements in place, went live in 2012. These first ten offices were Sligo, Arklow, Tallaght, Kings Inns, Ballymun, Buncrana, Coolock, Dundalk, Finglas and Killarney.

A further two Intreo offices have now opened in Newcastlewest and Blanchardstown. It is intended have the full service available from a total of 40 offices this year and to complete the full roll-out of all service elements to all 63 offices of the Department in 2014. As part of this process it is intended to complete the roll-out of elements (i) and (ii) above to all offices during 2013. Element (iii) requires infrastructural works in many office locations and therefore has a longer timeline.

The plans for the remainder of 2013 are now being finalised and details of the office locations to which the new service will be rolled out will be published in due course.

Invalidity Pension Eligibility

174. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding determination of entitlement to invalidity pension in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Meath; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23597/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): Invalidity pension is a payment for people who are permanently incapable of work because of illness or incapacity and who satisfy the contribution conditions.

This department received a claim for invalidity pension for the person concerned. The medical evidence provided by the claimant in support of her claim was examined by a medical assessor who was of the opinion that the person concerned is not eligible for invalidity pension as she does not satisfy the medical criteria. The application for invalidity pension was, accordingly, disallowed by a deciding officer. The person in question was notified of this decision and the reason for it.

Further medical evidence was subsequently submitted by the claimant. This additional evidence, along with the original information, was evaluated by a different medical assessor who found that the person concerned does not satisfy the medical criteria. Accordingly, the deciding officer confirmed the original decision and notified the claimant of the outcome of the review. The claimant was also notified of her right to lodge an appeal with the social welfare appeals office.

Carer's Allowance Eligibility

175. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if she will confirm receipt of requested information in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Dublin as set out by her Department's inspector; if any of the five items requested remain outstanding thereby preventing determination of eligibility in respect of carer's allowance and rent support; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23598/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): I can confirm that the Department received an application for Carer's Allowance from the person concerned on 1st November 2012. The application was sent to a social welfare investigative officer for assessment of means. The investigative officer interviewed the person concerned on 14th March 2013.

During the course of the interview five additional supporting documents were requested, and these were received at a later date. However the investigative officer was not in a position to determine the means of the person concerned as he did not receive a satisfactory explanation regarding the reasons for, or funding of, any absences from the State. The person concerned was also requested to provide their passport but this was not forthcoming. Following completion of the investigative officer's report on the matter, a deciding officer disallowed the application on the grounds that she failed to disclose her means. The person concerned was notified of this decision and of her right to review or appeal in a letter that issued on 25th of April 2013.

If the person concerned is not satisfied with the decision she may request a review or may submit an appeal to the independent Social Welfare Appeals Office.

Social Welfare Benefits Eligibility

176. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the extent to which adequate care is likely to be available in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 2; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23599/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The person concerned should contact her local Community Welfare Officer at the earliest available opportunity whereupon any possible social welfare entitlements that she may have can be identified.

Rent Supplement Scheme Payments

177. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection if and when rent allowance will be awarded in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23601/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The rent supplement claim from the person concerned has been awarded with effect from 12th November 2012 and has been paid up to date.

Rent Supplement Scheme Eligibility

178. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the way resolution is likely to be achieved in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who is deemed to have left their previous accommodation without good cause notwithstanding the fact that information submitted clearly indicates a breakdown of relationship with them and their landlord; if she will confirm that the breakdown of relationship with landlord is sufficient to merit good cause; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23602/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): In cases of disputes between private landlords and tenants on Rent Supplement, the Department advises that both parties contact the PRTB for a resolution. Similarly, in cases where there is a dispute or issues between RAS landlords and their tenants (or tenants in any Local Authority accommodation) the Department advises both parties to contact the Local Authority in the first instance to resolve the issue. The person concerned should contact the Local Authority to resolve the issue and to be placed back on the housing list.

With reference to previous PQ's on this matter (18136/13 and 15901/13) the person concerned has appealed the decision made.

Public Services Card

179. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the alternative method of identification, if any, acceptable in respect of registration for public service card for persons holding neither driver's licence nor passport; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23603/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Department has developed, in conjunction with a number of other Government Departments, a rules based standard for establishing and authenticating an individual's identity for the purposes of access to public services. This programme of work, which is known as the Standard Authentication Framework Environment or SAFE for short, also provides for the introduction of a Public Services Card

(PSC) to enable individuals to gain access to public services more efficiently and with a minimum of duplication of effort, while at the same time preserving their privacy to the maximum extent possible.

A PSC is currently issued following a registration process which involves the capture of an individual's photograph and signature and the verification of identity data already held by the Department. As part of the registration process, applicants are requested to provide documentation supporting the authentication of their identity. This is most easily achieved through the presentation of secure photographic ID (such as a passport, National Identity card or driver's licence).

The process does take into account that some people will not have such documents. In the main, these will be UK or Irish nationals as, to be present in the jurisdiction, others will require a valid passport or National ID card. The process for applicants without photo ID involves a more in-depth interview focussing on the verification of information supplied by the individual or otherwise available to the Department based on their personal circumstances.

Disability Allowance Appeals

180. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the position regarding and appeal in respect of refusal of disability allowance in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 24; if the appeal is likely to be determined at an early date; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23604/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The Social Welfare Appeals Office has advised me that an appeal by the person concerned was registered in that office on 3rd April 2013. It is a statutory requirement of the appeals process that the relevant Departmental papers and comments by the Deciding Officer on the grounds of appeal be sought. When these have been received, the case in question will be referred to an Appeals Officer who will make a summary decision on the appeal based on the documentary evidence presented or, if required, hold an oral hearing.

The Social Welfare Appeals Office functions independently of the Minister for Social Protection and of the Department and is responsible for determining appeals against decisions on social welfare entitlements.

Jobseeker's Allowance Payments

181. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection the full extent of family income supplement or jobseeker's allowance including ADA and CDA paid in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23605/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): According to the records of this Department family income supplement was not paid to the persons concerned. A total of €634.20 jobseeker's allowance was paid in the case of the first person concerned for the period 20 May 2010 to 01 June 2010 and the payments included an increase in respect of a qualified adult and a qualified child.

Personal Public Service Numbers

182. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Social Protection when a PPS number will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if she will make a statement on the matter. [23606/13]

Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton): The process for allocating a Personal Public Service (PPS) Number normally involves an application in person at one of my Department's PPS Number allocation centres.

In respect of the particular case raised by the Deputy, the person attended Newbridge PPS Number allocation centre on the 9th of May. However, the documents presented by the person have been retained for examination. Once this examination has been completed, my Department will be in contact with the person.

Questions Nos. 183 and 184 withdrawn.

Special Areas of Conservation Appeals

185. **Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if a person who has ceased farming and who is the registered owner of lands that are subject to a special area of conservation is entitled to a compensation scheme; and if so, to whom do they apply to for this compensation. [23393/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Under the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011, compensation is payable from my Department where a person has been refused consent by me for a prescribed activity within a European site that they have been undertaking in the five year period prior to the refusal.

My Department administers a small-scale farm plan scheme, which supports only active farmers in adopting appropriate management practices in areas nominated for designation. There is no funding scheme available from my Department for farmers or landowners who have ceased farming in a European site.

Most financial support for farmers, including payments in respect of farming within European sites, is made available through schemes operated by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine.

Arts and Culture Funding

186. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the amount of funding he has allocated for the City of Culture programme 2014; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23423/13]

187. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he will outline his plans to make Limerick Ireland's first National City of Culture; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23424/13]

188. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht in view of the closure of the Belltable, if he will outline his plans to ensure that Limerick city has a designated arts centre; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23425/13]

189. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if he

will provide details of the long-term artistic and economic benefits he expects to accrue to cities that are designated cities of culture; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23426/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): I propose to take Questions Nos.186 to 189, inclusive, together.

Last July I announced the introduction of a new National City of Culture Initiative for Ireland. As part of this initiative a city in Ireland is selected and designated as a National City of Culture every two years, with the designation itself lasting for one calendar year. Limerick City will be first National City of Culture in 2014 giving the City an opportunity to shape and brand the new Limerick.

Limerick City is undergoing a process of profound change at present and 2014 is an important year for the city as it will be the year in which a new single local authority will be established. The Limerick Reorganisation Implementation Group (LRIG) is preparing for this change, and I believe that the designation of Limerick as a City of Culture will help to shape, brand and promote a new Limerick city.

Limerick's preparations are well underway with former European Parliament President Pat Cox leading the initiative, joined by two other internationally renowned Freeman of Limerick. These are Riverdance composer Bill Whelan and rugby international Paul O'Connell. I understand that proposals from interested applicants for 2014 are now being accepted by LRIG. Further details are available at www.limerickcityofculture.ie.

The aim of the National City of Culture Initiative is to deliver a programme of cultural events and engagement in a city for one calendar year and to build a longer-term positive impact. The National City of Culture Initiative will seek to bring artists, arts organisations, local authorities and civic groups that are working in a city together not only through the design of a calendar of events that showcases all that the city has to offer in arts and cultural expression, but also to generate a legacy in cultural co-operation among all the citizens of the city. There are a number of excellent galleries, theatres and museums operating in Limerick and these venues will play an important role in the 2014 programme of events.

I am awaiting a proposed programme of events for 2014 from the LRIG. As soon as I have received this proposed programme, the question of funding will be considered.

An EU study in 2004 found that the designation of European Capital of Culture served as a catalyst for the cultural development and transformation of the chosen city, and it is aimed to replicate these benefits on the national stage through this initiative.

Sports Funding

190. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht if funding will be reimbursed to a sports club (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23433/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Dinny McGinley): To date, payments in respect of the improvement works have been made based on the expenditure submitted to my Department. While a claim of €6,050 has been made in respect of the design and supervision fees, no payment has been made in this regard.

In keeping with the appropriate regulations with regard to public procurement, my Department had no option but to cancel the outstanding balance of €3,814.90 due to the organisation

in question. The difficulty arose when a company that did not tender for the development was selected for works on the dressing rooms.

I would recommend that the club's representative make contact with my Department's office in Na Forbacha which may be in a position to advise them further on the matter.

Special Areas of Conservation Designation

191. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the process used to determine which areas of raised bogs were to be designated as special areas of conservation under the habitats directive; the total area of raised bogs owned by the State or by semi-State companies that were surveyed; the total area of such bogs that were designated under the directive; the total area of raised bogs owned by the State or semi-State companies; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23443/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Under the EU Habitats Directive, each Member State is required to designate Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) for the protection of endangered habitats and species as listed in the Directive. As part of Ireland's obligations under the Directive, 53 Special Areas of Conservation were nominated for designation between 1997 and 2002 for the protection of Active Raised Bog, Degraded Raised Bog still capable of natural regeneration and Bog Woodland. Each of these habitats is listed in Annex I of the Directive.

The choice of sites for selection as SACs arose from an extensive survey of the habitats in Ireland and the application of the scientific criteria specified in Annex III of the Directive. In short, the criteria used included:

- The degree of representivity of the natural habitat type on the site.
- The area of the site covered by the natural habitat type in relation to the total area covered by that natural habitat type within national territory.
- The degree of conservation of the structure and functions of the natural habitat type concerned and restoration possibilities.
- A global assessment of the value of the site for conservation of the natural habitat type concerned.

The reasoning behind the nomination for designation of each individual site is contained in the *Natura 2000 standard data form*, which can be viewed on my Department's website at www.npws.ie. The ownership of these bogs was not a central consideration in their selection for survey or designation and there are no precise details available to my Department of the area of State or semi-State land which were surveyed or designated as raised bog SAC. I understand however, that of the 53 designated raised bog SAC there were significant amounts of State owned land in 33 of these sites at the time of survey.

My Department does not have details of the total area of raised bog owned by the State or semi-State companies.

Special Areas of Conservation Designation

192. **Deputy Colm Keaveney** asked the Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht the

number of notifications of site designations under the habitats directive that were issued; the number of landowners that received individual notice of such designation; the policy and procedure for the sending of such notification; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23444/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): In 1997, before the commencement of the designation process for Ireland's network of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) under the Habitats Directive, my Department as then configured undertook an information campaign which involved issuing letters to some 230,000 rural households advising people in general terms of the forthcoming programme and where they could obtain further information of the proposed designations.

Notification by successive Ministers of their intention to designate individual sites was undertaken in accordance with the procedures and requirements laid down in the transposing regulations, the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997, which have now been replaced by the European Communities (Birds and Natural Habitats) Regulations 2011.

Information on the number of individual notifications issued to individuals for all 429 sites nominated for designation as SACs under the Habitats Directive over the past 16 years is not readily available and its compilation would involve a disproportionate amount of time and work.

However, in relation to the 53 raised bog Special Areas of Conservation, I can advise that some 1,457 letters and site specific information packs were issued to individuals identified as being potentially affected by the proposed designations of those SACs nominated between 1997 and 1999. A further 3,534 letters and site-packs were issued to persons potentially affected by the proposed designations in 2002 of the remaining raised bog sites. These letters included maps of the sites, as well as details of restrictions to activities therein, compensation provisions, and the manner in which an objection might be made to the proposed designation.

My Department sources its information for issuing letters from a number of sources, including the Property Registration Authority, the Land Commission (now Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine), the Land Parcel Identification System used by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and the electoral register.

It should be noted that the development of the Land Direct system by the Property Registration Authority in recent years has allowed much more comprehensive land-owner identification. This has improved the Department's ability to reach as many interested parties as possible. While every reasonable step has been taken over the years to identify landowners and notify them directly, it is not possible to guarantee that all such persons can be identified. It is commonplace, particularly in bogs, that individuals' interests are not registered at all, or not in their own names. Turbary rights, in particular, are not always up to date or accurately reflect actual land use activity.

For this reason, and in accordance with the Regulations referred to above, copies of maps of proposed SACs and copies of the Government Notices relating to those sites are also displayed in public access points such as Garda Síochána stations, local authority offices, local offices of the Department of Social Protection, local offices of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and offices of Teagasc located within or near the sites concerned. Proposals to designate sites as SACs are also advertised in the appropriate local newspapers with radio advertisements being run on local stations. A free-phone number is also operated to facilitate the dissemination of information to those who are alerted through these publicity measures.

Deontais Caipitil

193. D'fhiafraigh **Deputy Pearse Doherty** den Aire Ealaíon, Oidhreacht agus Gaeltachta maidir leis an gcúnamh caipitil a chuireann an Rannóg Áiseanna Pobail agus Teanga ina Roinn ar fáil, cad é luach na ndeontas a ceadaíodh in 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011 agus 2012, agus cén céatadán, contae ar chontae, a fuair na contaetha sin. [23475/13]

Minister for Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht (Deputy Jimmy Deenihan): Tugtar eolas sa tábla thíos ar na deontais caipitil a ceadaíodh i leith áiseanna pobail, teanga agus caitheamh aimsire sa Ghaeltacht do 2011 agus 2012. Ní miste a nótaíl go mbaineann sé seo leis an tréimhse ó 1 Eanáir 2011 go 31 Nollaig 2012.

| Contae | | 2011 | | 2012 |
|--------------|-------------|------|--------------|------|
| | € | % | € | % |
| Dún na nGall | €132,400.00 | 61 | €123,637.00 | 9 |
| Maigh Eo | €0.00 | 0 | €41,753.00 | 3 |
| Gaillimh | €85,501.00 | 39 | €981,992.30 | 69 |
| Ciarraí | €0.00 | 0 | €91,757.00 | 7 |
| Corcaigh | €0.00 | 0 | €147,244.00 | 11 |
| Port Láirge | €0.00 | 0 | €10,169.00 | 1 |
| An Mhí | €0.00 | 0 | €0.00 | 0 |
| Iomlán | 217,901.00 | | 1,396,552.30 | |

Housing Assistance Payments Eligibility

194. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the position regarding housing in respect of a person (details supplied). [23400/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): The provision of sheltered housing is mainly funded through my Department's Capital Assistance Scheme (CAS) which provides funding of up to 100% of the approved cost for the provision of accommodation to meet the needs of persons with specific categories of housing need including older people, people with an intellectual, physical or mental health disability, the homeless, returning emigrants and victims of domestic violence. My Department's involvement with the voluntary and co-operative housing schemes relates primarily to the provision of funds for individual projects. The administration of the schemes, including the nomination of tenants from the local authority housing list, is the responsibility of the relevant housing authority.

Decisions on eligibility of individual applicants for social housing support and the allocation of that support are solely a matter for the relevant housing authority, in this case Dublin City Council.

Property Taxation Exemptions

195. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government regarding waivers for the property tax on unfinished estates, 82 waivers were recommended by Kerry County Council but only 27 were granted, the reason the rest were refused; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23531/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): An exemption from the local property tax applies to developments listed in the schedule to the Finance (Local Property Tax) Regulations 2013. The list of unfinished housing developments eligible for the exemption was compiled by local authorities utilising the categorisation employed for the purposes of the National Housing Survey 2012. The Survey was carried out over the course of summer 2012 by my Department in conjunction with local authorities and the Housing Agency.

The categorisation methodology for the survey was different to that which was used in 2011 and which provided the basis for the waiver from the household charge. That earlier categorisation related largely to the level of on-site activity at the time the 2011 survey was carried out and had less to do with the physical character of a development. The 2012 survey was based purely and objectively on the actual state of completion of a development, and established that there were 1,700 unfinished developments, with 1,100 of them deemed to be in a seriously problematic condition. This represents a 37% reduction in unfinished developments since 2010.

Only developments that were deemed by local authorities to be in a “seriously problematic condition”, regardless of whether a developer was on or off site, were included in the LPT regulations.

For purposes of preparing the final list of developments to which the exemption from the local property tax would apply local authorities were asked by my Department in February 2013 to confirm or update the then existing list of estates in a “seriously problematic condition” as appropriate. A small number of local authorities’ returns were queried by my Department at an aggregate level where it appeared that the list of developments being put forward for inclusion under the exemption was inconsistent with the results of the 2012 survey or where, for example, developments with no completed units or those completely unoccupied had been proposed for inclusion. Authorities were asked to examine their lists again with a view to achieving greater consistency with the results of the 2012 survey.

Non-Principal Private Residence Charge Collection

196. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will review the cumulative penalties being applied to the non-principal private residence charge in view of the fact that some property owners inadvertently did not realise their liability for this charge and now face unaffordable charges; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23378/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The Local Government (Charges) Act 2009 broadened the revenue base of local authorities by introducing a charge on non-principal private residences. The self-assessed charge is set at €200 and liability for it falls, in the main, on owners of rental, holiday and vacant properties.

Under the Act, it is a function of a local authority to collect the Non-Principal Private Residence Charge and late payment fees due to it, and all charges and late payment fees imposed and payable to a local authority are under the care and management of the local authority concerned. In this regard, application of the legislation in particular circumstances is a matter for the relevant local authority. Guidelines have issued to local authorities in relation to the operation of the “care and management” provisions of the Local Government (Charges) Act 2009 and local authorities are expected to implement these guidelines appropriately. 2013 is the last year of operation of the Charge. Outstanding liabilities at end 2013 and resultant late payment penalties will be collected post 2013.

Planning Issues

197. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will ensure that local authorities in considering requests for future planning permissions will take account of the record of builders and developers to deal satisfactorily with pyrite and other breaches of building regulations in their former projects and developments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23405/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O’Sullivan): Section 35 of the Planning and Development Act 2000 provides that planning authorities may apply to the High Court for authorisation to refuse to grant planning permission to a developer who has substantially failed to comply with the conditions of a previous permission. This power was significantly strengthened in the Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006, which effectively reverses the burden of proof in relation to the refusal of planning permission to a developer who has substantially failed to comply with a previous planning permission. Under the amended provisions, the authority may refuse permission in such a case and the developer will have to go to the High Court if he or she wishes to apply to have this decision annulled.

In relation to the building code, I have recently signed into law the Building Control (Amendment) Regulations 2013. The revised regulations will require, *inter alia*,

- the submission of compliance drawings and documentation to local building control authorities;

- an inspection plan to be drawn up and executed during construction by a registered professional (who will be known as the Assigned Certifier); and

- mandatory certificates of compliance to be signed by the designer prior to construction and by the Assigned Certifier and Builder when a building is complete.

I expect that the improved quality of the information submitted to local building control authorities on and from commencement will facilitate them in undertaking a risk based approach to inspection.

My Department is currently in discussions with the Construction Industry Federation, with a view to putting in place a voluntary scheme of registration for builders with the intention of transitioning this to a statutory scheme over time when it is proven to be a quality registration scheme and operating effectively in practice.

Housing Assistance Payments Implementation

198. **Deputy Noel Grealish** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will ensure that the proposed housing assistance payment which will replace rent supplement will continue to be paid while a case is being heard by the Private Residential Tenancies Board, even if a landlord’s termination notice has expired, in view of the fact that it is necessary to have a termination notice in order for the PRTB to hear the case; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23413/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): The details of the proposed Housing Assistance Payment Scheme (HAP) are being developed by my Department in conjunction with the Department of Social Protection, the County and City Managers Association and other relevant bodies through the project Steering Group.

It is intended that the HAP scheme will come under the remit of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004.

Section 86(1) (a) of the Residential Tenancies Act 2004 provides that tenants must continue to pay rent pending the determination of a dispute that has been referred to the Private Residential Tenancies Board.

The Residential Tenancies (Amendment) (No 2) Bill 2012 Bill was published on 19 July 2012 and Second Stage in the Dáil concluded on 24 January 2013. It is proposed to include measures in the Bill during Committee Stage to address the problem of rent arrears and the over-holding of rented properties by tenants during the dispute process. This will allow the issue of non-payment of rent to be addressed promptly and separately to other elements of a tenant-landlord dispute if necessary.

Ministerial Meetings

199. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government the discussion he and his officials had in October 2012 with a delegation from the Council of Europe regarding local government here; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23419/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Hogan): I and relevant officials met a delegation from the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on 4 October 2012. This was part of the periodic monitoring process undertaken by the Congress on the application of the principles in the European Charter of Local Self Government in Member States.

I understand that the delegation also had discussions with a number of other parties including local authority members and officials, Oireachtas Joint Committee members, Supreme and High Court personnel, the Ombudsman, and certain academics specialising in local government matters.

As this visit was prior to the publication of the Action Programme for Effective Local Government, which sets out Government decisions for local government reform, the delegation made a further visit to Ireland on 3 May 2013 to review the position in light of the Action Programme. The delegation again met me, and my Department and certain local government interests, including elected members' representatives.

The Congress delegation and Secretariat have been provided with comprehensive information in relation to the Irish local government system and the local government reform programme and their report is now awaited.

Leader Programmes Expenditure

200. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if he will investigate and clarify the amount paid by Mayo North East LEADER Partnership Ltd and South West Mayo LEADER Partnership Limited to a company (details supplied) for the provision of public relations and consultancy services since 2007; the precise services provided in respect of each contract; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23439/13]

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Phil Ho-

gan): My Department currently contracts a total of 51 Local Development Companies to deliver both the Local Community Development programme (LCDP) and the LEADER elements of the Rural Development Programmes 2007-2013 (RDP). Mayo North East LEADER Partnership Ltd and South West Mayo LEADER Partnership have informed my Department that no payment was made to MOR Public Relations, Galway in the context of the delivery of these programmes.

Local Development Companies contracted to deliver both the LCDP and the LEADER elements of the RDP are private limited companies and as such my Department has no remit with regards to any expenditure incurred by these companies outside of the programmes for which my Department has direct responsibility.

Departmental Expenditure

201. **Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh** asked the Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government if his attention has been drawn to the shortfall in funding for disability adaptations for housing in Dublin City Council which is causing hardship for those with disabilities who are stuck in housing which is not suitable for their needs; is restricting their ability to function further or in the case of an increasing number of patients in hospitals is preventing them from being discharged from acute or rehabilitation hospitals or public funded nursing home beds due to their homes being not suitable; and the steps he will take to address the shortfall as a matter of urgency. [23471/13]

Minister of State at the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government (Deputy Jan O'Sullivan): On 22 February 2013, I announced capital allocations to local authorities under the suite of Grants for Older People and People with a Disability amounting to €42.750 million. This year I allocated local authorities the full amount of their contractual commitments which, in the case of Dublin City Council, amounted to €2,906,500. The balance of the available funding was allocated on the basis of each authority's share of the new applications on hand in January 2013. This brought Dublin City Council's overall allocation to € 4,932,320.

A small capital reserve was set aside to deal with any acute or particular difficulty which might arise in the operation of the schemes over the course of the year. Dublin City Council applied for additional funding from this reserve and was notified of a supplementary allocation of €118,063 on 22 April 2013, bringing the Council's overall allocation for 2013 to €5,050,383.

In the case of extensions and adaptations to the local authority social housing stock, my Department allocates capital funding each year to wards the cost of necessary works to meet the needs of persons with a disability. In 2012, my Department recouped €6.8 million to all local authorities for this purpose, of which some €1.6 million related to expenditure by Dublin City Council.

Garda Remuneration

202. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if new remuneration arrangements for An Garda Síochána will include a specific clause to facilitate greater flexibility for individual gardaí (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23575/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The allocation of resources

and matters relating to transfers are solely for the Garda Commissioner. However, it is proposed that the general issue of remuneration will be considered as part of a review of An Garda Síochána which is included in the proposals emanating from the recent discussions facilitated by the Labour Relations Commission on the Public Service Agreement.

Garda Investigations

203. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the reason no action was taken on a matter (details supplied). [23408/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As I advised the Deputy in my response to his Parliamentary Question dated 1st May 2013, I am informed by the Garda authorities that the incident, which occurred in 1989, was the subject of thorough investigation.

Complaints were also made to the Garda Síochána Complaint Board who further investigated the matter and found no evidence of an offence or breach of discipline on the part of the members concerned.

Property Services Regulatory Authority Remit

204. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality with reference to the new regulations governing livestock marts, the reason marts are required to have a licensed auctioneer as a committee member and as principal officer; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23454/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Property Services Regulatory Authority (PSRA) is responsible for the control and regulation of Property Service Providers (i.e. Auctioneers/Estate Agents, Letting Agents and Management Agents). Under the Property Services (Regulation) Act 2011, all Property Services Providers (including auctioneers in livestock marts) are required to hold a licence from the Authority. This requirement applies to corporate bodies (including companies), partnerships and sole traders, together with their Principal Officers (i.e. Director, Manager, Secretary or other similar officer) and Employees who provide property services, as well as Independent Contractors.

In the case of corporate bodies, such as marts, providing property services, it is necessary for the corporate body itself and for each principal officer and employee of the corporate body, who is involved in the provision of property services, to hold licences from the PSRA. These requirements are set out in the provisions of the Property Services (Regulation) Act 2011 and the PSRA does not have any discretion in relation to the matter.

Garda Transport Provision

205. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if the Divisional Officer in the Dublin North region has made a request to his Department for additional Garda vehicles to be supplied to the Garda R District in the Dublin region as part of the fleet of Garda vehicles that are due to come on stream this year. [23512/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): Decisions in relation to the provision and allocation of Garda vehicles are a matter for the Garda Commissioner, in the light of his identified operational demands and in the light of available resources. I am advised by

the Garda authorities that the requirements of the R District are fully taken into account for the purpose of the allocation of transport resources within the Dublin Metropolitan Region North Division. The Deputy will be aware that an additional €3 million was made available towards the end of last year which enabled the Force to procure a further 171 vehicles. This brought total investment in the Garda fleet in 2012 to €4 million and resulted in a total of 213 new vehicles being procured during the year. I am informed by the Garda authorities that the roll out of the most recently purchased patrol vehicles has been completed.

In addition to the investment provided in 2012, a specific allocation of €5 million has been provided for the purchase and fit-out of Garda transport in the current year. This represents a very considerable financial investment in Garda transport, particularly at a time when the level of funding available across the public sector is severely limited. It is a clear indication of my commitment to ensure that, to the greatest extent possible, An Garda Síochána are provided with sufficient resources to enable them to deliver an effective and efficient policing service.

Garda Equipment

206. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality his plans to provide funding to An Garda Síochána for the reissue of the Uzi submachine gun to armed Garda units; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23513/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): As the Deputy will be aware, the specific arrangements made by An Garda Síochána in relation to firearms are, as operational matters, dealt with by the Garda Commissioner. In that context the Commissioner determines the appropriate measures to be put in place, including the specific firearms to be deployed, without reference to either myself or my Department.

In view of the nature of the functions involved, it would not be appropriate for me to comment on the firearms that are used by Garda personnel. However, I can assure the Deputy that the armed capability of Garda members is kept under on-going review by the Garda authorities.

Crime Statistics

207. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide, in tabular form, the number of convictions secured under section 5 of the Criminal Justice Public Order Act 2003 for each of the past ten years. [23514/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Garda Síochána Act 2005 makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose. I have requested the CSO to provide statistics directly to the Deputy.

Crime Statistics

208. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality if he will provide in tabular form the crime rates in County Kerry for January 2009 to January 2010, January 2010 to January 2011, January 2011 to January 2012 and January 2012 to January 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23530/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The Garda Síochána Act 2005

makes provision for the compilation and publication of crime statistics by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), as the national statistical agency, and the CSO has established a dedicated unit for this purpose. I have requested the CSO to provide statistics directly to the Deputy.

Naturalisation Applications

209. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23584/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy in July, 2012. The application is at an advanced stage of processing and the applicant will be informed of my decision as expeditiously as possible. As well as being a significant event in the life of its recipient, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation as provided for in law is also a major step for the State which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process. Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Status

210. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the entitlement to Stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 7; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23585/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person referred to by the Deputy has permission to be in the State as a Student until 04/06/2013. This person arrived in the State on 18/12/2008 and has no current entitlement to Stamp 4. The person has no pending application with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service. Information on the immigration requirements and conditions for non-nationals studying in Ireland, including the new student pathway, is available on the INIS website www.inis.gov.ie.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Status

211. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the residency

status and or procedure to update Stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23586/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned is a failed asylum applicant. Arising from the refusal of his asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 30 March, 2010, that the then Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of him. He was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the then Minister setting out the reasons why a Deportation Order should not be made against him. In addition, he was notified of his entitlement to apply for subsidiary protection in accordance with the provisions of the European Communities (Eligibility for Protection) Regulations 2006. The person concerned submitted an application for subsidiary protection. When consideration of this application has been completed, the person concerned will be notified in writing of the outcome. In the event that the application for subsidiary protection is refused, the position in the State of the person concerned will then be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted, including those relating to the possible relevance of the Zambrano Judgement to the case of the person concerned, will be considered before a final decision is made. Once a decision has been made, this decision and the consequences of the decision will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

212. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding determination of residency/eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23587/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person referred to by the Deputy was granted permission to remain in the State in 1999 under the arrangements then in place for the non-EEA parents of Irish born children. The permission has been renewed on a regular basis and is currently valid until 29th August, 2015. A valid application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy in July 2012. The application is at an advanced stage of processing and the applicant will be informed of my decision as expeditiously as possible. As well as being a significant event in the life of its recipient, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation as provided for in law is also a major step for the State which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without

the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Status

213. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality further to Parliamentary Question No. 200 of 28 February 2013, (details supplied) if arrangements will be made for the regularisation of their position in line with other family members; if arrangements will be made for update of Stamp 4; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23588/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that having checked with both the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) and Visas Division in INIS, there is no record of the person concerned entering the State in 2007 or applying for a visa to do so. Accordingly, he is without permission to be in the State at present. However, given the unusual family circumstances involved, I intend to seek further details from his aunt as to the manner in which he entered the State and his future plans prior to making a determination on his future status in the State. The Deputy should note that the position in the State of the person concerned is not such as would bring any entitlement to family reunification, a facility which is only available to persons recognised as refugees or with Subsidiary Protection status.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Subsidiary Protection Applications

214. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the progress made to date in the determination of residency status/eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23589/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): The person concerned is a failed asylum applicant. Arising from the refusal of her asylum application, and in accordance with the provisions of Section 3 of the Immigration Act 1999 (as amended), the person concerned was notified, by letter dated 18 August, 2006, that the then Minister proposed to make a Deportation Order in respect of her. She was given the options, to be exercised within 15 working days, of leaving the State voluntarily, of consenting to the making of a Deportation Order or of making representations to the Minister setting out the reasons why a Deportation Order should not be made against her. The person concerned initiated judicial review proceedings in the High Court, challenging the decision of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal in her case. The judicial review proceedings were struck out on 4 July 2008 meaning that the earlier decisions of the Refugee Appeals Tribunal and the then Minister stood. The person concerned submitted an application for subsidiary protection. When consideration of this application has been completed, the person concerned will be notified in writing of the outcome. In the event that the application for subsidiary protection is refused, the position in the State of the person concerned will then be decided by reference to the provisions of Section 3 (6) of the Immigration Act 1999 (as

amended) and Section 5 of the Refugee Act 1996 (as amended) on the prohibition of refoulement. All representations submitted will be considered before a final decision is made. Once a decision has been made, this decision, and the consequences of the decision, will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned. Given that the person concerned has no current right of residency in the State, the issue of an application for naturalisation does not arise at this time.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

215. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding an application for regularisation of long-term residency/eligibility for naturalisation in the case of persons (details supplied) in County Dublin; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23590/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that a valid application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the first person referred to by the Deputy in December, 2011. The application is being processed with a view to establishing whether the applicant meets the statutory conditions for the granting of naturalisation, such as good character and lawful residence, and will be submitted to me for decision as expeditiously as possible. The person referred to currently has permission to remain in the State until 30 April 2015. I am pleased to inform the Deputy that the second person referred to has had her application granted and will be presented with a Certificate of Naturalisation at a citizenship ceremony being held at the Convention Centre, Dublin on 20 May 2013. As well as being a significant event in the life of its recipient, the granting of Irish citizenship through naturalisation as provided for in law is also a major step for the State which confers certain rights and entitlements not only within the State but also at European Union level and it is important that appropriate procedures are in place to preserve the integrity of the process.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Status

216. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to validate an application for long-term residency/naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15 whose joint application with their spouse ceased following their separation; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23591/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person referred to by the Deputy was

approved as the subject of a Family Reunification application on 16 May 2006. I am further informed by INIS that the person concerned does not have an application pending for Long Term Residency or Naturalisation. However, it is open to them to submit an application for Naturalisation if they wish to do so. Comprehensive guidelines on making an application for Naturalisation may be found on the INIS website (www.inis.gov.ie).

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process.

Immigration Status

217. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the procedure to be followed to facilitate regularisation of residency/update of Stamp 4 in the aftermath of the separation of the parents in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15 whose application to renew their Stamp 4 is independent; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23592/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person referred to by the Deputy was approved as the subject of a Family Reunification application on 16 May 2006. I am further informed that the person concerned was granted permission to enter and reside in the State pursuant to Section 18 of the Refugee Act, 1996 (as amended) and is entitled to the rights and privileges specified in Section 3 of the Act for such period as the Refugee remains the holder of a declaration of refugee status, and that the separation of the parents of the person concerned does not affect these entitlements. When granted permission to remain under Family Reunification, the subject of an application must attend to register his/her permission to remain with the Garda National Immigration Bureau. Registration of itself is a matter for An Garda Síochána

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

218. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 15 [23593/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Citizenship Division of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that an application for a certificate of naturalisation was received from the person referred to by the Deputy in July, 2009.

Section 15 of the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act, 1956, as amended, provides that the

Minister may, in his absolute discretion, grant a certificate of naturalisation provided certain statutory conditions are fulfilled. One such condition is that the applicant intends in good faith to continue to reside in the State after naturalisation.

As the person referred to by the Deputy did not confirm on her application form that she intended to reside in the State after naturalisation, one of the Statutory conditions for naturalisation, her application was deemed ineligible. The person concerned was informed of this in a letter dated 27 July 2009.

It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the prescribed statutory requirements.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

219. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding long term residency/determination of eligibility for naturalisation in the case of persons (details supplied) in Dublin 15; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23594/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person concerned was granted temporary permission to remain in the State, on Stamp 4 conditions, on 25th June 2010. This permission was renewed subsequently and is currently valid until 3 January, 2014.

I am informed by staff in Citizenship Division that there is no record of the person referred to by the Deputy having submitted an application for a Certificate of Naturalisation. It is open to any individual to lodge an application for citizenship if and when they are in a position to meet the prescribed statutory requirements.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Immigration Status

220. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding eligibility for updated Stamp 4 in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 3; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23595/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am informed by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person referred to by the Deputy has permission to be in the State as a Student until 09/11/2013. This person arrived in the State on 05/12/2006 and currently has no entitlement to Stamp 4. The person has no pending application

with the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service. Information on the immigration requirements and conditions for non-nationals studying in Ireland, including the new student pathway, is available on the INIS website www.inis.gov.ie.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up to date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from INIS is, in the Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Naturalisation Applications

221. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the position regarding long term residency/eligibility for naturalisation in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare who is married to an Irish national; if their Stamp 4 card, previously submitted to immigration will be returned; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23596/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I am advised by the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) that the person referred to by the Deputy was granted temporary permission to remain in the State under stamp 4 conditions for an initial one year period on 10th June, 2002, on the basis that she was part of a family unit where the parents had been granted residency on the basis of parentage of an Irish citizen child. This permission appears to have been renewed on a regular basis by her local Immigration Officer until March 2010. I am informed that when she attended the registration office of the Garda National Immigration Bureau (GNIB) in May 2010, she was advised to contact my officials in the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS) regarding same. However it appears that the next contact from the person concerned was in March 2012 when she presented to her local Immigration Officer. She was refused registration on this occasion as she has been out of permission since March 2010. The local Immigration Officer advised her to write to INIS outlining her situation prior to renewal of registration. I am informed that she was given this direction by him on 26th August 2012.

I understand that some documentation has since been received from the person concerned by INIS. However, in order to assist in regularising her status in the State, further documentation was requested from her in writing on 13th March 2013. To date no response has been received. On receipt of the documents requested, her case will then be examined by the relevant officials in INIS. Once a decision has been made on her status, this decision and the consequences involved will be conveyed in writing to the person concerned.

I am also informed that the person concerned submitted an application for a Certificate of Naturalisation in August 2005. This application was refused by my predecessor at his absolute discretion. The person's legal representative was notified of the decision and the reason for same by letter dated 31st March 2009. She may re-apply at any time when in a position to satisfy the statutory requirements.

Queries in relation to the status of individual immigration cases may be made directly to the INIS by e-mail using the Oireachtas Mail facility which has been specifically established for this purpose. This service enables up-to-date information on such cases to be obtained without the need to seek information by way of the Parliamentary Questions process. The Deputy may consider using the e-mail service except in cases where the response from the INIS is, in the

Deputy's view, inadequate or too long awaited.

Crime Prevention

222. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps the Garda is taking to reduce crime in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23625/13]

223. **Deputy Dominic Hannigan** asked the Minister for Justice and Equality the steps the Garda is taking to reduce crime in an area (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23626/13]

Minister for Justice and Equality (Deputy Alan Shatter): I propose to take Questions Nos. 222 and 223 together.

I am informed by the Garda authorities that the areas referred to are within the Nobber Garda Sub-District which is part of the Navan Garda District. The area is patrolled regularly by the local uniform crime prevention patrols which are augmented as necessary by resources from the District Headquarters of Navan together with the Divisional Traffic Unit. All crime trends are closely monitored by local Garda management to ensure that resources are deployed across the District both for the prevention and detection of crime.

The Deputy will be aware that the Garda Commissioner has put Operation Fiacla in place in order to address incidents of burglary, aggravated burglaries and related offences throughout the country. Specific burglary operations have been implemented in each Garda region, in support of Operation Fiacla, to target suspected offenders, disrupt their activities and secure their attendance before the courts. Crime prevention operations are in place in the District in question which combine the activities of uniform, plain clothes, traffic and Regional Support personnel in a coordinated manner to ensure checkpoints are carried out in target areas, while searches, arrests and detentions are conducted against all identified targets.

An Garda Síochána also places great emphasis on the importance of the partnership between An Garda Síochána and the community in preventing and detecting crime, and maintaining a safe environment for everyone. In this regard, community support and engagement is facilitated in the area in question through interaction by Gardaí with Community Alert and Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in particular.

Overseas Missions

224. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Defence if further consideration has been given to the deployment of Irish observers to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force in Syria; if deployed, the number that would be sent and the length the deployment would be expected to last; if he will outline Ireland's potential role in the UNDOF; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23540/13]

Minister for Defence (Deputy Alan Shatter): On 14 May 2013, the Government approved the deployment of a number of members of the Permanent Defence Force for service at the headquarters of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) in Syria. The UNDOF Mission was established by the United Nations on 31 May 1974 under United Nations Security Council Resolution 350 (1974) following the agreed disengagement of the Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan Heights in May 1974. Since 1974, the mandate of UNDOF has been

renewed every six months.

The exact date of the deployment of the Irish personnel to UNDOF headquarters is yet to be confirmed. However, it is expected that Irish personnel will deploy into the mission area circa 15 June 2013. The Irish contribution to the mission will comprise a total of three personnel - two officers and one senior Non-commissioned officer - to staff officer appointments in the Information Analysis Cell in the headquarters of the mission at Camp Faouar. Irish personnel will serve tours of duty of twelve months in duration.

UNDOF makes an important contribution to stability in the Middle East and participation by the Defence Forces in this mission will be a tangible demonstration of Ireland's support for the United Nations in the challenging operating conditions it faces in the region.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Payments

225. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will facilitate an early release of Exchequer funds to the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine to allow it to issue a proportion of the disadvantaged area payment to farmers without delay due to the financial crisis caused by the poor weather; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23551/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Mindful of ongoing difficulties, I have decided that a formal request should again be made to the EU Commission seeking agreement to pay an advance from 16 October of the 2013 Single Farm Payment which, being the first day of the new EU financial year is the earliest potential payment date and almost two months ahead of the standard timeline. It will be recalled that my successful approach to Commissioner Ciolos for agreement to making an advance payment of the 2012 Single Farm Payment was prompted by the very wet weather experienced throughout last summer.

My Department will continue to make every effort to ensure that payments under the 2013 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme commence as early as possible in September, while taking into account of the need to adhere to the requirement in the governing EU Regulation, which provides that all eligibility checks must be finalised before full payments can commence.

In light of the difficulties experienced by farmers in sourcing fodder supplies, I announced the allocation of €1 million to fund the Imported Fodder Transport Scheme, which is designed to reduce the cost to farmers of imported forage (hay, silage, haylage) from outside the island of Ireland. In light of the continuing difficulties being experienced, I extended the duration of the scheme to Friday 24 May, a broadening of its scope to include maize silage and a doubling of the budget to €2 million. I am pleased to note that since the introduction of this Scheme that significant quantities of fodder have been imported and are reaching those in most need.

Following the issue of approximately 1,500 AEOS payments valued at €1.6m over the last two weeks, close to a further 600 AEOS payments valued at close to €1.5 million will issue this week. Both AEOS 1 and 2 payments will continue to issue in the weeks ahead as outstanding queries are resolved. This will bring the total paid out in respect of the 2012 application period to just over €40m.

To date approximately 29,200 of the remaining 30,200 REPS 4 participants have been paid a total of €167m in respect of the 2012 application period. An additional €1m will issue this week to a further 200 REPS 4 farmers. I am, of course, keeping the situation under review in light of the ongoing situation.

Suckler Welfare Scheme Payments

226. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if a person (details supplied) in County Cork has been paid all outstanding moneys under the animal welfare recording breeding scheme 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23375/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named registered forty one animals for the 2012 Scheme.

Payment issued in respect of four of these animals on 19 December 2012 and for a further twenty animals on 2 May 2013. In August 2011, applicants were informed of the requirement to notify the details of all measures required under the Scheme within one year from the date of birth of the animal. This requirement was also outlined on each of seven post weaning forms that issued to the person named in 2012. This data was not received for ten of the animals before they reached one year of age and these ten animals are now deemed ineligible for payment. One further animal was not eligible because it was born to a dam under 24 months of age.

The remaining six animals were not born until December 2012 and cannot be considered for payment until all of the prescribed measures under this Scheme have been undertaken and the details notified and found to be in order.

Coillte Teoranta Harvesting Rights Sale

227. **Deputy Billy Timmins** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine his views on correspondence (details supplied) regarding the State sale of Coillte; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23403/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The Government is fully conscious of the concerns that have been raised in relation to the proposed sale of Coillte harvesting rights. The issues raised by interested parties had been identified and considered by NewERA, Coillte, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and my Department as part of the comprehensive analysis undertaken pursuant to the Government's decision that a concession for the harvesting rights to Coillte's forests be considered for sale. The overall analysis is currently being finalised and, as I advised last week, a report on the process to date and a set of recommendations will be considered by the Government shortly.

Sheep Fencing-Mobile Equipment Scheme Applications

228. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when payment will issue for a fencing grant application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23416/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person concerned is an applicant for grant-aid under the TAMS Sheep Fencing/Handling Scheme and has received approval to proceed with the investment works concerned. To date, my Department has no record of having received a payment claim in relation to the application concerned.

Land Parcel Identification System

229. **Deputy Tom Barry** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the details of the cost, requirements and term of the contract for digital mapping. [23452/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): As part of the underpinning of the area based support measures, which deliver some €1.6bn annually to Irish farmers, my Department is required, under relevant EU legislation, to maintain a detailed database of individual land parcels. This is known as the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) which currently records, electronically, some 1.3 million individual parcels and which is required to be kept updated, based in particular on individual claims submitted from farmers and the results of inspection activity carried out by my Department for verification purposes. Because of the database's highly specialist nature, it has been necessary, since the inception of area based direct payments which have and will continue to be critical to the development of the Irish agriculture and food industries, to engage an external contractor to assist in this process. The Department's systems in this critical area must meet demanding EU and national audit requirements.

This contract is awarded on the basis of a competitive tendering process in accordance with standard EU Public Procurement Procedures. The most recent tendering process commenced in December 2012 when my Department posted, on the e-tenders website, a '*Request for Tenders for the provision of Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) Update and Maintenance*'. Following an adjudication process, a contract was awarded to the successful tenderer.

The requirements of the contract can be summarised as follow:

1. Update the LPIS database as requested by applicants under the Single Payment Scheme.
2. Update the LPIS database following annual reviews of land parcels as required under the European Union's Integrated Administrative and Control System, governing the implementation of the Single Payment Scheme and other area related schemes.
3. Update the LPIS database with the results of Ground Eligibility inspections.
4. Carry out an annual Quality Assessment of the LPIS as required under EU legislation.
5. Update the LPIS database as required under the Rural Environment Protection Scheme and the Agri-Environment Options Scheme.
6. Digitising required by the Forest Service.
7. Provide Geographic Information System technical support required by my Department.

It is intended that this contract shall be for a one-year period, with an option to extend, on an annual basis, for a further two years. The estimated total value of the contract is in the region of €1.5m.

Forestry Management

230. **Deputy Luke 'Ming' Flanagan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will provide a copy of the Principles of Sustainability with which Coillte should adhere in order to comply with their commitment to sustainable forest management; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23458/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Coillte Teoranta was established as a private commercial company under the Forestry Act 1988 and

day-to-day operational matters, such as the management of the forest estate, are the responsibility of the company.

Coillte's forests are certified by the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC), under which, I understand, Coillte are required to comply with a number of principles and criteria. The FSC was established in 1993 as an international voluntary non-profit making organisation, to support environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of the world's forests. They developed a set of 10 international principles and criteria (P&C) for responsible forest management. In many countries, these international P&C have been adapted locally and developed into National P&C. The Forest Stewardship Council (Ireland) website contains the Irish FSC standard (May 2012) available for download.

In addition to the requirements associated with FSC certification, Coillte are required to comply with felling licence conditions. All tree felling is regulated by the Forestry Act 1946 and woodland owners are required to comply with best forest practice and environmental guidelines.

Food Labelling

231. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he intends to insist on the fattening country on labels, along with birth country/country of origin for all beef products entering Ireland so that consumers can make ethical choice, in relation to for example, rain forest cleared land. [23461/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Food production and labelling in EU Member States operates in accordance with harmonised rules. Regarding beef, in particular, there are comprehensive regulations governing the identification of bovines and the labelling of their meat. These provisions were introduced in the wake of the BSE crisis to improve traceability.

In general, all fresh, frozen or minced beef marketed in the EU (with the exception of offal) is subject to a mandatory system of origin traceability and origin labelling. The purpose of these rules is to ensure that beef on sale can be traced back to the animal or group of animals from which it came.

There are two elements to the beef labelling regime which apply to all parts of the supply chain; the compulsory system, which requires food business operators to label their beef products (unless cooked or processed) with certain prescribed information up to and including the point of sale to the consumer; and the voluntary system, which covers any other labelling claim that processors or retailers wish to make concerning the origin, characteristics or production methods of the beef they are supplying. The claims made on product labels, marketing material or point of sale notices must be clear and cannot be misleading.

The rules already require that beef labels indicate the country or countries where the animal (or group of animals) from which it was derived was born, reared and slaughtered. Where beef is derived from an animal (or group of animals) born, reared or slaughtered in a single country, this information may be grouped together under the heading 'Origin:' followed by the name of the relevant Member State or third country.

Food Safety Standards Regulation

232. **Deputy Clare Daly** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the regulations dealing with fish, pig, cow and poultry food manufacture, with particular reference to whether cow brains and spinal cord are permitted. [23462/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Detailed EU Regulations relating to food safety, animal by-products (ABP) and TSE govern the production of food of animal origin and the use or disposal of ABP. Specified risk material (SRM), which is classified as a Category 1 or higher risk ABP, includes the tonsils, intestines and mesentery of all bovine animals, the skull including brain and eyes, the spinal cord of bovine animals over 12 months and the vertebral column including dorsal root ganglia of bovine animals over 30 months.

The Regulations provide that SRM should be removed in slaughterhouses, cutting plants or high risk processing plants approved by the competent authority and completely destroyed by means such as rendering in a Category 1 rendering plant to avoid any risk to human or animal health. The SRM or the digestate produced from rendering this material should not be placed on the market to be used in the production of food or feed.

The Regulations prohibit the manufacture of feed for fish, pigs, cows or poultry using material processed from animals of the same species, nor is it permissible to feed protein derived from mammals to ruminants. The inclusion of SRM in animal feedstuff is also prohibited.

Afforestation Programme

233. **Deputy Michael Moynihan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in respect of lands that have some designations under the hen harrier (details supplied) his view regarding this land being planted under the afforestation programme; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23474/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): There are a number of Special Protection Areas (SPA) designated for the protection of the hen harrier where restrictions apply to afforestation and other types of development. Any future afforestation within the SPAs must take into account the results of recent Hen Harrier breeding and distribution surveys, the availability of suitable habitat, existing forest cover, age profile of existing forests, and the effects of other types of developments on hen harrier populations.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) of the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht is in the process of developing a Threat Response Plan (TRP) for the conservation of Hen harriers. Forestry will form a significant element of the plan, particularly in relation to overall forest restructuring. My Department is working with NPWS in the development of the TRP which will determine the circumstances in which afforestation, if any, might be accommodated in Hen harrier SPAs without impacting on the conservation of the species.

Animal Identification Scheme

234. **Deputy Brendan Griffin** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if there is an approved list of suppliers for the bovine identification electronic rumen bolus; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23484/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Council Regulation (EC) No. 1760/2000 /EC requires that all bovines must be identified by two ear

tags (one of which may additionally carry an electronic component if that is what the farmer desires). These regulations do not provide for identification by an electronic rumen bolus. However, farmers are free to use a bolus as a third and unofficial means of identification but the Department has not approved any company to supply such products.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Application Numbers

235. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the number of persons that have been paid under the new agri-environment option scheme 3 out of the applications applied for prior to Christmas 2012; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23528/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): A total of 9,689 applications have been received by my Department under the Agri-environmental Options Scheme. The selection process is almost complete and all applicants will be notified of the outcome very shortly.

In light of the difficulties experienced by farmers in sourcing fodder supplies, I announced the allocation of €1 million to fund the Imported Fodder Transport Scheme, which is designed to reduce the cost to farmers of imported forage (hay, silage, haylage) from outside the island of Ireland. In light of the continuing difficulties being experienced, I extended the duration of the scheme to Friday 24 May, a broadening of its scope to include maize silage and a doubling of the budget to €2 million. I am pleased to note that since the introduction of this Scheme that significant quantities of fodder have been imported and are reaching those in most need.

Common Fisheries Policy Negotiations

236. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the outcome of discussions at the 13-14 May meeting of the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council regarding the Common Fisheries Policy; if political agreement has been reached on a final compromise package to enable conclusion of negotiations with the European Parliament and the European Commission as part of the trilogue on CFP Reform during the Irish Presidency; when he expects that co-decision on this matter will be complete; if he expects it will be concluded during the Irish Presidency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23543/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I am pleased to report that after some 36 hours of negotiations over Tuesday and Wednesday of this week 14th – 15th May, we have now secured a new mandate from EU Fisheries Ministers to enter final negotiations with the European Parliament on a reformed Common Fisheries Policy. This represents a major breakthrough in the negotiations and represents a considerable success for Ireland's Presidency of the EU.

The new position drafted by the Council of Ministers is based on a revised 200 page compromise legal text which I presented to Fisheries Ministers early on Wednesday morning and I greatly welcome the support received from my EU Ministerial colleagues. This agreement follows very difficult and complex negotiations and amounts to a significant step forward on behalf of EU Fisheries Ministers. It enables further crucial negotiations with the European Parliament to take place which will hopefully lead to an agreed package of significant reforms being agreed in the coming weeks. This decision by the Council is a major conciliatory step in the direction of the European Parliament's own position on the reforms and should hopefully pave the way for successful conclusion of the complex inter-institutional negotiations on the

reform. It is evidence of the importance placed by Fisheries Ministers on ensuring that this radical package of measures is finally agreed.

The Irish Presidency has prioritised securing CFP reform before the end of its term and three-way talks (trilogues) between the Council, European Parliament and Commission will now continue with the aim of achieving that goal on the basis of this new position drafted by the Council of Ministers. The Council has recognised the practical challenges for fishermen and the potential socio-economic impacts in coastal communities during the negotiations over the past number of months. I believe that the historical package agreed with the Council of Ministers this week will prepare the way for a European wide discards ban, facilitate more sustainable fishing levels in addition to appropriate management of fleet capacity and a lead to a workable regionalisation policy. It will provide the framework for the long term sustainability of fish stocks around our shores, the continued economic viability of our fishing fleet and fish processing while supporting the communities that depend on a vibrant fishing industry. The package agreed this week will allow us to rebuild fish stocks in European waters and will allow for setting TACs and quotas to reflect catches when a landing obligation is introduced on the basis that for the first and subsequent years, discarding of that stock no longer be allowed. In the longer term as fish stocks reach and are maintained at healthy levels, it will support increased fishing opportunities for our fishermen.

It is important to emphasise that we are under no illusions as to the scale of the final challenge facing us in securing agreement with the European Parliament. The strong compromise mandate given to me this week however places a responsibility on our co-legislators in the European Parliament to show reciprocal flexibility to facilitate a successful conclusion on the Common Fisheries Policy reforms, which is the objective of both institutions. I remain cautiously optimistic that final agreement can be secured by the end of the Irish Presidency.

Common Agricultural Policy Negotiations

237. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the outcome of discussions at the 13-14 May meeting of the EU Agriculture and Fisheries Council regarding the Common Agricultural Policy as part of the trilogue with the European Parliament and European Commission on CAP Reform during the Irish Presidency; when he expects that co-decision on this matter will be complete; if he expects it will be concluded during the Irish Presidency; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23544/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): I used the opportunity of this week's Council of EU Agriculture Ministers to bring Member State colleagues up to date with the progress of trilogue discussions with the Commission and the European Parliament on reform of the CAP. I outlined the positive and constructive nature of the negotiations between the three institutions, with good progress made on a number of issues across all four CAP reform dossiers. However, I drew Ministers' attention to the fact that, notwithstanding this forward movement, the three institutions hold quite different views in a number of areas. These will require political input to resolve if the reform package is to be agreed by the end of June.

We had a discussion on some of the issues that have already presented themselves as politically sensitive in the course of the trilogue discussions. The first of these relates to the definition of 'active farmer', and particularly the concept of a 'negative list' of entities which would not be considered active farmers and would therefore not receive direct payments under the reformed CAP. Member States want such a negative list to be a voluntary provision, while the European Parliament would prefer it to be mandatory.

The second issue relates to the proposed young farmers' scheme. Again, the discussion focused on the question of whether this scheme should be mandatory or voluntary for Member States. The Council's view is that the scheme should be voluntary, while the Parliament prefers a mandatory approach. Similarly, on the small farmers' scheme, although the Council and Parliament agree that the scheme should be voluntary for Member States, the discussion focused on whether a change proposed by the Commission would allow it to become a mandatory scheme for all Member States, which the Commission would strongly prefer.

I was pleased with the exchanges on all three issues. Member States had been asked to consider how an agreement with the Parliament and Commission might be achieved and I noted a broad sense of flexibility and openness from Member States.

The exchanges at Council represent the beginning of the final phase of negotiations and we are all conscious of the need for reasonable compromise if we are to get a deal agreed by the end of June. That requires movement from all three institutions and not just from the Council. I do not underestimate the efforts that will be required by all three institutions if we are to achieve our target but I am satisfied, based on progress to date, that we are on track to achieve political agreement between the three institutions on reform of the CAP by the end of June.

Single Payment Scheme Administration

238. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine if he will extend the closing date for single farm payment applications in view of the impact the current weather conditions are having on normal farm practices and the decision by his Department not to allow applications to be accepted in local departmental offices; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23550/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under the governing EU Regulations, which are directly applicable in the State, the latest date for receipt of applications under the Single Payment Scheme is 15 May; therefore, I do not have any latitude available to me to extend this date.

While the level of applications in respect of the 2013 Scheme received by midnight last night has yet to be definitely tallied, it is clear that the vast majority of applications were received by my Department on time. A feature of the 2013 campaign is the record number of applications lodged via iNet, my Department's on-line application facility.

Also, in order to improve its service to farmers, it was decided to formally acknowledge – either by text message or by post – all SPS application forms received in 2013. This will assist those farmers, who may have forgotten to submit their application and who otherwise would not be conscious of this and who can still avail of late application arrangements for up to 25 days after the standard closing date, with a sliding scale of penalties; details of these are set out in the Terms and Conditions sent to all applicants and also available on my Department's website.

However, in order to be in a position to carry out this process, it was necessary to provide that 2013 SPS forms together with entitlement-related applications should be submitted directly to the Department's Single Payment Unit in Portlaoise, where extended opening hours operated in recent days to facilitate applicants.

Disadvantaged Areas Scheme Eligibility

239. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason an area based payment has not yet been paid to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; if they are entitled to appeal this decision; if they are eligible to apply for the area based payment in 2013; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23560/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): Under 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme, there are two criteria to be satisfied in relation to equines. Firstly, the holding itself must meet the definition of an Equine Breeding Enterprise and secondly, horses, in order to be taken into account for stocking density purposes, must be aged one to five years and, where older, must be a breeding mare for the purposes of the Scheme.

While the person named submitted nine equine passports, none was in respect of a breeding mare which foaled in 2009, 2010 or 2011. Therefore, as the Terms and Condition of the 2012 Disadvantaged Areas Scheme have not been satisfied, no payment is due for the year in question.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

240. **Deputy Éamon Ó Cuív** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine when an agri-environment option scheme 2 payment will issue to a person (details supplied) in County Galway; the reason for the delay in payment; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23561/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person named was approved for participation in the 2011 Agri-Environment Options Scheme with effect from 1st September 2011 and has received 75% payment totalling €849.93 in respect of 2011.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme, a comprehensive administrative check of all applications, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. The person named also was selected for a ground inspection which took place on 8th May 2012. During this inspection, areas of non-compliance with the terms and condition of the scheme were noted in relation to the Natura option which resulted in a penalty being imposed. The person named was informed of the nature of the penalty and the appeal options and as no appeal has been received, the application has been processed for payment on the basis of the inspection findings and the balancing 25% payment (net of penalty) will issue shortly.

Payments in respect of the 2012 Scheme year are subject to a similar administrative checking process which includes verification of capital investments through checks on receipts. These checks have now been completed and following the payment for 2011, the payment in respect of 2012 will be finalised.

Agri-Environment Options Scheme Payments

241. **Deputy Patrick O'Donovan** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason there has been a continued delay with the issuance of agri-environment option scheme payment in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Wexford; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23564/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The person

named was approved for participation in the 2011 Agri-Environment Options Scheme with effect from 1st September 2011.

Under the EU Regulations governing the Scheme, a comprehensive administrative check of all applications, including cross-checks with the Land Parcel Identification System, must be completed before any payment can issue. The person named was also selected for a ground inspection which took place on 11th May 2012. During this inspection, areas of non-compliance with the terms and condition of the scheme were noted in relation to the Planting of New Hedgerow and Tree Planting – Standard options which resulted in a penalty of 20% being imposed. The person named was informed of the nature of the penalty and the appeal option and as no appeal has been received, the application has been processed for payment on the basis of the inspection findings and payment (net of penalty) in respect of 2011 will issue shortly.

Payments in respect of the 2012 Scheme year are subject to a similar administrative checking process. Following payment for the 2011 scheme year, the 2012 application will be finalised.

Milk Quota Applications

242. **Deputy Dara Murphy** asked the Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine the reason a person (details supplied) in County Cork was unable to purchase milk quota in 2011 when they were under 35 years of age; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23576/13]

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Simon Coveney): The named person was one of more than 200 farmers who applied under the Category of ‘brand new applicants’ to this Department’s 2011 New Entrants to Dairying Scheme. Each year’s Scheme involves, within this Category, the allocation of 10 million litres of milk quota to 50 applicants who previously were not involved in milk production or did not hold a milk quota and whose application and business plan, in the opinion of an independent assessment panel, best demonstrated evidence of a viable and sustainable enterprise going forward.

The assessment panel, having completed its examination of the 2011 applications, was of the view that the named person’s application and business plan, when compared with other applications received in the same Category, did not achieve a sufficiently high standard for inclusion in the list submitted for approval.

Youth Services

243. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the level of Exchequer funding the Foróige organisation has received in Waterford City and county in each of the past five years. [23490/13]

244. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the number of full and part-time Foróige staff employed in Waterford each year over the past five years; and the total staff hours involved per year. [23491/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): I propose to take Questions Nos. 243 and 244 together.

The information requested by the Deputy has been sought and I will write directly to the Deputy in the coming days.

Youth Services

245. **Deputy John Deasy** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs the total Exchequer funding allocated to Foróige nationally in each of the past five years; and the number of Foróige groups that received funding, by county, in each of those years. [23492/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The information requested by the Deputy has been sought and I will write directly to the Deputy in the coming days.

Child Detention Centres

246. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs her views on recent media reports that there is a lack of space in children's detention centres, particularly that a unit in one of the centres cannot be used due to staffing issues; if she will ensure that all spaces in such centres are made available or that alternative residential arrangements can be made for children at risk of harming themselves or others who appear before the courts. [23519/13]

Minister for Children and Youth Affairs (Deputy Frances Fitzgerald): The current lack of bed spaces in the Children Detention Schools, at Oberstown, County Dublin has been caused by a recent increase in the number of young people being referred by the Courts, compared to the trend over the past few years. This has put severe pressure on the number of bed spaces available in the Children Detention Schools.

I am considering all options to resolve the matter and my Department is working closely with the Board of Management of the detention schools to resolve the staffing issues which have delayed the opening of an 8 bed unit in Trinity House School.

The Irish Youth Justice Service of my Department operates a bed management system, on a 24 hour basis and will continue to ensure that the courts are notified of beds as they become available.

Following extensive conciliation and staff consultation facilitated by the Labour Relations Commission, a new cross campus roster which provided for flexibility in the deployment of staff across the campus came into operation with effect from 25 February 2013. This replaced rostering arrangements which had been in place for over 30 years and is at the early stages of its implementation. However, staff absenteeism has meant that it has not been possible to reopen an 8 bed unit in Trinity House School, which when open will provide additional capacity to the courts.

An extensive audit of the new rostering arrangements is currently underway and the efficiency and effectiveness of these new arrangements will be reviewed.

I assumed legal responsibility for the Children Detention Schools in Oberstown on 1 January 2012. On 2 April 2012, I announced a capital investment package for the Oberstown Children Detention schools project in Lusk, Co Dublin. This project is on target and construction is due to start in July 2013 and 3 new units will be completed by mid 2014. Tenders for the new development were received on 3 May 2013 and the evaluation of tenders received will be carried out by the Office of Public Works over the coming weeks.

The Government remains fully committed to ending the use of St Patrick's Institution for the detention of children by developing the required facilities on the Oberstown campus.

With effect from 1 May 2012, I also announced the ending of the practice of detaining 16 year old boys in St Patrick's Institution through using existing capacity that was available on the Oberstown children detention school campus. Since July 2012 there have been no 16 year old boys detained in St Patrick's Institution. The numbers being detained in Oberstown have, however, increased significantly.

I am satisfied that the decision to have 16 year old boys detained in the detention schools and end the practice of sending them to St. Patrick's Institution was the correct one and fulfils Government and international imperatives to end the imprisonment of children. This decision was taken following detailed consideration of patterns of remands and committals of children over the previous 2 years.

Alcohol Pricing

247. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Health his views on the recent ruling by the Scottish Supreme Court in favour of the legality of the Scottish Government's plans to introduce minimum alcohol pricing; his views on the implications of this judgement from an Irish perspective; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23441/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I welcome this decision and it is positive for our own proposals for a minimum unit pricing policy.

I am pleased to inform the Deputy that real and tangible proposals are currently being finalised on foot of the recommendations in the National Substance Misuse Strategy report. These proposals cover all of the areas mentioned in the report, including legislation on minimum unit pricing which is about setting a statutory floor price per gram of alcohol.

The Cabinet Committee on Social Policy has considered these proposals and I intend to bring forward specific proposals for consideration by Government as soon as possible.

In the meantime, work on developing a framework for the necessary Department of Health legislation is continuing. For example, in conjunction with Northern Ireland, a health impact assessment is being commissioned as part of the process of developing a legislative basis for minimum unit pricing. The health impact assessment will study the impact of different minimum prices on a range of areas such as health, crime and likely economic impact.

Vaccination Programme

248. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if SOUND the organization that represents sufferers of the unique narcolepsy disorder will have an input to any committee which plans for the future care of their members; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23480/13]

270. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether access to international expertise should be made available to SOUND, the organisation that represents Sufferers Of the Unique Narcolepsy Disorder and his Department and the Health Service Executive; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23533/13]

272. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether sufferers from Narcolepsy should have access to new drug treatments; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23538/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 248, 270 and 272 together.

My priority in this area, is to ensure that those affected by narcolepsy, with symptom onset post pandemic vaccination are provided with a range of services and supports to meet their health needs. The Health Service Executive has responsibility for health service delivery and at my request the HSE developed a range of appropriate services and supports to address the needs of this group. Together, the HSE and the Department of Education and Skills provide a very comprehensive range of services to those affected.

Multi-disciplinary assessments are ongoing, all care plans are individualised, based on clinical assessment, assessment by allied health care professionals and educational assessment. This includes input from international expert sleep consultants based in Ireland and any drug therapies as clinically recommended in the individual case. The Health Service Executive advocacy unit is in regular contact with the support group SOUND. Through regional co-ordinators the HSE also has frequent contact with individual members of SOUND.

Treatments and individual medical needs for those diagnosed with narcolepsy may change over time. Every possible effort is being made to provide ongoing individualised treatments, supports and services to those affected by narcolepsy following pandemic vaccination.

Vaccination Programme

249. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if there will be compensation for chronic illness as a result of the vaccine damage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23482/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): My Department is currently examining the recommendations of the Vaccine Damage Steering Group. However, this issue is complex and needs to be considered in the wider context of how best to address the long term health and social needs of people who may have experienced adverse outcomes from other health services.

Health Services Expenditure

250. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide in tabular form on a county basis, the way the €35 million allocated for additional staff in mental health services in Budget 2013 was spent; the locations at which the positions were created; the amount of additional posts that were created; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23376/13]

251. **Deputy Pearse Doherty** asked the Minister for Health if he will outline the way the extra allocation of €35 million for mental health services in Budget 2013 has benefitted service providers and users; if he is satisfied that the allocation has been utilised to the maximum extent possible to increase the level of frontline mental health services available to the public; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23377/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 250 and 251 together.

An additional €35m was allocated in Budget 2013 for the continued development of our mental health services across a range of headings, including the further development of forensics and community mental health teams for adults, children, older persons and mental health intellectual disability 477 posts have been approved to implement these measures. Discussions

took place within the HSE, and in consultation with the Department of Health, to finalise the allocation of these resources and commence recruitment. In March, each of the four HSE regions were asked to submit a business case against each of the identified objectives detailing how the funding is to be spent and the type and number of WTE to be recruited.

Approval has issued to two of the Regions, HSE Dublin North East and HSE South and it is expected that approval will issue to the remaining two HSE Regions shortly. When the Approval Letters issue, the Regional Directors of Operations will ensure that the necessary paperwork is submitted to the HSE National Recruitment Service and the recruitment process will commence. Until this process is completed it is not possible to give a breakdown of new posts by county. I have been assured by the HSE that the recruitment process for the new posts being funded in 2013, and any outstanding posts from the 414 approved in 2012, is being given priority within the HSE.

Hospital Services

252. **Deputy Finian McGrath** asked the Minister for Health if he will provide an update on supports for organ transplants at Beaumont Hospital, Dublin 9 and the issue of unavailable theatre space and infestation of *Aspergillus* fungus on key wards. [23379/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the particular queries raised by the Deputy, as these are service matters, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Medicinal Products Supply

253. **Deputy Joe McHugh** asked the Minister for Health his views on the decision by the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics not to recommend reimbursement for Pirfenidone to patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis; if he will engage with the Irish Lung Fibrosis Association; if he will review a submission (details supplied); and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23381/13]

264. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health if he will expedite without delay in providing Pirfenidone to patients who are suffering from idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis (details supplied) in County Donegal; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23495/13]

265. **Deputy Charlie McConalogue** asked the Minister for Health when a decision will be made by the Health Service Executive on the funding of pirfenidone in order for the drug to be provided to patients; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23496/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): I propose to take Questions Nos. 253, 264 and 265 together.

The HSE has received an application for the inclusion of pirfenidone in the GMS and community drugs schemes. The application is being considered in line with the procedures and timescales agreed last year by the Department of Health and the HSE with the Irish Pharmaceutical Healthcare Association (IPHA) for the assessment of new medicines. In accordance with these procedures, the National Centre for Pharmacoeconomics (NCPE) conducted a pharmacoeconomic evaluation of pirfenidone and concluded that, at the submitted price, pirfenidone is not cost-effective for the treatment of patients with mild to moderate idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis.

The report is available on the NCPE's website (www.ncpe.ie).

The NCPE report is an important input to assist decision making and informs further discussions between the HSE and the manufacturer of the drug. The HSE is currently in negotiations with the manufacturers of pifrenidone and therefore it would not be appropriate to comment further while these negotiations are ongoing. The HSE assessment process is intended to arrive at a decision on the funding of pifrenidone that is clinically appropriate, fair, consistent and sustainable. The HSE understands that patients and clinicians are very anxious that a decision be made as soon as possible.

Medical Products

254. **Deputy Jack Wall** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for specialised bandages and medication under the medical hardship in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23414/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the HSE for attention and direct reply to the Deputy.

Ambulance Service Provision

255. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health if he will outline the reason that no ambulance was available in Midleton, County Cork, on 6 May 2013 to respond to a seriously injured toddler who fell from a balcony and died later the same week; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23427/13]

258. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is acceptable that members of the public who dial 999 are informed that no ambulance is available, and that they are then advised to organise their own transport and take a seriously ill child to South Doc and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23430/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): I propose to take Questions Nos. 255 and 258 together.

Firstly, I would like to extend my sympathies to the family of the deceased child and to all those involved. The death of a child in any circumstances is a tragedy for all concerned. The incident has been referred to the HSE's Serious Incident Management Team. In line with HSE incident review methodology, an incident review has been commissioned into the manner in which an emergency 999/112 call received at 14.00 hours on 6 May 2013 was managed. A preliminary report has been requested as a matter of urgency and this will be followed by a full report. The NAS has appointed a Liaison Officer to the family to keep them informed of progress and the outcome of the review. It would be inappropriate to make any further comment, pending the outcome of the review.

Ambulance Service Provision

256. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is acceptable that in a recent incident in Midleton, County Cork, when a seriously ill child was being transported to Cork University Hospital by ambulance, a fully qualified and trained paramedic drove while a very inexperienced trainee paramedic attended to the ill child; and if he will make

a statement on the matter. [23428/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): As this is a service matter this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Ambulance Service Response Times

257. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health his views on whether it is acceptable that a badly injured young person who was assaulted in Youghal town centre, County Cork, during the May bank holiday had to wait more than fifty minutes for an ambulance to take him to hospital; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23429/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The National Ambulance Service is not a static service. The NAS deploys its emergency resources in a dynamic manner and works on an area and national, rather than a local, basis. The dynamic deployment of ambulance resources ensures that the nearest appropriate resource within a region is mobilised to an incident. For dynamic deployment of emergency resources within a region to be effective, those resources must be available to be used as efficiently as possible. Following a referral to the Labour Court under the Public Service Agreement, the NAS is currently progressing a number of efficiencies arising from the Court's ruling, including more efficient rostering and the removal of overtime built in to rosters. New rosters are now in place, including in the greater Dublin area, and are operating successfully.

The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) has developed key performance indicators (KPIs) for pre-hospital emergency care, which classify 999 emergency calls by clinical status. Clinical Status 1 (Echo) calls involve life-threatening emergencies of cardiac or respiratory origin, while Clinical Status 1 (Delta) calls involve life-threatening emergencies other than cardiac or respiratory. The target times for responding to Echo and Delta calls are 7 minutes 59 seconds by a first responder (a person trained in minimum basic life support and use of a defibrillator) and 18 minutes 59 seconds for a patient-carrying vehicle. With effect from January 2012, HIQA set the standard at 75% within the target time for first responders and a target has been set at 80% within the target time for patient-carrying vehicles.

The NAS has been taking a number of steps to improve emergency responses. These include development of a Performance Improvement Action Plan, an Intermediate Care Service, the national control centre reconfiguration project and a trial emergency aeromedical service.

In light of the above, and following a review of the validity of time-based KPIs, it is considered, in line with international views, that clinical outcomes would be more appropriate as performance indicators. Accordingly, work has begun on their development. I also welcome the fact that use of clinical indicators will enable a focus on Clinical Status 1 (Echo and Delta) calls. In relation to the specific query raised by the Deputy, I have asked the HSE to reply directly to the Deputy.

Question No. 258 answered with Question No. 255.

Ambulance Service Provision

259. **Deputy Sandra McLellan** asked the Minister for Health his views on the restructuring of the National Ambulance Service; if this restructuring has delivered a better and more reliable service to persons in towns across Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter.

[23431/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): A significant reform programme has been underway in recent years in pre-hospital care services, to ensure a clinically driven, nationally co-ordinated system, supported by improved technology. The programme involves a number of measures, including the Performance Improvement Action Plan, development of the intermediate care service, the trial emergency aeromedical service (EAS), and the NAS Control Centre Reconfiguration Project. In particular, the National Ambulance Service (NAS) is developing staff clinical skills in line with the development of paramedic professional qualifications by the Pre-Hospital Emergency Care Council.

The NAS is a forward-looking service. It deploys its emergency resources in a dynamic manner and on an area and national, rather than a local, basis. It has been, and still is, undergoing major transformation, including in terms of clinical skills and work practices, application of technology and modernisation of management and infrastructure. Many of these initiatives are still in train and I am confident that they will result in the improvements in the treatment available in pre-hospital care to seriously ill and injured patients.

Nursing Home Services

260. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health his plans to invest in and upgrade facilities in five community nursing homes to meet the Health Information and Quality Authority standards post 2015; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23457/13]

261. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health in view of our growing ageing population, the provision for places in community nursing homes in County Mayo that will be made; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23463/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): I propose to take Questions Nos. 260 and 261 together.

As these are service matters they have been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Medical Card Applications

262. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding a medical card application in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Kerry; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23477/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible.

The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently reissued to Oireachtas members.

Hospital Closures

263. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Health the reason Cherry Ward in James Connolly Hospital, Blanchardstown, Dublin 15 has been closed from 3 of May 2013 [23485/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Questions Nos. 264 and 265 answered with Question No. 253.

Professional Qualifications

266. **Deputy Denis Naughten** asked the Minister for Health if EuroPsy, the European standard of education and professional training in psychology set by the European Federation of Psychologists' Associations is recognised here; if he will outline the way an EU psychologist accesses this recognition; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23497/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): The Minister for Health is the Competent Authority for the recognition under Directive 2005/36/EC, of non-Irish professional qualifications of certain categories of health and social care professions for the purpose of recruitment to the publicly funded health sector in Ireland.

Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications, applies to all EEA nationals wishing to practise a regulated profession in an EU Member State other than that in which they obtained their professional qualifications, on either a self-employed or employed basis. Its intention is to make it easier for certain professionals to practise their professions in European countries other than their own but due safeguards are provided in the assessment of the qualifications for public health and safety and consumer protection. In certain circumstances, non-EEA nationals who are legally resident in Ireland can benefit from the provisions of the Directive.

For the purpose of the Directive, a regulated profession is defined as a professional activity access to which is subject, directly or indirectly, by virtue of legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions to the possession of specific professional qualifications. Where statutory registration does not exist for a profession in Ireland, as is the case with Psychology at present, non-Irish qualifications are assessed for their equivalence to the Irish entry-level qualifications required to work in the public health sector.

The Directive provides for mutual recognition of qualifications for certain professions. In the case of the health and social care professions, the Directive does not provide for automatic recognition of professional qualifications obtained in another Member State; it provides for an assessment, on a case-by-case basis, of the qualifications of an applicant against those required to practise in the host member state. If the activities covered by the profession in the home and the host member state are not comparable but deficits in the qualifications are identified, subsequent post-qualification professional experience of the applicant must be considered. If deficits still remain, the host Member State must offer an applicant a compensation measure, a choice of completing an adaptation period or taking an aptitude test.

EuroPsy the European standard of education and professional training in psychology set by the European Federation of Psychologists' Association can form part of an individual's application for assessment of qualification for equivalence to the Irish entry-level qualification required to work as a psychologist in the public health sector.

Mental Health Services Provision

267. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health when the acute mental health admissions unit in Beaumont Hospital will be fully operational. [23515/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter this question has been referred to the HSE for direct reply.

Health Services Issues

268. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Health if the Health Service Executive has secured the rights to the National Health Service/PICKER acute hospital and maternity patient in-patient survey tools and if the PICKER tool will now be used by the Health Service Executive; and the reason for the decision to use this tool instead of continuing to rely on information gathered by independent patient organisations such as the Irish Society for Quality and Safety in Healthcare [23518/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Discussions in relation to the funding of the Irish Society for Quality and Safety in Healthcare (ISQSH) are proper to the Health Service Executive (HSE), as is appropriate to its holding of the Health Vote.

I have arranged to have the Deputy's questions referred to the HSE for attention and a more detailed response.

Medical Card Eligibility

269. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding free general practitioner visit cards; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23532/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Government is committed to introducing, on a phased basis, a universal GP service without fees within its first term of office, as set out in the Programme for Government and the Future Health strategy framework. This policy constitutes a fundamental element in the Government's health reform programme. There has been no change to the Government's over-arching commitment to this goal. This Government is the first in the history of this State to have committed itself to implementing a universal GP service for the entire population.

Having examined the progress made in the universal GP care plan, it became clear that the legal and administrative framework required to provide a robust basis for eligibility for a GP service based on having a particular medical condition is likely to be overly complex and bureaucratic for a short-term arrangement. Relatively complex primary legislation would be required in order to provide a GP service to a person on the basis of their having a particular illness. The assessment system for such an approach would have to be robust, objective and auditable in order to have the confidence of this House as well as the general public. This legislation would have to address how a person could be certified as having such an illness, and who could do this, and how to select the diagnostic basis for medical conditions. As well as primary legislation, there would be a need for secondary legislation to give full effect to this approach for each condition. While it would not be impossible to achieve this, it would take several months more to finalise the primary legislation, followed then by the preparation of statutory instruments. In my view, this would entail putting in place a cumbersome legal and administrative infrastructure to deal with what is only a temporary first phase on the way to universal GP

service to the entire population.

The Cabinet Committee on Health has discussed the issues relating to the delay in the initial step of the roll-out of the universal GP service. In doing so, it has considered the importance of weighing the balance between, on the one hand, resolving the legal issues but with a further delay and, on the other hand, with the need to bring forward an important Programme for Government commitment with the minimum of further delay.

No decision has been taken by the Cabinet Committee or by Government on changing the first step of the plan to extend GP care without fees to persons with chronic illnesses. Instead, it has been agreed that we should prepare and set out a number of alternative options with regard to the phased implementation of a universal GP service without fees. Minister Reilly and I expect to report back to the Cabinet Committee in the near future. As part of this work, consideration will be given to the approaches, timing and financial implications of the phased implementation this universal health service.

The Government has already made clear its commitment to delivering on the implementation of a GP service for the entire population by providing additional financial resources in the two most recent Budgets. The HSE Vote now contains funding of €30 million for this year for an initial phase of the provision of GP services as part of this Programme for Government commitment.

To conclude, far from abandoning its commitment to universal GP care, this Government is determined to expedite the implementation of a national GP service for the entire population, something to which no previous Government has ever aspired.

Question No. 270 answered with Question No. 248.

Medical Card Eligibility

271. **Deputy Michael Healy-Rae** asked the Minister for Health if he will issue a special services medical cards to cover all medical treatments, medications, general practitioner and consultant visits in respect of persons suffering from Narcolepsy disorder; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23536/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): Under the provisions of the Health Act 1970, eligibility for health services in Ireland is based primarily on residency and means. Medical cards are not awarded to any particular group of patients on the basis of a specific medical condition.

Notwithstanding, the Health Service Executive has, at my request, developed a range of appropriate services and supports to address the needs of children/adolescents affected by narcolepsy with symptom onset post pandemic vaccination. With the Department of Education and Skills, the HSE provides a very comprehensive range of services and supports to those affected. These supports and services include access to rapid diagnosis, clear treatment pathways, temporary medical cards and reimbursement of expenses incurred.

Question No. 272 answered with Question No. 248.

Infectious Diseases Incidence

273. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Health if his Department has been in

contact with the World Health Organisation regarding a new coronavirus similar to that of the severe acute respiratory syndrome that broke out in Asia ten years ago; his views on whether this new virus which already has seen one diagnosis in France could spread here; the preventative measures he is taking to ensure that this virus does not spread to Ireland; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23547/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In September 2012, my Department was notified via the European Early Warning and Response System (EWRS) of a novel coronavirus (nCoV) in a patient in a Qatar who was subsequently transferred to a hospital in the UK. The UK also informed the European Centre for Disease Control (ECDC) and notified the WHO under the International Health Regulations. From September 2012 to date, the WHO has been informed of a global total of 34 laboratory confirmed cases of human infection with nCoV, including 18 deaths. There have been no cases in Ireland to date.

Here in Ireland, the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HPSC) has issued guidance to hospitals, GP's and Directors of Public Health concerning the management of patients who present with severe respiratory symptoms and a history of travel to the Middle East. The HPSC recommends:

- Continued surveillance for severe acute respiratory infections (SARI) and to carefully review any unusual patterns.

- Testing for nCoV should be considered in patients with unexplained pneumonias, or in patients with unexplained severe, progressive illness or complicated respiratory illness not responding to treatment, particularly in persons travelling from or resident in areas of the world known to be affected.

- Specimens from patients' lower respiratory tracts should be obtained for diagnosis where possible.

- Clinicians are reminded that nCoV infection should be considered even with atypical signs and symptoms in patients who are significantly immunocompromised.

- Any clusters of SARI in healthcare workers should be thoroughly investigated.

- New cases and clusters of nCoV should be immediately reported to local Departments of Public Health.

The HPSC has issued guidance documentation on surveillance for nCoV, the investigation and management of suspected or confirmed cases, infection prevention and control and the submission on samples to the National Virus Reference Laboratory (NVRL) for investigation. The NVRL is co-ordinating any diagnostic investigations required. It should be noted that all primary cases of nCoV in Europe have been associated with travel in the Middle East. Person to person transmission has only occurred in a very small number of people who have had prolonged contact with infected people. At present there are no restrictions on travel to any areas in the Middle East and screening of travellers from those areas is not recommended.

Further information, including copies of the guidance documentation, can be found on the HPSC website - www.hpsc.ie/hpsc/A-Z/Respiratory/CoronavirusInfections. I can assure the Deputy that the situation continues to be monitored closely.

Medical Card Applications

274. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding an application for a medical card in respect of a person (details supplied) in County Mayo; if he will expedite this application; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23556/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently reissued to Oireachtas members.

Hospital Services

275. **Deputy Joanna Tuffy** asked the Minister for Health his views on the phlebotomy services at Tallaght hospital, Dublin 24 (details supplied); if he if will consider instructing hospitals to operate a dedicated phlebotomy hotline service for blood test appointments with a free telephone number; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23567/13]

Minister for Health (Deputy James Reilly): In relation to the particular query raised by the Deputy, as this is a service matter, I have asked the Health Service Executive to respond directly to the Deputy in this matter.

Medical Card Applications

276. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23579/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently reissued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Applications

277. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health if and when a medical card will issue in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23580/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently reissued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Eligibility

278. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the position regarding the determination of eligibility for a medical card in the case of a person (details supplied) in County Kildare; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23581/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The Health Service Executive has been asked to examine this matter and to reply to the Deputy as soon as possible. The Health Service Executive operates the General Medical Services scheme, which includes medical cards and GP visit cards, under the Health Act 1970, as amended. It has established a dedicated contact service for members of the Oireachtas specifically for queries relating to medical cards and GP visit cards, which the Deputy may wish to use for an earlier response. Contact information has recently reissued to Oireachtas members.

Medical Card Eligibility

279. **Deputy Bernard J. Durkan** asked the Minister for Health the extent to which adequate care is likely to be available in the case of a person (details supplied) in Dublin 2; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23600/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Alex White): The assessment for a medical card is determined primarily by reference to the means, including the income and expenditure, of the applicant, his/her partner and dependants. Under the legislation, determination of eligibility for a medical card is the responsibility of the Health Service Executive (HSE).

The Primary Care Reimbursement Service (PCRS) of the HSE operates the medical card system and the lady to whom the Deputy refers should contact that office to see if she meets the criteria for entitlement to a medical card. The web address is www.pcrs.ie, phone/fax numbers: 01 8647100/ 8343589 and postal address: HSE, Finance Shared Services, Primary Care Reimbursement Service, Exit 5 M50, North Road, Finglas, Dublin 11.

Respite Care Services

280. **Deputy Dara Calleary** asked the Minister for Health if his attention has been drawn to the fact that there is currently a six month waiting list for respite services in County Mayo; if his attention has been drawn to the fact that no respite is available at Ballina District Hospital, Swinford District Hospital, the Sacred Heart Hospital and St. Augustine's Home; the provisions that are available to persons requiring respite services in County Mayo; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23630/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Kathleen Lynch): As this is a service matter it has been referred to the Health Service Executive for direct reply.

Road Signage

281. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason road signage at the Carrentreila by-pass on the N26 is being replaced when the road is only open a few years; the cost of this replacement signage; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23392/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects, including the provision of signage, is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

National Roads Authority Expenditure

282. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the amount that has been spent by the National Roads Authority for each county for each year for the past five years; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23394/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Signage

283. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the consultation the National Roads Authority engages in with local authorities to avoid signage pollution particularly in scenic and amenity areas; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23399/13]

284. **Deputy Michelle Mulherin** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the reason the National Roads Authority is causing every side road to be signed with oversized directional signposting and signing townlands at every side road with two large signs as if those roads only led to one townland when many of the side roads lead to numerous townlands, instead of erecting a small sign with the road number which would be cheaper and more cost effective; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23406/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 283 and 284 together.

As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects, including the provision of signage, is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned.

Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Public Transport Provision

285. **Deputy Dessie Ellis** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport his plans to introduce alternate materials for windows on Dublin buses in areas which suffer anti-social behaviour including stone-throwing, the number 40 often cannot go into Finglas south for fear of windows getting smashed which leaves elderly residents having to walk home from the main road. [23493/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): This is an operational matter for Dublin Bus and I have forwarded the Deputy's question to the company for direct reply.

Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Public Service Obligation Services

286. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way Iarnród Éireann has performed in its public service obligation contracts in the years 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013. [23508/13]

287. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way Bus Éireann has performed in its public service obligation contracts in the years 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013. [23509/13]

288. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the way Dublin Bus has performed in its public service obligation contracts in the years 2010, 2011, 2012 and to date in 2013. [23510/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 286 to 288, inclusive, together.

Public Service Obligation services are subject to contracts between the National Transport Authority (NTA) and the three CIÉ companies. I have forwarded the Deputy's questions to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within ten working days.

Road Traffic Offences

289. **Deputy Thomas P. Broughan** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if cyclists who break traffic lights can be prosecuted under existing road traffic legislation; and, if there is no such provision, if he has considered bringing forward such legislation in view of reports that a very small minority of speeding cyclists are acting in a dangerous manner by not yielding to pedestrians. [23511/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): Cyclists, like all road users, are required to comply with road traffic legislation. This includes a requirement to respect traffic lights, both at junctions and at pedestrian crossings, and to keep to roads or cycle lanes. Cyclists can be prosecuted for breaches of the law.

Section 108 of the Road Traffic Act 1961 provides that a member of An Garda Síochána may demand the name and address of a pedal cyclist when intercepted committing a road traffic offence. The section also provides for the seizure of the bicycle if the cyclist refuses to provide their name and address or Garda suspects that false or misleading information has been given

to them. Enforcement of the legislation is of course a matter for An Garda Síochána. Action No. 92 of the 2013 - 2020 Road Safety Strategy provides that my Department legislates for the extension of the fixed charge system to bring other offences within the scope of that system, including those related to cyclists. A completion date of the second quarter in 2014 has been set for that Action.

Railway Safety Issues

290. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the date on which Irish Rail will be replacing the pedestrian bridge at the level crossing near Bray train/DART/bus station in County Wicklow that was taken down in 2011; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23523/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): As Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport I have responsibility for policy and overall funding in relation to public transport. Following the establishment of the National Transport Authority (NTA) in December 2009, the implementation and development of infrastructure projects in the Greater Dublin Area (GDA), such as replacing the pedestrian bridge at the level crossing near Bray Train/DART/Bus station, comes under the remit of the NTA. Noting this I have referred the Deputies question to the NTA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you do not receive a reply within 10 working days.

Sports Capital Programme Applications

291. **Deputy Martin Heydon** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the grants that have been awarded to a club (details supplied) in County Kildare under sports capital grant allocations or any other funding stream from his Department since 2000; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23524/13]

Minister of State at the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Michael Ring): I can confirm that the club referred to by the Deputy has received the following allocations under the Sports Capital Programme since the year 2000:

€63,487 in 2001 (€14,896 was later withdrawn from this grant)

€40,000 in 2002

Details of all allocations under the Sports Capital Programme are available on the Department's website www.dttas.ie

Road Projects Expenditure

292. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the total budget his Department have allocated for roads in an area (details supplied) in 2013 under various programmes; the total that has been drawn down by the local authority to date; if he expects the full amount to be drawn down this year;; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23526/13]

293. **Deputy Andrew Doyle** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport the total budget his Department allocated for roads in an area (details supplied) for 2011 and 2012 under various programmes; the total amount and the percentage that was drawn down from the allocated budget; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23527/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): I propose to take Questions Nos. 292 and 293 together.

Details of the 2013 regional and local road grant allocations to Wicklow County Council under the various grant categories and the amounts drawn down to date are outlined in the following table. Details of regional and local road grant allocations and payments to Wicklow County Council in the years 2011 and 2012 can be found in the regional and local road grant allocation and payment booklets for those years, which are available from the Dáil library. The allocations for 2013 are also available in the Dail Library. It is not possible for me to state, at this point, whether the local authority will draw down all the grant funding available to it under the various headings.

2013 Regional and Local Road Grants

| Grant Category | 2013 Allocation | 2013 Payment to Date |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Restoration Improvement | €3,226,320 | €48,942 |
| Restoration Maintenance | €1,136,450 | €3,650 |
| Discretionary Grant | €1,229,800 | €703,789 |
| Winter Maintenance Grant | €289,176 | €289,176 |
| Specific Improvement Grant | €683,000 | €96,829 |
| Low Cost Safety Improvement | €172,000 | €7,277 |
| Training Grant | €48,000 | €0 |

With regard to national roads, as Minister for Transport, Tourism & Sport, I have responsibility for overall policy and funding in relation to the national roads programme. The planning, design and implementation of individual road projects is a matter for the National Roads Authority (NRA) under the Roads Acts 1993 to 2007 in conjunction with the local authorities concerned. Noting the above position, I have referred the Deputy's question to the NRA for direct reply. Please advise my private office if you don't receive a reply within 10 working days.

Road Improvement Schemes

294. **Deputy Heather Humphreys** asked the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport if he will consider putting in place a stimulus package to create employment and repair local and regional roads that have fallen into a serious state of disrepair due to the continuous bad weather; and if he will make a statement on the matter. [23568/13]

Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Leo Varadkar): The improvement and maintenance of regional and local roads is the statutory responsibility of each local authority, in accordance with the provisions of Section 13 of the Roads Act 1993. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities own resources supplemented by State road grants paid by my Department. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter

for the local authority. Works on those roads are funded from local authorities own resources supplemented by State road grants paid by my Department. The initial selection and prioritisation of works to be funded is also a matter for the local authority.

I announced the 2013 regional and local road grant allocations on 25th January this year. A total of €350 million is being provided under the Regional and Local Roads Investment Programme this year.

There have been very large reductions in roads expenditure over the past number of years. In 2007 there were grants of €607 million available towards regional and local roads, these grants have fallen to €350 million in 2013 and will fall further to about €300 million in 2014. Based on the existing funding levels it is not possible to put in place a stimulus package along the lines suggested by the Deputy. Should further funding become available, I can assure the Deputy that the roads maintenance programme will be able to absorb it and to generate significant additional employment as a result.