



DÍOSPÓIREACHTAÍ PARLAIMINTE
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

DÁIL ÉIREANN

TUAIRISC OIFIGIÚIL—Neamhcheartaithe
(OFFICIAL REPORT—Unrevised)

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters	173
Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate	174
School Staff	174
Educational Disadvantage	177
Hospital Equipment	181
Healthcare Infrastructure Provision	183
Ports Policy	186
Teachtaireacht ón Seanad - Message from Seanad	189
Exclusion of Israel from Sporting Fixtures: Motion [Private Members]	189
Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions	222
Ceisteanna ó na Comhaltaí Eile - Other Members' Questions	231
Ceisteanna ar Pholasáí nó ar Reachtaíocht - Questions on Policy or Legislation	233
Prohibition of Sulky-Racing Bill 2026: First Stage	244
Tourism: Statements	245
Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Prohibition of Importation of Goods) Bill 2026: Second Stage	278
Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Prohibition of Importation of Goods) Bill 2026: Referral to Select Committee	323
Estimates for Public Services 2026: Message from Select Committee	323
Gnó na Dála - Business of Dáil	323
Criminal Law, Civil Law and Defence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026: Instruction to Committee	324
Criminal Law, Civil Law and Defence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026: Report and Final Stages	336
Estimates for Public Services 2026: Message from Select Committee	372
Media Regulation Bill 2026: Report and Final Stages	372
Air Pollution (Amendment) Bill 2025 [Seanad]: Report and Final Stages	373
Report of the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform: Motion	373
Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2026: Second Stage (Resumed)	373
Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2026: Referral to Select Committee	375

Public Health (Alcohol) (Amendment) Bill 2025: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]	376
Stop the Game Campaign and FAI Participation in Matches against Israel: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]	378
Exclusion of Israel from Sporting Fixtures: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]	386

DÁIL ÉIREANN

Dé Céadaoin, 10 Meitheamh 2026

Wednesday, 10 June 2026

Chuaigh an Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan) i gceannas ar 9 a.m.

Paidir agus Machnamh.

Prayer and Reflection.

Ábhair Shaincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Matters

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): I wish to advise the House of the following matters in respect of which notice has been given under Standing Order 39 and the name of the Member in each case:

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire - To discuss the loss of staff at Bunscoil Chríost Rí for 2026-27 school year.

Deputy Robert O'Donoghue - To discuss provision of a permanent two-classroom SEN facility and PE hall for Balscadden National School.

Deputy Joe Cooney - To discuss industrial development and employment opportunities for the Shannon region.

Deputy Martin Kenny - To discuss the Peterhead Ten.

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin - To discuss the provision of school transport services.

Deputy Pat Buckley - To discuss an application for an interim ancillary grant by Ballygiblin National School, Mitchelstown.

Deputy Shane Moynihan - To discuss the reform of eye care services in line with emerging trends.

Deputies Paul Murphy, Ciarán Ahern and Seán Crowe - To discuss the exclusion of St. Dominic's National School, Tallaght from the DEIS plus scheme.

Deputy Albert Dolan - To discuss the pricing of train tickets between Athenry and Galway.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne - To discuss the need for social and affordable housing in Arklow, County Wicklow.

Deputy Thomas Gould - To discuss the proposed new prisons in The Glen, Cork.

Deputy Tom Brabazon - To discuss the loss of a mainstream teacher at St. Francis Junior School, Clonsaugh, Dublin 17.

Deputy Eamon Scanlon - To discuss the exceptional staffing pressures at St. Patrick's National School, County Sligo.

Deputy Pa Daly - To discuss the need for an autism unit at Causeway Comprehensive School - Scoil Chuimsitheach an Tóchair.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly - To discuss the school summer programme.

Deputy Pat the Cope Gallagher - To discuss the designation of Burtonport as an approved port for landings by fishing vessels on a Saturday from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Deputy Matt Carthy - To discuss the EU pact on migration and asylum.

Deputy Natasha Newsome Drennan - To discuss access to treatment for Friedreich's ataxia under the HSE reimbursement scheme.

Deputy Ged Nash - To discuss the recent fish kill on the River Glyde, County Louth.

Deputy Pádraig O'Sullivan - To discuss the progress of proposed school extension works at Cóláiste an Phiarsaigh, Glanmire, Cork.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae - To discuss delays in the opening of the new Killarney Community Hospital.

Deputy Colm Burke - To discuss the establishment of a national radiation therapy equipment replacement programme.

The matters raised by Deputies Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire, Paul Murphy, Ciarán Ahern and Seán Crowe, Colm Burke, Danny Healy-Rae and Pat the Cope Gallagher have been selected for discussion.

Saincheisteanna Tráthúla - Topical Issue Debate

School Staff

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Is mian liom labhairt faoin chruachás ina bhfuil Bunscoil Chríost Rí. De réir cosúlachta, beidh sí síos cúigear múinteoirí don bhliain atá romhainn.

Bunscoil Chríost Rí is a primary school in the Turner's Cross area of Cork city. It is a very well-established school with a high reputation which does exceptionally good work. The Minister of State might be familiar with the school. It is probably the primary school the Taoiseach attended. The school currently faces a worrying situation for the 2026-27 school year. It could be down five teachers for the next year. I want to focus on the English as an additional language allocation. I will go through the manner in which the school could be down five teachers.

For enrolment reasons, it appears the school will lose two mainstream teachers. It is on the borderline, in that the school might be able to keep one because it has 455 students on the roll - the key date for enrolment was 30 September. That is a significant blow. The school is asking

that consideration be given to that. The special education teacher hours were cut from 205 to 230. When school management considers its allocations, it is trying to understand what it has and how it can meet the needs in different ways. The school serves the Turner's Cross area, as well as a wider area. Many children come in from the Kinsale Road accommodation centre, which is the direct provision centre close to the airport. There is a high degree of diversity, including linguistic diversity, in the school. That has to be supported and resources need to be put in place for that.

The school has had a permanent English as an additional language post since 2013. For the past three years, the school has successfully applied for and received an additional two English as an additional language fixed-term posts due to the large English as an additional language numbers. The application form or process seems to have changed this year without any engagement, discussion or schools being made aware of it. In September 2025, as was the case in previous years, schools were informed of the situation and a table was provided which outlined the number of new entrant pupils and teaching hours per week. For one to four new entrant pupils there were five teaching hours, for nine to 13 there were 15 teaching hours and for 21 to 30 there were 25 teaching hours. That criteria seems not to have been included this year and does not seem to have been disclosed to schools.

For this year, the school had 39 category A and 49 category B pupils, which is much the same as last year in terms of the number of children with English as an additional language requirement for support. Due to the fact that the goalposts seem to have shifted, the school will now go from two full-time posts for English as an additional language to ten hours per week. That is a huge blow in and of itself. When a reduction in special education teaching hours and two full-time general allocation teachers being lost are added to that, it is a huge blow and it will be very difficult for the school to adjust to that.

Minister of State at the Department of Education and Youth (Deputy Michael Moynihan): The primary school staffing schedule is a long-standing feature of the primary allocation system which ensures fairness and transparency in the allocation of mainstream class teachers in primary schools across the country. The key factor for determining the level of staffing resources provided in an individual school is a staffing schedule for the relevant school year and the number of pupils enrolled on the previous 30 September. Staffing arrangements for primary schools for 2026-27 are set out in Circular 0025/2026. Having an enrolment of 479 pupils in September 2024, Bunscoil Chríost Rí has a current mainstream staffing of an administrative principal and 20 mainstream teachers.

The information given to me is that school enrolment fell to 453 pupils last September. The Deputy mentioned the figure was 455. Perhaps that is something we might check. This enrolment allows for mainstream staffing comprising an administrative principal and 18 classroom teachers for the 2026-27 school year, with two fewer teachers than are currently in place. The school also has additional supporting staff comprising nine special education teachers, one English as an additional language, EAL, teacher and three special class teachers under the rural DEIS and non-DEIS home school community liaison initiative. The school has been allocated a shared home school liaison teacher based on enrolment for the 2026-27 school year.

The Department has adapted to the dynamic landscape of student enrolment and has prioritised enhanced English as an additional language support.

An online portal system was introduced in the current year to allow schools to apply in a timely and efficient manner. Following the application process, Bunscoil Chríost Rí has been informed of an EAL allocation of ten hours per week for the 2026-27 school year in addition to the permanent EAL post that is in place within the school. This is less than the current EAL allocation and corresponds with an increase in the overall enrolment in the school enrolments of pupils with EAL needs.

As I understand it and as it is presented to me, the school is not losing five teachers in the 2026-27 school year. The staffing arrangements, and I would be very strong on this, which have been long-standing, include arrangements for an appeals mechanism for schools to submit a staffing appeal under certain published criteria. The primary staffing appeals board meets three times a year. The board met in May and will meet again later this month. It is important that the school, if it wishes, should submit an appeal on the staffing allocations to the appeals board with all the necessary supporting information it can have from the school cohort and the school community as well. This will be a crucial meeting of the appeals board in June this year to try to ensure we have everything in place for September insofar as possible. However, I encourage the school to make sure an appeal is submitted. The application forms are available on Circular 0025/2026. It is important we have sight of that and that a decision is made by the appeals board which, as the Deputy knows, is independent of the Department. Information should be submitted as soon as possible.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Some of what I said is to give context to the way that this is being compounded. The key part to focus on is the English as an additional language aspect. The school is disappointed to be down by two mainstream teachers. However, they understand there are criteria regarding numbers. The 455 is by way of illustration that they have hit the bar on another date. Had the key date been another date, they might have been successful in keeping another teacher. However, the key part is the English as an additional language. The permanent position is still there, but they are effectively down by two positions in that area alone. This year they submitted 39 category A. According to the table I have here in front of me from last year and previous years before that, for the bracket 31 to 40 hours, that would have been 35 hours alone, even before we get into the 49 category B.

This is a school that is supporting a community that has a high degree of linguistic diversity, that includes a lot of children from direct provision from the Kinsale Road centre and is supporting a community which has mixed needs but certainly pockets of disadvantage. The goalposts have shifted here. That is the bit I would like the Minister of State to take back to the Department. Schools were not informed that there would be a different approach to the calculation in terms of EAL. The policy compounds that with the loss of the two permanent general allocation teachers and the loss of the special education teacher. Separately, it is now looking like there will be a loss of special needs assistant, SNA, hours. All of these things are compounding this, but the key injustice here is the fact that the goalposts have shifted and schools were not informed of this in advance. From having effectively three EAL positions it now looks as if the school will have one and ten hours. That is a huge loss, when the same number of children who have those needs are involved. Those children will now be in bigger classes, with access to fewer special education hours. That is a huge problem. I want the

Minister of State to take that back to the Department. The goalposts shifted and the school is down because of it significantly.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: We have a huge level of investment in terms of teachers. The past number of years have seen more than 5,000 extra teachers within the school system. That is little comfort to Bunscoil Chríost Rí. In order that we are all understanding this, there is no reduction in SNAs from 2025 to 2026 or from 2026 to 2027. The Deputy will be aware of the documentation that was launched last week on the SNA workforce development plan, the redeployment plan and the new circular. That is setting out our roadmap for SNA employment. There will be no cliff edge in relation to schools or school communities into the future. It is important to understand that.

In regard to the point on the numbers, my information is 453.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: The criteria are different this year.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: The Deputy mentioned 455.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: That is the general allocation. The English as an additional language is the key bit.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): The Minister of State will respond.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I believe my information is correct in relation to that. I take the Deputy's point on the numbers and the acceptance of the school community. We have put in a huge amount. Bunscoil Chríost Rí has a huge reputation as a massive school within the Turner's Cross area, as the Deputy outlined. Any information that is submitted to the Department in terms of an appeal will be adjudicated on. I know the school is facilitating and working with a diverse community as well. It is important to say that this policy documentation has not shifted the goalposts in a dramatic fashion. These are long-standing issues we have had. It is important that if the school, and I believe it will, submits an appeal, that appeal will be adjudicated on in a timely fashion to ensure that certainty is brought to the school community in advance of September 2026.

Educational Disadvantage

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): We now have Deputies Paul Murphy, Ciarán Ahern and Seán Crowe to the Minister for Education and Youth to discuss the exclusion of St. Dominic's National School, Tallaght, from the DEIS plus programme. There are three names on it. If only two Deputies are speaking, we will split it half-and-half with two minutes each.

Deputy Paul Murphy: Apologies from Deputy Crowe who supports this issue but cannot be here this morning. I welcome the DEIS plus scheme. It can make a real difference for children in school communities with high levels of educational disadvantage. The extra resources will

make a real difference. There are other issues around the country but we are raising a particular issue regarding a school which is excluded from the current scheme. It has appealed that. It seems to highlight a flaw in the methodology which is primarily based, as far as I understand it, on the deprivation index. Therefore, it can miss the level of granularity which means that for some schools, the level of deprivation that was reflected in their school community is not fully captured by that data.

St. Dominic's National School in Tallaght is one such school. It is one of the largest DEIS band 1 schools in the country with 431 pupils. There are about 50 different nationalities represented. It is a really fantastic school and a great place for kids to learn but it definitely could do with the extra resources. One simple example is that in the area served by St. Dominic's is Tallaght village, which would not qualify as an area of particularly high deprivation. However, within this area, there is an IPAS centre and a homeless hub. Multiple children from both these places are going to the school. Many kids who are coming in are in homeless housing assistance payment, HAP, accommodation or are kids from lone parent families with high levels of intergenerational educational disadvantage. The school community is worried that it certainly was not captured at the first step and needs to be captured on appeal stage so that it gets DEIS plus status.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: To echo those comments, this is something that has joint political support across our constituency. We have worked constructively with the Minister of State before and we welcomed his engagement on the issues related to schools in Dublin South-West. DEIS plus is clearly very welcome and many schools in Dublin South-West have already benefited from it in the first round of applications. We are asking for this for St. Dominic's school which, as Deputy Murphy said, is a fabulous school in the heart of Tallaght serving 50 different nationalities. It already caters for two special classes and is opening an additional two in the coming year. It is a DEIS urban band 1 school, arguably one of the largest in the country, and is appealing the Department's decision not to include it in the DEIS plus first-round allocations. It has numerous reasons for doing that. Primarily, it seems that the methodology applied by the Department is very data-driven and is supposed to be objective, but possibly in sticking to so much data, some of the subtlety and the local knowledge are lost that would be involved in these kind of applications. What the school is saying is that the school itself and maybe the addresses of the students in the schools are not necessarily in the most deprived areas, strictly speaking, from a geographical point of view, including the conditions and situations in which the students are living and coming into the school.

The school takes from a very wide catchment, including from as far away as Citywest and the Citywest Hotel. Those students are in deprived situations and that data and that sort of subtlety are not captured by the Department's model. We are supporting the school's appeal for DEIS plus status and we would ask that the Minister of State would also give that significant consideration.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I compliment the way both Deputies work across political divides in terms of education and I will continue to liaise with them. We might not turn water into wine at every juncture but we certainly will try.

Addressing educational disadvantage and ensuring that every child and young person can achieve their full potential are key priorities for me and the Minister for Education and Youth.

The introduction of DEIS plus represents the most significant expansion of targeted education support since the establishment of the DEIS programme. The scheme is designed to provide enhanced supports to a small cohort of schools with the highest concentration of children and young people experiencing persistent and intergenerational disadvantage.

The Deputies raised the issue of St. Dominic's National School in Tallaght. I acknowledge the strong work being undertaken by the principal, all of the team and the wider school community in supporting pupils and families. It is important to stress that although the school was not identified under the DEIS plus programme, it does not mean that disadvantage is not present within the school community. St. Dominic's National School remains a DEIS urban band 1 school and continues to receive significant range of supports available under the programme, including reduced class sizes, enhanced staffing supports and full home school liaison provision.

DEIS plus schools were identified using a nationally consistent and evidence-based model developed using pupil-level administrative data and a range of indicators associated with persistent and intergenerational disadvantage. These indicators include deprivation level, Traveller and Roma identity and children residing in State-funded emergency accommodation and international protection accommodation. The model examines enrolment data across the previous three academic years to ensure consistency and fairness in its application nationally. I recognise that the local school communities can experience significant and complex challenges that are deeply felt by people's families and staff, however, in establishing a national scheme such as DEIS plus, it is essential that the same evidence-based criteria are applied consistently across all schools to ensure fairness and equality of treatment throughout the education system.

The scheme is intentionally highly targeted. Schools that have been included in the scheme have been assessed as having a concentration of disadvantage significantly above the national average and at the highest level nationally. While many similar schools clearly serve children and families experiencing disadvantage, the DEIS plus programme is targeted at those with the very highest concentration of students at risk of education disadvantage.

As the Deputies will be aware, the appeal process is currently under way for schools that were not satisfied with the outcome following the application of the DEIS plus identification model to their enrolment data. St. Dominic's National School has submitted an appeal under the process and I would be very mindful that it is not appropriate for me to comment on the specifics of any individual school appeal while the process remains ongoing. All appeals are subject to a technical review process in line with the criteria set out by the Department with independent oversight provided through an independent appeals panel. It is anticipated that the schools will be informed of the outcome of the appeals process by the end of June 2026.

The Department and I continue to engage with school communities and education stakeholders regarding the implementation of the DEIS strategy to 2035 and the range of supports available to schools serving communities experiencing educational disadvantage.

Deputy Paul Murphy: We absolutely accept there need for objective criteria. That is not in doubt. The question is whether we have objective criteria that capture the reality beyond simply the geographical deprivation index. It is not entirely clear. I do not think a list of the criteria has been published - if a school is above this, it is in but if a school is below this, it is out. The

school has appealed. There is a limit in the appeals process because the only basis on which the school could really appeal was to update the Primary Online Database about its pupils and then say it had done that. It obviously hopes that this is enough to put it over the line but there are flaws even there. If the school had pupils who were in it two years ago and who should be captured but who are now in a different school, it is not technically able to update their addresses because they are now registered elsewhere. Therefore, that is not being captured in the appeal and the school does not have a chance to put forward all these arguments. I think they have been submitted to the Minister of State in parliamentary questions in terms of the points about homeless hubs and IPAS so, hopefully, they can be taken into account.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: I thank the Minister of State for his engagement. The appeals process itself is basically based on the Primary Online Database, which is very rigid and does not really allow for any subtlety or colour to be given. Part of what we are doing today is giving the Minister of State an insight into how the school works and into the background of the students there. The school desperately needs the resources that DEIS would bring to allow it to have a well-being and a trauma teacher and an administrative deputy principal because like staff in so many schools around the country, the staff in the school are working to the pin of their collar and the students would hugely benefit from the additional resources that DEIS plus would bring, so we are asking the Minister of State to do it. One thought I will leave the Minister of State with is that when Deputy Murphy and I visited the school a couple of days ago, there were food and snack baskets at the door and they are not just used by the students but by the parents.

Deputy Michael Moynihan: I accept that engagement by all political representatives with regard to school communities in disadvantaged areas is hugely important because education is a fundamental. It can determine the trajectory of someone whether he or she is in a disadvantaged area or elsewhere. I do understand that the Deputies have a real and genuine engagement within the education sector.

Although St. Dominic's National School was not identified for inclusion in DEIS plus, that does not diminish in any way the challenges faced by the school communities and the outstanding work done there by the school leadership and all of the team working in the school and dealing with disadvantage.

Due to the appeals process, the Deputies will understand that it is important for me not to comment on that process right now and I do not intend to. The criteria set down very early on aimed to make sure that we were targeting the most disadvantaged communities across the country. The resources we were putting in - there are significant resources in DEIS plus and indeed the entire DEIS programme - are to ensure that disadvantage is dealt with within the communities. A number of Deputies have raised issues about the criteria but they are transparent. Deputy Ahern spoke about them not reflecting some of the things that are outside of them but, in the first instance, it is important that the appeals process is dealt with and that it is brought to a conclusion as early as possible. We are hopeful that decision will be taken by the end of June 2026, so the school will have certainty for next year. I do understand that there is disadvantage in other communities that has not been captured but we are targeting resources in the best possible way.

Hospital Equipment

Deputy Colm Burke: Currently in Ireland, we have 23 linear accelerators in Galway, Dublin and Cork. Of those 14 linear accelerators in Dublin, 12 are more than ten years old and eight are more than 15 years old. It is clearly established that any machine that is more than ten years old is going to cause delays and breakdowns are far more frequent and as a result, the service cannot be delivered. In fact, the figures for 2025 are quite frightening where the radiation that people required was not delivered within the 14-day time period, which is the guideline.

Paragraph 22 of the National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 set out that a rolling replacement programme would be put in place. This has not occurred. In relation to radiation therapy, we have a whole team of people. We have radiation oncologists, radiation therapists, medical physics, dosimetrists and nurses. There is a whole team. If a linear accelerator breaks down, treatment is not provided and a whole team wastes one, two or three days.

Radiation therapy cures about 40% of cancers. The European Society for Radiotherapy and Oncology, ESTRO, sets out quite clearly that the lifetime of these machines is ten years. Some of these machines are 18 years old. There is a programme, to start in 2027, which talks about replacing two machines per year but that is not enough. We now need to set out a clear programme of action so that the number of replacements is four per year over the next three years and not two per year. This needs to be put in place.

We have had a huge increase in population. We will also have an increase in the number of people who require treatment. We have the expertise. We have good and dedicated staff. It is important that we give them the support they require. There are 14 machines in total in Dublin. If St. Luke's replaces two machines every year, some of them will be over 21 years old by the time they are replaced. It is time that we looked at this. It is not a big cost in real terms because there would be a huge saving. We are wasting staff time when a machine is not working.

Over the past 12 months, we have also had to have patients receive treatment in the private sector. This cost over €17 million last year alone. Why are we delaying the replacement of these machines? Recently, I opened the cancer summit in Croke Park, which was attended by more than 300 people from hospitals, pharmaceutical companies and a whole range of services in the healthcare area. There was a big discussion about the fact that we are delaying putting new equipment in place.

Minister of State at the Department of Health (Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor): I thank Deputy Burke for raising this very important issue. The Government is committed to improving cancer care, ensuring better prevention and maintaining improvements in cancer survival rates and timely access to treatments. The availability of appropriate, fit-for-purpose facilities and equipment is critical to the safe and timely delivery of cancer care.

Since the launch of the national cancer strategy in 2017, the Government has allocated €105 million to support cancer services and improve outcomes for patients. Under the national cancer strategy and the recommendations of the national plan for radiation oncology, two state-of-the-art radiation oncology centres have opened in Cork and Galway, in 2019 and 2023 respectively, representing a €120 million capital investment.

Expansion and equipment replacement programmes are progressing across Ireland's public radiation oncology network. Deputy Burke spoke about the phased expansion that is under way. This is at Beaumont Hospital, where formal tender documents have already been issued to advance the project. A dedicated equipment replacement programme is also active across the St. Luke's Radiation Oncology Network to upgrade essential linear accelerators.

On a national scale, the Department of Health and the HSE are actively developing a strategic infrastructure programme to systematically plan for the future replacement and expansion of radiation therapy equipment at all public facilities. To progress this strategic initiative, formal engagement between the Department and relevant stakeholders is scheduled to begin on 12 June 2026, which is in two days' time. Centralised planning for this programme and subsequent oversight in its implementation will enable cost-effective procurement and efficient delivery of enabling works. The programme will also align with the national cancer strategy and *Sláintecare*, supporting sustainable, high-quality radiotherapy services nationwide.

As advised by the HSE, replacement of equipment takes into account not only age but also performance linked to use and ongoing maintenance regimes - end of life and end of support, as designed by the manufacturer - and the availability of spare parts. This is a critical consideration in replacing radiation oncology equipment. As such, the replacement of this equipment in the St. Luke's Radiation Oncology Network in Dublin is a priority.

The majority of radiation oncology services in Ireland met or exceeded the KPI targets across 2025, with the exception of the St. Luke's Radiation Oncology Network which performed below target across the year. As I have previously stated, an equipment replacement programme is in place to address this issue. In November 2025, the Department of Health's sectoral plan for 2026 to 2030 was launched under the national development plan. The sectoral plan sets out infrastructure investment priorities for the next five years, building on a strong track record of delivery to support the provision of equitable, accessible and high-quality healthcare across Ireland. A key strategic priority under the sectoral plan is continued investment in cancer care, including radiation oncology. I welcome this opportunity to discuss equipment replacement and expansion. The Government recognises the importance of the timely replacement of equipment as its effectiveness decreases.

Deputy Colm Burke: In 2016 access to radiation therapy within 15 days was 86.4% and in 2019 it was 86.5%. Last year it was 78.7%. It has dropped. In fact, in 2024 it was down to 64.7%. Part of the problem is machines breaking down. There is a need for a national radiotherapy equipment replacement programme. I know the programme is starting but it is about whether we can do it faster over the next four years. We will be in Government for this period of time so let us make a serious effort. We have the expertise and we need to make sure we have ring-fenced capital funding to replace four machines per year over the next three to four years so that we have a large number of machines replaced. This will create efficiency.

As I said earlier, all of the figures clearly indicate, because the population has increased dramatically over the past 20 years and we also have people living longer so we have an older population, that we are more likely to have more people identified with cancer. Therefore, more people will require treatment. Time is of the essence in providing treatment and it is very important that we have the best quality machines available so the staff can do this. This

treatment cures up to 40% of cancers. It is extremely important that we give it priority over the next three to four years and set out a clear plan of capital funding. We must remember that when we are replacing the machines we will have delays because one or two fewer machines will be available. This is why we need to roll it on as fast as possible.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I thank Deputy Burke. As he said, this is a serious issue. I know the Government is committed and I will certainly bring it back to the Minister, Deputy Carroll MacNeill. Ensuring better prevention, maintaining improvements in cancer survival rates and timely access to treatment are priorities for the Government. Access to state-of-the-art and fit-for-purpose facilities and equipment is fundamental to the safe and timely delivery of such care. Deputy Burke is right that timely delivery is so important. He spoke about the machines that have broken down. As I have previously set out, a replacement programme for radiation therapy equipment is under way across St. Luke's Radiation Oncology Network in Dublin, funded under the HSE's capital plan for 2026. The replacement programme will conclude in 2030.

To address future radiotherapy equipment replacement, the Department of Health and the HSE are developing a strategic infrastructure programme to plan for the replacement and expansion of radiotherapy equipment at public radiation oncology facilities.

Engagement between the Department and relevant stakeholders will begin this week to advance this work. I assure the Deputy this will happen and I will definitely keep him updated, as that is important. Under the current strategic plan, direct investment of €120 million has been made in state-of-the-art radiation oncology centres in Cork and Galway to address radiotherapy equipment needs. A key strategic priority under the Department's health sectoral plan for 2026 to 2030 is the continued investment in cancer care, including radiation oncology. The plan will also progress national cancer infrastructure planning for oncology day wards, inpatient oncology, cancer diagnostics and outreach and community service delivery consistent with Sláintecare and the national cancer strategy.

I again thank the Deputy for highlighting this matter. I will definitely go back to the Minister. As the Deputy said, timely care is so important. I assure him the Government is committed to that.

Healthcare Infrastructure Provision

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am glad to get the opportunity to raise this issue again. I will tell the Minister of State why I am doing it again. I raised this matter exactly a month ago, on 12 May, with the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell. We spoke at length about the need and the urgency of opening the community hospital in Killarney. On 29 May, there was a meeting arranged between the HSE locally and the five TDs from Kerry, one of whom is me. It was laid out clearly in front of us by the HSE people, who I believe are in charge of Cork and Kerry, that the community hospital would open before the end of June. That was on 29 May. About a week ago, it was made known to the county councillors that it would not open at the end of June. I will not speak for the other Deputies but I feel my credibility is being undermined by this kind of carry-on, which is what I would call it. We were told clearly it was going to open and the patients would be transferred from the old district hospital to the new community

hospital building before the end of June. Who is calling the shots? Is it the HSE at national level? Is it the Minister? Who has the power or the responsibility? Who directed these people? Did they take it upon themselves? I do not think they did. Someone informed them to relay to us that the hospital would open before the end of June. I want an answer to that. I do not know whether the Minister of State can give it to me. I thought it might be the Minister of State who was here last month but I have learned he has gone away, and that is fine. The man is entitled to go about his business but I thought it would be him here.

There are many elderly patients waiting to get into this public nursing home. We have excellent private nursing homes all around Killarney but we need a dementia unit. It is critical for so many because there are people getting dementia at a younger age. There were to be 30 beds opening for dementia patients as part of this. Many of the private nursing homes cannot cater for dementia patients or do not have the facilities. We are begging for this on our knees. The lights have been on in the building since before Christmas and it was cleared to go.

I raised with the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, that the INMO said there was no engagement by the HSE with it regarding the staffing. The HSE said it was engaging with the INMO every second day or every second week. Who is telling the truth? It will come out now that the reason for the delay is exactly that, namely, that the INMO and also HIQA have questions to be answered.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Go raibh maith agat, a Theachta.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: It is hard to see the children's hospital ever opening-----

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): The Minister of State-----

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: -----if the Government cannot open a community hospital in Killarney.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Deputy, you will have an opportunity again in a moment.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: All right. Thank you very much.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I thank the Deputy for raising this serious issue. I am taking it on behalf of the Minister of State with responsibility for older people and housing, Deputy O'Donnell. Long-term residential care is a crucial part of our healthcare system. Across the country, our HSE community nursing units, CNU's, and community hospitals play a vital role in the provision of long-term care and other services. The Government is committed to continued investment in healthcare infrastructure which supports the highest quality care for our older people. This investment includes the community nursing unit capital programme, which was launched to ensure up to 90 of our public community nursing units and community hospitals would be refurbished or replaced to ensure the best-quality environments for our older people.

The public private partnership, PPP, aspect of the CNU programme continues to progress and will deliver 528 beds in seven facilities across the country. The new CNU in Killarney is part of the PPP project and will have 130 beds, with, as the Deputy said, 50 long-stay beds, 30 dementia-specific beds and 50-short stay beds. The CNU will provide a high-quality living environment which will be in line with all regulatory requirements. The HSE advised me it expects the new Killarney community nursing unit to open before the end of June. The HSE is still saying that. This only came to me yesterday.

The opening is dependent on registration approval from HIQA, so the Deputy is right that this is what the HSE is waiting on. The HSE is engaging with HIQA regarding a small number of outstanding issues. The Deputy is right that this is about opening these units, which are critical. Once HIQA registration is granted, the HSE will set a date and move forward with the transfer of residents from St. Columbanus's Community Hospital and the district hospital to the new building. HSE South West has assured the Minister there is ongoing engagement with residents and their families ahead of the transfer, so there has been a lot of engagement.

All current staff from both St. Columbanus's Community Hospital and Killarney Community Hospital will transfer to the new facility. I have been advised by the HSE that the recruitment campaigns are under way for the additional staff required to extend occupancy to the full 130-bed capacity. I am aware - this is what the Deputy spoke about - that the INMO served notice of industrial action last Friday in relation to staffing levels at the newly built Killarney community nursing unit. The HSE has advised there has been active dialogue by way of weekly meetings with unions over the last two months. The HSE advised that much has been agreed and some further engagements regarding staff rosters are in the final stages. The HSE is, therefore, in the final stages of this process and there has been a lot of communication. The HSE will meet the INMO again tomorrow. The HSE hopes an agreement can be reached on the remaining outstanding issues at this meeting. I thank the staff and representative bodies for their continued engagement. We know the excellent work they do.

HSE South West will continue to engage with residents, their families, staff and the wider community on all updates about the opening of the new Killarney community nursing unit. The opening of the new unit is an absolute priority for me, the Minister and Ministers of State and the Department of Health. I have no doubt this state-of-the-art CNU will enhance the lives of older people in Killarney and surrounding areas for many years to come by providing the highest quality health and social care services. I look forward to seeing it officially opened. I am sure the Deputy will be at the opening. He is right that this is important. It is about everybody working together to get the unit opened.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I thank the Minister of State for her reply but practically everything she read out was read out by the Minister of State, Deputy O'Donnell, a month ago.

Here we are with this confusion again placed upon the people of Killarney and the surrounding area. Surely the HSE knew the hospital was to be finished before the end of last December. Surely it knew staffing arrangements would have to be agreed with the INMO. Surely it knew HIQA would have to have everything certified. Why was that not done? It has had nearly two years to organise all this and we are being told the same thing today that I was told a month ago.

So much is contingent on this hospital opening. We need extra respite services in Killarney, which were to go into the whole district. We need a minor injuries unit, which I think was going into St. Columbanus's Community Hospital, and a primary care centre. All these things are held up while this is being finalised. The summer holidays will come and I am worried the new hospital will not be open and there will be nothing at all done about those three things, especially the extra respite services that are needed. I see people could not go on holidays last year after minding their elderly or sick parents, sisters or brothers. They had no place for the patients to go. We were promised that would be decided and sorted out for this summer but it is not going to be. That is the crib I have. It is terrible to think there is some fooling and carry-on going on in the HSE. God knows it is getting enough money to spend it properly, to see it is properly done and to see things like this are done in a timely fashion.

Deputy Jennifer Murnane O'Connor: I thank the Deputy for highlighting this matter. The opening at the end of June is a priority for him. I reiterate the older persons' service in Killarney and surrounding areas will be enhanced by the opening of the new state-of-the-art, 130-bed community nursing units. The new CNU in Killarney is part of the overall CNU programme, which will deliver seven public private partnership, PPP, projects and provide a complement of 130 beds, of which 50 will be long-stay beds, 30 will be dementia-specific beds and 50 will be short-stay beds.

The HSE is engaging with HIQA on a small number of outstanding issues and expects the new Killarney community nursing unit to be open before the end of June. It is waiting on HIQA registration. I welcome the ongoing engagement taking place again tomorrow. I hope the outstanding issues can be resolved.

I thank the staff and representative bodies for their continued engagement. The opening of the new CNU in Killarney is an absolute priority for the Department of Health and the HSE. I am working with the Ministers and committed to ensuring residents can move into their new home without delay.

Ports Policy

Deputy Pat the Cope Gallagher: I thank the Ceann Comhairle for selecting my Topical Issue. I did not think last time I raised this matter in the House that I would have to come back again. It is not one of the major problems in the Department, which has more to deal with. However, whether it is the Department, the Minister of State or the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority, SFPA, they are unable to resolve this. I will make the charge immediately and explain it: it is total discrimination against the people I represent in Burtonport.

When Deputy Dooley assumed the office of Minister of State with responsibility for the marine and made his first visit to Donegal, he met with a fisherman from Burtonport who uses the port. He listened attentively to him and I thank him for that, but that was over a year and a half ago and still no progress has been made. I pose this question: who is in charge? Is it the Minister of State, the officials in the Department or the SFPA?

I will explain the simplicity of all this. As I outlined to the Minister of State at the time, Greencastle, Rathmullen and Burtonport were originally designated as landing ports for Northern Ireland-registered vessels landing crab into the State, with Bunagee, Malin and

Glengad in the north of the county added later - not by the SFPA but by ministerial order. Burtonport was still ignored. All designated ports except Burtonport allow landings from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m., Monday to Friday, and until 5 p.m. on Saturday. Burtonport is restricted to 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. on weekdays, with no Saturday landings permitted. This places vessels landing in Burtonport at a clear disadvantage. They simply seek parity with other ports. This has a direct impact on access to the Chinese market. Transfers are made to Holland on Saturday for onward shipment to the premium markets in China where maximum prices can be attained for Irish products. Those landing into Burtonport are deprived of that. The restricted hours and lack of Saturday landings are inconsistent with the arrangements in the other designated ports.

To illustrate the impact, a recent landing had to be made at Burtonport on a Saturday when a crew member had to return to Burtonport to bring his child to hospital. That was not considered a *force majeure*. They very kindly said - I am being sarcastic when I say that, "We're only warning you. We're not going to charge you." There are plenty of *force majeure* landings into Dún Laoghaire by Belgian fleets. Where is the SFPA when this is happening? It happened when a father of a child had to be taken into Burtonport. An initiative has to be taken. There is no way this should be allowed to continue, whether it is the Minister of State, the Department or the SFPA. I had this out with the former executive chairman of the SFPA before his retirement. What steps has the Minister of State taken to replace that person? Some weeks afterwards, has he taken steps to put somebody there in an acting capacity?

Let me in conclusion make the charge of discrimination and vindictiveness, and pose the question again: who is in charge?

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Timmy Dooley): I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. It is an issue I am very familiar with as a result of his continued lobbying. I had an opportunity to meet with the Deputy and some representatives of the fishing community who use Burtonport Harbour.

All work in relation to Ireland's exclusive fisheries zone comprises law enforcement matters for the Irish control authorities. Under the Sea-Fisheries and Maritime Jurisdiction Act 2006, all operational matters concerning sea-fisheries control are, as a matter of law, exclusively for the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority. It is effectively in charge of the entire operation there. The Naval Service is involved as well. Under the Act, I am precluded from getting involved in operational matters. When it comes to the designation of the port, I understand that is the competency of the Department and Minister concerned. As I have delegated powers in that regard, it is my responsibility.

UK fishing vessels, including Northern Irish vessels, had a pattern of landings into many Irish ports prior to the UK's withdrawal from the EU. In the post-Brexit period, UK vessels are now considered as third country vessels. County Donegal has the most landings by smaller Northern Ireland fishing vessels into smaller ports to which they traditionally landed.

Killybegs and Castletownbere have been designated for third country landings for some time. In 2021, Burtonport, Rathmullen, Greencastle, Howth and Ros an Mhíl were designated as ports for third country landings also. In 2023, three new ports in County Donegal — Bunagee, Glengad and Malin Head — as well as Dunmore East, were designated for landing of UK-registered Northern Ireland vessels. In addition, the opening hours in Greencastle were

extended. The four newly designated ports were additional to the seven ports already designated.

There are significant practical and cost implications for the State in the designation of EU ports for third country landings. Under EU regulations, such designations represent an entry point to the European Union, following which food is free to circulate within the full EU Common Market.

10 o'clock

On this basis, for any ports designated, Ireland is obliged to ensure that it has in place a meaningful control presence.

The current ports designated and the opening days and times for those ports were decided to allow for Northern Ireland registered vessels to continue to land into Irish ports, while ensuring that the Sea-Fisheries Protection Authority, SFPA, has the capacity to continue to perform its vital control functions effectively.

The authority has advised that additional resources would be required in order to extend the operational hours for Burtonport. On that basis, the SFPA has been asked to submit a business case to the Department on this matter, and any additional resources that may be required at Greencastle. All business cases are assessed on their own merits once submitted. Any additional headcount that may be sought by the SFPA will require sanction from both our Department and the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation.

I also assure the Deputy that the designation of ports for landings does not preclude vessels from coming into ports for *force majeure* reasons, such as safe harbour. I take on board the issue he raised, and I will try to have that investigated.

I have set out for him the facts as they are and will answer some of his specific questions. Paschal Hayes, as the Deputy knows, submitted his decision to retire some time ago. There will be a public competition to replace that third member of the authority, but in answer to the Deputy's question regarding who is now in charge, I intend to appoint in an acting capacity one of the two remaining members of the commission in the coming days. I will keep him updated on that.

Deputy Pat the Cope Gallagher: I am disappointed to learn that a business case has to be made to open Burtonport for a few hours. When looking at the map of Donegal, there is no designated port from Greencastle to Killybegs where fishermen can land on Saturdays. It is putting people's lives at risks and depriving them of accessing the Chinese market. It makes no sense at all. It makes no sense to have Burtonport linked to Greencastle, which is an hour and a half away, whereas it should be linked to Killybegs, which is 48 km and 45 minutes away.

As the Minister of State knows, fishery officers are not laid off if there are no landings in Killybegs during the summer. There are 20 fishery officers there and all they have to do is slip down the back road from Killybegs to Ardara to Burtonport, and they do not have to come. There is an insinuation that a fishery officer has to be there every time a vessel is landed.

I will pose the question at a later stage and I want the details. Is there a fishery officer at every port when fish are being landed? There is not. I am around long enough to know that. There is somebody in the Minister of State's Department or in the SFPA who is being difficult. They are being intransigent about this. They are discriminating against the people I represent. I strongly believe that this must be resolved soon rather than later.

I think I am the only one left in this House from the class of 1981. I am here all of these years and I never had to come in to make a case like this for something that is so simple. We talk about money; I understand if the SFPA is coming to make a case to the fisheries committee. When its officials attend, they have to spend some money in preparing to come there and the amount of money we are talking is peanuts.

A predecessor of the Minister of State's was able to designate ports in north Donegal but ignored west Donegal for some reason. To leave all of that area without a designated port on Saturdays deprives fishermen of going into that lucrative market.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Go raibh maith agat, a Theachta. Tá an t-am caite.

Deputy Pat the Cope Gallagher: I sincerely hope that I will not have to come into this House again to make the case.

Deputy Timmy Dooley: I assure the Deputy that I will make every effort to ensure that he does not have come in and be as passionate as he is about this issue. It is something that I am aware of. I am working to try to find a resolution. I take the Deputy's point about the language that is sometimes used to set out the reasoning, with terms such as "business case", "headcount" and "personnel".

Having travelled the road in the Deputy's presence, it is clear to me that there is an issue here that has to be resolved. I commit to doing my best to try to get it resolved as quickly as possible. It is a fair ask. I do not believe it is unreasonable, and I certainly do not believe that the costs should be prohibitive taking everything into consideration. The Deputy should be assured of my effort to try to resolve this in so far as is possible and as quickly as possible. I thank him again.

Deputy Pat the Cope Gallagher: I thank the Minister of State.

Teachtaireacht ón Seanad - Message from Seanad

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Seanad Éireann has passed the Arbitration (Amendment) Bill 2025 without amendment.

Exclusion of Israel from Sporting Fixtures: Motion [Private Members]

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I move:

That Dáil Éireann:

agrees that:

- the State of Israel is committing an ongoing genocide in Gaza, something which both the Taoiseach and Tánaiste have publicly acknowledged;
- since 7th October, 2023, nearly 75,000 people have been murdered by Israel in Gaza, including more than 20,000 children;
- of the more than 170,000 Palestinians who have been injured in Gaza since October 2023, 43,000 have sustained life-changing injuries, including amputations, spinal cord injuries and severe mobility impairments;
- all of Gaza's infrastructure, including water, energy, healthcare and education systems, have been systematically and deliberately destroyed by Israel;
- Israel has repeatedly violated a so-called ceasefire agreement that was announced in October 2025, with nearly 1,000 Palestinians being killed since then;
- on 28th May, Israel's Minister of Defense, Israel Katz, confirmed that he was committed to the ethnic cleansing of Gaza, through large-scale forced migration of Palestinians from Gaza;
- on the same date, 28th May, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, announced that he had directed the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to increase its occupation of Gaza to 70 per cent of the territory;
- since October 2023, nearly 1,500 Palestinians have been murdered in the West Bank;
- violent settlers are acting with complete impunity in the West Bank, murdering Palestinians, razing Palestinian villages to the ground, and forcibly expelling Palestinians from their homes;
- since 2020, Israeli courts have not handed down any jail sentences to settlers found responsible for the deaths of Palestinians;
- Israel's bombardment of Lebanon has intensified in recent weeks, with approximately 20 per cent of Lebanon now occupied; and
- according to a statement from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), on 29th May, 11 children are being killed or injured every day in Lebanon by the IDF;

notes that:

- on 18th May, 2026, the IDF boarded a Gaza aid flotilla in international waters, and kidnapped humanitarian activists, including 13 Irish citizens;
- those citizens were assaulted and abused by members of the Israeli military and publicly goaded by far-right Israeli Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, before being deported from Israel;

- at the time, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade stated that the treatment of detained activists was "unacceptable" and "appalling";
- the East 1 settlement construction, East of Jerusalem in Gaza and the West Bank, is currently being pursued by the State of Israel, in breach of international law;
- both the European Union and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, have condemned the East 1 plan being carried out by the State of Israel, stating that these actions damage the viability of a two-state solution, and are in breach of international law; and
- this represents the ongoing denial by Israel of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, is forcible transfer, and constitutes a war crime;

further notes that:

- sportswashing is a known method for apartheid States to distract from breaches of human rights and other unethical conduct, including war crimes;
- the Irish women's basketball team were not financially supported by the Government to boycott playing Israel in the FIBA Women's EuroBasket 2025 qualifier, despite "strong concerns" expressed from Basketball Ireland over the fixture;
- in 1999, the then Fianna Fáil Government prevented a Euro 2000 qualifying match between Ireland and Yugoslavia from taking place, because of Serbian atrocities in Kosovo;
- the Government acted, despite UEFA turning down a request from them to cancel the game;
- at the time, the then Taoiseach said "It is not for a government to force a sporting decision on a body. But if the body refuses to make a decision, then we will have a decision to make";
- in February 2022, FIFA and UEFA banned Russia from all club and international games, after Poland and Sweden refused to play World Cup qualifiers with the team;
- on 5th December, 2025, the Taoiseach described RTÉ's decision to boycott the Eurovision as "an act of solidarity";
- Irish athletes, such as Wheelchair Rugby player Alan Dineen, have stated they will refuse to play against Israel in international competitions;
- the removal of a fixture from grounds within the Republic of Ireland does not represent an appropriate measure, while the support of this measure is a continued endorsement of the fulfilment of fixtures against a State currently in breach of international law; and
- on 28th May, 2026, the Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport and the Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, announced their intention to boycott the upcoming Ireland-Israel game; and

calls on the Government to:

- advocate, at national and international level, for Israel to be excluded from all international sporting competitions, as long as the genocide and illegal occupation continues; and

- support Irish sporting bodies to boycott fixtures, events, and competitions, where Israel is competing, as long as the genocide and illegal occupation continues.

I offer our sympathies, as a party, to the victim and family of the awful incident in Belfast on Monday, condemn the racist violence that has ensued and call for calm in all communities in the North at this moment.

I am proud to move the motion, which seeks to ask this Government to advocate for the exclusion of Israel from all international sporting competitions and to support Irish sporting bodies that are asked to compete in competitions where Israel has not been excluded.

I thank everybody who has worked on the motion and on the communications around it, the many civil society groups that have been tirelessly working on this campaign to stop the game, including the Stop the Game group and Irish Sport for Palestine, and many other volunteers who are working hard to really express a growing sentiment in society that this is not okay and that we cannot stand alongside Israel in a sporting fixture of this nature and allow that to be a sportswashing exercise for the ongoing genocide in Gaza, the West Bank and in Lebanon.

I will talk through some of the details of the motion. What we essentially offer is an opportunity for the Government parties to act as leaders, to stand up and say that we will not stand for this, we will distance ourselves from Israel and that we will wholeheartedly take part in the boycott, divestment and sanction movement that is growing globally to respond to the genocide in Gaza.

I also want to pre-empt some lines that the Government seems to always throw out when this is debated and when we discuss Gaza, which we discuss a lot in this Chamber. We are sick of hearing on the Opposition benches, and what is wearing really thin, is the continued line that this Government is a leader and is leading out in its response to Palestine.

Dr. Susan Power is the head of legal at Al-Haq, an organisation in Palestine. She spoke in briefing rooms in Leinster House and at a committee meeting. I also heard her at an event later the date. She spoke about how when the occupied territories Bill was originally proposed in 2018, the Irish flag was raised in Bethlehem and that people in Gaza heralded that finally a country was seeing what was going on and that it was responding. She says now that she is ashamed of Ireland's lack of action and that the words the Government speaks and the limited number of actions that it is so keen to list out again and again pale into insignificance compared to what we actually need to see in terms of action.

There are some many things that it can do as a government to support the Football Association of Ireland, FAI, in pushing back against UEFA on its failure to exclude Israel from the Nations League competition. Primarily, it can support the FAI in stopping the game and not playing. It can inoculate the FAI from any potential sanctions that may come its way. It can support the association in all of the fallout from any such exclusion.

The Minister of State and the Government can interact with the governments from the nations involved in this Nations League so that we have a united approach. That is what boycotts

is and the motion offers the Government the opportunity to boycott, to be leaders in this and to gain the momentum that we need to see for push back against this genocide.

One of the other lines I want to pick up on is that the Government constantly says that we, in the Opposition, do not have a monopoly on empathy. Nobody on the Opposition benches has ever claimed that we have a monopoly on empathy, but we do have empathy, and we choose to display it. In our role as Opposition Members, who have to hold the Government to account, we ask the Government: where is its empathy? Where is its leadership, and will it stop the game?

There is precedent here. As we all know, a Fianna Fáil Government previously refused entry to players on similar grounds.

Le linn cinedhíothaithe, níl aon rud neodrach faoi pháirt a ghlacadh i gcluichí spóirt leis an tír atá i mbun an chinedhíothaithe sin. Caithfidh muid seasamh a thógáil, mar a tugadh in aghaidh na Rúise, in aghaidh na hAfraice Theas le linn apartheid agus in aghaidh na hIúgslaive.

I ask the Minister of State to please listen to what we have to say and hear our indignation. His colleague, the Minister, Deputy O'Donovan, said that we – my party and I – show indignation. The Minister of State will have a whole lot of it coming at him because we are indignant at this genocide and the impunity Israel is enjoying.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Aindrias Moynihan): Iarraim ar an Teachta nuathofa, an Teachta Ennis, labhairt den chéad uair. I welcome Deputy Ennis for his maiden speech. Tá cuig nóiméad aige.

Deputy Daniel Ennis: In this maiden speech, I will start by thanking the people of Dublin Central who voted for me and turned out in good numbers. In everything I do, I am going to work to repay the trust they put in me. I thank my family and friends and everyone who has helped me get to this point. It is a proud honour for both myself and my family. Without my fiancée, Chloe, my son, Wylder, and my daughter, Wren, I simply would not be here. I thank them for all their love and strength. I thank the amazing campaign team, Gary, Cáit and El, as well as everyone who turned out, including volunteers and canvassers. I also thank the youth and sports clubs and schools that were my safety nets in the north inner city.

On that point of sport, sport has changed my life. Growing up in the north inner city, sport kept me on the right track. It kept me connected to my community and friends. From grassroots level on our local pitches and play spaces right up to national level, sport has always been a place of unity, friendship, inclusion and, most importantly, respect. I have seen sports pitches be places that unite our communities and bring people together over a shared love and language. Sport saves lives. It has taught me so much. It is more than just a game.

Sport only works as a tool when we ensure it is grounded in respect, that is, respect for each other, the game, our teammates and our opponents. We must also have respect for our athletes representing our nation and its jersey. This Government has shown a complete lack of respect for our nation, supporters and athletes when it insists that we should play any sporting fixture against Israel. Many of our athletes and club members have already voiced concerns and frustrations about the possibility of Ireland playing sporting fixtures against Israel. Wheelchair rugby player, Alan Dineen, made his position clear when he stated that he would refuse to play

against Israel in any international competition. FAI members were clear when 93% of them passed a resolution last November to ask UEFA to remove Israel from all competitions. The Irish public could not be any clearer in this regard. We should not be playing against a genocidal regime.

People have said that politics should not be involved in this decision and that sport and politics simply do not belong together. Choosing to play any fixture against the Israeli state, however, is a political decision. It is a political decision because, for Israel, this is not about football; it is about keeping its reputation clean by continuing on like nothing is happening. For Israel, it is more than a game. It is certainly more than a game for us, too. It is more than a game because, right now, it represents a regime that, for nearly three years, has systematically committed genocide against the Palestinian people. It represents a regime that has overseen the killing of nearly 75,000 Palestinians, including some 22,000 children. It is absolutely shocking and shameful. It has deliberately destroyed water, energy, healthcare and education infrastructure in Gaza. It has committed ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian people from Gaza. Sharing that pitch is sharing respect with not just the Israeli team but with that genocidal regime.

By our Government refusing to act on this matter, it is placing a responsibility on the shoulders of athletes. While the athletes who represent this country at international level are some of the bravest people we have - they have committed their lives to their sport - it is not and should not be their responsibility alone to make choices like this. This is a decision for our Government and governing bodies. In June 1999, we were faced with a similar situation that we are faced with now. The Republic of Ireland and Yugoslavia were scheduled to play a European qualifier at Lansdowne Road. UEFA refused to postpone the game and threatened the FAI with sanctions if they did not play. The public and players made themselves clear at that time that they did not want this to go ahead. Certainly, the Government at the time had a tough decision to make but days before the game was due to take place, the Government led by Bertie Ahern of Fianna Fáil - in which our current Taoiseach was a Cabinet Minister - refused to grant the Yugoslavian players entry visas because of the atrocities that were taking place in Kosovo.

The football pitch has been a place where I have learned some of my core values. This set of values prioritises being brave, standing up for yourself and fighting for what you believe in and fighting for what is right. It is a set of values that all athletes show time and again when they play, especially when they play for our country. When they go out on the pitch or court, they put themselves out there and show bravery, leadership and accountability. They show how to be bigger and be a part of something bigger.

In 1999, when our Government decided that we could not justly play against Yugoslavia, it was brave. It stood up for what was right. It showed leadership and accountability. It showed the same traits that our athletes show every single time they step out to represent our country. We need our Government to act like our athletes again. We need it to be brave and stand up for what is right. We need it to ensure that none of our athletes have to be faced with a decision to play on the same pitch or court or in the same stadium as the same genocidal regime that is committing atrocities in Gaza. We need the Government to respect and trust the power of sport and show that this is more than just a game.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: Some 75,000 people have been murdered, 23,000 of whom were children. A total of 260 journalists and 565 footballers have been murdered. Both our Taoiseach and Tánaiste have said it is a genocide. Yet, it is business as usual for Israel. It gets to pretend that it is a normal state. It is far from normal, however. It is a murderous regime that is conducting a genocide. Yet, it still gets to access European trading markets and European funds. The Israeli football team will now get to represent its country in a stadium, with its flag flying and its national anthem being sung, and the Irish Government thinks it is okay to send our players out representing Ireland to play against it.

We hear repeatedly that sport is above politics. That is one of the Government's mantras when it comes to this issue. Sport was not above politics when the former Taoiseach, Garret FitzGerald, supported the boycott of apartheid and sporting organisations at that time. It was not above politics when the Government at the time removed the visas from the Yugoslavian players. It was not above politics when, during the previous Government, Ministers supported the boycott of Russia. Yet, all of a sudden, when it comes to Israel, sport is above politics. The Government cannot take or make a decision on it. It cannot have a statement or opinion on it. Where is the Government's moral compass? That is what this comes down to. Where is its backbone, because previous Governments had courage when it came to this?

Our motions asks for two things. First, we ask the Government to advocate at a national and international level for a boycott. Second, we ask that it supports sporting organisations. What is so difficult for this Government to do that? Why is it so difficult? I ask the Minister of State to lead.

Deputy Liam Quaide: First, I commend my colleague, Deputy Gibney, on today's Private Members' motion and for her strength of advocacy on Palestine. The Israel-Ireland match should not go ahead. This is not a normal sporting fixture. It is a fixture involving a state that is carrying out genocide in Gaza, maintaining an ethno-supremist system of apartheid and accelerating ethnic cleansing in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and now southern Lebanon.

The Government wants credit for recognising the State of Palestine. I welcomed that recognition, as I welcomed other acts of solidarity it has taken. Those actions, however, cannot be treated as sufficient when Gaza has been almost entirely destroyed, much of its population murdered or permanently disabled, destruction and mass murder continue despite the so-called ceasefire and while the facts on the ground in the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Gaza increasingly make any meaningful, viable Palestinian State close to impossible.

Illegal settlement expansion and settler violence, property destruction and theft, military occupation and forced displacement are the machinery by which Palestine is being dismantled in real time. This is why the Government's ban on Israeli Ministers, Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, from travelling to Ireland was such weak and empty tokenism. These insular tribalist extremists are about as likely to visit Mars as they are to take a trip to Ireland. This is cynical gesture politics aimed at two men who are never coming here. Ben-Gvir and Smotrich may be among the most grotesque versions of Israeli colonial criminality but they are not an aberration.

They are the logical outcome of a state being granted total impunity by our closest international allies, the US, UK and EU, to mass murder, terrorise, starve, displace and plunder a defenceless civilian population. The Government now says it cannot act but history says

otherwise. In 1999, Ireland was due to host Yugoslavia at Lansdowne Road while atrocities were being committed in Kosovo. UEFA refused to postpone the fixture. The then Government did not shrug its shoulders and hide behind the sporting authorities. It refused entry visas to the Yugoslav squad and the match did not proceed. When the political will existed, an Irish Government used the powers available to it to prevent normal sporting relations with a state engaged in mass atrocities.

Deputy Eoin Hayes: On the eve of the World Cup, it is worth remembering the immense potential for good that sport, and particular football, can have in the world. Much of what we will see in the coming weeks will be the global community coming together to cheer on their teams in the spirit of friendly competition and comradery. While the power of sport can be used for good, the same power can be usurped and used to obfuscate and distract from great wrong, from corruption and abuse, and even from the greatest crimes against humanity. It can be used by regimes that want to pretend that they are normal and are operating within the bounds of international laws and norms. Let us be clear: there is nothing normal about the regime in Israel. War crimes are not normal. Apartheid and indefinite occupation are not normal. Genocide is not normal. An Israeli Government headed by extreme ethnonationalists is not normal. With its flagrant and consistent breach of international norms, Israel has abdicated its right to be treated like a normal state.

The Gaza genocide has inflicted untold horrors on the Palestinian people. It has also seen incredible moments of defiance and courage from aid workers who have attended the wounded and hungry, journalists who have borne witness to the brutality of the Israeli regime and the brave activists who have sailed into the path of a military with no respect for international law. We have seen it in the refusal of many Jewish people around the world not to allow this onslaught to be carried out in their name. We have seen that courage most clearly in the resilience of the Palestinian people, who have refused to give up the hope for self-determination. It is this bravery that should impinge on the Government's conscience when it comes to the Nations League fixture against Israel. There will be consequences, fines and penalties imposed by UEFA but do any of these stack up against the horrors of Gaza or against the incredible bravery of those who are persecuted?

Deputy Jen Cummins: I thank my colleague Deputy Gibney for the work she has done on this motion. I congratulate Deputy Ennis on his maiden speech. It is a great honour for people to be able to come here and I congratulate him.

Football is important to many people. This game has involved many people who would never watch a programme about politics or tune into anything to do with politics. This means a lot to people. The roll-out of this game in this country or another country has ignited a flame for many people who probably just go to football matches and never think about politics. I have been struck by that over the past while.

The Government is trying to hide behind the FAI by saying this is not its issue. That is a problem because it can do other things with other organisations. It can provide funding. It is a wishy-washy argument. People are saying that politics and sport should not be involved together and have nothing to do with each other. Politics is everything. Sport is everything to many people. Of course, they are naturally intertwined. It was not an issue when Russia invaded Ukraine. International sporting bodies acted swiftly. Sanctions were introduced and

its teams were excluded. Political leaders at that time were not shrugging their shoulders as they are now. There are moments when silence is not the right thing and this is one of those moments.

I want to consider some numbers. Some 75,000 Palestinians have been murdered and 170,000 have been injured. The Aviva Stadium holds 51,700 for a football match. That is for a football match, where people are seated. That is not the capacity for a concert. I am talking about when people are seated. If the match were to be moved to Croke Park, which is bigger, the capacity would be 69,100. Neither of those stadiums would be big enough to hold the number of people dead because of the genocide. If people can picture that in their minds, they will realise the importance of making sure that this match is stopped. The world can see exactly what is going on with the genocide on the Palestinian people and what the Israeli Government is doing. Having that flag flying at any stadium in this country is not acceptable. Just because the match may be moved to a different country, out of sight will not be out of mind.

Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (Deputy Timmy Dooley): I move amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after "Dáil Éireann" and substitute the following:

"notes:

- that the Irish people are deeply concerned about the conflict in the Middle East and Gulf region, particularly the situation in Palestine, and that the Government is committed to working with key partners to end the conflict;
- that Israeli actions in Palestine consistently contravene international law, and the Government continues to press for appropriate action, both at European Union (EU) and international level, in response to egregious Israeli breaches of human rights and democratic principles;
- Ireland's commitment to working with key partners to end the conflict in Gaza, and to advancing a sustainable peace plan and addressing the huge challenges facing Palestinians in Gaza;
- the Government's grave concerns about the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, with intolerable conditions;
- that Israel must immediately remove restrictions on aid access and facilitate essential supplies and services to reach people across the Gaza Strip;
- the Government's condemnation of the law passed by the Israeli parliament to expand the scope of the death penalty and revive its implementation in Israel and occupied Palestine;
- the particular concerns about the discriminatory nature of the law as it relates to Palestinians, and that the implementation of this law would give rise to serious breaches of international human rights law and international humanitarian law;
- the approval and publication of the text of the Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Prohibition of Importation of Goods) Bill 2026, noting that the

Bill fulfils the commitment set out in the Programme for Government, to progress legislation to prohibit the import of goods from Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, and further noting the proposed introduction of the Bill in Dáil Éireann this week;

— that, in line with the Taoiseach's statement, Ireland will act to prevent those members of the Government of Israel who have been instrumental in fomenting the unfolding disaster in Gaza, and the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration has instructed immigration officers to refuse entry to Itamar Ben-Gvir, Minister of National Security of Israel, and Bezalel Smotrich, Minister of Finance of Israel, should they seek to enter Ireland;

— Ireland's support of an EU-wide prohibition on trade with Israeli settlements, and that at both the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and the FAC Trade in May, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, requested that the European Commission bring forward proposals for a prohibition on EU trade with settlements, on the basis of the EU's Common Commercial Policy, and furthermore, that the Minister also reiterated Ireland's longstanding position that the EU-Israel Association Agreement should be suspended or, at a minimum, that the trade elements should be suspended;

— that a number of other member states supported Ireland's call for stronger collective EU action, and agreed that targeted sanctions alone cannot substitute for meaningful measures relating to trade with illegal settlements; and

— that the Taoiseach also wrote to European Council President, António Costa, on 20th May, reiterating Ireland's position on EU trade with Israel, and requesting an urgent discussion of these issues among EU leaders at the next meeting of the European Council on 18-19 June;

in relation to sport, further notes that:

— the performance and integrity of our top athletes on the international stage have a very positive representational impact for Ireland, as Irish sport provides the world with a window into Ireland and the Irish people, both at home and abroad;

— international success for our top sports people enriches our country in a variety of ways, and Ireland's achievements on the global sporting stage have been a cause of both celebration and inspiration for the Irish public, and will continue to be so into the future; and

— the Government is committed to supporting Irish athletes competing at the highest level of international competition; and

recognises that:

— national governing bodies of sport, such as the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), are independent, autonomous bodies responsible for the governance of their own sports, including the organisation of sporting fixtures, whether in domestic or international competitions;

— it is the role of the FAI to decide to fulfil its UEFA Nations League fixtures against Israel in September (home) and October (away);

- the FAI has stated that it intends to fulfil both fixtures against Israel;
- the FAI has made this decision in accordance with its obligations as a member of UEFA, the governing body and confederation for football in Europe; and
- the Government acknowledges the FAI's independence and autonomy in arriving at this decision and any decisions it may make in the coming days."

I thank the Deputies for raising an issue of considerable importance to all of us. Nobody on this side of the House in any way disagrees with the sentiment they express about the atrocities that have been committed against a humble, innocent group of people. We differ on the specific issue but not on the meat or about the seriousness of what is happening. That is the case for the Irish people, who are deeply concerned about the conflict in the Middle East and the Gulf region, particularly the situation in Palestine. The Government is committed to working with key partners to end the conflict and to advance a sustainable peace plan.

Israeli actions in Palestine consistently contravene international law and the Government continues to press for appropriate action at EU and international level in response to egregious Israeli breaches of human rights and democratic principles. Last year, the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory called it out for what it is. Having examined carefully Israel's conduct of the war since 2023, as well as the actions and statements of senior Israeli military and political figures, it concluded that Israel is responsible for the commission of genocide in Gaza. That is the gravest of crimes in international law. The Government calls on Israel to immediately remove restrictions on aid access to facilitate essential supplies and services reaching people across Gaza.

There have been many calls for Irish sporting organisations to boycott or exclude Israel from international sporting competitions in the context of the conflict in Gaza. These include calls to the FAI not to fulfil its UEFA Nations League fixtures against Israel this autumn. It is important to note, however, that the national governing bodies of sport, such as the FAI, are independent, autonomous bodies responsible for the governance of their own sports, including the organisation of sporting fixtures in domestic or international competitions. That is a fact we cannot ignore. The Government and Sport Ireland have no role in determining or supporting the organisation of such fixtures. At the end of the day, neither the Government nor any of us here in this Chamber decides who plays whom in sport, whether at domestic or international level, notwithstanding the point that politics is involved in everything. Public opinion and our opinion is involved in everything but we have no role in making those decisions. If we were to suggest that we had a role, it would be considered by others as overreach. We must be careful what we are advocating for. Not responding to that request in no way limits the empathy of those on this side of the House or reduces the disgust and distress that we too feel about the atrocities that have been perpetrated on innocent civilians in that zone.

The FAI has stated that it intends to fulfil both fixtures against Israel in accordance with its obligations as a member of UEFA. The Government acknowledges the FAI's independence and autonomy in arriving at this decision and any decisions it may make in the coming days. The performance and integrity of our top athletes on the international stage have a positive

representational impact for Ireland as Irish sport provides the world with a window into Ireland and the Irish people at home and abroad. International successes for our top sportspeople enriches our country in a variety of ways. Many of our fondest memories are centred on Ireland's achievements on the global sporting stage. These achievements have been a cause of celebration and inspiration for the public, and will continue to be into the future. That is why the Government is fully supportive of our athletes competing at the highest level of international competition. However, ultimately international sporting federations are responsible for deciding how to carry out their competitions and who may participate. International federations, in this case UEFA, have a leadership role for their global games and it is at that level that strategic decisions should be taken rather than by the national governing bodies of individual countries.

The Deputies opposite are well aware that the Government has advocated at European level for the ending of the neighbourhood agreement that exists between the EU and Israel. I think this is the appropriate action, that relates to governmental activity rather than sporting activity, that shows our commitment to trying to build an alliance at European level and hurt Israel where it matters most in relation to trade. Of course, that is something we have to continue.

The FAI has decided to play the fixtures against Israel in accordance with its obligations as a member of UEFA. While there is speculation that the FAI may request that UEFA allow the game to be moved to a neutral venue abroad in the coming days, this is ultimately a decision for the FAI to make. While the decision to fulfil the fixtures or not is a matter for the FAI, it is important to note that not fulfilling the games could have serious sporting consequences for the Irish team, including losing points, relegation in the national league standings, weaker seeding for Euro 2028 qualification and harm to Ireland's FIFA ranking. These consequences may not matter to some, for sure, but they matter to Irish football.

At an operational level, I understand that the FAI is continuing to engage with An Garda Síochána to ensure appropriate preparations for and policing of the home leg of the fixture. The FAI has also engaged with the Norwegian Football Association, which hosted a match against Israel in November last year, to see if any lessons from its experience can be applied to the preparations for the upcoming game in Ireland. Norway played the away leg of its World Cup qualifiers against Israel in Debrecen in Hungary. Furthermore, the FAI is engaging with the Palestinian Football Association to get its views on how to prepare for the match. Additionally, the FAI has engaged with the Israel Football Association, which has confirmed that it does not expect a significant number of Israeli fans to travel to Ireland for the fixture.

In accordance with UEFA rules, home legs and fixtures cannot be played in another jurisdiction unless concerns are raised about the capacity for the fixture to be held securely and safely. This is in the broadest sense, from health and safety to fan behaviour to policing. In this instance, An Garda Síochána has confirmed that it is prepared to police the home game.

While there has been a wholesale exclusion of Russia from most international sporting events, a point which was raised, the exclusion is built upon international consensus driven by international sporting bodies and within the EU is linked to sanctions against Russia following its illegal invasion of Ukraine. No such international consensus exists in relation to Israel. I am sorry that is not the case, notwithstanding the efforts that the Government has made and continues to make at European level to build that consensus.

It is the case that colleagues of mine in other parliaments across the European Union will reflect very positively on the statements and actions of the Government in being leaders in this regard. With respect, it was indicated that we had not shown leadership. In almost every other parliament in Europe, we are seen as being leaders in relation to what we are trying to do to bring Israel to heel for its atrocities. That is not the case in other member states and the consensus does not exist within parliaments there.

Reference was made, if not here, then elsewhere, to RTÉ deciding in December 2025 to neither participate in nor broadcast the 2026 Eurovision Song Contest due to Israel's ongoing participation. This has been referred to in current debates. That was an independent decision taken by the State broadcaster, which is legally and editorially independent of the Government. Again, if there was a debate in this House demanding that the Government involve itself in a decision like that, it would be seen as overreach, and rightly so, if we were to get involved in what is an independent authority. I think it would reflect badly.

The issue of funding was also raised. Sport Ireland, which is funded by the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, is a statutory body with responsibility for the development of sport, including the allocation of funding across its various programmes. The Sport Ireland recognises national governing bodies, NGBs, play a key role in helping to deliver the strategic priorities identified in national sports policy. Funding delivered via Sport Ireland to the NGBs is not tied to the operational or administrative models used by the NGBs, either nationally or locally. All NGBs are independent, autonomous bodies responsible for their own governance and decision-making, including regarding the organisation of and participation in international sporting competitions.

It is very clear that there have been issues with other organisations and NGBs over time, and it is all about corporate governance and good governance, the management of their strategic goals and ensuring that the State's money is spent appropriately. This is where the level of Government involvement has to end. Otherwise, it would be seen as an overreach. The Government has no role in how NGBs organise their sport or in their day-to-day operational functions. Furthermore, it would simply not be appropriate to intervene in matters such as this. The FAI is completely within its rights to fulfil its international fixtures and the Government acknowledges its right to do so.

The motion put forward today risks isolating not only Irish football but the entire Irish sporting ecosystem, making our sports and sportspeople merely an appendage of Irish foreign policy and entirely dependent on financing from the Government. I do not think, notwithstanding everything that has been said, that would be in the best interests of our sporting organisations. For these reasons, the Government proposes to amend the wording of this motion as per the amendment submitted to the House.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I thank Deputy Gibney for all her hard work on this motion. Moving the match to a neutral venue is not a solution; it is cowardice. The issue has never been where the game would be played. The issue is whether it should be played at all against an opponent actively committing genocide. A neutral venue will not make the game neutral.

Across Ireland, there has been overwhelming public support for strong action in response to Israel's barbarity but the Government has failed time and again to meet this moment and respond with the urgency needed. Instead, we get weak responses dressed up as difficult

decisions, like finally introducing the occupied territories Bill after years of delay while gutting it by removing services. Similarly, the suggestion of moving the game to Hungary is an attempt to make the controversy go away. It is absolutely beyond belief that this Government can stand back and do absolutely nothing. Is this what passes for political leadership from this Government? Previous Governments were not so cowardly.

In 1999, a Fianna Fáil Government took a stand in response to the atrocities in Kosovo and refused visas for Yugoslavian players, which was against the position of UEFA at the time and without the approval of the FAI. In 1999, we were not pretending that football existed in some separate moral universe. We understood the political power and symbolism of the game. What has changed? Israel is using sport to launder its international reputation in the midst of a genocidal campaign in Palestine and ethnic cleansing in Lebanon. Why are we facilitating that?

The Irish people do not want this game to go ahead. Is anyone listening to them? It is the job of this Government to represent the people and not to sit back and remain silent as a genocidal state plays soccer in Europe while committing mass murder in Palestine. Government Ministers are boycotting a match which they refuse to say should not go ahead. They expect players to walk onto the pitch and carry the consequences for this Government's political cowardice. The Minister of State said he does not disagree with the sentiment of this motion and went on to talk about his strength of feeling. He then read out, word for word, the same speech as the Minister of State, Deputy McConalogue, gave last night. This does not really display the sentiment that the Minister of State, Deputy Dooley, expressed. It is completely unacceptable. Ireland should not be facilitating this game, not in Dublin, not in Hungary and not anywhere.

Deputy Aidan Farrelly: I take this opportunity to thank the Minister of State for reading, word for word, what is already on the Official Record of the Dáil. It is a bit of an insult to everybody involved here this morning that this is pretty much the exact same speech we have heard very recently.

The Fine Gael Minister for sport, Deputy Patrick O'Donovan, has told us that sport and politics should not mix. That same Minister for sport, who demands an invitation to the opening of an envelope in every sports club, has the cheek to tell us that sport and politics should not meet. That same Minister for sport, who threatened League of Ireland clubs with a funding freeze because of the actions of a small group of people, tells us that sport and politics should not mix. That same Minister for sport, who directly intervened to ensure that the FAI would appear before an Oireachtas committee last year, tells us that sport and politics should not meet. That same Minister for sport, who has told us he will not attend the game, but that the game should go ahead, tells us that sport and politics should not mix. Quite frankly, what a farcical situation we find ourselves in.

The political cowardice on show in this House on this issue is utterly shameful. Where is this Government's bravery? Where are its values, the very principles that should underpin its politics?

The principles I see are to blame everybody else and take no responsibility or action for yourselves. It is FIFA's fault, it is UEFA's fault, and it is the FAI's fault. My worry is who is next for the Minister, Deputy O'Donovan. It will be the players' fault. It will be Heimir

Hallgrímsson's fault. It will be the fans' fault. It will be everybody's fault but the Minister's. Just stop the game. Of course, sport is political. Open any history book and you will find swathes of examples of the relationship between sport and politics, so we know this rhetoric from this Government will not cut it.

A neutral venue for this game is not the answer. What the Government has done is back the squad into a corner. The Government is backing the management and the players - the professionals - into making a decision. These elite athletes who so desperately require elite political representation instead get left with political amateurism, inaction and cowardice. Stop the game because what a sad day it is if it is left up to these players or staff to boycott. That is a position they should not find themselves in. Doing the right thing is not always easy but at least for us it is our job. It is not their job. That is why we are here. While this Minister and this Government continue to cherry-pick the times when politics and sport should collide, we should acknowledge the undeniable intersectionality between them.

It is only June. As the momentum builds behind this campaign, and those who play football or simply love Irish football are forced to be substitutes for those charged with making tough political decisions, we will be back here. I believe this Government will collectively rue the day it could have stood with the majority of people in Ireland and said, "Stop the game."

I commend Deputy Gibney on her work on this and ask the Minister of State to consider withdrawing that amendment.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I also thank Deputy Gibney for her work in bringing forward this motion and the excellent work done in recent days highlighting what this Government should be doing. It is deeply disappointing to see this amendment moved and the Government should reconsider that seriously.

When we talk of sport and football, I will start by reading the words of 13-year-old Saif, who suffered a life-changing injury when he and his uncle were shelled by an Israeli tank. He said that he used to walk but everything he does now is in the chair. He also said that he used to play football with his friends and what he liked most was playing ball down at the sea. Saif cannot play football any more. He will never play football. It was his dream to play for Palestine. The game between Ireland and Israel cannot go ahead, not here, not anywhere. Ireland cannot normalise and legitimise a genocidal regime that continues to bomb children in tents and shelters.

The Taoiseach and the Minister talk weasel words about insisting the game must go ahead and talk about losing league standing and losing points. Why must the game go ahead? Israel is committing a genocide. Does the scale and depth of the barbarity and terror in that word - what Israel is doing - mean nothing any more? Surely it is our duty and our role, given how Ireland was colonised and brutalised in the past, that of all people we should be the first European country to take a principled stand and refuse to play Israel, not to mention our legal obligation to prevent genocide and war crimes. Ireland could start a global movement of countries refusing to be complicit with the dystopian terror that Netanyahu is inflicting on Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon. Stopping the game would give hope that there still remains a universal value called, "Our common humanity". Ireland could be a candle in the dark for Gaza. We did it before in 1979, when the Irish Government banned the South African rugby

team due to apartheid. Why will this Government not show the bravery that government showed then?

There is a rising tide of anger on this. The Government is on the wrong side of history. It is going against the Irish people. The movement will grow until this game is stopped. Stop an cluiche. Déan an rud ceart. Seas suas do Gaza. Caithfidh Éire dóchas a thabhairt don Phalaistín. The game must be stopped. We can and must do it again.

I will finish with words from a doctor who writes about his experience in Gaza. It is horrific. He says that what is going on, right now, is hell, hell in one of its most severe forms, and that children have lost their childhoods. He said that a Gazan life, before all of this, was worth everything. Now, he says, it feels as if it is worth nothing. The Minister of State spoke about all the things the Irish Government is doing for Palestine. This is something. It is an act that is within the Government's power. The Minister of State talked about the EU-Israel free trade agreement not being within the Government's power; it is other governments. The Government can do this. If the Minister of State wants, he can stand up today and say, "The Irish Government believes this game should not go ahead". Why will the Minister of State not do that? The Government can support the FAI. It can support the consequences. The Minister of State can say, "Ireland takes leadership. We will take a stand. That is the right thing to do."

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Darren O'Rourke): We will go to a Sinn Féin slot. The first speaker is an Teachta Ó Laoghaire.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: I congratulate Deputy Ennis on his maiden speech and on his election. I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this motion.

Listening to the Minister of State's speech, with references to governing bodies, UEFA, regulations, rules, etc., you would imagine this is a mere matter of sports administration and competitions. Let us engage with that for just a minute. Even on that front, this is an open and shut case. This is a football association that is acting completely contrary to every rule, statute and convention of FIFA and of world sporting organisations. Article 64.2 of the FIFA statute states that it is completely prohibited for football clubs from one country to organise themselves in the occupied territory of another country. It is the rule under which Russia was suspended from FIFA. Similar rules have excluded Russia from other forms of competition. The UN convention against apartheid in sport includes clear statements in relation to human rights treatment and the manner in which sports organisations should organise. Three hundred sports facilities in Gaza and the West Bank have been destroyed in the past number of years.

In terms of what people involved in football in the FAI, in Ireland, are saying, 89% of delegates say that they do not want this game to go ahead. That is the democratic body of the FAI. Two thirds of professional footballers are saying they do not want this to go ahead. Let us be frank. This is not simply a question of sports administration. This is a fixture against a state that is guilty of the greatest crimes of this century. This is a fixture against a football association which fully endorses that and fully endorses all the crimes that have happened in recent years. There have been 75,000 people killed in the past number of years, 20,000 of whom were children, and some 733 even since this supposed ceasefire. Children have been directly targeted. Hospitals have been directly targeted. Humanitarian refugee camps have been deliberately targeted. Aid has been refused. Medicines and food have been stopped at

the border and even now are being delayed. What is getting through is barely a trickle. This is the same football association that is peopled and staffed by people who fully support and endorse this and wherever this fixture will take place, members of the Israeli Government will attend.

On that, I do not even understand why we are discussing this issue of Hungary and other locations where the match might be played. It is an Irish non-solution to a different problem. It is an answer to a question that nobody asked. This is not about how Israel does in competitions or how this fixture might go. It is not even about policing. It is, I am sure, partially about policing. Unfortunately, the track record of Israeli fans at many fixtures is a problem. Fundamentally, the issue here is that predecessor governments have set the precedent for this Government. The Government has chosen to ignore it but the fact is that previous Irish governments made it clear that they believed the then apartheid South African Government, the Yugoslavian Government and the Russian Government should not have their actions legitimised by allowing their sporting organisations to participate in sporting competitions as if they were a fully respected and accepted member of the international community.

That was the position then and it was the right position. Why is that not the position now? I do not think that is simply a matter of sports administration. I believe that is a matter of politics. There are worse governments than the Irish Government in Europe, yes, but when you look at the broader international scene, the Irish Government falls considerably short. It is always pulling its punches.

We will see that later on tonight with the occupied territories Bill. Two thirds of trade with those occupied territories is the kind of trade the Department of foreign affairs and the Department of enterprise say themselves should not happen and there should be no trade with the occupied territories. Effectively, it will make an exception and permit trade in services with the occupied territories. It effectively legitimises it. In this area, the Government is pulling its punches and in that area, the Government is pulling its punches. The context here is that the Israelis are trying to narrow the ground and effectively destroy the potential for self determination for the Palestinian people to have their own state. It is not that we have to do just one thing. We should take every action possible. The game must not go ahead.

Deputy Thomas Gould: We must stop the game; it is as simple as that. The Irish Government must step in now. As the Social Democrats have outlined, all sporting events with Israel should be stopped. We should lead a campaign in Europe and the world to have Israel banned and boycotted, the exact same way it was done with the Russians. There are double standards here. The question we must ask ourselves is: where do these double standards come from? Is it Europe? Is it America? Is it big business? Is it the Israeli lobby? Or is it that this Government has no backbone to stand up and face it down?

When you think back to Mary Manning and her ten colleagues of female workers, for three years, they went on strike against Dunnes Stores, South Africa and the apartheid state and the Irish Government did not have the guts to back them. It took 11 working class women to stand up to a regime that the Americans and British supported. We are back here again all of these years later and the same countries are telling Ireland what to do because there is no other explanation for why this is happening.

You can look at what happened with Yugoslavia and how Bertie Ahern stepped in as the Fianna Fáil Taoiseach at the time and stopped the team from coming here. Why does Micheál Martin not stand up and say the Israeli team is not welcome here? The Irish basketball players had to play them over the past 12 months. Where was the Irish Government to support them?

At least 75,000 people have died, including 22,000 children. When you think about it - 22,000 children - it is unimaginable. I cannot imagine it. I have two children and 22,000 children have died. We are allowing Israel to come over and play soccer?

Fair play to RTÉ as it had the guts to say it will not go into a competition with Israel. Now, we need the Government to have the guts to do the same. I stand with the Irish players, all the athletes, fans and sporting organisations. It is not their job. It is the Government's job as the Irish Government. Where is it? Stand up, say no to genocide and say this game will not go ahead. To all the Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael backbenchers who have come in here and cried crocodile tears for the past number of years, do not come in here and talk again unless they are willing to stand with this motion. This Government must stop the game.

Deputy Pat Buckley: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing this motion here today. I sat here last night and have sat here again this morning, listening to the debates. The first thing I have noticed is there is absolutely zero from the Government bench. It is absolutely shameful. It is crocodile tears we see in here. I do not like scripts but I will speak very bluntly. The Government just does not have the balls to stand up to genocide. If this game goes ahead, you might as well bring in who I call Netanyahu the Devil along and dress him up in Prada and we will have a huge Israeli hoo-ha with the headline that the Devil wears Prada in honour of everything the Israelis did in Palestine. It is absolutely shameful.

There is awful pressure on those players. Everybody is very proud to put on their national jersey. To think of an Israeli team with an Israeli flag on Irish soil with the national anthem and the Israeli national anthem being sung and it being acknowledged as normal is absolutely unbelievable and unimaginable. Yesterday, I listened to a debate in the audiovisual room from the Stop the Game campaign. One thing that struck me was there were 100 children lined up on a soccer pitch in Palestine. They placed them so close together that it took one bullet to shoot every one of them. That is the gut these Israeli people have.

It has been said over and over again here that this Government has an opportunity. We are known as a very proud nation, a strong nation and a sporting nation but we also stand up for those who are being persecuted because we have learned from our own history. We have heard many lines here before about how we do not want to be on the wrong side of history. I urge the Government to withdraw its countermotion. It is utterly shameful. The Irish people are very angry and very hurt. What if the Government had to walk in the shoes of any Palestinian. I have spoken to many of them. I have asked them how they are actually still coping and living today. One individual said to me that all we have left is hope.

Each and every one of us has an opportunity to throw politics out the window, do the right thing and stand up to say "No" that we are not letting this game go ahead and that Ireland will not participate in any sporting event whatsoever and tell the FAI to forget about the sanctions. There is a court proceeding that can go further than this. I do not even think UEFA has the balls to take us on because it will set a precedent. If we do the right thing now, we can stand

up here in a year's time or ten years' time and say we are proud we did the right thing and we stood up for the people who needed us.

Deputy Louis O'Hara: The Palestinian people have been subjected to starvation, occupation, dispossession and genocide at the hands of Israel, which has shown no restraint in its onslaught of the Palestine people. The international community has failed to stand up for Palestine for decades and speak up against the heinous crimes of the Israeli State. Israel is not a normal state and must not be treated as such. When Russia invaded Ukraine, both economic and sporting sanctions were imposed, and rightly so. There are many other examples but across the world, governments, FIFA and UEFA in this instance are completely silent when it comes to the genocide in Palestine. They are content to allow Israel to continue to participate as normal. It is a shocking double standard.

By participating in this game wherever it is held, we are normalising Israeli genocide and occupation. Ireland has a proud tradition of standing up for human rights on the international stage. We must use every opportunity available to us to stand up for international law. It is time for the Government to finally show some leadership and get behind this campaign to Stop the Game on legal and moral grounds. Stand with the people of Ireland who do not want this game to go ahead. Stand with the people of Palestine who are experiencing genocide. There is a moral obligation on us to do so.

On the one hand, the Government says the Israeli State is committing a genocide against the Palestinian people but on the other hand, the Government is content to welcome its sports teams here. Where is the leadership? Where is the Government's moral backbone? It is utter cowardice for the Government to expect Irish players, who are in a really difficult position, to go out and fulfil this fixture but Ministers then publicly announce they will not be attending the game. The Government will send the players out to play the game but it will not even show up on the day to back them up. The reason for that is the Government knows going ahead with this game is the wrong thing to do. The FAI's own members, stakeholders and supporters oppose this game taking place. Sport can send a really strong message and with the support of the Government, the FAI should be empowered to take a moral stance here. The Government should use its conscience and stop this game.

The occupied territories Bill will be debated today. The decision to strip that Bill of services is a cynical act by the Government. It knows it is diluting the legislation and by doing so, the Government is completely blunting the measures that are needed to hold the State of Israel to account for its genocidal acts. Start listening to the people, Stop the Game and pass the occupied territories Bill in full.

Deputy Martin Kenny: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing this forward this morning.

11 o'clock

The truth is we cannot have a situation where the world stands idly by but that is what has been happening, not just in the couple of years since Israel started bombarding Gaza but for decades. For more than half a century, we have seen Israel treat the Palestinian people as not just second class but as third- and fourth-class citizens. People have been mutilated in their own homes.

I am often struck by the fact that soccer and football, certainly in working class communities, bring everybody together, particularly those who come from different ethnic backgrounds. We see kids of all races and creeds coming together to play football. It brings huge energy and positivity to society, here in Ireland and around the globe. Yet, here we find it being used as something negative. Genocide and murder are being hidden behind soccer, a game that is so positive.

The Government has a job of work to do here. We have to recognise that this is not about the rules of international football; this is about politics. It is about whether we take a stand. It was very interesting to hear about a neutral venue. I think it was Desmond Tutu who said to claim neutrality in the time of oppression is to stand on the side of the oppressor. That is exactly what is being done here with this talk of neutrality. There is no such thing as a neutral venue. There is no such thing as a Government being neutral in a time of oppression. You have to either stand with the oppressed or stand with the oppressor. That is the choice we have here, and the choice which, unfortunately, the players may have to make at some point if the Government and others do not stand up to what is happening. Of course, there may be consequences. However, those consequences are minor compared to the consequence of the loss of one child, never mind 22,000 children who have lost their lives since this conflict erupted in its most recent form in Gaza.

Many soccer clubs affiliated with the Israel Football Association are located in occupied territories, on land which was stolen in the West Bank from Palestinian people. They are illegal soccer organisations, yet FIFA and World Soccer are doing nothing about it. The Government has an opportunity to stand with the oppressed, and that is what it has to do. That is what is required of a Government which claims to be in favour of international law and ensuring standards are applied equally and fairly. If they are applied equally and fairly, we should be applying them in the same way to the Israelis as we apply them to the Russians, applied them to the Yugoslavians and South Africans and would apply them to any other terrorist organisation around the world which claims to be a government.

There are Jewish people around the world and in Ireland - I met a couple of them recently - who are totally outraged by what is happening in Israel. They are very annoyed it is being done in their name. Zionism is a different thing altogether from the Jewish communities around the world who are being plagued by what is happening in Israel. It is totally wrong, and the Minister and Government need to stand up and say "Stop the game", so that we can truly identify with the people being oppressed in Gaza and the West Bank.

Deputy Ann Graves: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this motion. I also congratulate Teachta Ennis on his maiden speech.

Sinn Féin fully supports the motion to exclude Israel from sporting fixtures. We also stand with the Stop the Game campaign, which includes a huge number of organisations and individuals across Ireland, from football clubs, fan clubs and trade unions to students, players and pro-Palestinian groups, all of whom are united in making sure Israel's genocide is not legitimised or sportswashed, in a coalition across Ireland campaigning to stop the Ireland versus Israel games in September and October.

There must be accountability for Israeli crimes against humanity. Israel should face boycotting, divestment and sanctions. The least we can do in Ireland is ensure the green jersey

is not used to rehabilitate Israel at a time when the IDF is involved in genocide in Gaza and the first annexation of the West Bank. I have been around long enough to remember and to have stood in support of the brave stance taken by Dunnes Stores workers in Henry Street in 1984, when union members decided to take a stance against apartheid in South Africa. The Dunnes Stores strike led to the Irish Government introducing legislation to officially boycott apartheid in South Africa, contributing to the further international isolation and eventual downfall of apartheid there. It is a proud example of what we should be doing now with Israel.

Ireland should not play Israel in sport. Doing so legitimises genocide and gives cover to statute violations, apartheid and war crimes. Attempts to move the football games behind closed doors or to a different country are cowardly and have to be called out. The game should not go ahead, whether in Dublin, Hungary or anywhere else. That is not the point. We are witnessing is genocide in Gaza and the destruction of Palestine in real time. We know what is going on.

There should be no excuses, no change of venue, no games - just no way. The Government must rise to the challenge and show real leadership. It cannot pass the buck and leave it to sporting bodies, and most definitely not to the players. Only last year, the Government failed children in Palestine who could not visit Ireland to play Gaelic games. The excuse at the time related to visas. There should be no excuses. The Government must do the right thing and be the leader it claims to be.

Irish people have consistently stood shoulder to shoulder with Palestine. We have marched in our thousands in solidarity with the Palestinian people. The Government must respect the values of human rights, justice and international law. It must stand up against genocide in Gaza and Israeli apartheid and stop the games now.

Deputy Robert O'Donoghue: I will start by quoting Eric Cantona, who has been very vocal in his support for boycotting Israel:

We all remember apartheid in South Africa. The sporting boycott was critical in ending it. We have power. You have power. And football fans around the world have power.

I would go further. It is not just football fans around the world who have power. Every sporting fan, every athlete, every governing body and every nation that participates in sport has power. Sport cannot be separated from human rights and sporting boycotts can play a significant role in increasing pressure for change. We are now more than one thousand days into the destruction of Gaza. Nobody can dispute the scale of human suffering that has taken place. Tens of thousands have been killed and entire communities have been devastated. We are witnessing a real-time destruction of the Palestinian people and we ask ourselves what are we prepared to do about it.

Sport is often described as having no place in politics. We hear that phrase repeatedly, but history tells us otherwise. Sport has always been political. Nations use sport to project an image of themselves to the world. Governments celebrate victories as national achievements. Major sporting events are used to showcase internationally how a country represents itself on a global stage. If sport can be used to promote a country's image, then surely it is legitimate to ask whether that image reflects reality. How a country represents itself on the global stage

must be measured against how it treats other human beings. That is why this debate matters. I thank the Social Democrats for bringing it forward.

The motion argues that Israel should be excluded from international sporting competitions. I agree with this, as the destruction and illegal occupation continues. When apartheid South Africa was isolated from international sport, it was not just because of sport that it suddenly became political. It was because the world recognised that continuing as normal sent a message that oppression could be ignored. When Russia was rightly suspended from international competitions following its invasion of Ukraine, sporting organisations acted with remarkable speed. The question many people are asking today is simple: if sporting sanctions were appropriate in those circumstances, why is Israel being treated differently?

Here in Ireland, we have our own history of taking principled positions. In 1999, the Government intervened to prevent a game involving Yugoslavia because of atrocities taking place in Kosovo. The principle was clear, namely, that there are moments when events become so grave that business as usual is no longer acceptable. We were fined £25,000, but we stood in solidarity with a nation under siege because how you treat the weak is your true nature calling.

We in this Chamber and sporting authorities need to provide that leadership again. What message do we send when sporting events continue exactly as normal? What message do we send when flags are waved, anthems are played and international fixtures proceed while images of destruction and suffering continue to emerge day after day?

Whether intentional or not, we risk normalising what should never be normal. We risk sending the message that there are no consequences, human rights are secondary and international law is optional.

Those who oppose sporting boycotts often argue that athletes should not be punished for the actions of government. That is a serious argument, one that deserves consideration. However, sporting sanctions have never been primarily about individual athletes. They are about international pressure. They are about signalling that the global community cannot continue with business as usual while grave violations are taking place. History shows us that sporting isolation can be a powerful non-violent tool. It allows ordinary people to take a stand without causing harm. It provides peaceful means of expressing collective outrage and demanding change. We need Ireland to advocate nationally and internationally for Israel's exclusion from sports competitions while the destruction of Palestine continues. Ireland should support sporting bodies which choose not to participate in fixtures involving Israel. A sport does not exist in a vacuum. Every generation is tested. Every generation faces moments when remaining silent becomes the choice itself.

Sport cannot stop war, rebuild a city or bring back those who have been lost, but sport can send a message. It can declare that human rights still matter, international law still matters and that no nation, regardless of power and influence, should be exempt from accountability. If we truly believe that sport has the power to unite and represent our values, then we must ensure that those values include justice, equality and human dignity.

Deputy Eoghan Kenny: I thank the Social Democrats for this important motion. I must pay tribute also to senior international players like Séamus Coleman and Nathan Collins. They

have been put in an incredibly difficult position, but they have shown in their recent comments how connected they are to the Irish supporters and to Irish society, and we are very proud of them.

In 2022, the Polish Football Association showed its mettle and its connection with its players. Polish players stood up against the sportswashing of Putin's murderous regime and forced the hand of UEFA and FIFA. I commend the Polish Football Association and the players for that stance. That is exactly the approach our football association should be taking and the fact that it has not shows the wild disconnect between the leadership of the FAI and the players and supporters of Ireland.

Taking a home international away from the team and supporters hits particularly hard when we consider that the Palestinian national team and supporters have not been able to have a true home game since 2019 because of a murderous and genocidal government that poses a lethal threat to players, fans and hundreds of thousands of innocent people. Many of us in this House, thousands of Irish people, activists, fans and players want to see this game cancelled and boycotted. The single most cowardly decision that the governing body could have made was to move this game to a neutral venue. It removes the ability of ordinary people, Irish fans, to protest what they firmly believe would be the sportswashing of genocide. No banners, no protests in the street, no platform for our soccer fans to have their voices heard. Irish fans would have no issue with having a home game taken from them if it meant that the Irish people and Irish soccer were taking a stand against Israel's participation.

Finally, I would like to say to those who spout nonsense about politics and sports, sport is political. All sport is political. Art is political, music is political. That sentiment is nothing but a cloak to guard an opinion that you do not care about standing up for the oppressed in the only ways that ordinary Irish people have at their disposal. Stop the game, Minister.

Deputy Ciarán Ahern: On 24 February 2022, the same day that Putin launched his illegal invasion of Ukraine, Russia's World Cup qualifier play-off opponents, Poland, Sweden and the Czech Republic, all announced they would refuse to play their matches on Russian soil. Three days later, those three countries announced they were all boycotting the fixtures in their entirety. These decisions were taken without the approval of FIFA. There was no hand-wringing about points deductions, world rankings or finances. They simply made the right decision. After these countries took this action themselves, FIFA then announced that Russia would be suspended indefinitely from international competitions and UEFA announced that Russian clubs would similarly be suspended. Those countries took that decision because, as it was put in a statement released by the Polish players and the Polish FA at the time, there are more important things in life than football.

This is a question of principles. Why is Russia's horrific and illegal war in Ukraine different from the genocide, the ethnic cleansing and the apartheid that Israel has inflicted on the Palestinian people? Israel should not be participating in sporting fixtures while it continues to bombard Gaza and Lebanon, expand settlements in the West Bank illegally and carry out its policies of apartheid. Hundreds of Palestinian footballers are among the victims of the genocide, including Suleiman al-Obeid, the "Palestinian Pelé", who was killed while he was waiting for humanitarian aid. The FAI must take the brave step and refuse to play against this genocidal regime, just as the Polish, Swedish and Czechs did before, and this Government must

back them. It must reassure the FAI of its and our full support, financial, political and whatever else. Do not put this on the players. Football bodies take a stand on political issues all the time. They take stands against racism and against advertising alcohol, gambling and smoking. FIFA celebrates inclusivity and pride. These are all intensely political decisions. This decision is no different. Stop the game. Not here, not anymore.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I heard the Minister of State on the television last night and I have to say it was mealy-mouthed, disingenuous and lacking in any moral fibre. What he said was that the Palestinians think we are great, that we are doing so much. He went on to dispute the idea that this match meant anything. I spoke to ordinary Palestinians who live in my area, some of whom have been the victims of the genocide and were helped out of Gaza by the Minister of State's Department, for example. It would mean a lot to them if this match were not to go ahead. Obviously they would prefer the Government to sanction Israel and impose economic sanctions, but it would mean a lot to people in Gaza to hear that a team stood out and refused to play Israel. I wanted to pass that message on to the Minister of State.

I do not know if the Minister of State has had any hand, act or part in the rumour that the FAI is talking about shifting the game. I think the magnitude has hit home with the FAI and the Government as regards playing fixtures here, given the history of this country and so on. Shifting solves nothing. The venue was never the issue. It is about playing a team that is steeped in genocide, apartheid and racism. I am not going to list the reasons, but many of these players have actively cheered the genocide. Many of them have been in the IDF. The women's team, for example, participated in a PR stunt where they swapped their jerseys for IDF jerseys. Two Palestinian women footballers were kidnapped last week. How long do we need to go on here?

The FAI moving the fixture is an attempt to quell the opposition and I do not think it is going to work. There is a very important role for the Government here. The FAI would fear finance and it would fear sanctions against it. Six points in the face of genocide is nothing to me, but the FAI would fear maybe financial retribution from UEFA and FIFA if it pulled out of having fixtures played here. I believe UEFA would be on very dodgy legal ground if it were to carry that out because it is breaking its own statutes anyway. The FAI would have a very strong legal case to challenge that, since UEFA is not abiding by what it says. However, the Minister of State could step in here and reassure the FAI that the Government will not allow the sport to suffer in any way financially. It is very important that he do that.

The pressure needs to be kept on the FAI and the Government. I also appeal to the players to get together and come to a collective decision, if needs be. Hopefully it will not come to that. The women's team went on strike in 2017 when players refused to play against the Czech Republic, a World Cup qualifier, because of their ill treatment and unequal treatment. That was a success.

The Spanish women's team refused to play a match as long as Rubiales was left in charge because of sexual harassment. Sometimes players take a stand for the right reasons and sometimes it is very effective.

Deputy Brian Stanley: I thank the Social Democrats for bringing forward this comprehensive motion. Football is very important and I certainly do not want to be stopping

any sport but there are other things that are more important. It is important that the slaughter that we have witnessed in Palestine, not just in the past two or three years, but going back over generations, is stopped. Medics, journalists, families and children have been killed; it is absolute genocide. The strangulation of normal life in the West Bank, ethnic cleansing of the West Bank and now Lebanon, all of southern Lebanon, almost a quarter of the territory, are war crimes. People in Israel who support it are as guilty as their government.

I do not care what religion anybody is. Whether they are Jewish, Catholic, Protestant or whatever I am not interested. That is not issue here. The issue is whether people support the genocide of their government and the people in Israel who do so share some of this blame. Many Israeli people do not support it and many Jews I have met do not support it, which is good but over 75,000 people have died in Gaza since October 2023. With the aerial bombardments, starvation, disease and people buried under rubble, what people have seen is horrendous. Since the October 2025 ceasefire, 947 Palestinians have been killed with over 3,000 injured. To rub salt into the wounds, the treatment of the flotilla, including the 13 Irish citizens, was fingers up to the international community.

Israel is not a normal state. Israel is a terrorist state and should be treated as such. FIFA and UEFA banned Russia and there have international bans on Yugoslavia as well. Is what Israel has done to Palestinians not the same? I note that well over 90% of FAI members voted to instruct the association to call on UEFA to suspend Israel and that should have happened.

There is growing support across the country for the match not to go ahead. Ordinary people, who normally would not think too much about politics or what is going on in the world, are horrified by what they have seen through the good work that has been done by journalists - those who have been left alive to actually witness it - in Gaza who have brought that information to us on a daily basis. People may say that it is tokenistic or whatever but back in 1984 when the women in Dunnes Stores took the small step of not handling South African fruit, it mushroomed and ballooned into the boycott of the apartheid regime. This has the potential to do the same thing.

We must send a powerful message to the Israeli Government and the Israeli people who support it. Its genocide is not acceptable. As I have said, there are some things more important than sport. Irish people want action and here is the opportunity. I welcome the measure taken by RTÉ to boycott the Eurovision, which was good. I welcome to measure by the Government to ban the two Israeli ministers, the security minister and the finance minister, but it should go further than that. Israel needs to be ostracised in total until it makes amends for what it has done to the Palestinian people.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: I love football. I have played football since I was aged five. One of the things I love about football is it is young people all over the world playing the beautiful game, doing something beautiful. What Israel is doing to Palestinian children is the very antithesis of what football is about because it is ugly, murderous and genocidal. A very significant part of Israel's decades-long genocidal campaign against the Palestinians is its desire to murder Palestinian children, including the children who play football.

Back in 2015, more than a decade ago, I read out a quote from among many from ministers. One particularly stuck out by Ayelet Shaked, a Knesset MP who later became minister for justice, talking about Palestinian children. He said, "They should go, as should the physical

homes in which they raised the snakes. Otherwise, more snakes will be raised." That was his attitude and he became a minister after saying that. That is the altitude of the Israeli regime towards Palestinian children that has led it to kill more than 350 children who play football in the past three years, more than 1,000 mostly young people who play sports of various kinds.

One of those children was a young man called Muhammad Khalifa. I was very proud to be part of organising one leg of soccer events involving MuhammadKhalifa's team, Al-Hilal in Gaza. They played in Ballybrack as well as elsewhere in the country. He was aged 12 the time in 2016. A decade later, he was massacred along with seven members of his family and his brother. He had gone on to play for the Palestinian national youth team and he was wiped out by an Israeli attack which wiped out his entire family. He played hurling while he was here. He met the President. It was such a beautiful thing. His life was extinguished along with hundreds of other young people playing football by a regime that treats young Palestinians playing football and young children as snakes to be wiped out. That is the psychosis of the Israeli regime and that is why it must not be normalised. The idea of normalising it by playing a game of football against a state that does that to children is disgusting. The Government should support the boycott and stop the game.

Deputy Peadar Tóibín: Benjamin Netanyahu's IDF have been involved in some of the worst atrocities have been committed anywhere in the world in the past 50 years. A total of 75,811 people have been killed in a few short years in the conflict in Gaza - 73,770 Palestinians and 2,039 Israelis. The word disproportionate does not cut it. This has been the slaughter of the people. It has been the intentional killing of tens of thousands of innocent women and children. Horrific images of blood-soaked children have flooded onto our screens and in the past number of years. Many of these children have been atomised by bombs supplied by Western countries. The Israeli Government is also facilitating the stealing of land in the West Bank. The IDF are now involved in a killing spree in Lebanon, demolishing whole swathes of villages, towns and cities. The IDF have pulled in the US into bombing Iran which is causing the cost-of-living crisis all around the world.

On the one hand, the Government is saying that the Israel is involved in genocide and on the other hand that we should play a soccer match against Israel. The Minister of State should think about the incongruence of that. The Government supports this soccer match against the perpetrators of genocide on this planet. The Government has an incredibly two-tiered approach to this - one approach for Russia and one for Israel. Why is that the case? It is simply because of the international community. The Government does not have the backbone to have a consistent approach in these two very similar situations.

We believe we should be doing far more than we are doing here. Ireland has a history as a campaigner for peace and justice. We have had our own peace process. Our peacekeepers have put their lives on the line for peace internationally. Irish missionaries have fed the poor, and built schools and hospitals all around the world. Ireland has a history of being an honest broker in relation to peace. Norway, another small country with similar population, worked hard and created the Oslo Accords. Norway focused its reputation and experience on becoming a catalyst for peace. We in Aontú have been calling on the Government to get off its backside and do the same to try to become a catalyst for peace in this region. We are not saying it will be easy. It may well end in failure but peace is always worth trying for.

Ireland has lived in the shadow of a powerful military neighbour for centuries. Our experience is very similar to the experience of the Palestinians. Britain has murdered and killed Irish people through bullets and famine in their hundreds of thousands and many Irish people see themselves in the eyes of the people of Palestine. Given this shared experience, the Government's actions are even harder to understand.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: I welcome the Minister of State with responsibility for sport to the House.

Sport has always occupied a unique place in humane society. It transcends politics, religion, ethnicity and nationality. It brings people together in a way that very few things can. That is why I approached this motion with extreme caution. Let me be clear to this House: I condemn the horrific attacks that were carried out by Hamas against Israel on 7 October 2023, the murder of innocent civilians, the taking of hostages and the acts of terror. None of that can ever be justified. Equally, I am deeply troubled and disgusted by the devastating loss of civilian life in Gaza and the suffering of innocent men, women and children. It is absolutely heartbreaking to watch. One lesson that I have learnt in life is that war brings tragedy and grief to everybody it touches. However, young athletes should not be asked to carry the burden of resolving geopolitical conflicts that they did not create. As the Minister of State knows, a sporting career is short. For many of these players, there will be few opportunities for them to represent their country on an international stage. We should be very careful, therefore, before we ask them to sacrifice for that decision of which they have absolutely no control. The decision regarding Israeli participation in games with Ireland in UEFA competition is a matter for UEFA, not the FAI or for this House to impose on sports people.

History teaches us one thing, which is very important. When South Africa emerged from apartheid, Nelson Mandela understood the extraordinary power of sport by uniting a nation and not dividing it. He used the Rugby World Cup not as a weapon, but as an instrument of reconciliation. He brought a country together where politics alone had failed to do so. That lesson is as relevant to this House today as it was then. I say to those who are angry that they have the right to be angry, and they should be angry. I say to them to bring their energy to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, this Chamber and the institutions and governments that have the power to act on that and to push for sanctions and for accountability locally, nationally and internationally. That is where the battle truly is, not on the sports ground. Parliaments and this Parliament exist to settle political disputes. Sport fields exist to bring people together. At a time the world feels increasingly divided, we need more spaces where people of different nationalities, beliefs and backgrounds can still meet peacefully and respectfully in a mutual respect of one another in the name of competition. This House should be protecting those spaces and not dismantling them.

Let politics be debated in the parliament. Let diplomacy be pursued by this Government and the European governments. However, let athletics compete, let supporters come together and let sports remain the most powerful focus that we have to unite the people.

Deputy Barry Heneghan: Gabhaim buíochas le gach éinne a bhí ag caint. Aontaím le go leor rudaí atá á rá ag an Teachta O'Flynn faoi accountability but I disagree with him fundamentally on this. The Israelis have not let sport exist. When Alaa Al-Dali was trying to leave Gaza for the Olympics, he was deliberately shot in the knee. His own words described

it as "a grenade which exploded". He is now an amputee. I met him when I was on the flotilla travelling to Gaza. Speaking of Nelson Mandela, his grandson was also on that flotilla. I speak to him regularly. He is a current elected official in South Africa. It is a repeat of what we said on yesterday's motion in the sense that sport is and can be a time for peace. However, when a country is inflicting genocide, multiple reports have said it is inflicting genocide and UN independent reports are stating that it is inflicting genocide and using starvation as a weapon of war, breaking every international law, illegally abducting EU citizens in EU territorial waters, then it has broken everything. Bringing them here and allowing them to play on our pitch while standing for Amhrán na bhFiann is not nearly the same as the comparison that was just made by the Deputy. Under the Geneva Convention, we have every obligation to do everything that we can to oppose anyone that is inflicting genocide.

There is a rumour that Germany's away jersey is green because we were one of the first countries to play them after the Second World War. I used to say that thinking it was true, but it is not. We were one of the first countries to play them. We always have been a lobbyist for peace. Ireland is recognised worldwide for our peacekeeping missions, diplomacy, neutrality and everything that we have done. However, when we eventually played Germany, it was after the regime had fallen and the Germans had changed. This is the fundamental point. We are not against Israelis; we are against the current Israeli regime. I have said this 100 times. After my speech last night, I had people sending me emails and tweets saying that I am antisemitic. I am not antisemitic. This is against genocide. We had Israelis on the flotillas. Regarding the most recent flotilla, we had the video of the Minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir. I welcome that the Government has brought in sanctions. I welcome the investment that the Government has made in aid for Gaza and how it has been using its voice in the EU. I hope that when we take up the EU Presidency and we are setting the agenda, we use it to the best of our ability to be a broker for peace. Regarding our strength, níor bhain sé go stairiúil leis an líon saighdiúirí nó the big defence budget. Ireland's power is our respect worldwide as a broker for peace. That is why there needs to be a message sent out from this motion. I thank the Social Democrats and the Opposition. I thank the Minister of State for saying at last week's committee meeting last week that he is not going to go to the game. We need to look at it in that sense. We did before in 1982. Another Fianna Fáil Government did it back in 1999. We can do it again. Let us consider how quickly we and FIFA brought in sanctions for Russia. There is a clear hypocrisy and issue here that needs to be assessed.

I welcome the occupied territories Bill being brought in. I would love it to have services included. I would like something done rather than nothing. I look forward to it being introduced. That message will go around the world. Ireland will always oppose genocide, as Deputy Tóibín said based on our history and what all of our ancestors have seen. Le linn an Ghorta Mhóir nuair a bhí na seandaoine ag ithe féir ó thaobh na mbóithre timpeall na tíre toisc nach raibh aon bhia in aon áit, with grass stains on their mouths, would they not have liked somebody to have stood up to someone inflicting genocide on our forefathers? That is why I support it and really support what the motion is doing. It is a fundamental difference. I hope and I am optimistic that there will be a global shift. It has been a very long time coming. This needs to change for all the children starving, who have lost parents and lost legs and for all the women and men who have been peacefully protesting in Gaza and been shot in the knee or head and blown up. The figures constantly get higher. Aid workers are being told that they cannot bring in aid, such as a prosthetic due to it possibly being used as a weapon. The flotillas

that are bringing baby food and medicine, which is allowed under international law, are being illegally abducted. Nothing is happening. Irish citizens having bullets shot at them by the IDF while bringing in aid is not acceptable. Any regime that is inflicting and allowing this feels they can act in impunity, can get away with it and continues to do more.

I will not say that the Government has not done anything. I welcome what the Government has done in the past by recognising it at the ICJ and the millions of euro that we have given in aid.

We are lagging behind other countries but it is not too late for us to catch up, to run and lead with them, especially with the EU Presidency coming. I welcome this motion and will not support the Government's amendment to it.

Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport (Deputy Charlie McConalogue): I thank Deputy Gibney and the Social Democrats for tabling this motion and I apologise for not being here at the outset of the debate. Based on the debate in the House today and the debate on the Sinn Féin Private Member's motion last night, as well as from the discussions we have on a regular basis in this House, it is very clear that this House and the people of Ireland have significant concerns about Israeli actions in Palestine and the dire and worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza. I reiterate that Israeli actions in Palestine consistently contravene international law. The Irish Government continues to press for appropriate action both at EU and international level in response to egregious Israeli breaches of human rights and democratic principles. Last year the independent international commission on the occupied territories called it out for what it is: genocide, the gravest of crimes in international law. The prevention by Israel of essential and sufficient humanitarian aid going in to the people of Gaza, the continued facilitation of violent settlers in the West Bank and the appalling displacement of so many people in Lebanon is completely unacceptable.

Ireland has taken a strong stance in respect of the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, including recognising the State of Palestine, and the Government stands ready to play its part in working towards a sustainable peace between Israel and Palestine through the realisation of a two-state solution. We have a consistently strong record as a country in driving these issues and in taking action, including by intervening in the case taken by South Africa against Israel in the International Court of Justice alleging violations of the genocide convention. These are no small measures for a country like Ireland to take but it is clear that they will not be sufficient to drive meaningful change on the ground. The Government believes that the most effective and impactful way to deal with Israeli actions is at European Union level. It is clear that the EU needs to do more on this issue and the Taoiseach has written to the President of the European Council, Mr. António Costa, asking that it is put on the table for the next European Council meeting which, I understand, he has agreed to do. We will continue to raise this at EU level which we believe will ultimately have far more effect than unilateral actions taken at home. We will also continue our endeavours to use our influence to persuade the international community to take appropriate action and stop this conflict.

Much has been made in this debate of moral imperatives. It is clear that the moral imperative in Ireland is to do what is most effective in attempting to mitigate and end the suffering of the Palestinian people. Reducing this conflict to one or two particular football games does not achieve that objective. For good reasons, governments should not interfere

with international sports federations nor national governing bodies of sport, particularly in regard to directing who should play whom in international sporting events. FIFA, the world football governing body, and UEFA, the European football governing body are responsible for the system within which these fixtures are scheduled. They both maintain a strong line against interference by governments in international football competitions. What we do not want is to see the Irish team penalised due to interference by an Irish government. We are in government to run the country and the FAI should be left to run football. It would be a strange sight indeed to see governments dictating football fixtures or fixtures in any sport. The FAI, to its credit, has strongly represented the views of its membership that Israel should be excluded from international football competitions, including bringing a motion to UEFA to this effect last year. While we may all agree with the motion, the reality is that it was not passed by UEFA. The FAI must conduct itself in line with UEFA rules.

While deciding whether to fulfil these fixtures is ultimately a matter for the FAI, it must be acknowledged that refusing to play the games against Israel risks isolating Irish football from the international football community. This risk does not fall upon Members of this House but on the FAI which has the decision-making and stewardship capacity. The FAI's role is to ensure that football remains viable domestically and in good standing globally, without inflicting long-term institutional damage on the sport. With support from the Government, the FAI has made great strides in reforming its operations over recent years, driving change towards a modern, professional and sustainable football ecosystem in the country. It is in no one's interests that Irish football becomes isolated and indefinitely dependent on Government goodwill, as has been effectively suggested by some in recent days. Punishing athletes for the actions of governments undermines the foundational principles of international sportsmanship. Players have trained their entire lives to compete for their country at the highest level and denying Irish footballers the opportunity to compete in the Nations League compromises their opportunity to engage in sport as well.

The motion is not limited to the upcoming Nations League matches but calls on the Government to support any and all sporting boycotts against Israel. Let us be clear about what it proposes. It calls on Irish sporting bodies to boycott fixtures, events and competitions where Israel is competing, as long as the illegal occupation continues. An official boycott would set a dangerous precedent with wider implications that are not realistic or reasonable in the sporting landscape. Reflecting the reality that meaningful change on the ground in this conflict will not be driven by unilateral action by Ireland but by action at an EU and international level, the motion risks isolating Irish sport, financially undermining the entire sector and reducing it to a tool of foreign policy. Across all sports Irish athletes are currently trying to qualify for the Los Angeles Olympics. Many will have to compete against athletes from Israel. Are these young sports people supposed to park their Olympic dreams because the IOC has not excluded Israel? Should our boxers sit out international tournaments where there is an Israeli competitor? The same could be argued for our rowers, sailors and almost all athletes across all sports. If the Social Democrats' motion and approach was to be followed through, it would be an empty plane that departs for Los Angeles.

Many Deputies have referenced UEFA, FIFA and other sporting organisations that have excluded Russia from international sporting competitions. Conveniently, they do not note that these exclusions were not decided by unilateral action but by multilateral action by a significant number of national sporting organisations. As has been long pointed out during this debate, all

national governing bodies of sport, including the FAI, are independent and autonomous bodies responsible for the governance of their own sports, including the organisation of fixtures. The FAI is completely within its rights to fulfil these international fixtures and the Government acknowledges its right to do so. This well-established position has been rejected by the Social Democrats. Last night, Deputy Gibney called on the Government to intervene in the governance of football, and she does so again with this motion. As I have outlined previously, this would be very much at odds with the appropriate way for sports to be separate from political decisions. The Government does not have the legal authority to interfere with sporting fixtures and our amendment to the motion reflects this position. The Government's proposal to amend the wording of this motion has been submitted to the House.

Deputy Cian O'Callaghan: I thank Deputy Gibney for her work on this motion and congratulate Deputy Ennis on his maiden speech. I want to remember Trevor Dietz, the Fontaines DC manager. He was someone I knew for 30 years who was a strong advocate for and steadfast supporter of the Palestinian people throughout his life. My thoughts are very much with his family and friends today.

The Minister of State, the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste have all recognised that a genocide is taking place in Gaza. Indeed, everybody in this House recognises that a genocide is taking place. How can we actually recognise that and give meaning to it while at the same time take the approach that it should be just business as usual with Israel? That is what is happening. The current situation is that there are no meaningful sanctions against Israel. It actually has a preferential trade agreement with Europe in which Ireland participates. It is fine for the Government to say that we must address this at a European Union level because that will be more effective but it has been saying that for years. It is an absolute cop-out. There has been no agreement at EU level to do anything meaningful and there is unlikely to ever be agreement, and the Minister of State knows that. What we need the Government to do is show leadership. That is what we are asking for. Leadership was shown in the 1980s by the Dunnes Stores strikers in Henry Street and by Ireland. That had a real impact on bringing down apartheid in South Africa. We need leadership from the Government now, similar to that.

Deputy Gary Gannon: It is an extraordinary attempt at an Irish solution to tell us that the game of football the Irish national team is going to play against a country the Irish State believes is committing genocide against its people will now take place at a neutral venue and expect that to be some form of compromise. The Minister of State, Deputy McConalogue, referenced that the Taoiseach himself believes that Israel's actions against the Palestinian people and people in Gaza amounts to genocide. The Irish State has aligned itself to an International Court of Justice case that agrees this is genocide. Yet, we are now expected to take part in a game of football, or any sport, as if it is just normal that we remove our obligations and try to unsee what we have been watching every single day for the past three years and to which we have added legal weight at the highest international courts.

What actually makes a venue neutral? Will the Minister of State paint a picture for me of this neutral venue in some other state? Do the obligations of the Genocide Act not apply there? Are the players, who we expect to walk into the stadium, expected to leave their morality at the door? The Minister of State has said he will not attend the fixture in Ireland, presumably as a form of protest. That is a message but he expects the players to leave their morality at the

door of the stadium on the way in. Does the Minister anticipate the stadium to be filled with fans or does he anticipate this neutral venue to be behind closed doors? Does the Minister of State reckon the capacity of the stadium would exceed about 75,000? When the Irish players look out into the stadium at the empty seats they may see a lost Gazan life that was taken by the same country whose flag now stands up beside our Tricolour and whose anthem we will listen to alongside our national anthem. Is that the Minister of State's expectation of an empty stadium where one can probably see dead Gazan bodies? Does he imagine there would be journalists there? Would those journalists have any consideration for the Gazan journalists who were targeted by Israel precisely because they could not tell the story of the horrors that are being inflicted there?

Football is something that I have lived by my whole life. It is where I found a lot of my identity. It is where I became inspired as a kid. The Gazan children who were murdered will not be inspired by a match that plays at this neutral venue, where apparently our obligations under the Genocide Act do not apply and where players are asked to leave their morality at the door. I am a football fan. I cheer wildly when Ireland scores but I do not care about six points in the Nations League division two if what we are asked to do is separate our morality or conscience to achieve that. This is not normal. This should not be seen as normal. I would not like to see the Irish team line out against Russia and I would protest that. I cannot separate the hypocrisy of being asked to do so against a state that the Irish State believes, at the highest levels, is carrying out a genocide.

Sport and politics always mix. There has been no time in history where sport and politics have not mixed. Where would we like to start? Yesterday I referenced examples from Ireland, from Yugoslavia, and from apartheid South Africa. I can go back in history as long as we want. Sport has always been a means by which people present their identity and their politics but on this particular occasion the Tricolour will fly alongside the flag of a nation we believe is carrying out genocide. There is weight to the Minister of State's office. There is weight to the Taoiseach's office. When he referred to the genocide, it was a brave decision but it does not stop there. In recognition of genocide, we also apply the standard that we will not treat as normal a state we believe is carrying out genocide. I understand the complexities but I also understand the simple reality that courage matters now more than ever.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I thank everybody for their incredible contributions today. We have heard some really impassioned, very well informed and evidence-based detailed contributions from everybody on these opposition benches, unified in our message for the Minister of State to stop the game. What a shame that those contributions fall not just on deaf ears but there are no ears here as there is barely any representation from the Government. I welcome that the Minister of State, Deputy McConalogue, has been able to return here to the debate. I know he did explain in advance that he had another engagement but honestly it did not really make any difference because the words we heard delivered from his colleague, the Minister of State, Deputy Timmy Dooley, were the exact same words we heard last night in a debate on a different motion. I am just shocked at that. The Ministers of State literally just changed the numbers at the top of the documents. This is the level of engagement they have given to this motion and to our work as parliamentarians to represent people who are appalled at the thought of us playing Israel in a soccer game. That is all the Ministers of State bothered to do; just change the number on a motion and read the script back to us.

The Minister of State's take on our motion is simply wrong. We are not trying to penalise the sporting community. We are not trying to set back Olympians and athletes in any sport. That is not what we are trying to do. It displays for me that the Minister of State does not understand what boycott actually means. As other colleagues have said, and as I called out to the Minister of State last night when he read out the exact same speech, the whole idea about this is that there is not the same consensus in the international community about Israel as there has been for Russia and other countries where we have seen a united action against them. We do not have that. In the absence of that, and in the Minister of State's now acknowledged acceptance that we do not have that, what we have to try to do one by one, as individual beings and as individual nations, is to stand up and say "No, we will not take that". What will happen is that a domino set of actions will follow, which means that we will not be the ones penalised and our sports people will not be the ones penalised but it will be Israel who will be penalised because they will not be able to stand in resistance to the actions that we start. That is what boycott, divestment and sanctions do. That is how it works and it seems to be lost on you guys completely.

This genocide is unique because we are all seeing the atrocities. We are all aghast because the other thing we are seeing is the inaction of governments the world over. I mentioned Al-Haq earlier. One of its other contributors was really powerful in their description. They said that not only is the inaction clear from governments but those same governments have ministers who have been to Palestine. The Minister of State's colleagues have been there and they have told us this. They know what is going on. The Minister of State will excuse me for getting graphic for a minute but they have heard of the decapitated bodies coming back to Palestinian communities. They have heard of and they have witnessed the atrocities that are going on there, including the not isolated but systemic rape and torture of Palestinian prisoners. They have seen this. The Government has seen this and in response chooses inaction. We are so angry as a party, as a people, as a football community and as a globe that this is being allowed to continue. We can all see it with our own eyes.

The Government obfuscates, dances on the heads of pins and tells us the reasons it cannot act. We cannot tolerate it any more. The Minister of State and his colleagues know what is going on. They know the tools that are available to them. They know the words of the Genocide Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which say that we will save future generations from the scourges of war. The Government knows it has the ability to do this.

The final quote I want to finish on was from that same group. They said that the Palestinian people and the Lebanese people are not crying out now for us to save Palestine or for us to save Lebanon. They are crying out for us as a globe to save humanity. Do the one thing that is in front of you; stop the game.

Amendment put.

An Ceann Comhairle: In accordance with Standing Order 85(2), the division is postponed until the weekly division time this evening.

12 o'clock

Ceisteanna ó Cheannairí - Leaders' Questions

An Ceann Comhairle: We move on to Leaders' Questions. Under Standing Order 38 I call Deputy McDonald.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: We must address events in Belfast over the past 48 hours. There was a knife attack on Monday night that was barbaric, vicious and depraved; the stuff of nightmares. The victim suffered horrific slash injuries to his eyes, face and neck. Were it not for the selfless bravery of members of the community, including Maitiu Mág Tighearnán putting himself at risk by jumping from his car and using his son's hurl to stop the brutal assault, the victim would surely have lost his life.

I acknowledge and thank the first responders on the scene and the swift action of the PSNI, which apprehended the suspect of this heinous crime. He is now in custody, faces the full weight of the law and must pay a heavy price for this brutal crime. My thoughts are of course with the victim and his family as they live through this nightmare and as he continues to be treated in hospital. It was right that political leaders in the North came together to unequivocally condemn this attack and call for the swift delivery of justice. The assault provoked genuine shock, disgust and anger across communities.

Last night, groups of masked men burned families out of their homes, targeted and attacked innocent people and terrified and endangered small children. We witnessed racist intimidation and violence orchestrated by loyalist and far-right thugs. These are people hell-bent on whipping up hatred for their own ends. Many of those leading this violence are the same people who will burn Tricolours on the top of bonfires on 12 July. What occurred last night echoes back to the pogroms on Bombay Street in 1969, when families and children were burnt out of their homes by loyalist mobs. Why? Because they were Catholic and Irish. Many were forced to leave, fleeing for their lives across the Border into Dundalk and beyond. They were refugees in their own country.

This was inflicted on Irish nationalists time and again. When we said "never again" and that we would never allow anyone to be treated this way again, we meant it. We meant anyone - not Irish and not any community. Nobody has the right to spread fear, intimidate or terrify innocent families. We have a duty to communities to show political leadership and stand up for what is right. The good, decent people of Belfast have lived through division and hatred before. They wear the scars and pain of those times and will not allow it to happen again. They will not allow their peace and better future to be robbed from them.

In the aftermath of this violence, threats have been made to the life of Belfast's mayor, Róis-Máire Donnelly. She will not bow to these threats of violence against her. She will continue to stand with every community in Belfast and continue to call out racist thugs. I ask the Taoiseach to join with me in offering support to the victim of Monday night's vicious assault and to take this opportunity to condemn unequivocally the appalling, orchestrated violence carried out against innocent families last night.

The Taoiseach: The events of the last few days in Northern Ireland have filled us with horror. The attack on that young person two nights ago was absolutely savage and horrific. Our thoughts are with the victim and his family. It is beyond our comprehension that a person could

wield such violence on another individual in such a manner. The very graphic representation of that on social media has shocked many people. Like the Deputy, I salute the courage of Maitiu Mág Tighearnán for his very brave intervention to essentially save the life of the victim.

The violence of last night has to be roundly condemned. I pay tribute to all of the political leaders who yesterday responded in the first instance to the attack of the previous evening, and for the unified message condemning any attacks on individuals, families and homes. What we witnessed last evening is absolutely appalling - that families would be burned out of their homes because of race or ethnic reasons. I join with all Members of this House in condemning unreservedly the attacks of last evening. They were orchestrated. We have had evidence of this in other countries where situations like this are exploited, which results in the violence of the type we saw last evening.

All of us have to be very vigilant and clear in standing up for fundamental, human values in terms of the dignity of every single individual in our society. We uphold and defend the dignity of every single individual irrespective of what transpires or occurs and fully support the rule of law. In this instance, we fully support the PSNI in terms of its investigation of both the crime against that young individual and the violence and criminal activity in evidence last evening across the North but particularly in Belfast. An Garda Síochána will continue to work with the PSNI in terms of the broader issues that relate to this. More fundamentally, we must call on all citizens to support the police, in this instance the PSNI, to get swift justice in respect of the appalling attack two nights ago, but also in terms of those who targeted individuals in their homes and burned out people from their homes.

This brings back appalling memories of incidents of this kind from the late 1960s and early 1970s but it has a particular manifestation in today's world. I watched some of the commentary from some social media outlets, and some media platforms of a particular orientation or political disposition which, to say the very least, was decidedly unhelpful in terms of how they portrayed the events of the past 48 hours. There can never be any implied justification for the attacks of last evening.

Deputies: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: There never can be any attempt at rationalisation of it either. Nobody has the right to take the law into their own hands or to say to someone, "You are not living here any more".

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Of course, everyone has the right to live in safety. That vicious, depraved assault causes all of us disgust. Savagery like that has no place on our streets in any part of Ireland. The perpetrator of an act like that must face the full weight of justice.

The organised mobs, and this was organised, who burned families out of their homes and terrified children are the same people who in July will burn Irish Tricolours on the top of their bonfires. These people and their organised racism need to be faced down.

To carry out actions like that and then to threaten the life of Belfast's first citizen, Róis-Máire Donnelly, reflects just how serious this matter is. I invite the Taoiseach again to assert that we

will jointly face this down and I ask him to address the issue of those threats to Belfast's first citizen.

The Taoiseach: Such threats are appalling and must be roundly condemned. Unfortunately, it has become a phenomenon in this era that there are increasing numbers of threats to public representatives across the board. To threaten the Lord Mayor in the context of yesterday and the day before is appalling and has to be condemned. All threats to public representatives have to be condemned. Unfortunately, both the Garda and the PSNI are pursuing too many cases where threats are made to the lives of politicians in this House, in the Northern Assembly or, in this case, to the Lord Mayor. We all join in condemning that.

We also have to face down racism. We also have to make sure that our Garda here and the PSNI in the North are adequately resourced and supported without any equivocation-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: There is none.

The Taoiseach: -----in all communities to pursue these people who seem to think they can create an alternative-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Taoiseach. Time is up.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: Loyalists.

The Taoiseach: -----framework to get their way. They must be resisted by all of us.

Deputy Holly Cairns: I condemn the horrific attack in Belfast on Monday. Our thoughts are with the victim and his family. I also condemn the racist attacks last night and join others in calling for an end to the violence.

I will talk to the Taoiseach today about the extreme pressure family carers are under. Some 71% are now struggling to make ends meet, according to the recent Family Carers Ireland report. Nearly half are experiencing extreme loneliness, are desperate for support that never comes and are feeling like their world is shrinking. This is an indictment of the Taoiseach's Government. The State, which should be there to help them, is actually making their lives harder and pushing an increasing number of carers into poverty. That is the grim reality. Imagine how frustrating it is for those carers to hear this Government's repeated claims that it values their work as they are forced to pay out-of-pocket for essential equipment and therapies that should be provided by the State. They are forced to jump through endless hoops just to qualify for carer's allowance and are living in constant fear that a new review or a new assessment will push them just over the threshold leaving them with nothing - no financial support and no services.

Catherine Rossiter, who cares for her 12-year-old twins, Aoife and Eoghan, launched this report with Family Carers Ireland. She said:

I often think my life is a test of human endurance. How much can I take as a carer before I break? What will happen to my young daughter and son then? The worry feels endless.

This is the reality for so many carers across the country. They are exhausted, drained and filled with dread when they think about the future. The vast majority of carers in this position are women. They are saving the State billions of euro every year and what are they getting in return? Loneliness, burn-out and poverty.

The Government has a growing reputation for making commitments and abandoning them. It committed to abolishing the means test for carers. Carers have had enough of empty promises, so will the Government keep this one? There is no excuse not to do so. We can afford it. It would cost €266 million, according to the report by the Parliamentary Budget Office. It could be paid for by tripling the bank levy on banks earning record profits, with money left over to invest in services. Will the Government abolish the means test for carers in the forthcoming budget? Will it give carers that reassurance of making that commitment to them now?

The Taoiseach: The Government does acknowledge and takes very seriously the role of carers in our society. I acknowledge that we have made commitments in the programme for Government, particularly the commitment in terms of the weekly income disregard and that we would eliminate the means test, essentially. Already, as part of the most recent budget, and from this July, the weekly income disregard will increase from €625 to €1,000 for a single person and from €1,250 to €2,000 for carers who are part of a couple. The latest reforms will result in more carers qualifying for carer's allowance. In effect, it means that a carer in a two-adult household with an income of approximately €110,000 will still retain their full carer's payment, and even with an income of €138,000 will retain a partial payment. That is a significant step taken already in respect of the programme for Government commitment to abolish the means test for carer's allowance over the lifetime of the Government, which is the commitment we made.

In addition to that, the carer's support grant of €2,000 is paid this month. We will in the forthcoming budget further develop on that commitment and further realise it in terms of the income disregard and the means test. We increased the core weekly social welfare rates by €10. The highest ever increases in child support payments occurred in the last budget. I took a keen interest in that with the Minister, Dara Calleary, because of the unit in my Department dealing with child poverty. We increased the child support payment for children aged 12 or over by €16 to €78 and for children under 12 by €8 to €58. Since 2020, that is, in the past five years, the weekly child support payment has increased by 95% for children aged 12 or over and by 61% for children under 12. I heard the Children's Rights Alliance this morning describe that as a significant move, although recent inflation in fuel prices has negated it to some extent. Nonetheless, it is recognised generally as a more targeted way of dealing with child poverty. We have increased the fuel allowance. We increased the domiciliary care allowance by €20, bringing it to €380 per month now. That has gone up by €70 since 2022. We are progressively increasing key payments that will help carers and children who are being cared for. The Minister is also working on proposals, and there has been a public consultation, in respect of the cost-of-disability payment. A lot of work has been done on that. There was a focus network summit on 13 May last in respect of that specific issue, which was hosted by the Minister for Social Protection.

Deputy Holly Cairns: The Taoiseach says he acknowledges the role of carers and acknowledges the need to abolish the means test ultimately over the lifetime of this Government. I assume he acknowledges, then, that the changes in the threshold do not abolish it but, rather, slowly work towards that. I appreciate that the Government is doing that but if I am right, I can take it from the Taoiseach's reply that the Government does not plan to abolish it entirely in this budget, and that it is something it plans to do over the lifetime of the Government. I ask the Taoiseach to reconsider that because when you consider the very fortunate position the Government is in in terms of record surpluses as well as the reality of this report, which shows that 75% of carers have never received respite, 76% have cut back on non-essentials, 32% report bad mental health and 48% experience severe loneliness, this is something the Government can do now. It would cost €266 million when carers are saving the State billions of euro. I ask the Taoiseach to seriously reconsider and to consider doing this in the next budget. It is something the Government has committed to doing. It needs to happen now. Will the Government do it?

The Taoiseach: As I said, we are going to do it. We did give the commitment that it would happen over the lifetime of the Government. I would not underestimate the step we have already taken because I think that when this lands in July, the increase in the income disregard will actually be quite significant, maybe more significant than people thought. We will make a further significant move in the forthcoming budget and I think we will be well on the way then to eliminating the means test.

Of course, there is a wide variety of measures we have to take to improve the situation for carers and people with disabilities more generally. We are looking at a new transport scheme to be introduced by the Department of Transport and the Minister for Transport, which we have been working on in the Cabinet subcommittee on disability. I mentioned already family support payments and the cost-of-disability initiative. There is a wide range of areas, if you bring them all together, that will make a meaningful difference. Of course, there is the investment in core services as well. What can alleviate a lot of pressures on people is providing other supports such as-----

An Ceann Comhairle: Your time is up, Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: -----therapies, as we are doing in the school-based therapy service, which will take some pressure off carers.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Ivana Bacik.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: Before I begin, my thoughts are with the man who remains seriously injured in hospital, and with his family, following Monday's brutal knife attack in north Belfast. I also condemn the appalling violence perpetrated against Northern Ireland's migrant communities overnight and commend the work of the emergency services in response. We must all condemn those who seek to exploit any awful incident in order to target ethnic minority and immigrant communities. We saw it here during the Dublin riots in November 2023. All of us have a responsibility to unite against racism and violence.

I will raise with the Taoiseach the final report of the south east independent commission of investigation - the report into the depraved systemic sexual abuse of children by the paedophile, Bill Kenneally, which was published yesterday. The details set out in the report are nothing short of horrendous. So many young lives were destroyed by his vile and heinous crimes. I pay tribute to all the survivors. What they endured is the stuff of nightmares.

Bill Kenneally tortured young boys over many years in unfathomable ways. He exploited his position of authority to abuse them. He ensured their silence through blackmail and intimidation. When some of his young victims found the courage to report him, their bravery was met with inertia and cover-up by the Garda and by those who should have been protecting them, whose duty it was to protect them. For far too long they were not protected. The report is unequivocal. There was a clear dereliction of duty by senior gardaí in dealing with Kenneally's disgusting crimes. Had proper procedures been followed, and had the children been taken seriously, more children could have been protected from suffering at the hands of Bill Kenneally.

No institution comes out of the report well - not the Garda, not the health authorities, not sporting bodies, not Fianna Fáil and not the Catholic Church. It now falls to the Taoiseach and the Government to respond. I am still reading the report, as we all are. It is very detailed, but we know it makes a number of important recommendations. It recommends in particular an urgent review of the need to introduce a criminal offence of misconduct in public office. That in particular follows the failure of former Fianna Fáil Deputy, Brendan Kenneally, to contact authorities after he became aware of his cousin's campaign of abuse in 2001.

We understand that the Taoiseach will offer a State apology to Bill Kenneally's victims. That is very welcome, but survivors deserve clarity about when that will happen. After the ordeal they suffered, the minimum these men deserve is the Taoiseach's respect. I regret to say that the decision by the Minister, Deputy Jim O'Callaghan, to share this 400-page report with the survivors so close to publication did not show sufficient respect, as they have said. We have seen this before. Survivors of mother and baby homes were forced to learn key findings of that report through the media. We understand that survivors of Kenneally's vile crimes were given only 24 hours to digest the report before its findings were all over the news.

Will the Taoiseach do right by Bill Kenneally's survivors? Will he engage respectfully and directly with them? Will he commence the process of introducing that crucial new offence and will he implement the other recommendations of the report into his crimes?

The Taoiseach: First of all, I want to say without equivocation that the crimes committed by Bill Kenneally were absolutely horrific over a prolonged period of time and caused immense trauma and suffering to many people and families. I am reading through the report, like Deputy Bacik. The judge, Michael White, has been very clear in terms of the central finding of a failure and a dereliction of duty in relation to the way An Garda Síochána dealt with this, particularly in 1987 when the perpetrator himself, Bill Kenneally, was in the Garda station and almost acknowledged culpability in respect of this, and the failure to do things properly in terms of taking statements and sending them to the DPP at the time. There are wider issues as to why the Garda was not in a position to do that and so forth, but I am not going to go through that here. That, in my view, and also some failings in terms of the health board at the time, demand a State apology. That is my clear reading of the report so far.

There is no equivocation by the commission in terms of that central conclusion in respect of the failure to deal with this properly and comprehensively at the time, even by the standards of the day. The report goes into the contrast, which it describes as profound, in terms of the understanding and the framework and edifice we have in place today for child protection, but even by the standards of the late 1980s the commission says it is absolutely not acceptable.

There is then also the behaviour of others, including the former public representative, former TD, Brendan Kenneally, at the time. The commission is very clear that it fell below the standards that one would expect. It seems to me that the recommendation that has been made pertains to the failure of An Garda Síochána in terms of that central failure to prosecute, and to do what one would consider to be the basic investigative response required to deal with the facts and the position that were known at the time. There were then failures to alert others. There was a failure to alert the Vikings basketball club by people who knew. To be very straight, there was a failure to notify the Fianna Fáil Party locally. That is very clear in the report. It was not notified at that time-----

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach. I call Deputy Bacik.

The Taoiseach: -----by those who knew also.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Bacik to respond.

The Taoiseach: It is a damning report in that respect. We will follow through on it.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach will be back in.

The Taoiseach: We hope to arrange time in the House to have a proper consideration of this report.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: I thank the Taoiseach for his considered response. Like him, I commend the judge, Michael White, on all his work and for taking on this report and giving us such a comprehensive picture. I agree that we need a debate in this House once we have had time to digest the full findings of the report. Unfortunately, however, there have been so many of these situations where we have seen paedophilia covered up and even facilitated by State agencies, and where we have seen failures to support and protect victims and survivors. I am thinking of the survivors of Eamonn Cooke, the survivors of industrial schools, the brave individuals who came forward about the "Blackrock Boys" and the survivors of Michael Shine. Deputy Nash has been speaking out on behalf of survivors in that appalling situation. I know the scoping inquiry is due to report soon. We have been looking for a public inquiry into the litany of failure there in respect to victims.

The State must clearly do better. I know, as the Taoiseach said, there are better procedures in place now, but we can still do more. On 25 June, in this House we will be putting forward the Labour Party's Bill to ensure that where religious orders have colluded in cover-ups, that they can be pursued in order to facilitate the payment of redress to victims.

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time is up. I call on the Taoiseach to respond.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: This is another step in ensuring survivors and victims are supported and protected and the justice system responds.

The Taoiseach: We need to let the report speak for itself. It does not have a finding of a cover-up, a conspiracy or collusion. We have to be true to the report of the commission. However, it does have a finding of gross dereliction of duty and the need to reform the law in that respect, which the Minister will now be pursuing with the Law Reform Commission, as recommended by the commission. Yes, we can do better. The State has initiated quite a range of inquiries, as the Deputy iterated, going back to the industrial schools. We have a scoping inquiry under way on the victims of Michael Shine. The Minister for Health is working on that and also on other inquiries at the moment. We must also make sure that State authorities and every official are aware of all the responsibilities people have in respect of any reporting and the necessity to report.

An Ceann Comhairle: I thank the Taoiseach.

The Taoiseach: In my view, in the first instance it bears rearticulation that any abuse allegation should be reported to the Garda.

An Ceann Comhairle: I call Deputy Coppinger.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I want to send my sympathy and solidarity to the man who was brutally attacked in Belfast, and to all affected by the subsequent racist violence. I am going to refer to it in my Questions on Policy or Legislation.

I will raise with the Taoiseach again the issue of gender-based violence, which he and the Government acknowledge is an epidemic. It is largely unreported. One of the key reasons is the hostile, traumatising and misogynistic legal system that so many complainants face. Survivors' counselling notes being used in trials has been an issue raised on the floor of this Dáil and campaigned on for over a year now by survivors and by the Rape Crisis Centre.

The handling of this issue by the Government is shocking and disgraceful. It is shoehorning that issue into 12 or 13 others. It is squeezing it with so many issues into a new Bill, which will finish tonight at 9.15 p.m. or so. We will gather here and survivors will be in that Gallery because they want to come and see this through to the end. They will see it squeezed and, potentially, amendments will not be reached for debate. These are amendments that were sought by survivors and by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, whose representatives the Minister refused to even meet to discuss their proposals for dealing with this. I think the Minister let the cat out of the bag on Committee Stage when he asked a Sinn Féin Deputy and me what if an individual he was counselling provided information to him in that counselling session and, subsequently, a criminal trial took place and he had a record of what was said to him that completely undermined what was said in the prosecution - in other words, women lie and counselling notes can potentially be used as evidence to try to catch them out. He said that he cannot ban the counselling notes. What the Minister has always said, and the Taoiseach has

said, is that it is unconstitutional but the Taoiseach had a chance even within the Constitution to make really strong privilege. Very quickly, in the 45 seconds, he has done nothing to limit or regulate the Garda or Director of Public Prosecutions, DPP, seeking the notes. The rape crisis centre had asked for a court order at that stage. It does not improve the standard for disclosure. The Government broke a promise to introduce presumption of non-disclosure explicitly. It does not require the accused to engage with the facts of the case at application stage. It removes survivors' agency to consent or not. It continues the violating practise of raw counselling notes being handed to lawyers and the accused. It does not expressly state that counselling notes are not evidence. There is no legal advice to survivors about the whole process. The complainant is only notified of an application order after the court order pre-trial hearing is given. There is a total ban in Tasmania but I think the Taoiseach could have gone much longer. Survivors are extremely disappointed.

The Taoiseach: At the outset, the Deputy made an assertion in respect of the Minister. She kind of made a few leaps and sort of said that the Minister is saying that women lie in court cases. That is outrageous and should be withdrawn. There is no room for that in debates of this kind. We are all coming to this issue in a bona fide way. That is the first point I would make. There is no agenda here. We agree that violence against women and domestic violence, in particular, is at an appalling level. There are multiple factors responsible for that and legislation can help. The reforms the previous Government and this one have introduced, particularly the establishment of Cuan, the expansion of refuge places, which needs to happen faster and at a more accelerated pace if we can get the infrastructure delivered, and a range of other measures are testament to that. There are also cultural issues and issues to deal with the increased prevalence of violent pornography online and so forth, which we really have to deal with and which is a factor in the level of violence against women and the misogyny we are experiencing in our societies.

The Minister has sought within the constitutional framework and within constitutional parameters to deal with the issue of disclosure. The Civil Law and Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill endeavours to do that to ensure, in the first instance, that judicial oversight governs the disclosure of any counselling records so that the rights of victims to privacy are always taken into account. On 19 May, the Minister brought forward further amendments to the legislation to further restrict the disclosure of counselling records. In this context, the presumption of non-disclosure was introduced in relation to these records. A presumption of non-disclosure ensures the legal status of these records is that they are not to be released except in certain circumstances. The current protection regime will also be extended to the following personal records: medical records, child protection records and social work records. Those records often contain highly personal information and are currently routinely disclosed. These reforms will ensure that any disclosure of sensitive material only occurs where necessary and always subject to strict judicial scrutiny.

It is a significant strengthening of the law over what we have. It restores the original intent of the original legislation and it is a better balance between competing rights. Of course, the constitutional rights are significant in terms of the accused's rights to a fair trial. The Minister is not just saying this for the sake of saying it. There are significant constitutional issues that have to be navigated in the drafting of this legislation. This is a significant improvement on where we are and it should be acknowledged as such.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I think the Minister's remarks could certainly be interpreted that way. They show a complete lack of understanding about the impact of this issue and also about how therapy works wherein people can often blame themselves; they can take on guilt or they could say that maybe it was their fault and all sorts of things. I am not going to go into all the details again. I am just going to state what is in the law. Within the Constitution, there are other rights. There is the right to privacy, a right to dignity and a right to healthcare. I believe there are contending rights there. I am not saying it is easy but I think it could have been addressed. There are human rights as well. Even within the limit of the law, however, Dublin Rape Crisis Centre did contribute a detailed submission. Senior counsel, who the Minister knows, drafted it. There is not a presumption of non-disclosure stated in the Bill. That is the reality. It could have been stated. The rape crisis centre put forward the idea of a narrative rather than raw counsel notes being handed over. The Canadian system seems to be what the Minister is repeating, which has not reduced requests for access to the notes.

The Taoiseach: I appreciate the Deputy has acknowledged that it is not easy and that there are difficulties in terms of framing legislation within constitutional parameters here. That is at the core of this. I would have much empathy with the broad argument in terms of the disclosure of counselling notes. However, this legislation represents a very significant improvement and strengthening of the legislation on behalf of women, in particular, as opposed to what we had. There had been a request for additional time. My understanding is that was facilitated by the Chief Whip, and there will be two hours and 30 minutes in total this evening for the conclusion of the legislation.

Ceisteanna ó na Comhaltaí Eile - Other Members' Questions

Deputy Sean Fleming: I want to raise an issue with the Taoiseach today regarding the lack of Industrial Development Authority, IDA, supported jobs in County Laois. I think the Taoiseach will be shocked by what I have to say. The IDA has ignored Laois for many years. There are 145 IDA-supported jobs in County Laois. That is by far the bottom of its list by a long shot. If the Laois figures were replicated nationally, those figures would amount to 8,000 IDA-supported jobs across the country. If that was the case, the Government would have closed up the IDA for not doing its job years ago. Its record is so bad in County Laois and this has to be dealt with. I am pleading for the Taoiseach's personal help with the IDA chief executive and senior management to do something about this.

What happens every time we contact it we are referred to the regional office, which is based in Athlone. What I will say about the four counties the IDA covers in the midlands is that there are 8,000 jobs but only 145 of them are in Laois. Even when we look at the midlands region, it has only 2% of the jobs from IDA-supported companies. When we look at it nationally, it is even worse.

I got the figures for site visits to County Laois by the IDA for the most recent available year, which is 2024, from a response to a parliamentary question. There were two site visits to County Laois but there were 18 to Westmeath. Why? The IDA regional office is in Athlone and there is an absolute complete and total bias by the people in the regional office in Athlone in terms of bringing people to other counties. When somebody want to come to the midlands,

what do they do? The people in the office in Athlone take them for a little drive down the road to some place on the outskirts of Athlone. That is what is happening. Of course, the IDA will say to us that it cannot tell people where to go; they want to go to places where there is already a cluster of other IDA companies. In pursuing that, however, it has left Laois totally out on a limb.

I think the Taoiseach will be shocked to hear that the figures are as stark as they are. I will shortly have a few words to say about Laois's central location, the motorway and the best train service of any regional town in Ireland. The population has gone from 30,000 to 90,000 in my time as a TD. The population of Portlaoise has gone from 10,000 to 30,000 in the last number of years. It is the fastest growing town Ireland. We are providing houses, as the Government wants us to do. Our local authority is ahead of every other country when it comes to the number of houses. We are getting those houses and we appreciate them. Of course, there are issues but we do not have jobs in Laois for most people.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue, specifically in respect of the industrial activity and the IDA's performance in attracting investment into County Laois. I must say that I find the figure of 150 jobs quite extraordinary. When we look at Laois geographically it is on the motorway. It has critical mass in terms of population and one would have thought that there would have been a natural gravitation of foreign direct investment to Laois because of its proximity to labour markets in Dublin, Cork and Limerick. Therefore, it has all the ingredients, one would have thought, to enable more jobs to be located there. Of course, Laois is close to other locations where there are substantial IDA jobs. County boundaries are important but if we look at Kildare, for example, it has an extraordinary number of FDI jobs. It is surprising, in contrast, that Laois does not have a more proportionate number of FDI jobs. Some of that may be because there is a significant critical mass of public sector jobs in Laois due to good decentralisation policies of previous Governments, of which Fianna Fáil was a leading member, but we will not go there.

I have spoken to the IDA about this. It has happened a lot on the motorways in some other areas as well. I often thought Thurles would have done better because of its location. Not everywhere on the motorway has had quite the same degree of FDI as other places. It does need focus and attention.

The IDA aims to secure about 550 of 1,000 investments - about 55% - in regional locations, including a target of 40 investments in the midlands. Regional investment is supported through strong infrastructure, skilled talent and established industrial clusters, which perhaps is an issue in Laois, and available property solutions. Property solutions - suitable sites - are key. The IDA has invested a lot in land and infrastructure across the midlands, particularly in County Laois. About 30 ha are available for development at the IDA business and technology park in Portlaoise. Recent initiatives include supporting ESB infrastructure to increase local power capacity, enhancing site readiness for large-scale investment and securing planning permission for a new internal road to unlock additional development lands. All of these are designed to strengthen Portlaoise's attractiveness for future investments. The IDA is focusing on high-value manufacturing services and research and development opportunities in the region. Under its 2025 to 2029 property programme, the IDA plans 23 projects nationwide, including an advanced building solution and further business park upgrades in Portlaoise.

Deputy Sean Fleming: What the Taoiseach said is interesting. Based on what he said, I can confirm the unusual situation that there are more people who leave County Laois every day to go to work outside the county than there are people with jobs in the county. More Laois people have to commute to work, maybe using the motorway. However, there is also good news. The IDA bought a 45 acre site a few years ago adjacent to a site it already had and it has planning permission to develop it. Let us hope that will bring jobs. The first critical step is for the IDA to arrange a few site visits, not a miserable two visits which it arranged two years ago. The figure has to be up at ten or 12. I understand the issue of clustering and I believe that can have an impact. We need a good kickstart in Laois to get up there in that regard.

Enterprise Ireland is not much better. We have only 2,000 Enterprise Ireland jobs in County Laois, which represents only one in six of the entire midlands region. Both outfits are ignoring County Laois.

The Taoiseach: Laois is a beautiful county but the Deputy's points about investments there are well made. I would give the example of Carlow. For many years, Carlow had an IDA site. When I was Minister for enterprise the IDA even gave up and wanted it to be used for indigenous companies. I advised patience and that we keep going. Eventually Merck Sharp and Dohme arrived to Carlow. It, along with others, has transformed the area industrially. The site is there and we appeal to the IDA to do everything it possibly can to secure a significant, sustainable, high-value industry for the area.

Ceisteanna ar Pholasáí nó ar Reachtaíocht - Questions on Policy or Legislation

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Taoiseach has brushed aside growing calls to stop Ireland's Nations League fixture against Israel while the genocide continues against the Palestinian people. His response and that of the Government have been utterly disingenuous. Nobody is asking the Government to usurp the role of UEFA or the FAI. The Taoiseach is being asked to show leadership, support the position that this game must be stopped, protect Irish players from any repercussions, provide the political, diplomatic and financial backing necessary to make that position sustainable and protect the FAI. There is a clear precedent for this. The Irish Government supported opposition to sporting fixtures involving apartheid South Africa. The Taoiseach was in Cabinet in 1999 when the Government refused visas to the Yugoslav team ahead of the planned Ireland-Yugoslavia fixture. In neither case was the Government organising or cancelling sporting fixtures. It was, however, providing leadership, so the truth is the Taoiseach can act. I know my microphone has been switched off.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, everyone is subject to the same time constraints.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Taoiseach can act and have influence but he chooses not to. Thank you for turning my microphone back on. I was two seconds over, was I?

An Ceann Comhairle: You were 20 seconds over and into someone else's time, Deputy.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Thank you for turning off my microphone.

Deputy James Lawless: Learn the rules.

The Taoiseach: In the minute available to me, I will make the point that at one level the Deputy says that she is not asking us to usurp but she is, really. I do not understand the logic of what she is saying.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Then the Taoiseach cannot read.

The Taoiseach: We are not members of UEFA. The FAI has to navigate UEFA in the same way it has to navigate FIFA. The Irish football team has had a lot of success recently.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Do not start waffling again. I know that.

An Ceann Comhairle: Stop with the interruptions, please.

The Taoiseach: The bottom line here is-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: The Irish Government was not the IRFU when all of you took the right stance.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: *The Irish Times* reported-----

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: I am sick of this.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: -----on figures that my colleague, Deputy Liam Quaide, obtained. Reports of wildlife crime to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, NPWS, have nearly doubled in five years.

Deputy Mary Lou McDonald: Nobody wants to talk about it.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: Sorry, a Cheann Comhairle.

The Taoiseach: I cannot hear a thing.

An Ceann Comhairle: Please do not interrupt, Deputy McDonald.

Deputy Jennifer Whitmore: I will start again. *The Irish Times* reported yesterday on figures that my colleague, Deputy Liam Quaide, obtained showing that reports of wildlife crime to the National Parks and Wildlife Service nearly doubled in five years, from 301 incidents in 2021 to 581 last year. These are serious offences and include illegal hedgerow removal, habitat destruction and unauthorised drainage, yet prosecutions collapsed to just 17 in 2024. That is one prosecution for every 34 reported crimes. Three entire counties had zero prosecutions in five years. Yet, when Deputy Quaide sought answers from the NPWS on its staffing capacity, the Minister of State refused to provide them. Without enforcement our wildlife laws are not

worth the paper they are written on. Will the Taoiseach commit to a full review of the enforcement capacity of the NPWS and ensure there is transparency about the staffing of national parks in all regions?

The Taoiseach: I read that report and I will engage with the Minister of State, Deputy Christopher O'Sullivan, and the NPWS. I think we have roughly doubled the staffing level of the NPWS in the past five years and have provided it with additional resources, correctly so. The Minister of State is very focused on the enforcement dimension. There has been good success also in terms of conservation and the biodiversity side of the equation, so to speak. Enforcement is important because we need to stop this crime. It is interesting that in the initial phase of the reintroduction of the white-tailed eagle there were some cases of birds being poisoned many years ago but with education and by working with co-ops and people, a better understanding emerged. That programme is now a resounding success. Enforcement is important but education and working with people to change attitudes and culture are also very valuable inputs to this.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: The cost-of-living perma-crisis is hurting all our communities, worst of all people on low and middle incomes. Spiralling costs in housing, health, energy and groceries are forcing people to spend more and more of their pay on bare necessities. This is causing real suffering. In this context, the Irish Fiscal Advisory Council has again issued warnings about the Government's spending. Five out of every six euro collected in corporation tax is being spent, but not in a sustainable way and not to deliver quality public services. We, in the Labour Party, are for public spending. We know communities need investment and we backed our spending plans with revenue raising proposals - taxes on wealth and not work. We have called for investment in what matters, not just for sectoral interests that shout the loudest. The Government is leaving PAYE workers behind. There was nothing for them in the Finance Bill debated last night. Will the Government give working people a break and commit to indexing tax bands for PAYE workers now to protect against inflation, as we in the Labour Party have consistently sought?

The Taoiseach: I am not quite clear about what the Deputy articulated in that minute, in terms of whether it was more spending, more tax or whatever.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: It is how it is spent.

The Taoiseach: We appreciate the role of the fiscal council. Its reports are a valuable part of the budgetary process. We fully accept there are issues in terms of how we manage our public finances in the context of the revenue. However, the Future Ireland Fund and the Infrastructure, Climate and Nature Fund have been a success and they have not been funded by borrowing to date.

Deputy Ivana Bacik: We supported them.

The Taoiseach: It is interesting that if we look at Irish expenditure over the last number of years in terms of the argument around the sustainability of public expenditure, there is no doubt

that there have been a lot of increases, but one metric to evaluate is to look at total gross voted expenditure as a ratio of national output. Basically, we are kind of tracking fairly consistently over the last years, at about 33% through the 2026 to 2030 period.

An Ceann Comhairle: We are all sticking to time, Taoiseach. I call Deputy Copping.

The Taoiseach: It did increase sharply during Covid.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I condemn the horrific attack on the man in Belfast. I hope he recovers and I send my solidarity and hope the perpetrator is brought to justice. However, I also want to condemn the horrific violence that is being wreaked in the North since that attack. It is straight from the far-right playbook to use an horrific tragedy or incident when it is a person of colour who is the suspect in a violent assault and to implement its precooked plan of racist and chaotic destruction. People are being stopped and questioned about their skin colour, nationality and race. Homes have been destroyed. Families who have been in the North for decades have been burnt out or attacked in their homes. Businesses have been set alight. Outside actors like Farage and Musk are intervening and actively whipping up violence as well. There has also been an element of hand-wringing from some politicians in the North who have been involved in stirring up racism themselves in the past. I commend the activist groups that have intervened and shown that type of solidarity. The majority of working class people do not want the North to unfold into a racist hellhole.

The Taoiseach: I appreciate the comments Deputy Copping has made. The violence last night in Belfast, the racism on display and the burning out of families because of their ethnicity have to be roundly condemned. It is very dangerous. It puts Northern Ireland in a very difficult and challenging spotlight in terms of where the North goes into the future societally. Some areas are potentially becoming no-go areas because of the colour of someone's skin or their ethnicity, despite the fact they might have been living in an area for quite some time. It is making life very difficult for many families and causing anxiety and stress. It will demand a significant community response and a response from social services. It is a very serious issue. On the exploitation of this by far-right elements in particular, we have to be extremely vigilant of in dealing with this because it is happening in other locations and jurisdictions as well.

Deputy Paul Lawless: The EU migration pact was passed in the Dáil by just seven votes and within six months, 35 TDs had either retired or lost their seats. Ireland is not in Schengen. Ireland shares a common travel area with Britain and we are an island nation. We have every right to control and manage our own borders. Yet, in June 2024 the Government voted to surrender that control. It handed decision-making over to the EU in terms of who can enter Ireland, how claims are processed and even the potential fines we will face. This pact was not designed for Ireland. It was not designed for our geography or, indeed, our housing crisis or public services crisis. Incredibly, the Tánaiste cannot outline to the Dáil-----

The Taoiseach: I am the Taoiseach.

Deputy Paul Lawless: -----what this is going to cost in terms of fines.

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is confused on this one; there is no question about that. The International Protection Act 2026 has been introduced by this Dáil and supported by this Dáil. It will provide a very fair, sustainable, efficient and robust asylum procedure. It will also result in faster dealing with applications and appeals that may be made against those decisions. It will be much faster. It also enables us to return asylum seekers who need to go back to the place where their asylum application originated in Europe. This is strengthening laws in respect of asylum seeking and no amount of shallow, empty soundbites that are used against this legislation will sustain. This is, again, part of a wider agenda to try to instil fear and misinformation.

Deputy Alan Dillon: Hear, hear.

The Taoiseach: What Deputy Lawless said there is misinformation. It is absolute misinformation.

Deputy Paul Lawless: It is handing over control to Europe of how they are being processed.

The Taoiseach: It is absolute nonsense and I think it is wrong.

Deputy Paul Lawless: We had a protocol and we could have opted out.

The Taoiseach: Nonsense, just bloody nonsense.

Deputy Cathal Crowe: I raise the issue of St. Joseph's Secondary School in Spanish Point, County Clare. A beautiful school, its enrolment has doubled across the last decade. With that growth have come certain difficulties for the school. At the moment, 216 female students in the school have to use four toilet cubicles. That is all the students have. The school has been approved for ten more toilet cubicles but the approval just sits on a shelf. The school keeps sending in the paperwork the Department requires but it is getting very little back. It has been approved for new science laboratories, preparatory areas, a music room, construction rooms and two general classrooms. It keeps sending in the information the Department requires but it seem to be on a hamster wheel going no place. For five years, the school has responded to every single thing asked of it. This is now at a critical stage. The school is now turning away students because it cannot cater for and those who are in the school do not have basic infrastructure like classrooms and even toilets. I ask the Taoiseach to intervene. I have raised this at the education committee and with the Minister but it does not seem to be going any place. It will need new impetus to get it moving.

The Taoiseach: I thank Deputy Crowe for his robust advocacy on behalf of St. Joseph's Secondary School and its extension application. I take on board what he said. There has been significant investment in school buildings but, clearly, there is a necessity for more. I will engage with the Minister for education on this issue to see if we can move forward and advance this extension for the benefit of the students who attend the school and, of course, the staff who work there, as well as the wider community. It is a valuable school in a beautiful part of the country. We will certainly do what we can. There are wider issues as well.

Deputy James Geoghegan: No international protection applicant should be sleeping in a tent in a public park in any part of this country. Yet, in my constituency, in Herbert Park, it is a regular occurrence of late that international protection applicants are sleeping in tents in a park beside a playground that people frequent with their families and children. From the questioning I have done in the public accounts committee, we know the average duration of stay of an international protection applicant in a tent is less than two days. We are paying €1 million for an NGO to refer international protection applicants in a tent to an accommodation service. As the International Protection Act comes into being very shortly, can the Taoiseach say that there will no longer be tents in public parks anywhere in this city in which international protection applicants will be sleeping? Operationally, we can make changes to prevent that happening. Even at the smaller numbers that we had in the past, this is not sustainable. Nor is it fair on the international protection applicants or the communities in which these tents are being put up.

The Taoiseach: It is absolutely not sustainable and it is not safe for people either. It is not appropriate. It is wrong that people should feel the need to use tents at times.

1 o'clock

The facilitation of that is something I have issues with. The Government does not support that. The Minister has sought accommodation in different locations but also, the Act itself will lead to much faster treatment of applications. About 70% of applications are decided in the negative; in other words, people do not actually have an entitlement to asylum. The number of negative responses to appeals is quite high as well. Speed in assessing the applications and also the appeals is crucial to this and critical to the avoidance of the kinds of issues the Deputy has raised.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I wish to raise again the atrocious conditions of many roads in Counties Cavan and Monaghan. I have raised this with the Taoiseach on a number of occasions. He has responded by saying that his Fianna Fáil representatives have also raised this issue with him but, clearly, he has either not listened or his Cavan-Monaghan representatives are not effective. This year, the Government allocated less funding for local road restorations to Cavan and Monaghan than last year. Our local authorities are doing their best. They are trying to patch and stretch the funding but the funding simply is not enough. At a time people are paying more and more in taxes and charges for the luxury of driving their cars, which is, in fact, a necessity, I ask the Taoiseach again: will he ensure that Cavan and Monaghan receive additional funding as a matter of urgency for our local road restoration and maintenance?

The Taoiseach: The Deputy is being unfair to his colleagues, Government TDs who are-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: Less money this year than last year.

The Taoiseach: -----people of considerable experience and who have had significant impact over the years in respect of Cavan-Monaghan. There has been increased funding overall in terms of roads this year. I will engage with the Ministers for housing and the environment, local authorities and the Minister for public expenditure to make sure we can deal with the

significant challenges that people undoubtedly face across the country in respect of roads, road maintenance and restoration.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: I want to raise again the issue of microgeneration and the tax exemption limit for households. As I said here yesterday in the debate on the Finance Bill, targeted and practical changes over the lifetime of this Government will help us pull away from fossil fuels and towards renewable fuel permanently. One such change is the microgeneration taxation exemption. While the extension of the €400 exemption for selling electricity back into the grid to December 2028 is welcome, it is not enough. Once households exceed that threshold, the additional income must be declared and they have to enter into an administrative process to do that. It introduces a bit of complexity for them.

We know where energy prices are going. They are going up at the moment. Electric Ireland and company are putting those prices up. Can the Government look at raising this cap to €600, recognising that it will help us collectively achieve decarbonisation and energy security goals?

The Taoiseach: It is a very reasonable point the Deputy is making. It is a good scheme and it has been a good, welcome initiative. We always evaluate initiatives in terms of how they are working. I will speak to the Ministers for energy and Finance in respect of this.

Deputy Michael Healy-Rae: I welcome the statements from the Minister, Deputy James Browne, the Minister of State, Deputy John Cummins, and the Tánaiste on overhauling rural planning. This is an issue the Taoiseach feels very strongly about himself. Kerry has been severely impacted. Places like Kilcummin and Beaufort are effectively sterilised, as is the Ring of Kerry route. Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, has questions to answer on this and on not allowing us to use existing entrances on the N70 or the N86 Tralee to Dingle road.

Meat needs to be put on the bones of those statements. For us to really make an impact on people's lives, we have to give clear direction to the local authorities as to what the Government's policy actually is. When will the national planning statement for rural planning be announced? What can we expect to see in that to help people to build houses for themselves?

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for his comments. This is a very important issue for people generally, but young people and young couples in particular, in rural Ireland. Given the housing crisis we are in, we simply have to look at every avenue to increase housing capacity.

The Minister and the Minister of State with responsibility for housing have been working substantively on this with significant proposals. I envisage that in the next number of weeks, they will bring it to Cabinet. We have had a discussion at the Cabinet subcommittee on this and hopefully it can be brought to a conclusion *sar i bhfad*.

Deputy George Lawlor: For a number of years, I have been working with St. Joseph's Gaelic football club in Wexford on the development of a fabulous new facility in the heart of Wexford town on Whiterock Hill. The club is just about to put the final touches to it. It has received assistance over the years, of course, but in the final touches, it has received an offer from Uisce Éireann to connect to water and sewerage services. Whiterock Hill is not an isolated area. There are about 1,500 houses on the hill and this will be a community facility. The club has

received an offer of connection for €52,000 from Uisce Éireann, which will connect it to water and sewerage services. As I said, it is not in the middle of nowhere. It is alongside a main road and there are houses all around it. Can the Taoiseach personally intervene on this? I have written to the Minister for housing and I have received an acknowledgment. The club is anxious to get going on a fabulous community facility but €52,000 is just unacceptable.

The Taoiseach: I pay tribute to St. Joseph's Gaelic football club for its ambition and energy and for serving the community so well. This project represents the manifestation of a further milestone in the club's development and history. I will ask the Minister and endeavour to engage with Uisce Éireann to see if anything can be done here to facilitate what is a very significant community facility for the wider community that will be used by all.

Deputy John Connolly: There are few other instances in the country that highlight how challenging and difficult we have made it to complete crucial infrastructure projects than the Galway city ring road. As the Taoiseach will be aware, the project was first mooted and planned for in 1999. There have been three separate planning decisions. The design and planning work that has gone into each of those has taken a significant time. There have been alternative compulsory purchase orders and a number of legal cases. The latest and third grant of planning for the project was on 9 April this year but, unfortunately, that faces judicial review, posing further delay to this crucial project and potential derailment.

On 14 April this year, TII announced it had reached agreement with parties, which will allow the withdrawal of the judicial review proceedings relating to Luas Finglas. TII said that this means Luas Finglas can now proceed. Last December, our colleague, the Minister for Transport, Deputy O'Brien, confirmed the withdrawal of judicial review proceedings against An Coimisiún Pleanála's grant of planning for the metro project following constructive mediation. I ask that the Taoiseach supports-----

An Ceann Comhairle: The Taoiseach to respond now, Deputy. Time is up.

Deputy John Connolly: -----engagement with the transport authorities and the parties who have taken judicial reviews.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising this issue. I also recognise the strength of his advocacy in regard to the ring road in Galway and the absolute necessity for it. It is with some degree of dismay that we read that there will be a judicial review of the planning. I urge the authorities - and I will engage with them - to see if mediation can bring about a speedier outcome to the issues that have been raised. My understanding is that the county council is the lead authority but I will talk to TII, the county council and relevant Ministers. I have spoken to the Minister for Transport on this because, for the wider public good and for Galway generally, this road needs to be built.

Deputy Paul Murphy: I want to condemn the horrific attack in Belfast on Monday night and commend those who bravely intervened. I also want to condemn what was effectively a racist pogrom in Belfast last night. The scenes and the stories of families having their homes

burned down and being forced to flee out of burning homes by violent gangs were absolutely heartbreaking. It is grimly reminiscent of the pogroms in Belfast in the 1920s and the 1960s.

The Taoiseach has rightly condemned those who set those homes alight. Will he also condemn those who fanned the flames online? I refer to the likes of Elon Musk, one of the richest, most powerful men in the world, Tommy Robinson, Conor McGregor and also those politicians who have engaged in the scapegoating of migrants. These people, who are at the top of society and some of whom are rich and powerful, are happy to see people divided and to see hate and division spread to distract from their own failures that people in our society are paying for.

The Taoiseach: I condemn, and I have condemned, what happened on last evening. "Racist pogrom" is a good description of last night in north Belfast. I made the point in my earlier remarks that there were certain media outlets of a particular political disposition that sought, from observing some of the interviews, to raise tensions.

That is unacceptable and I roundly condemn that. Everybody has a responsibility for what is said because the dignity of every individual must be respected. To have families and young children subjected to what happened last evening is unacceptable. What happened the previous evening was savage and has created huge anxiety, fear and anger. That must be acknowledged, but all of us in political life, as public representatives, must call out the level of racism that was evident last night.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am appealing to the Taoiseach with just a couple of days to go to enact the European Union migration and asylum pact. I tried for almost two years on the Business Committee to have a debate here. Deputy Carol Nolan and I, and our rural Independent colleagues, tabled a motion on 1 May 2024, a May Day call, which the Government voted down. I appeal to the Taoiseach to have a pause and try to listen to the people. I ask the Taoiseach to please give the people a voice here and do not be patronising like he was in reply to Deputy Paul Lawless. This vote was passed in summer 2024 by a margin of merely seven votes. That was before we had nearly 40 new TDs here.

We all condemn the savage attacks in Belfast and that have been ongoing in this country. The Government has turned a blind eye to it and tried to demonise people. Please put this to the people and let the people decide. Is the Taoiseach so frightened of the people that he will not do this?

An Ceann Comhairle: The Deputy's time is up. He is penalising everybody else.

The Taoiseach: This is parliamentary democracy. By 86 votes to 62, the International Protection Act 2015 was passed in this House. It has been signed by the President. Why are Members inventing and deliberately misinforming people? That is what is going on here. This law has been debated in this House at length.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: It was guillotined.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy, stop interrupting.

The Taoiseach: It has been passed by this House. People have different perspectives, as they are entitled to. It has been passed, signed, and is coming into law. That is all. This is a new development where TDs are coming in to say that a matter was only won by this amount or that and we must have another debate, despite the fact that legislation went through all Stages. This is misinformation and let us call it out. All last week, there were emails going to everyone about how a terrible day was going to happen on Friday when legislation that was debated here at length was commenced. Legislation is commenced all of the time. That is all that is happening. By the way, it gives us control.

Deputy Johnny Guirke: Since first being elected to the Dáil, I have repeatedly raised water outages in Trim, Clonard and Ballivor in County Meath. Outages and disruption are causing huge frustration for residents in these areas, and rightly so. Recently, residents in Ballivor went days without water and this forced school closures and disruption to local businesses. Five years on from when the project was announced, construction has not started on the long-promised new water reservoir in Ballivor. Water is tankered in daily. Houses are being built where water infrastructure cannot cope. Uisce Éireann has been frustrating to deal with. Standard responses are being issued days after outages with no real answers for people in Ballivor who know that water outages will happen again. Just yesterday, parliamentary questions seeking answer on this issue from the Minister were disallowed, stating that the Minister has no responsibility to the Dáil for this matter. Nobody is responsible for anything.

Can the Taoiseach commit to coming back to me with a start date for the upgrade to Ballivor water storage project? When will a shovel be in the ground? Previous commitments have not been honoured.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. I cannot get involved in every single scheme with Uisce Éireann but I would say to Irish Water that it needs to reflect on its relationship with public representatives because the number of TDs who are complaining about not getting replies is too high. Something needs to be resolved here to have a proper flow of information. I will check with Irish Water but the Deputy is saying he cannot get any information. I do not know.

Deputy Johnny Guirke: Not a word.

An Ceann Comhairle: I am sorry, Deputy.

The Taoiseach: A number of TDs have been raising this kind of issue from time to time.

Deputy Johnny Guirke: We need to know.

The Taoiseach: I will go back to the Minister. We do not want people to have to flood the system with a load of parliamentary questions about a particular scheme. That information should be provided to Members automatically. I am hearing now of Members using AI for parliamentary questions. If we keep doing that, we will have thousands of questions in here and the system will be paralysed. I know the Deputy is not doing that, in fairness.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I raise ongoing issues in my constituency of access to appropriate school places for children with additional needs. A parent was in touch with me about her child, Roman Slater. She is really worried. He is five years of age. He is currently in his third year of ageing out in pre-school. He has no placement and no July provision. He is on the list for schools locally, including St. Brigid's Infant National School and Gaelscoil Uí Earcáin, but he has not yet been placed in a school, St. Canice's, where classrooms are being developed currently. His parents feel that they have not got the help needed from the special educational needs organiser, SENO. They are still waiting for a final report and assessment of need that has not been received. They are worried about where he will have a school place in September. On that, St. Canice's school has just completed the modular build for additional classroom, but parents are still waiting to hear if they will actually have places in September. Will the Taoiseach ask the Minister of State, Deputy Moynihan, if he can follow up on these cases please?

The Taoiseach: I will talk to the Minister of State. If this modular building is complete, there will be classes. We have allocated an extra €646 million over and above the Estimate of last year to the Department of Education and Youth. A significant amount of that will be allocated to special education for the express purpose of more teachers and special needs assistants. We want every child to have a place in September. If the Deputy can send the details on to the Minister of State, I will alert him that the Deputy has raised an issue with me here.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: This month's Irish Business Against Litter survey found an increase in the number of cigarette butts around our community. Cigarette butts cause damage to the environment in a number of ways. They are microplastics. They leach into the water system. It has been estimated that one butt can contaminate 1,000 litres of water, yet throughout the country, local authorities are doing nothing in their plans to educate or to enforce the law. Even here, in the smoking area just outside, there are butts scattered around. The Taoiseach should see the Department of agriculture building, where there is a massive number. There is significant ignorance and it is damaging our environment. We need to get a little tougher about it. I know it is not the biggest issue in the world but it is for the fish in the ocean and the lakes.

The Taoiseach: It is a no-brainer. I am appalled that there are cigarette butts on the ground outside State institutions. It should not happen. It is just unacceptable. Every individual has responsibilities in that regard but we do, as institutions of the State, have responsibilities to make sure that does not happen. I will ask for a re-examination of that and see what measures can be taken to clamp down on this.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne: Are there plans to ensure that Uisce Éireann becomes more accountable to this House? The level of response and the slow rate of response to queries from Members of the Oireachtas is not acceptable. I would like the Taoiseach to commit to raising this with the chief executive of Uisce Éireann. The problem is that we are forced to table questions in this House and they are then disallowed, but we cannot get any answers from Uisce Éireann. I have specifically raised on a number of occasions plans for the development of the Ferns and Camolin wastewater treatment plant in County Wexford and Aughrim wastewater treatment plant in County Wicklow. We have seen water out yet again in Gorey in the past

number of days. I appreciate the Taoiseach cannot get involved in every scheme or issue but the level of communication from Uisce Éireann to elected members is not acceptable.

The Taoiseach: I thank the Deputy for raising the issue. I know he has raised it previously. Uisce Éireann is subject to audit by the Comptroller and Auditor General and is accountable to the Committee of Public Accounts but that is more in terms of the broader governance issues. It is also subject to requirements of the Code of Practice for the Governance of State Bodies and has, I understand, established a dedicated team to deal with representations and queries from public representatives. It has acknowledged, as I said earlier, that there are concerns around the effectiveness of communications of Uisce Éireann with public representatives. It has undertaken a review of elected representative engagement, with input from across its entire business, which is due to be concluded shortly. I will engage again with the Minister in light of this discussion with the Deputy and others in respect of a need to change and maybe demonstrate, by experience, an improvement.

Prohibition of Sulky-Racing Bill 2026: First Stage

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I move:

That leave be granted to introduce a Bill entitled an Act to prohibit sulky-racing where no lawful permission has been granted.

I am pleased to bring this legislation before the House once again. Its purpose is straightforward and urgently needed. The Bill prohibits sulky racing on public roads unless explicit permission has been granted and lawful permission has been there for that. As outlined in the briefing notes, sulky racing is an extremely dangerous activity. The practice places the public, young passengers and the horses themselves in grave danger.

The Bill is driven by the growing number of serious incidents occurring across the country and particularly in my own county, Tipperary. In recent months, gardaí were called to the outskirts of Clonmel after a young trotting horse collapsed during an early-morning sulky run. There was another incident where the horse broke from its carriage and ran directly into oncoming traffic. A motorist narrowly avoided a multi-vehicle collision near Thurles when a group of sulkies took over both lanes of the N62 without warning. These events are becoming disturbingly frequent. The Clonmel incident happened outside a busy shop and a dance studio. There are often large numbers of youths and parents going in and out to the shop and the dance studio. If the horse had ploughed into them, it would have been horrific. It hit two cars. The briefing notes describe how children as young as ten hitch horses or ponies to lightweight carts and race them along busy regional, national and primary roads. The reality we are dealing with is unregulated, uninsured, high-speed racing on public roads, often alongside moving traffic. It is reckless, unsafe and horribly cruel to the horses.

In Tipperary we have seen horses driven to exhaustion, abandoned on roadsides and, in some cases, left to die where they fall. Images from the Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, ISPCA, show the horrific injuries. I compliment the organisation and all the different horse and dog refuges that try to do so much in this case. These animals can suffer

torn ligaments, broken bones and wounds inflicted by makeshift tack. This is not sport; this is avoidable cruelty.

Let me be clear: I am not anti-sport and I am not opposed to traditional equine culture. Tipperary is rightly proud of its world-class horse racing heritage but what is happening on our roads is not legitimate equine activity. It is unlicensed, unlawful and dangerous. It endangers motorists, pedestrians, young people involved and the animals themselves.

At present the law is a patchwork of inconsistent local authority by-laws. Counties such as Tipperary, Kilkenny, Limerick and Waterford all have different by-laws, which leads to a total lack of consistency in approach. The Bill seeks to correct this by establishing a national united framework. It grants local authorities the powers they need to enforce the law and it provides for meaningful penalties, including fines of up to €5,000 and, in more serious cases, imprisonment. The Bill does not interfere with off-road sulky racing - something that takes place in many countries and is very lucrative – on sand-based paths organised by legitimate equine sports organisations. It addresses growing dangerous practices of unlicensed, unlawful sulky racing on public roads, a practice that has caused serious injury and will continue to do so unless we act.

I do not claim the Bill is perfect but I hope that all sides of the House will support it. The issue straddle the Departments of justice, agriculture and local government. The Minister, Deputy Heydon, has been making noises that he would support it. I have introduced the legislation twice and it was not supported. I hope we will come together, take this legislation, amend it, if necessary, but do something now. We should not do like we did with the scramblers and end up with a law in the name of some person who was killed. Please act for the sake of ending the cruelty to the animals and for the safety of the public. I commend the Bill to the House.

An Ceann Comhairle: Is the Bill opposed?

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Mary Butler): No.

Question put and agreed to.

An Ceann Comhairle: Since this is a Private Members' Bill, Second Stage must, under Standing Orders, be taken in Private Members' time.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I move: "That the Bill be taken in Private Members' time."

Question put and agreed to.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 1.25 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 2.29 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 1.25 p.m. and resumed at 2.29 p.m.

Tourism: Statements

Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Peter Burke): Tourism is one of Ireland's most important economic sectors. It supports 229,000 jobs, helps sustain 46,000 businesses and generates significant economic activity in every county. Few sectors have such a broad regional footprint with an estimated seven out of every ten jobs located outside of Dublin.

Tourism supports employment and enterprise in our cities and towns along the Wild Atlantic Way, throughout Ireland's Ancient East, in our coastal communities and increasingly across the Hidden Heartlands and other emerging destinations. Tourism is therefore not only an important economic sector in its own right, but also a key driver of regional development, supporting local businesses, creating employment opportunities and helping communities to thrive. The sector continues to perform strongly. Ireland remains an attractive destination for international visitors while domestic tourism continues to play an important role. This success is built on the strong foundations of a high-quality tourism offering, resilient and innovative businesses, the work of our tourism agencies and the contribution of communities who welcome visitors to every part of Ireland.

Government has an important role to play. The strength of Ireland's tourism sector is no accident. It is underpinned by strong policy direction, strategic investment and a co-ordinated approach across the public and private sectors. Our role is to create the conditions for tourism to succeed by supporting competitiveness, enabling investment and working with industry, communities and our tourism agencies to ensure the sector continues to deliver economic growth, regional prosperity and community well-being into the future.

My approach to the sector is set out in A New Era for Irish Tourism, launched in December 2025 as a key commitment under the programme for Government. The policy sets a clear, forward-looking framework for the development of the sector to 2031. It reflects tourism's role as a key economic driver of growth, job creation and balanced regional development. Through A New Era for Irish Tourism, I have set a clear ambition to grow visitors and revenue and create sustainable careers. A key focus of the policy is extending tourism beyond the traditional peak season, supporting more year-round activity and more sustainable employment in local communities. We want tourism to thrive, not just in our cities or traditional hot spots, but in every county, town and community. I want to grow total tourism revenue to €14.8 billion. That means boosting overseas revenue by 50% to €9 billion by 2031 and domestic revenue to €5.8 billion, increasing visitor numbers by at least 7% annually in less mature regions, shifting growth towards the off-peak season and providing employment for at least 250,000 people in quality sustainable jobs. These are ambitious goals, but I am confident they will be achievable through strong partnership and co-ordinated delivery.

Delivering on these ambitions requires more than a clear vision. It requires effective implementation, strong collaboration and a sustained focus on outcomes. That is why I am establishing a robust governance framework to oversee the delivery of A New Era for Irish Tourism. I will chair the tourism policy oversight group, which will meet for the first time next month. This group will bring together Government agencies, local authorities and key industry stakeholders to maintain a clear focus on implementation and progress. Supporting this work will be a number of targeted delivery streams focused on key priorities, including culinary tourism, sustainability, market development, robust data and insights, and unlocking the potential of key State assets. The purpose of these structures is to ensure alignment,

consistency of approach and effective collaboration across Government agencies, local authorities, industry and other stakeholders that have a role to play in the future development of Irish tourism.

Supporting tourism growth requires sustained and targeted investment. Earlier this year, Government committed €400 million for tourism development and promotion through my Department's sectoral capital plan. My Department is working through Fáilte Ireland, and continuing to invest in the infrastructure, attractions and visitor experiences that underpin the sector and drive demand across all regions. This investment is delivering tangible results. A key example is the €12.6 million redevelopment of Galway City Museum. This flagship funding, provided by Fáilte Ireland in partnership with Galway City Council, contributes to a broader project value of €19.3 million. Upon completion, the redevelopment is expected to attract an additional 820,000 domestic and overseas visitors over a ten-year period and generate an estimated €47.3 million in direct visitor spending for local and regional tourism economies. Investment is also helping communities in regions undergoing economic transition. Through the EU Just Transition Fund, Fáilte Ireland is delivering a number of transformative tourism projects across the midlands. These projects are supporting regeneration of communities previously reliant on peat extraction, creating new visitor experiences, strengthening local economies and helping to position the region as a destination for sustainable tourism. They demonstrate that tourism can support economic diversification while also contributing to wider environmental and climate objectives.

We are now progressing a new capital investment plan through Fáilte Ireland, in which I will set out a clear direction for future funding and ensure that investment is aligned with objectives set out in A New Era for Irish Tourism. This will ensure that as the sector evolves our tourism offering continues to improve, supporting regional growth, strengthening competitiveness and delivering for communities across the country. I have a laser focus on balanced development, ensuring that less mature tourism markets in places like the midlands get the support and investment they need. We are already seeing encouraging evidence that a targeted approach is working. The latest figures for 2026 from the Central Statistics Office show encouraging signs that Ireland's tourism sector continues to perform strongly, with growth across all key indicators - visitor numbers, expenditure and length of stay. This is a clear reflection of both the strength of our offering and the effectiveness of our strategy. In April 2026, overseas visitors spent €431 million in Ireland, while visitor expenditure in the first four months of the year exceeded €1.3 billion. Visitors also spent almost 3.9 million nights in the country during April. Those figures highlight the significant contribution tourism continues to make to businesses, communities and local economies across our country.

The data also points to the value of maintaining a diverse visitor base. Great Britain remained our strongest local source market by visitor numbers, while continental Europe and North America continue to make a substantial contribution to tourism expenditure. This diversity is one of the sector's key strengths. It helps reduce exposure to economic or geopolitical shocks in any single market and supports a more resilient tourism sector overall. That is why market diversification is a central element of my Department's policy. Through the market diversification plan, Tourism Ireland and other key stakeholders are working to broaden Ireland's reach, strengthen our presence across a range of priority markets and ensure we remain well-positioned in an increasingly competitive international environment.

This strategic approach is being backed by targeted investment. In budget 2026, €7.5 million was secured to support market diversification initiatives and expand opportunities in both established and emerging markets. This complements other measures, including the strategic air access fund, which plays an important role in supporting connectivity and helping Ireland compete effectively for international visitors. Strong connectivity continues to underpin tourism performance. Winter 2025-26 saw significant growth in inbound capacity, with air seat capacity increasing by 15% year on year. Sea access also strengthened, with ferry capacity growing significantly. Looking ahead to summer 2026, capacity is expected to remain positive, with overall air access projected to increase by approximately 3%.

Tourism Ireland continues to promote the island intensively in overseas markets. Its 2026 programme spans over 15 key markets and focuses on attracting visitors with both the intent and means to travel. Its strategy includes sustaining strong demand in the United States and Great Britain, while growing tourism from mainland Europe and investing in high-potential markets such as Canada. It also includes building long-term partnerships in emerging markets such as India and China. Campaigns such as Ireland Goes Beyond and Ireland Unrushed showcase the depth and quality of Ireland's tourism offering and encourage visitors to explore more of the country. These campaigns are supported by strong partnerships with airlines and travel operators, ensuring effective reach and impact. Earlier this year, we announced a new direct flight from Dublin to Shanghai with the now active strategic air access fund matching direct flights with resources and boots on the ground to market this new connectivity.

Ireland is well-positioned as a welcoming, stable and high-quality destination, but we cannot be complacent. I am conscious that the global environment remains uncertain. Geopolitical developments, particularly in the Middle East, are impacting global aviation markets with rising fuel costs and capacity adjustments creating volatility. I am monitoring these developments closely and will continue to prioritise connectivity, ensuring that Ireland, as a destination, remains accessible and competitive to international markets. The strength of our policy approach is that it recognises this as a reality.

As the sector evolves in response to these global challenges, A New Era for Irish Tourism is guiding our approach by strengthening existing markets while creating new opportunities for growth. Through targeted investment, market diversification and strategic supports, we are helping to create the flexibility the tourism sector needs to respond quickly to changing circumstances and to seize new opportunities as they emerge.

Domestic tourism underpins the sector and continues to play a critical role in driving sustainable year-round growth across all regions. Strengthening this domestic base remains a key priority, particularly in the context of global uncertainty. It supports businesses, sustains employment and ensures that tourism activity is distributed across the country, particularly in less mature destinations where tourism acts as a vital driver of local economic development. Fáilte Ireland is central to turning our policy ambitions into action through the development of visitor experiences, support for businesses, strategic investment and regional tourism development.

On the domestic marketing front, we are taking clear and targeted action. In March 2026, Fáilte Ireland launched a national campaign, Find Yourself on a Short Break, which is designed to stimulate that domestic demand and encourage more frequent short breaks across the country. Delivered through a mix of advertising, digital engagement and partnerships, the

campaign highlights the breadth and diversity of experiences available across Ireland. It places a strong emphasis on encouraging short breaks and regional travel, promoting off-season tourism and showcasing well-being and experiential offerings.

Another strong driver of both international and domestic demand are initiatives like festivals. Festivals are known to play a vital role in driving tourism across our regions. From large-scale international events to smaller local festivals, they bring visitors into communities, support local businesses and contribute to the vibrancy of our towns and villages. During 2026, over €600,000 is being provided to 31 local authorities through the regional festivals fund. Administered by Fáilte Ireland, this fund will support approximately 250 festivals nationwide. In addition, a further €310,000 has been made available to local authorities specifically to support food festivals, strengthening Ireland's growing culinary tourism offering. These campaigns and investments are fully aligned with A New Era for Irish Tourism and support the development of a stronger year-round tourism offering and, simultaneously, a more strategic approach to our food and drink sector.

Work is under way in Fáilte Ireland on progressing our new culinary tourism strategy, which will showcase the strength of Ireland's food heritage and create new opportunities for regional and year-round tourism. From local producers to world-class chefs, distilleries and local artisans, our food offering is a powerful driver of visitor experience and regional development and we are committed to ensuring it plays a central role in how Ireland is positioned internationally. The culinary delivery stream under my tourism policy oversight group will ensure there is a coherent approach to how we continue to deliver on what will be an exciting and prosperous opportunity for tourism.

Looking across the broader tourism sector, we are supporting businesses on the ground. I am very conscious of the cost pressures facing businesses across the tourism and hospitality sector. As part of our response, the Government has taken targeted action to support the sector, including through reducing the VAT rate for hospitality to 9%, which will take effect next month. This is a practical step to strengthen competitiveness, protect jobs and ensure that as the sector continues to grow it can deliver sustainable benefits for communities across every region of the country. We need to protect local employment.

Tourism offers rewarding and diverse careers across hospitality, culinary arts, outdoor recreation, transport, events, visitor attractions and destination management. As the sector continues to evolve, so too will the skills required to succeed within it. The future success of tourism greatly depends on our ability to attract, retain and develop talent particularly in these businesses. Earlier analysis by the expert group on future skills needs identified the importance of addressing skills needs in the hospitality sector, a priority that continues to be reflected in more recent workforce and training initiatives. Through continued collaboration between Government, industry, agencies and education partners, we must ensure that the workforce of the future is equipped with the skills needed to succeed in an increasingly innovative, digital and competitive tourism sector.

Fáilte Ireland is investing in the people at the heart of the sector through a strong focus on workforce and skills. The employer excellence programme supports businesses to strengthen HR capability, leadership and staff retention, while a national online learning platform provides accessible training across key business areas. At the same time, targeted workforce initiatives,

including student placements and employer supports, are helping to build a stronger talent pipeline.

Alongside investing in people, we must also ensure that the wider conditions supporting sustainable growth are in place. We know that access to accommodation can be a factor for those considering employment in the sector, particularly in areas of strong tourism demand. More broadly, it highlights the importance of a balanced and co-ordinated approach across Government policy, ensuring that tourism development sits alongside wider housing and community needs.

The introduction of regulatory controls for the short-term letting sector is intended to ensure that tourism develops in a way that recognises and complements the wider needs of local communities, both economically and socially. The introduction of a national register for short-term letting from December 2026 will bring greater transparency to the sector and support a more balanced approach to its future development. Fáilte Ireland will have responsibility for implementing and managing this register in line with the relevant legislative framework and EU requirements. Work is progressing on a new tourist accommodation strategy and I was encouraged by the strong engagement in the recent public consultation process, reflecting the importance of this issue for communities and businesses across the country. As committed to in A New Era for Irish Tourism, the resulting strategy will complement existing legislative and regulatory frameworks and align with wider national policies supporting the continued development of sustainable tourism across all counties.

Tourism is a corner-stone of our economy and a key driver of growth across Ireland. The sector is performing strongly, supported by clear policy, targeted investment and effective delivery. We remain focused on sustaining that growth, addressing challenges and ensuring that tourism continues to deliver for communities across the country. I am confident that through the delivery of A New Era for Irish Tourism and the broad range of measures I have outlined, we can continue to realise our ambitions and ensure that tourism continues to grow and thrive in every region of Ireland.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: For counties such as Mayo, tourism is a critical economic driver. The Wild Atlantic Way has helped to showcase the extraordinary beauty of our coastline, our islands, our heritage and our communities. Yet, despite the success of these attraction, there remains significant untapped potential that requires sustained investment and support from Government. I am glad to hear the Minister talk about the oversight group and that the local authorities are part of it because it is often the case that the necessary joined-up thinking is not seen and we do not get the basics right. Keem Bay beach in Achill was named one of the best beaches in the world. That is really significant. There is an opportunity to establish a visitor centre to keep people in the area and to provide a better experience for them. It is very important that opportunity is taken.

If we are to be serious about growing tourism, we must be serious about the connectivity and infrastructure that is needed to maximise the outcomes from the money that is invested in tourism, including money invested in advertising abroad to attract people here. Tourism cannot thrive if visitors cannot easily reach destinations, move between regions and access attractions. Too often, the Government speaks about promoting tourism while failing to invest adequately in the transport networks and public infrastructure that underpin the sector. This is especially

true in the west and north west. We cannot expect regions like Mayo to realise their full tourism potential when transport links remain inadequate and investment lags behind demand.

Visitors expect and need a seamless travel experience. They want reliable rail connections, accessible bus services, safe roads, quality walking and cycling infrastructure and straightforward information about how to get from one destination to another. However, many still encounter fragmented transport services, poor integration between providers and limited public transport options outside of our main cities. It goes without saying that we need stronger links between airports and ports and towns in tourism destinations. I will give the Minister an example. Ireland West Airport, Knock, recently celebrated its 40th anniversary.

I wanted to get from Castlebar to Knock to get a flight from Knock Airport. I wanted to use public transport. Just trying to find out about the bus service that connects Castlebar to Knock proved to be an onerous task in trying to do that. I went to the bus stop to see what was displayed there. There was nothing whatsoever displayed on the bus stop in Castlebar. It is the small things like that which need to be addressed to ensure people avail of the services that are even there. I commend all the bus drivers. It was quite an experience. Getting on the bus to Knock, I saw that I could not tap my card. It does not take a card; you have to have cash. If you do not have cash, what do you do in that situation? Besides the security issues that arise for drivers who have to provide their own floats, that is not good enough in 2026. When we talk about overarching and high-level stuff, we need to get the lower-level stuff right. That is the point that I want the Minister to go away with today. We need the stronger links. We need to get the basics right in tourism. We need transport providers that communicate with each other and provide integrated information and ticketing timetables. We need improved connectivity. It is not simply a tourism issue; it is a regional development issue as well. When we match up regional development with tourism, that is how we are going to get our maximum outcomes for what is needed.

As a party Sinn Féin understands that tourism policy and regional development policy go hand in hand. Better transport links help attract visitors, support local businesses, create employment opportunities and make rural communities more sustainable places to live and work in. These communities that welcome visitors must receive the infrastructure and services necessary to support increased tourism activity, such as public toilets, parking facilities and broadband connectivity. So many local community groups are doing really good work in developing tourist attractions and walkways, for example. They have to beg and beg for public toilets to be put on the local beach and to be supported in that way. That is not right. These things should become more automatic that those services are there. There is little value in encouraging visitors to travel to rural Ireland if we fail to provide the infrastructure needed to support them once they arrive.

It is obvious to us in Sinn Féin that the future success of Irish tourism requires a stronger all-island approach. Tourism Ireland was established as one of the formal areas of cross-Border co-operation under the Good Friday Agreement because it offers enormous potential to international visitors. International visitors do not see the island as two separate tourism destinations. They see Ireland as a single destination. Our tourism strategy should reflect that reality. Major tourism initiatives like the Wild Atlantic Way, Ireland's Ancient East and Ireland's Hidden Heartlands should be developed further on an all-island basis. Expanding and connecting these initiatives across the island would create a more seamless experience for

visitors, encourage longer stays and increase spending in local economies, North and South. Again, an all-island tourism strategy must be matched by all-island connectivity. An unfortunate consequence of Brexit saw the British Government introduce the electronic travel authorisation requirement for international visitors. This has made additional barriers for tourists travelling between the North and South. It is something that has to be dealt with once and for all.

Deputy Pearse Doherty: Tourism is one of Ireland's most important industries. We all know that it supports jobs, sustains local businesses and brings investment to local communities across the country. The beauty about tourism is that it goes right deep into some of our most rural and most hinterland parts of our island. If we are really serious about developing tourism, we must also be serious about addressing regional inequalities that continue to hold areas back. I come from Donegal. I can say hand on heart that it is the most beautiful and scenic place in the country. It is blessed with spectacular scenery that you would not see anywhere in Europe, although I am very biased in that regard. It has got that tradition and is rich in culture, our language, our heritage, our islands and all that it offers. However, the problem is that if we are being serious, there are serious infrastructural issues in relation to Donegal. The north west is not serviced by motorway. It is not serviced by rail links. It has serious issues in relation to its public transport infrastructure, which is supplemented by a number of private operators that have operated excellently for many years.

There is also basic infrastructure. I come from Gweedore, for example. There are hotel developments that are being stalled and held up because we do not have a sewerage scheme that been promised time and time again from the Government. We also have tourist attractions that need just that little bit of investment, particularly our islands, which have seen a huge explosion of tourism over the past while, but can be further developed in a more sustainable way. I wish to raise the issue in relation to Glenveagh National Park, which is a jewel in the crown in the north west. The issue here is that time and time again we see people come to Glenveagh National Park, they travel long distances to visit for the day and find that tours are not available depending on the day that they arrive. This should not be happening in a national park which is open seven days a week. Tours should be available at all times. It is basic investment that needs to be there. There were issues in the past where people could not get car parking and had to travel two hours back. Some of those issues are being addressed.

Tourism takes many different forms. There are types of investment that are required to sustain, support and supplement what we have. I have described Donegal as a number of pearls that we have across the county from different locations and different events. What is missing there is the necklace that ties them all together. In a way, the Wild Atlantic Way is a form of that type of necklace. When we are missing a pearl or two, the necklace does not look the way it should. When we make sure that all of the pearls are joined up, it is something that is attractive and can encourage more tours, operators and people from overseas to come here.

One of the issues that I have raised in the past has been the issue of the entertainment sector and it being able to attract tourism into regions across the State. I have raised the issue of the fact that we have seen music festivals close down over the last number of years and the need to support music festivals, in particular. I have skin in the game in this as I am a director and chairperson of our not-for-profit music festival in Donegal. I am not speaking about our own festival. The Minister will be aware of the liquidation of *tickets.ie* recently. This has caused

major problems. We have not-for-profit music festivals that operate in my county of Donegal, such as the Rory Gallagher International Festival. It is an outstanding festival that has operated for many years that was a client of this company. We are now seeing them out hundreds of thousands of euro. This cannot stand. This company that is going into liquidation is 75% owned by the DEAG Entertainment Group in Berlin. We need to be looking all the avenues. That means our foreign affairs Minister, our EU Commissioner and the German ambassador here need to be called in. There are serious issues that do not just affect the Rory Gallagher International Festival; it also affects other private festivals in the State. There also may be an issue where the Government intervenes. There is a question now that we need to look at whether we want to make sure these festivals continue next year. If they do, the money has to be paid, or the State will have to support them in some way to make sure that they continue.

Deputy Thomas Gould: Tourism is such an important part of the Irish economy. It is such an important industry. More needs to be done to develop it, especially in my own city of Cork. In 1916, Thomas Kent's home was raided and his brother was seriously injured. He and his brothers were taken away. Thomas Kent was convicted and found guilty by the British. He was later shot in the grounds of the old Cork prison in the Glen. That was on 9 May 1916. He was the only person from Cork to be shot and executed as part of the 1916 Rising. For 99 years, his body was buried in that prison's grounds. That should be a historic centre. It is not just Thomas Kent was executed on that site; he was also imprisoned there. This is a building that should now be used not just for the community but for tourism. There is the likes of Ardmhéara Tomás MacCurtain who was shot in his bed by the British and the Irish Royal Constabulary, IRC. There was Terence MacSwiney who died on hunger strike in Brixton Prison. There were the Wallace sisters, the Delaney brothers and Ballycannon boys.

3 o'clock

It goes on and on. The republican history in Cork is immense but we have nowhere for people to go to learn about it. A number of months ago I met a family who had returned from America, one of whom was the granddaughter of a volunteer who had brought back the medal he got for fighting for Irish independence. Members of the Irish diaspora, no matter where they are in the world and no matter where they have migrated to, have stories about home. When they come back here to visit they want to go to a diaspora centre. A huge number of people left for the four corners of the world from Cork Harbour but when they come back, there is nowhere for them to go to trace their heritage or learn about the proud republican history that we have.

What I want to see is investment in Cork. There is an independent councillor in Cork, Kieran McCarthy, who runs walking tours around the city. There is brilliant take-up but we need much more of that. We need the buy-in. There is huge interest in historical tourism. People want to find out what is really behind the Irish. Whether it is our republican history, the arts or our authors, we have a product here. A lot of it is in Dublin and it is great to see but I am looking for investment in Cork.

We have Shandon Tower and I am looking for investment in that area and in Cork more generally. We have one of the most iconic buildings in Shandon but it is not being utilised to the maximum. We have the Butter Museum. Butter was brought from all over Munster, but especially from Kerry and Cork, to the butter market in Cork when the British ruled us, and it was sent from there to the four corners of the world. From an agricultural and historical point

of view, Shandon should be utilised more. However, I am not impressed with the way this Government has acted around Moore Street, the GPO and the two new prisons that are going into the old prison site. It is time to stand up for our heritage. Let us be proud that we are Irish republicans. Let us be proud of the fight for Irish freedom and let the world know about it.

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I welcome the opportunity to speak on tourism today. I also welcome the information the Minister has provided on the plans in this space and the development that he is pursuing. The points that I want to make do not take away from any of that. I acknowledge the work that is being done but I have some concerns and I am sharing them today in the hope of being helpful to the Minister in the development of what he calls sustainable tourism. The point is that sustainable tourism has to be more than just a phrase. It has to be thought through. I also want to correct Deputy Doherty because it is actually Kerry that is the loveliest county in Ireland. Donegal is a close second and I am spending my holidays there this summer.

The key point I want to make around sustainability and the vision for tourism is that tourism is supposed to serve the community, not the other way around, but many communities up and down this country have seen that balance reversed, unfortunately. There is a growing awareness of this issue globally as well. In the effort to make ourselves palatable and commercialised for tourists, we risk losing the culture and society which brought the tourists here in the first place. I also want to talk about the fact that tourism is a key sector of our economy but it is also where we see some of the poorest quality employment, sadly.

I will start on the over-tourism point. As I said, tourism is supposed to serve our communities and not the other way around, but up and down the country, that balance has been reversed. Over-tourism is a serious problem that is already having an impact on people and communities across Ireland. Nobody is denying that tourism is important to a lot of people in this country. For many, particularly in areas along the west coast, it is either their livelihood or the livelihood of others in their community. On our islands and across many communities, the tourism income they take in each summer is the difference between continuing to exist as a community and not. However, these communities are also seeing the amount of money returned to them decrease, year on year, as big companies take more control in the sector, with tourism becoming a burden on community infrastructure instead of a boon for the people. We have seen in Spain and other countries the impact it can have if the approach to tourism is not properly planned and balanced. We do not need to look abroad to see this, however. If one goes to west Cork or Connemara, one will see holiday homes sitting empty or on Airbnb, while young people in the same community cannot afford to buy a house and start a family. One will see hordes of chain tourist shops selling the same gimmicky image of what Ireland is, while local small businesses and artisans cannot afford the premises costs and are priced out by cheap goods made overseas. We need a system that takes into account the housing, infrastructural and community needs of areas around the country when we develop tourism. We also need to ensure that when these communities generate countless euros for the Irish economy, they see a dividend for that instead of being further eroded as communities. Ba chóir go mbeidh bua eacnamaíoch na turasóireachta ag dul chuig an bpobal féin. Má tá turasóireacht ag cur brú ar an bpobal, caithfidh a chinntiú go bhfuilimid ag tabhairt cothrom na Féinne do na pobail sin.

In the effort to make ourselves palatable and commercialised for tourists, we risk losing the culture and society which brought them here in the first place. I want to raise issues that were

highlighted recently by the arts festival organiser, Naoise Nunn, with the strategic tourism festival investment scheme, where Kilkenny Animated is seeing a 75% cut in funding over three years. Arts-led festival organisers are highlighting that they appear to be losing out in favour of more commercially-led tourism events, despite the fact that arts-led festivals like this are exactly the things that draw people to Ireland as tourists. They come here to experience our culture and society but if we do not acknowledge that in support schemes for tourism initiatives, these festivals will be smaller and less engaging, and will eventually disappear altogether, one by one. This does not just impact the festival themselves, but the hotels people stay in, the restaurants they eat in and the businesses they go to. They represent huge value to the Irish economy, as the Minister acknowledged, particularly to indigenous Irish businesses. We need to ensure the Department of Enterprise, Tourism and Employment, and Fáilte Ireland in particular, view the support of these initiatives and festivals as part of their remit. We cannot leave this solely to a very underfunded Arts Council, particularly when these festivals clearly support and are a part of regional tourism. I have been having a lot of conversations with people in this space and there is frustration about falling between stools in different Departments. The success of our festivals in drawing in tourists cannot be underestimated. We need to deal urgently with the issues that are leaving them caught in a policy gap between Departments.

Finally, I want to raise the issue of the jobs supported by tourism. Tourism is a key sector of our economy but it is also where we see the poorest quality employment. Dr. Deirdre Curran in the University of Galway recently published a report on the experiences of hospitality workers in this country, the vast majority of whom work in workplaces where tourists are a key part of the customer base. The findings were stark, but not really surprising, given what we already know about pay and conditions in this sector. Around 52% of workers surveyed did not get the breaks to which they were entitled, just under half did not get a written employment contract and one in five said they did not get their holiday pay. There were tales of physical, verbal, and psychological abuse faced by these workers. It is also important to flag, however, that many of these people love the work they do. They carry it out with pride. They are proud to provide good service to their customers and are a key part of what makes Ireland the country of céad mile fáilte.

We want to see a strong, resilient tourism industry but we will not be able to manage that if we do not tackle these issues. We must tackle staff turnover and invest in quality jobs in tourism. We urgently need to tackle low pay, ensure enforcement of employment law, and address the poor conditions faced by so many workers who are absolutely vital to Ireland's tourism industry and who love their jobs but who are being badly let down by the current practices this report has exposed. Teastaíonn uaillmhian uainn san earnáil turasóireachta. Teastaíonn fíis uainn do ghnólachtaí, féilte agus poist san earnáil seo a thacaíonn leis an bpobal, lenár sochaí agus lenár gcultúr, ní hamháin ó thaobh airgid de, ach ó thaobh dea-thionchar ar na gnéithe sin. We need a vision for tourism in Ireland that celebrates our culture and our communities and that benefits everyone, from the minimum wage worker in a hotel to the young family living on the Aran Islands. We can have it but only if we are serious about reforming our attitudes and policy to look beyond just money spent to where and how that money is spent and who, ultimately, benefits.

Deputy Jen Cummins: Dublin 8 is a magnificent place of history. It is where I live. I am very proud to live there and am extremely proud to represent the area. There are so many places in Dublin 8 that tourists come to visit, including St. Patrick's Cathedral, Christchurch, Kilmainham Gaol, the Royal Hospital Kilmainham, IMMA, the Guinness Storehouse, Dublinia, Marsh's Library, the Liberties and the National War Memorial Gardens.

I could go on because there are loads of them. We are really lucky but not every part of the history of the Liberties has been preserved. These include places like Kilmainham Mill which is centuries old. It was brought to a certain standard but it has not been completed. People can go and look at it but it is not functional. I happen to know the person who is a descendant of the people who owned that mill. It is a crying shame.

That is not the only place where there is a difficulty. Newmarket was a thriving market for years. A requirement, as part of the planning permission for one of the buildings in the regeneration or redesign of the area, was that a market be provided in that space. The applicant agreed to that and said anyone can use Newmarket as a market space for €67,000 per year. That is totally unacceptable. I want to know what will be done to make sure a market returns to Newmarket. I have been asking that question of the Department for a very long time and I have been given the wrong answer. I am still asking for an answer to that question. I would really appreciate if the Minister brought it back to the Department.

The Iveagh Market lay derelict and in bits for decades. It has been brought back up to a certain standard that meets health and safety requirements. What is going to happen with it afterwards? Can we not be like other European countries, or even like Cork? I went down to the English Market recently. We need that in Dublin. It is such a magnificent thing to have, not only for tourists but for the people who live there. The Liberties is renowned for weaving. The Liberties Weavers were born from that whole tradition of weavers we have in our community. The group meets but it does not have a permanent place. We certainly have enough spaces to be able to provide for those people who are doing amazing work. It is fantastic.

The Tivoli Theatre was torn down. Anyone who went to the panto at Christmas or to any of the many different events in the Tivoli will sadly miss it. That space is now about as undramatic and uninspiring as a place can be. It is absolutely disastrous. It is an affront to people like me who live in the area, and to the people who came to the area to go to the theatre, to see what has been left in its place.

Some of the places I have mentioned are in Dublin Bay South and I do not want to rob anybody from Dublin Bay South of their places but in Dublin South-Central, in a very short time, we have seen many more hotels being built, more short-term lets and more student accommodation. We do not need more hotels in Dublin 8, we do not need more short-term lets and we definitely do not need more student accommodation. We need to have a city where people who live there are the ones who are able to enjoy markets, venues, theatre, going out and being with our neighbours. It is not all just about tourists; it is also for the people who live here.

Deputy Cormac Devlin: I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this debate on tourism. Tourism is worth almost €9 billion a year to our national economy. It supports jobs in every county, town and community across this country. Last year, almost 6.5 million visitors from

overseas came to Ireland, spending an estimated €5.5 billion. We should, however, be honest about the trend. Visitor numbers in 2025 were down 3% and spend was down 9%. Cost is a factor and access is a factor. We cannot take this sector for granted.

In my constituency of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, tourism generates an estimated €126 million a year, according to the council's tourism strategy. It supports more than 3,000 jobs locally. At the centre of it is Dún Laoghaire Harbour, a great regional amenity. Last year, more than 80 cruise ships called to the harbour. More than four in ten of those passengers spent time in the town itself. That is footfall through our local shops, cafés and restaurants from April right through to September. The town has invested in itself. The DLR Lexicon, for example, is now the most visited public library in Ireland, welcoming around 1,300 people a day. The restored Dún Laoghaire baths facility has been brought back to life and has brought life to the seafront as well.

Our visitors' offering is real and distinctive, with the east pier, the Forty Foot and the James Joyce Tower. Interestingly, next week is Bloomsday and I commend entrepreneurs like Peter Caviston and volunteers like Margaret Brown on all the work they have done keeping that event going over the decades. We also have the National Maritime Museum of Ireland in the Mariners' Church. The People's Park at weekends has a market. There is the Dalkey Castle and Heritage Centre, and Killiney Hill. All are great and fantastic amenities. Then there are the businesses that anchor the town. There is the Royal Marine Hotel, which has stood over the harbour since 1828. Teddy's ice-cream is known to generations of Dubliners. The Fitzpatrick Castle Hotel overlooks Dublin Bay. Our wonderful pubs, restaurants and cafés, with their fantastic employees, make every visit to Dún Laoghaire very special.

What do the businesses need from the Government? There are three things, in my view. The first is support without over-regulation. There are small businesses but every new form, levy and inspection regime lands on the same kitchen table. Yes to sensible regulation but no to micro-regulation.

The second is the night-time economy. The night-time economy task force reported back in 2021. Towns like Dún Laoghaire would benefit directly. A visitor who stays overnight spends twice as much. I ask the Minister and his officials to set out a clear timeframe for implementing those reforms in full, including the modernisation of our licensing laws. That straddles not only the Minister's Department but the Department of justice as well.

As for the third, in budget 2026 the Government listened to the tourism sector. In the most recent budget the reduction in hospitality VAT to 9%, which the Minister referred to, was a significant, welcome and necessary intervention. That support must now be matched with practical measures in budget 2027, including targeted help with energy, employer and insurance costs, and marketing investment through Tourism Ireland on an all-island basis to win back European visitors.

I mention Tourism Ireland and investing on an all-island basis as I am the Chair of the Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement. The investment by the shared island fund in the likes of the Ulster Canal and the Narrow Water bridge project is going to bring huge investment and opportunities to that whole region, which is very welcome. However, at times the local councils' tourism strategies jar or do not necessarily link in with the overall national picture. I am sure this is a frustration to the Minister as well as to local

officials. It is important that we try to link in as much as possible on a regional basis the benefit of those local tourism strategies.

I ask that we keep backing the tourism sector, implement the night-time economy reforms, hold the line against unnecessary red tape and deliver practical supports for tourism businesses in budget 2027.

Deputy Micheál Carrigy: The Minister is very welcome. As he probably knows, I have been the chairperson of Longford Tourism for 12 or 13 years. When I started, County Longford probably had the lowest visitor figures in the country. We grasped that negative and we worked with the local authority and stakeholders to build the tourism product in our county. Last Christmas, we launched a new tourism network to drive the future of tourism in Longford. Our statement at the launch noted the following:

Longford's rich and often untold story forms the backbone of this vision, from ancient archaeological sites dating back to before the Egyptian pyramids, to revolutionary history, Celtic mythology, literary heritage and iconic love stories, all set within an unspoilt and undiscovered landscape.

That is what we are. We are unspoilt and undiscovered. We have been working very closely with Visit Westmeath where we were picked for one of the seven sites for the Home of Hallowe'en, which was a fantastic first year. We are looking forward to this continuing to be a successful festival. Longford is an unspoilt county. We have fantastic waterways, walkways and forest walks. We pride ourselves on the unspoilt beauty that we have and we want people to see that.

On Monday next, the Minister will be at the launch the new *visitlongford.ie* website, which is being worked on and is funded by the just transition fund. That fund had been transformational for our county by bringing in significant investment on the back of what was a negative story. The roles of the activation officers who were appointed to the various counties in the just transition area will finish at the end of this year. I ask that they continue for the just transition areas, which have suffered economically as a result of the shutdown of the power plants and the reduction in peat production. We should continue those roles. We need them because we have grown the product and the businesses in our region and we need that support for those businesses to make sure they are maintained in future.

I compliment our tourism officer, Denise Canavan, who is doing fantastic work since she took over the role, increasing the numbers of people, improving the product and working with all the communities in our county.

The Minister of State knows Longford very well, from the Maria Edgeworth Centre in Edgeworthstown and the Knights and Conquests Heritage Centre in Granard. I look forward to seeing the sod turned on the Norman heritage village on that site in 2026.

We have the fantastic Corlea trackway and its unspoiled beauty. It is undiscovered. That is the word I used earlier. I want to see further investment in that site. It goes back to 3,000 BC. It needs more investment to make sure more people come to see it. I ask that it be prioritised and we see significant investment in that project.

The Royal Canal project started in Longford, with the length from Cloondara out to the main line, and back into Longford town. It cost €300,000. In conjunction with Longford County Council, a group of seven of us on the committee secured LEADER funding and started that project with an 18 km section. We worked with other local authorities in counties Westmeath, Meath, Kildare and Dublin and shortly that project will now come in as far as Spencer Dock. People will be able to walk from Spencer Dock here in Dublin all the way down to the Shannon in Cloondara, and ultimately link up across the bogs into the west of Ireland out to Strokestown Park House. It is a fantastic project. The State has made significant investment in it and it is important to acknowledge the huge amount of funding that has been provided to make it a fantastic project. It will bring a further increase in tourism into our county.

I ask that the Government take away those issues. We are working hard on the ground with industry. We have all the stakeholders together. We just need support. We were delivering product through the just transition fund. I ask that support from that fund be continued, particularly through the tourism activator roles. Colm Croffey has had that role in Longford but they are in place throughout the region. We did not have support for a long number of years until the Hidden Heartlands brand was launched some years ago by people in the region, including me. The counties wanted their own brand. We were not on the Wild Atlantic Way or in Ireland's Ancient East. We have a unique beauty in the midlands and we want to make sure we get that support. Through the just transition fund, we have funding but we need continued support to make sure we can drive the tourism product, working with everybody involved, including local authorities, stakeholders, people in the business and the tourism committees and tourism officers throughout the region.

Deputy Louis O'Hara: I will start by speaking about a lot of the good work being done in County Galway to enhance our tourist offerings and support the many businesses and community organisations which contribute an awful lot to our history and heritage. I attended the 25th anniversary of the Athenry Heritage Centre last week and it was a fantastic occasion. The centre has been very successful in promoting Athenry as a heritage town and attracting visitors to the area. Huge credit should go to all involved in the local community.

Athenry is a town with significant tourism potential given our rich and unique history and heritage. It is fair to say that potential has not been fully realised. I acknowledge the many great efforts being made by community organisations to rectify that, and indeed by Galway County Council through the Athenry town team in terms of particular heritage spaces in the town. I hope those efforts are fully supported by the Government and the tourism authorities.

Last week, I attended the launch of the Yeats-Gregory explorer bus at Coole Park. This bus service that will run regularly through the summer months, linking all the key heritage, cultural and historical attractions across south Galway, including Coole, the Kiltartan Gregory Museum, Thoor Ballylee, Kilmacduagh and Gort town centre. It is a fantastic initiative that should be replicated elsewhere. Huge credit to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, Galway County Council and Fáilte Ireland for supporting it. There is a lot of positive work going on.

I raise Dunguaire Castle in Kinvara. The castle has been closed for the past three years. It is an enormous loss to the community and wider region, especially now as we come into the summer months and the height of the tourist season. It is a huge, missed opportunity for

Kinvara and surrounding areas. This is an iconic landmark right on the Wild Atlantic Way that has been left essentially abandoned. One of our greatest tourist and heritage assets in County Galway has been left closed to the public indefinitely. We have tourists standing outside every single day who want to enter but cannot do so. I am getting hundreds of emails from locals and tourists alike who cannot understand why this is being allowed to continue. It is causing enormous frustration.

The core of this issue is funding. While Galway County Council is willing to acquire the castle from the Shannon Group and reopen it, it cannot do so without Government funding to bring the castle up to a safe standard. Why is the Government hesitating about providing the funding required? All we hear are excuses from different Ministers passing the buck between Departments. It seems no one is willing to take responsibility for this situation. The frustrating part is the Government did it before when it provided significant funding to Clare and Limerick county councils to acquire sites like Bunratty Castle and St. John's Castle from the Shannon Group. There is precedent here. We are asking for fair play and for the same funding to be provided to Galway County Council and Kinvara to get Dunguaire Castle reopened. I ask the Minister of State to consider coming down to the area to visit Kinvara and the castle to see the huge missed opportunity for himself. He could engage with representatives and stakeholders in the local community. This situation cannot persist any longer.

Deputy George Lawlor: I welcome the opportunity to speak in the Chamber on this hugely important yet too often underestimated pillar of our national economy. Tourism is not and should not be a luxury add-on to our economic strategy, nor a seasonal afterthought. It is an extremely important component of our national economy, one that sustains many of our rural communities. It supports small businesses, preserves our cultural heritage and, in many respects, keeps rural Ireland alive. If we are serious about balanced regional development, we must be serious about tourism. It contributes billions annually to the Irish economy and supports hundreds of thousands of jobs, many of them in rural counties where alternative industries are often limited. It drives demand for hospitality, transport, food production, crafts, festivals and cultural experiences. It is one of the few sectors that reach into every town, parish and county. Where tourism thrives, the entire nation thrives.

When tourism is neglected, rural Ireland feels it first and hardest. Nowhere is this more evident than in my own county of Wexford. Wexford is a county whose identity, economy and social fabric are massively intertwined with tourism. We are blessed with natural beauty, cultural richness and a heritage that stretches from the Norman invasion via Baginbun to the 1798 Rebellion to the modern arts festivals which draw visitors from across the world. However, blessings alone do not sustain an economy; investment, vision and leadership do.

Next year, 2027, is the year of the Norman. A few years back, I had the pleasure of hosting a delegation from Normandy, including the president of the Regional Council of Normandy, Hervé Morin. Normandy has a population of 3.3 million. Incredibly, the delegation had very little knowledge of Ireland's or Wexford's connection to Normandy. It is with areas like Normandy that we should be looking to connect via much bigger national investment. There is huge potential in that connection, particularly since Brexit. The people of Normandy used to send their children to England to learn English. Ireland now has a terrific opportunity because of the constraints after Brexit.

If we look at a sister city of Wexford, Savannah in Georgia, it has huge historical connections with Ireland and Wexford. Some 57% of the population there trace their heritage to County Wexford. The city itself has a population of 170,000 people, yet last year it had 13 million visitors. If we compare that to Ireland, we had 6.4 million visitors. There is no direct flight to Savannah despite the huge connections. As an example, a 16,000 sq. ft Wexford bar has just opened in the heart of Savannah. I do not know if the Minister of State has been there-

Deputy Neale Richmond: Not yet.

Deputy George Lawlor: -----but it is a wonderful tourism addition and could be an embassy for our tourism industry.

We also need to look to exploit, in a sustainable way, what is available on our doorstep, for example, our seas and rivers. It is estimated that between 8 million and ten million people participate in sea angling across Europe every year, generating an economic impact of between €8 billion and €10 billion. France has recorded 1.4 million recreational anglers.

England and Wales show that, historically, participation reaches over 4.2 million, split between coarse, game and sea angling. Wexford hosted the world and European shore angling competitions in the recent past and will do so again, no doubt, in the future because of our dual coastline. It is a perfect area for angling, depending on the direction of the wind, yet we really do not pursue the opportunities that are clear in this sector, and it is something we really should be looking at.

The attractions we see across the country are not just points on a map; they are economic lifelines. They sustain jobs in hotels, cafés, bed and breakfast accommodation, restaurants, taxis, shops and activity providers. They support farmers who supply local produce. They keep our towns vibrant and our villages open. In Wexford, tourism is not an optional extra; it is the cornerstone of our prosperity.

Local authorities are expected to promote tourism, develop local strategies, support festivals, maintain public amenities and market their region, but they are expected to do all this with budgets that are wholly inadequate for the scale of the task. We cannot keep asking local authorities to deliver world-class tourism outcomes on shoestring budgets. It is unrealistic, it is unfair and it is holding back the potential of counties such as Wexford. If we want tourism to flourish, we must invest in the people and institutions that make it happen. Local authorities need substantial, multi-year, ring-fenced funding for tourism promotion, not *ad hoc* grants, once-off allocations or competitive schemes that pit counties against one another. What they need is predictable, strategic investment that allows them to plan, innovate and build long-term capacity. Let us imagine what Wexford County Council and all other local authorities could achieve with a properly funded tourism promotion department. We could expand international marketing campaigns. We could develop new and more greenways, blueways and heritage trails. We could support more festivals, and not just the flagship ones but the smaller, community-led events that give towns their identity. We can really do so much more with this product.

Deputy Alan Kelly: As the Minister will probably know, I used to work in Bord Fáilte and Fáilte Ireland until I made the crazy decision to get into politics. I am sure all Members wish I had not. I used to be a manager. I created the national tourism database. I am very proud of that because it distributes all the information to this day for everything we do in tourism. A colleague of mine, a fellow Tipperary man who was my manager, had a saying about tourism: "We cannot forget the hole in the doughnut." The issue is that a large number of people who come into this country go around the outskirts of Ireland. If, however, we consider the quality of the offering and, from a price comparison point of view, of what is also available for tourists down the spine of Ireland, there is a golden opportunity for us, particularly with Deputy Burke as Minister and, dare I say, with the Minister of State, Deputy Smyth, beside him. From Cavan all the way down to the Cork-Kerry border, it as an oval shape that is the hole in the doughnut. That is where we need to concentrate capital and current investment.

A number of years ago, when we had very little money, we launched the Lough Derg plan, a roadmap for experience development and destination marketing. Where I am from, along Lough Derg, which touches County Clare, north Tipperary and south Galway and the Shannon basin, is a hidden secret. People come into Killaloe now that we have the new bridge, which I hold my hands up as being responsible for. Access is incredible. They come along the lake. Some of them have never heard of the greatest place on earth, Garrykenny, which is unbelievably popular once people get there, or they go to Terryglass, Dromineer, Ballycommon, Ballina or wherever else.

I use that as an example of how we, as a country, need to extend our tourism season and our tourism product generally. Tourism can be defined by three As and an E: accommodation, attractions, activities and events. I urge the Minister, from a capital and current point of view, to put together a programme for - he does not have to call it this - the hole in the doughnut in this country when it comes to tourism. It is incredibly important that he does so, and it would be a testament and a legacy for him if he were to do so.

In the Nenagh and north Tipperary area, we are very proud of Shane MacGowan. There is a trail called Unravelling Shane MacGowan, which has been set up and supported by Siobhan, his sister, and Tipperary County Council, particularly Rosemary Joyce, with a huge number of people coming on the tour. There is the old family cottage, which we would love to get into some form of local authority or national ownership. I ask the Minister sometime he is passing down through the middle of Ireland - obviously, Nenagh is very central - to meet with the family there to discuss same. It would not involve a massive outlay but I wanted to take this opportunity to ask the Minister about that.

Finally, when it comes to the events side of the three As and the E, festivals are critical. The Minister is aware of the issue with *tickets.ie*. In fairness, he took a call from me last week about this. As regards the large-scale festival we have had in Thurles for the past number of years, Liberty Music Festival, now that *tickets.ie* has basically gone wallop, Councillor Jim Ryan in Thurles and others are having to find about €300,000 to support the festival to go ahead. Campsites and tickets are sold out yet, like a number of other festivals in this country, Liberty Music Festival is being massively affected by this. This is not the fault of the Government; it is a collective Oireachtas and regulatory fault. The idea that *tickets.ie* or any similar type of organisation can take millions of euro, put the money into its own account, hold it and then go wallop, just from a regulatory point of view, is nuts. It is insane. It is crazy. It

should not be allowed to happen. Let us imagine where we would all be left if *ticketmaster.ie* went wallop in the morning. There are all these small festivals. I ask the Minister to examine this from a regulatory point of view. I commend all those who are supporting the festival to keep it going this year. I do not know where they will get the funding for it or how they will be supported, but if there is any way in which that can happen, it would be great. On the principle of *tickets.ie* and the regulatory process, we, as a Legislature, need to deal with it.

Deputy William Aird: I welcome the opportunity to speak on the importance of tourism to our economy, our communities and our national identity. Tourism remains one of the most important and significant industries, supporting employment, enterprise and regional development in every county. Hundreds of thousands of people depend directly or indirectly on tourism activities, from accommodation to visitor attractions, transport, festivals, heritage sites and other recreation. Despite recent challenges, Ireland continues to attract millions of visitors each year.

As a TD for County Laois, I want to highlight the enormous tourism potential that exists in the midlands and in my own county and the need to match that potential with real investment on the ground. For far too long, Laois has been overlooked as a tourism destination but the reality is that the county has outstanding heritage, outdoor recreation and cultural experiences. We have the Rock of Dunamase, one of the most iconic medieval sites in the country, and Emo Court, one of the finest neoclassical estates in Ireland. Emo Court had 305,000 visitors last year and the Rock of Dunamase had 44,000. These figures show what is possible when the product is supported. Beyond that, the Slieve Bloom Mountains offer some of the best walking and cycling in the country. Our towns and villages, including Abbeyleix, Durrow, Portarlinton, Timahoe and many others, have strong cultural and heritage experiences, supported by festivals and sporting events - real economic benefit into rural, local communities.

Laois is located within easy reach of Dublin, Cork, Limerick, Galway and Waterford. However, tourism does not happen by accident. It needs investment in infrastructure, walking and cycling routes, public area improvements, heritage conservation and destination development. If we want counties like Laois to reach their potential, we must be fair in how national tourism funding is delivered. One of the biggest tourism and recreational gaps in County Laois is that we do not have a greenway. Ours is one of the few counties in this State without one. At a time outdoor recreation tourism is growing, that is a serious disadvantage.

However, I have good news as a Laois TD. Laois has real potential in this space, especially with the old Bord na Móna rail corridor from Cashel bog through Togher Woods and over to Ross bog. This is a continuation of an existing route, with strong potential conversion into a greenway, that exists and that was used to take the peat off the bogs, which is no longer allowed. That is why I am really passionate about what I say. I have called this proposal the O'More way. It reflects local identity and ambition. The corridor exists in its entirety, including under railway lines and national roads and routes. It is all there, ready to go up and ready to run if we get the funding.

I raised this recently at a joint committee meeting on rural development policy where I highlighted the need to prioritise viable greenway projects that are not yet funded. This is the frustration on the ground. Ready-made projects are waiting while others progress. I have also raised this directly with the Minister, Deputy Calleary. Too often, counties like Laois end up

at the back of the queue when funding decisions are made. I want to acknowledge the work of Laois County Council and the local groups that are pushing this forward. The support is there, the demand is there; what is missing is delivery. We need better joined-up thinking involving agencies like Bord na Móna. We cannot afford to lose projects that already have roots and strong backing.

Deputy John Connolly: Like other Members I am going to discuss the virtues of my own constituency from a tourism perspective. It offers a unique tourism experience. Unlike many other areas, we have a bustling city that is expanding but we also have a region of great natural beauty beside it in Connemara. It offers tourists a unique opportunity to experience both. Many see Galway mar príomhchathair dhátheangach agus príomhchathair chultúrtha na tíre seo - the bilingual capital of the country. One of the things about bilingualism and an Ghaeilge is nach ndéanfaimid dóthain chun cúrsaí turasóireachta a spreagadh ó thaobh na teanga de - we do not use the language enough. We do not use the fact that the language is spoken as the daily language of the community in Connemara and is widely heard across Galway city as something to attract tourists to enjoy. Sadly, not every part of the country can say that but we can in Galway. We appreciate it and as locals we feel that offers a unique opportunity for tourists to come and experience it.

One of the things Galway City Council has sought to do - I support it on this. In fact, I was a member of the council when we first discussed it - is the opportunity for the local authority to develop a tourism tax. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to travel so much abroad. I always pay a tourism tax to the hotel operator in addition to the cost of staying at the hotel. Again, fortunately, it is something that I can do. We need to look at it as an opportunity for local authorities to raise revenue. There are additional costs on certain local authorities as a result of being a location that tourists enjoy. We like to keep the city cleaner. There is greater usage of public transport. There is a greater need to maintain good road quality and, as Deputy Aird says, to build things like greenways.

Local authorities would benefit from the opportunity to raise funds through a tourism tax. Dublin City Council has sought it. Galway City Council was the first to moot it. We should give councils the liberty and the opportunity to do so. They are conscious enough to do so in a way that does not make the attraction too expensive or that it will not kill the goose that lays the golden egg in terms of tourism. We should move on that and allow them to do that.

Bhí mé ag caint faoi Chonamara ansin. Ba mhaith liom dhá áit eile i gConamara a lua atá thar a bheith tábhachtach ó thaobh cúrsaí turasóireachta agus cuairteoirí de. I want to mention the Connemara National Park. It offers a fantastic experience for tourists. In the region of a quarter of a million people visit it every year. I would like to see it being further developed. There is a wonderful visitor centre there and it has a new experience that teaches people about the Connemara pony - something that is again unique to the area.

Luaim chomh maith Ionad Cultúrtha an Phiarsaigh i Rosmuc, aonad a chuireann síos ar stair na háite maidir le Pádraig Pearse. Bhí cónaí air san áit ar feadh blianta agus é ag foghlaim na teanga. I will finish by referring to the importance of tourism to the offshore islands. It is the crucial industry for them. There is some concern about the impact of the changes to the short-term letting sphere that we are going to introduce. I just ask that we might consider particular details for the offshore islands.

Deputy John McGuinness: I want to make a pitch for my own constituency of Carlow-Kilkenny. We cannot be complacent about our success or rest on our laurels. We have to continue to be innovative and to develop our tourism product. In this regard, we need to look at the strengths of each county and not just make every county, city and village the same. We must look at what they have to offer and have strategic investment in what each county is doing or wants to do. It is not driven from the top; it is driven by the community and those who are involved in the tourism industry.

There should be a Norman museum and study centre in Kilkenny. It is the heart of our Norman history. It can attract tourists right across Europe who are engaging in Norman history and education. The Ministers for tourism and higher education should develop that type of offering with the South East Technological University, which will attract real money and real tourism. We need to build on the strengths that we have in the county, for example, in Graiguenamanagh, and highlight the historic areas and locations where business was conducted many years ago in a very different way, for example, Duiske Glass and Cushendale Mills. That would encourage people to know the brand and be able to identify it and buy it abroad.

There is a coal mining trail. I would link it to Castlecomer, County Kilkenny, which has historically been a big coal mining district. These are the things we should be looking at as well as what is happening currently in the equine industry. There are horses in Ireland, horses being exported, sport abroad and sport in Ireland. There is a massive amount of money that could benefit the economy if we were to exploit all of that area.

I agree with Deputies Lawlor and Gibney on what they said about festivals. We need to fund them in a strategic way. We need to give lot more funding through local authorities to ensure they can direct the funding to support the strategies they have for developing tourism. I urge that it would be considered seriously because the funding is very scattered and piecemeal. While there are big allocations, it is the smaller community efforts that should take pride of place and therefore the county should have a greater role in it.

Deputy Martin Kenny: I acknowledge the huge work that has been done by so many people around the country, particularly in a voluntary capacity to develop the tourism package that we offer to people. Tourists come to Ireland for a number of reasons. There is leisure tourism and activity tourism. We have a lot of that in my region with the Shannon waterway among others. We also have a lot of hill walking, etc.

In addition, we have interest tourism - people who want to come to look at history and how people lived in the past or developed. We have the coal mining experience in Arigna, Seán Mac Diarmada's Cottage in north Leitrim as well as Yeats country. We have all of the types of tourism packages that attract people and bring those who have an interest in a particular region or a particular area.

The Government needs to put more investment into all of that and ensure that we have the level of support required to build the critical mass so that it can work on its own. Very often in the early days that is one of the critical points as a lot of tourism packages cannot develop without support. The Wild Atlantic Way has been a great success from a marketing perspective, as has the Hidden Heartlands, which also runs through a lot of my area. It has a lot more potential and needs a lot more investment.

I want to return to a topic that was raised by others, namely, festivals. They are a big part of summer tourism attractions, in particular in a lot of small places around the country. People come to music festivals, literature festivals and whatever else. A lot of them are organised by community projects and community groups and they need funding and assistance to ensure they can survive. In the past, some of them got bits of assistance from the local authorities. Then there is a need for a bit of crowd control and the Garda charges them a fortune to manage the crowd. It just seems to turn it on its head. There needs to be an overall examination of all of that.

Finally, I want to come to the issue of *tickets.ie*. As we know, it went wallop in the last week. A lot of festivals around the country were affected. The Rory Gallagher International Festival in Ballyshannon, County Donegal has lost an awful lot of money. The organisers do not know where it has gone. It has disappeared. Cowboys and Heroes in Ballinamore, County Leitrim is a country music festival that was on again last weekend. Everybody who attended had a tremendous time. It was wonderful, but the promoters say there is no money there any more. This company is owned by DEAG, which is the largest shareholder. I understand it is a German company with an annual turnover of about €450 million, so there is no absence of money in the parent company, which needs to be held accountable for this.

My understanding is that in the past couple years since it was taken over by international companies, it has been scaled down. Its offices have been closed. It has been scaled down to the stage where it was all being run by one man working from home. Now, it has pulled the plug on it and nobody knows where it has gone. There is an issue about how we regulate such agencies and organisations. A solicitor or an auctioneer has to have a client account. That is what it was doing. It was handling clients' money. It was selling the tickets to the customers, taking in the money, holding it and giving it back. There is no such thing as client account in these organisations. There needs to be an examination of how this can be properly regulated and properly done. There also needs to be some kind of compensation, particularly for the community organisations but for all the organisations that run festivals around the country that may be largely out of pocket because of this.

Deputy Malcolm Byrne: This is particularly important debate. It is a critical industry for our entire country. To start with, I want to praise the work of Tourism Ireland and Fáilte Ireland in terms of what they do to promote tourism in this country, build infrastructure and, indeed, build relationships.

Specifically, to the Minister of State's own brief, given that people are increasingly going to be using AI platforms to plan their holidays, we need to look at a strategy around how we can ensure Ireland is well-positioned to be able to avail of those opportunities. As the Minister of State knows, I am fortunate to represent the constituency of Wicklow-Wexford, which I would argue has some of the finest beaches in the country running from Brittas Bay through Arklow south beach to Clogga, Clone, Ballymoney, where I spent much of my own childhood and which has a beautiful beach, to Courtown harbour, which is in need of renourishment at the moment, to Cahore, Old Bawn, Morristown and many others in between. We need a strategy to ensure that we have sustainable beach tourism in Ireland.

I was very struck by the University of Galway's report today about the impact of climate change on our coastal communities. We have to protect homes and infrastructure but it is also

important that we protect our beaches. They are a critical part of the local tourism infrastructure. Now that Wexford County Council has a marine area consent licence for the potential development of breakwaters at Courtown harbour, restoring the beach that many of us remember from our childhoods there is critical.

The Minister of State will be aware that next year, we are going to be celebrating Canada-Ireland 180, marking 180 years since 1847 when a lot of the connections developed between Ireland and Canada. As we know, Prime Minister Carney is coming here this week. Canada is now our fifth biggest market with over 200,000 people coming here each year but there is potential for a lot more. In the constituency I am proud to represent in south-west Wicklow, many travelled during the middle of the 1800s on assisted famine passage from that area. Over 6,000 men, women and children travelled from south-west Wicklow to Canada. That is, in fact, very much documented in the excellent book "Shoeboxes: From Irish Roots to Canadian Branches" by the late Kevin Lee and Tom Jenkins. Given the tens of thousands of people - there is a greater proportion of Canadians who claim Irish heritage than Americans - I believe it is a market that remains untapped.

As colleagues mentioned, next year is also the year of the Normans. While I know there are many who are making claims to Norman heritage, it was from Ferns Castle that the original invitation was sent to invite the Normans to Ireland. Ferns is a wonderful example of a Norman castle. It is very well maintained. Even more importantly, there is a Norman festival that takes place there, which I was involved in recently. There is a wonderful local Ferns village committee. It is critical, not alone in terms of us fostering our relationships with our nearest EU neighbour, France, particularly with all the ferries coming into Rosslare, for people to be able to explore those Norman links right around the south east. That potential is something we do need to do more about and to exploit and explore.

I also want to commend those who are involved in the development of the south Wicklow greenway project. We are aware of the success of greenways right around the country. The south Wicklow one has perhaps been taking a bit longer to get off the ground than many would have liked. I know that the chair, Anthony Murphy, former Councillor John Mullen and, indeed, many people in the local community who are very actively involved in this want to see it up and running. Developing those links from Arklow out to Shillelagh, even if it is done on a phased basis, is important for people to be able to visit all those wonderful villages right across south Wicklow as well as for the tourism potential we could see for Arklow town. We look at Dungarvan as an example and at how the Waterford greenway has been transformational. Something similar could happen with Arklow.

I am a bit frustrated about the slow pace of movement on the greenway. In fairness, the Minister, Deputy Darragh O'Brien, made money available to Wicklow County Council to progress it. I want to see this as a priority because of the tourism potential for all those villages from Aughrim and Avoca to Tinahely and Shillelagh and on to Carnew, and particularly with those Canadian connections. The potential of all that is huge and we need to explore it.

Sometimes we do not sell our island sufficiently. There is often too much of a focus, dare I say, on Dublin. It is critical, and I have outlined some of the points with regard to the potential of our links with Normandy and Canada. We need to talk about an all-island strategy. That is something I hope the Minister of State will take on board.

Deputy Joe Neville: I am delighted to discuss tourism which is of national importance and significance. One thing we have in common across the country is the need for tourism. One very positive step we had with this Government is that we put tourism under the economic brief. With the Minister, Deputy Burke, in attendance, we have someone with an especially keen watch on tourism because it does show how tourism can impact. It is obviously great when people come to visit the country because, ultimately, what they do is spend money in our economy. They spend money positively. We do it ourselves when we go on holidays around the country. What we do is leave money behind us. As a country and as towns and villages, we have to be careful. We have to ensure that we do not try to take too much money. We cannot kill the golden goose. Something we have to be careful about from our own economic perspective is that we keep an eye on prices, such as car rental prices, hotel prices and the lattes and scones potentially costing up to a tenner. They are the things we have to watch. We have to ensure that Ireland remains a place to visit where not only will people get a great experience but it will not cost them a fortune. In fairness, that is something on which we have to keep an eye. As Deputy Byrne outlined earlier, Ireland has a great tradition of tourism coming from the US, considering the number of people who went abroad. That is something we relied upon through different times. Movies like "Ryan's Daughter" sold Ireland to countries like America and since then, Ireland has benefitted economically from it. Tourism might be seen from a national perspective to have fallen down some levels of importance but we do know that for some areas, it is massively significant.

One issue I want to talk about is how this Government and, in fairness, the previous Government have over the past number of years reached out in many different ways to America, be it the American college football games or the NFL last year. We will have the Ryder Cup coming here. These events can draw in thousands of new people and thousands of eyeballs on the television. They can have a massive impact. That is hugely important.

Another issue I want to highlight is probably one we have not highlighted and sold enough to tourists. This should not always be about sales and money but one thing is the likes of the GAA. Do we push it enough to tourists? Do people know and understand that we have our own indigenous games? While we welcome games and highlight and showcase them, it is also important that we showcase what we have on our doorstep. We have traditions and games of our own. We are brilliant at exporting music and culture and those traditions but, ultimately, we also need to look at it from a sporting place. The GAA potentially has a great role to play. Obviously, it has done its bit with the museum and everything else but from a tourism board and national perspective, it is something we have to push more.

As I get down towards more of a parochial level, I look at Kildare North and Kildare in general. I have been lucky enough to have been a mayor of Kildare. I have been fortunate enough to be a councillor there for a number of years. However, one thing I felt was that we probably did not have enough visitors coming through. We have the golf courses and carting. We have the K Club. We have the horseracing. Indeed, we have places like Castletown House, Kilkea Castle and Lullymore in the north west of the county. We have some great locations. These are places that can really bring in more people because they are so close to the airport. Indeed, when we talk about tourism, we should not miss out on internal tourism and the fact that people are going from one side of the country to the other and spending their money.

4 o'clock

We need to continue to push on this. I know Into Kildare has done a huge amount of work and put a huge amount of effort into marketing the county. I look for more assistance from the Department, if possible, to continue that. I was lucky to be in Castletown House on Monday and got shown around for the umpteenth time. The OPW has been able to buy the land. We now have access restored. This is a cultural pearl of north Kildare that we should continue to push as well.

As I said, there are lots of opportunities and possibilities but in the good hands of the Minister, Deputy Burke, there is no reason why tourism will not continue to thrive in the country.

Deputy Michael Collins: I have been seeking this debate for about three months at the Business Committee so I am glad the Minister is here before us. I will concentrate very much on the serious issue of short-term lets. I have very little time so I will ask a number of questions the Minister might be able to answer in his summing up. There has been major confusion, as we have seen. Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael are all over the place on this issue, so much so that people have been told for the last two years to sign up in May but now that can has been kicked down the road. The Social Democrats and the Labour Party have been very clear that they do not support short-term lets. That is the end of tourism in rural communities as far as they are concerned and Sinn Féin is singing from both sides of its mouth.

Will the Minister confirm precisely what categories of accommodation are proposed to be exempted from the proposed planning restrictions? Will it be granny flats, converted barns and outbuildings? Is it them or is it glamping units, treehouses or accommodation attached to a principal private residence? Has there been any evidence-based assessment conducted by the Department to determine how many short-term letting properties would realistically become long-term residential tenancies if the proposed restrictions are implemented? Will that analysis be published? Will the Minister provide the most up-to-date estimate of the number of short-term letting units that will be affected in counties such as Cork, Kerry, Donegal, Mayo and Galway, broken down by local authority? Has the Department completed a tourism impact assessment quantifying the potential loss of visitor bed capacity arising from the proposed measures and if so will he bring it before the Dáil for debate? Given the repeated delays to the legislation, will the Minister outline which specific provisions remain unresolved between Departments and whether disagreements relate to housing-supply projections, tourism impacts, planning law or enforcement mechanisms? Has the Department conducted any analysis of the economic impact on rural communities where short-term letting income supports local restaurants, pubs' activities, providers and tourism businesses?

On Tuesday, 28 April, the Taoiseach told this House that if someone is operating an Airbnb for seven years, he or she does not need planning permission. Does the Minister stand over that statement? My understanding is that they will be required to make an application for retention in order to be able to get on the register. Perhaps the Minister will have a word with the Taoiseach and ask him to come to the House and correct the record. On Tuesday, 28 April, the Taoiseach told this House, "The policy decision we have taken, of which the Deputy is well aware, is that it relates to towns over 20,000, so that excludes straight away all of the western seaboard and the north western seaboard, all the way along." Perhaps the Minister could give the Taoiseach a geography lesson and remind him that Tralee, Limerick city, Galway city, Sligo and even towns such as Ennis and Letterkenny are vital hubs for the surrounding, rural,

seaboard tourism communities. Will the Minister bring clarity today about the criteria that planning authorities will use in assessing and making determinations on material change-of-use applications for existing and new short-term letting units in both towns and villages? These are issues that I would appreciate an answer to.

Deputy Ken O'Flynn: While I welcome this debate, I am representing the constituency of Cork North-Central. In 2034, Cork city will be celebrating its 850th birthday. It is a maritime city, with strong harbour connections and great stories. It has a huge natural harbour as the Minister knows. Our tourism industry is doing well when it comes to the number of cruises, which is up this year. Seamus Heaney from Visit Cork has been doing a tremendous job with a very small team of staff. I am not sure whether the Minister has had the opportunity to visit Seamus and his team, but they warrant tremendous respect for the amount of investment they have brought to Cork and the tremendous work that goes on in Visit Cork.

Thousands of tourists visit Blarney Castle every day but the problem is that Blarney does not retain those tourists. They are not staying there overnight. Equally with the cruises that come into the city, people are being taken on buses to Tipperary and Waterford. They are not investing in the city and the greater Cork area. As the Minister knows, Cork produces over 61% of the country's artisan foods. Cork is the largest producer of these foods. The English Market is doing a tremendous job as well. The recent royal visit prompted a lot of success and a lot of visitors. However, I do not see Tourism Ireland or the Department of tourism recognising Cork city as a place where you can invest in artisan food and where there is an investment opportunity for Cork to bring more people into Cork, to have the food and wine experience. The Minister is familiar with the Huguenot and Jacobite story in Cork as well, and the great wine houses of Bordeaux, which have direct connections to the Wine Geese of Cork, for example, Lawton's Quay and the great Pierre Lawton, who still operates his family's business, the Hennessy family, etc.

There is so much needed for Cork and there is so much needed for investment in Cork. We need to have an anchor tenant and we need to have an anchor business as an attraction to Cork. I am asking the Minister to bring in some sort of moneys and funding to the local authority to allow it to invest in a large anchor complex, such as what Guinness has in Dublin with the Guinness Storehouse.

Deputy Paul Lawless: Mayo is one of the most scenic and beautiful counties in this country. In recent years, we welcomed the US President and I understand next week Mayo is due to welcome the Canadian Prime Minister, Mark Carney. Tourism is the lifeblood of so many areas in Mayo, including west Mayo, east Mayo, north and south, in Cong, for example, Westport, Clare Island, the Barony of Erris, which is absolutely stunning, and Achill Island. Mayo has so much to offer. Many communities, particularly rural ones, depend on tourism. That is why I am very concerned about the short-term lettings. It is very important that we protect families who have a long-standing tradition in relation to it.

I also concerned by the fact there was a 6% drop in tourism last year. That represents millions of euro to the Irish economy and cost competitiveness is a factor. Ireland is the second most expensive country in the EU. It is important that the Minister look at that, for example, car rentals. I spoke to an Irish-American family who came back to Ireland last year. They outlined the phenomenal expense of their stay. They said that going forward with a young

family, it is becoming increasingly difficult. They talked about how obtaining a car rental and car insurance cost thousands of euro for a two-week trip. I ask the Minister to consider that and look at those practical measures.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: When I was told that I had 90 seconds to talk about tourism, my first thought was "Aw fliuch", because tá sé ag cur baistí i gconaí an t-am ar fad, so we have to make use of the fliuch or the wetness in Ireland. One of the ways to do it would be to promote Ireland as a more climate-friendly destination to people from the likes of Spain and the south of France. They could come here, get a little bit of coolness and have a great experience.

To tie in with that, i ndáiríre, we also have to make sure that we have proper canopies for cover, especially in our key tourism heritage sites. I mentioned in previous debates that we should have covered areas, both for markets and for eating, so that all the main streets of our tourist towns would have a canopy. It keeps the sun out, but it also keeps the rain out. If the Spanish, French or the Germans want to go for a hike in the rain, that is their prerogative and we should encourage that and promote it. Equally, when people want to enjoy the other experiences in Ireland they cannot sit outside, especially during the winter months. I note that the strategy references promoting more visits from May to October. Some of those months are dry but some of them are quite wet. We also have the potential in January and February for people with their coats on to sit outside in the fresh air have a cup of tea or coffee or have breakfast, but those coverings need to be in place. In terms of the strategy, maybe the Minister could look at that dry coverage for key tourist destinations.

Deputy Edward Timmins: I want to raise three topics under tourism. The first is short-term lets. Short-term lets provide the only form of tourist accommodation in many parts of rural Ireland. They bring tourists from all over the world to places that would never otherwise receive tourists. I know because I live in a village in rural west Wicklow and have witnessed what these short-term lets bring. These industries were here before the housing shortage and they will be here long after the housing shortage is gone. They supply accommodation where hotels will never be built. They offer a unique and authentic experience to the tourist and show Ireland at its best. We cannot destroy an industry on the basis that it may increase the housing supply by some small amount.

I know a poll was carried out across a number of host groups across the country. On average, 93% of hosts cannot or will not release their property to long-term letting. Hosts have no issue with a register. The impact of releasing extra rental accommodation will be negligible but the impact on tourism, people's incomes and rural Ireland is clear.

My second point is on the American Presidents trail. Twenty-three US Presidents have Irish heritage, with many coming from Northern Ireland. As the Minister will know, I first floated the idea of an American Presidents trail early last year in this House. I strongly believe this proposal could be a huge positive for a North-South project. It could also be a massive attraction for US visitors, especially those with Irish links and could be comparable to the Wild Atlantic Way. I strongly believe my proposal could be hugely positive for a North-South project and would fit with the whole reason for the shared island fund. It would boost the economy of the island and deliver benefits that we cannot predict.

I am pleased that the project has been approved by Cabinet and I want to thank the Minister, Deputy O'Donovan, for his great support in this project and ask the Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment to support it as well. I look forward to the development of the project over the coming years. I also believe that Tourism Ireland and Bord Fáilte should be building this into their tourism strategy.

My final point relates to hill forts. Baltinglass, where I hail from, is a small town in west Wicklow. There are nine hill forts in the vicinity of the town and it is described by experts as the hill fort capital of Ireland. This is by far the biggest cluster in the country. Research work and archaeological digs have been carried out and this work was widely reported on national television and radio earlier this year. This has further revealed many other ancient sites and lead-researchers have now described the area and the archaeological capital of Ireland. I bring this to the Minister's attention today and ask for him to support and develop this huge part of our heritage and history and bring it to a wider audience.

Deputy Naoise Ó Muirí: Tourism is one of Ireland's most important indigenous industries. It is a huge employer, particularly down the country. It is so important to all sorts of businesses around the country. There are 6.4 million overseas visitors into Ireland, bringing €5.5 million into Ireland. We have Dublin in the middle of that, which is a very popular destination. I want to touch on the tourism levy, which I support. It is important we use and develop the offering in Dublin from a tourism perspective. I have raised it here before. I know it has been discussed in this Chamber and elsewhere in recent times. Ireland is a bit of an outlier at the moment, particularly when it comes to capital cities. For a capital city like Dublin, 21 out of 27 EU member states have some form of a tourism levy and I think Dubliners would be very supportive of it. Perhaps the fact they would not be paying it would help but they pay it when they travel to other countries and other capital cities in Europe. I think there is strong support for its introduction.

Dublin City Council has estimated it would raise between €15 million and €20 million, which could be reinvested in local infrastructure. We are talking a small charge of probably €2 a head for a night in a hotel or maybe something of the order of €3. It is common and it happens everywhere. People understand the concept and think it is a fair ask. We could reinvest that money in infrastructure to improve the tourism offering across the city and beyond.

I understand Fáilte Ireland is commissioning research on existing tourist levies across Europe in line with the recommendations of the Dublin City Task Force. As others have mentioned, I am delighted to see tourism under the Minister's brief because it is an economic activity and it is important it is treated like that and is developed. An oversight board led by the Department is already in place to oversee its implementation. We just need to get on with it now, get Government support confirmed and do it. I am very supportive of that and hope the Minister and his Department will progress it.

I just want to mention the regional development of tourism within Dublin city. In my area on the northside, we have Clontarf, Howth, which is an old fishing port with a fantastic tourism offering, Ireland's Eye, the Casino in Marino and Bram Stoker's house in Fairview. There is so much to see and do within Dublin, which is not just in the city centre. There are the mountains on the southern side of Dublin also. A regional strategy within Dublin which tries to target promotion and resources in some way would be very welcome and worth pursuing.

Others have mentioned the short-term lets issue. In the interests of fairness, somebody who has been operating an Airbnb for seven years or more, they are doing that well and professionally. It is not a big issue in terms of accommodation if they are left to continue to do that. That is an economic activity from a tourism perspective. They do exist in Dublin. They do exist on the northside. We need to make sure that they are afforded the opportunity to keep doing that.

Deputy Albert Dolan: I am going to start off addressing the short-term lets. As the Minister knows, I am a member of the enterprise committee where we have been considering the legislation and considering the conversations around it. One of the main things that consistently comes across from people in the industry is that they are not really concerned with the register as such. However, they are very concerned with the implications that could follow on from the register if there is a planning obligation forced on so many of these rural lets. I represent Galway East where we have a significant number of fantastic short-term let options that provide accommodation that, to be honest, would not be there only for tourism. That accommodation is the type of accommodation that this Bill really is not going to bring back into long-term letting.

I can understand the power the Bill can have on big cities in terms of bringing townhouses and apartments back in as long-term rental accommodation use, which they were originally built for and which they were originally given planning permission for. However, there are a lot of units, dwellings, granny flats and really creative ideas like tepee huts and log cabins. A lot of these have been there for many years providing a unique form of accommodation and providing a unique experience. Whatever about the register, there needs to be serious consideration when it comes to the planning side of it because the obligation it would put on these operators would be seriously onerous and, from all the dealings I have seen from local authorities, is that it would amount to a significant cost on them as well. It would also add to the local authority's workload in their planning departments so that is also an important consideration.

Over the past decade, Fáilte Ireland did an incredible job, along with the local authorities, of implementing, designing and driving the Wild Atlantic Way. In 2024, there was a ten-year report on the Wild Atlantic Way and it showed it drives an extra €3 billion in revenue per year and has added an additional 35,000 jobs to the tourism sector. That is an incredible story. When the Wild Atlantic Way is so successful and has so much to offer, why are we allowing the best, most photographed castle in the west of Ireland and one of the most photographed castles in Ireland be left vacant and closed? It is currently owned by the Shannon Group, which is looking to divest. Galway County Council should take it over and should operate it. I know we have met with the Minister on this, that he has it as a consideration and that he needs other Departments to row in with him to make this a reality. Months have passed now and Galway County Council has not taken it into ownership. If Galway County Council took it into ownership, there is nothing stopping it from opening over the summer on a minimum viable product basis. That essentially means it does not have to be perfect for us to open it. Right now, the longer it is left sitting it is rotting and it is decaying and we will never be able to replace it. We are going to look back at history and say we did a great job with the Wild Atlantic Way but the best castle on the route was closed.

Deputy Máire Devine: I thank the Minister for taking this. I represent Dublin South-Central, the premier tourist route in the country. Others might disagree with that but the facts speak for themselves. You start at Trinity College and walk a straight line that brings you through Trinity College to the Iveagh Markets, St. James's Hospital - the old South Dublin Union - Roe and Co. and Guinness. Then you find yourself at the Royal Hospital, and then onto Kilmainham Gaol - where I am a member of the board - and the Phoenix Park. All of these are in Dublin 8, apart from the starting point at Trinity.

I am here as a bit of a grouch, I suppose. I am not normally a grouch but I refer to decisions over the past number of years in relation to the Liberties, our old town that has been neglected for so long. It is a deliberate neglect, with its problems, poverty and addiction but also the joyousness of its community in regard to what it offers. The Liberties, our old town, is in decay and that decay is built by the glass cages growing up around us.

Hats off, in a way, to the guys who occupied the Ardee House pub recently in protest at vacancies, voids, dereliction and the lack of community centres. We do not have a community centre in Dublin 8. It was burned to the ground and still has not opened five years on.

Last week, I organised, along with the Bridgefoot Street Residents Association, a protest outside a granted aparthotel, the edifice of which is faceless, featureless, bland and adds nothing to the Liberties. It is a unique space that could be incorporated into the vision of what our old town could be.

The Liberties has reached a tipping point. Even the judge in the Ardee House pub occupation case is sympathetic to the occupiers and their demands and has given them extra time. The Vicar Street Hotel and the Molyneux Hotel developers are coming in and building. I do not know if the Minister knows John's Lane Church but the steeple there is very high. It is a top tourist attraction as is St. James's Church. They are going to block that out. They are going to block and box in our flat complexes. You just see cranes all around them. The Minister knows the controversy around Oliver Bond House recently but all the other inner city flat complexes in Dublin 8 are going to be blocked in by tourism.

The Liberties needs all of Dublin behind it. I put out that cry and ask everybody. I refer to the Save Stephen's Green and the Save the Cobblestone campaigns, and all those issues on which local communities gathered around and managed to make a difference. We need this old town. It needs respect. The whole of Dublin needs to support it as it affects all Dubliners. I ask that the vision for our old town would not be aparthotels, hotels and transient accommodation. Let us rebuild the community vibrancy that the working-class Liberties always offered to the entire city of Dublin.

Deputy Mattie McGrath: I am not sure who is coming from my group. I will take as much time as I can. I thank the Minister, Deputy Burke, for coming to Clonmel some time ago and visiting what is known as the old Bulmer's site right in the centre of the town. It is a project that needs to be developed with something along the lines of the Guinness Storehouse, or something of the same nature. The Minister saw the vats, the history and the feeling of the work that went on there, the craftsmanship with the old barrels and the many hundreds of people who worked there. I remember, as a buachaill óg, drawing in apples on a tractor and trailer back in the 1960s.

Tipperary is a very proud county and we have Tipperary Tourism doing its best. I will start in south Tipperary with the Rock of Cashel, the wonderful cultural centre brought to fruition there by iar-Sheanadóir Labhrás Ó Murchú agus a bhean chéile, Úna, and the culture there as well. I will also move on to Cahir Castle. Cahir Developments Association has done so much development around there, with Cahir Tidy Towns.

I also cannot say enough about the community groups, including Knockmealdown Active, Knockmealdown Crossing and all the different groups. Ballyporeen has its own music festival. They are struggling and not getting enough supports. They need more supports and we need more connectivity.

If you go on then to Carrick-on-Suir, there is Ormond Castle. The castle at Carrick-on-Suir is a wonderful castle. The whole Ormond Castle trail could be more interlinked and there could be more connectivity in it. We want to get the tourists in, look after them and give them the product.

Mar fhocal scoir, I want to say to the Minister that the Government has such a confusing message with the short-term lets. People who have developed them in their farmyards and adjacent to their farmhouses, and who have little business going there, are totally in limbo with the Government. They do not know whether they are coming or going.

Deputy Danny Healy-Rae: I am glad to get the opportunity to talk on this very important topic this evening. Tourism is major moneyspinner for businesses in Kerry. I want to thank the businesses of Kerry because they do it so much better than anywhere else. Our hotels, guesthouses, restaurants, bars and all the entities we have in tourism - our jarveys, boatmen and busmen - all do their work so professionally. That is why people keep coming back to Killarney.

We have an issue, or the Government seems to have an issue, with Airbnbs. It is a great way for people in Kerry to bring business into our county because people come for that product. I think that for the person who owns a house, it should be their decision, and not the Government's decision, that they can use it whichever way they wants. Many people have been doing Airbnbs for over 20 years. Some of them have been at it for six or seven years. I will say to the Minister that all those who have been at it for more than seven years are entitled to keep at it. We need to further and better those people and ensure they continue in business.

Deputy Carol Nolan: I am happy to speak on the critical importance of the tourism and hospitality sector, particularly as we face mounting challenges that threaten thousands of jobs and the viability of businesses right across rural Ireland. In my own constituency of Offaly, tourism supports 2,200 jobs, so I stand firmly with Offaly hoteliers and the Irish Hotels Federation in their call for targeted Government intervention to protect this vital industry.

As I stated earlier this year, we must deliver measures to safeguard the long-term sustainability of our local tourism economy. The sector is under severe pressure. Recent Central Statistics Office, CSO, labour force survey figures reveal a stark reality. Employment in food-led hospitality has plummeted by nearly 20,000 jobs over the past year, falling from 136,000 to 116,000. This represents a 14.7% decline. Wider hospitality employment has also dropped significantly, with businesses grappling with unsustainable cost increases, high

insurance premiums, energy charges that are among the highest in Europe and growing consumer price sensitivity.

I welcome the Government's decision to reintroduce the 9% VAT rate for food and catering services. This was certainly positive and necessary. However, a single measure alone will not be enough. The rising costs of doing business, from insurance and energy to regulatory burdens, continue to squeeze businesses. At the same time, increases in the cost of living are reducing disposal income for Irish consumers, making Ireland less competitive for international visitors.

Minister for Enterprise, Tourism and Employment (Deputy Peter Burke): I thank all the Members for their contributions and you can see by the varied nature and degree of contributions how important the tourism sector is for the Irish economy. It is our largest indigenous sector, with 228,000 people employed in it, which is about 300,000 people on an all-island basis. Some 46,000 businesses right across our country really offer that authentic céad míle fáilte and are central to delivering that product for an indigenous sector. That is why I really welcome the fact that tourism is now at the very heart of the Department of enterprise, reflecting the huge amount it brings to our economy, indigenous sector, employment and, indeed, careers, which will be a very important part of my new strategy, A New Era for Irish Tourism, which looks at growing career pathways in the tourism sector, particularly with our tertiary education partners.

It will be important over the years ahead.

I note from this year, 2026, that we have seen a significant uptick in visitor numbers. About 564,000 visitors completed a trip to Ireland in April 2026. That is up by about 7% on 2025 and 3% on 2024, which was a significant year for Irish tourism. I believe we are back in a growth phase. We have seen since the start of the year that we have grown visitor numbers and spend, which is so important. Through the sectoral plan, we have amassed about €400 million to support the growth of the sector, realising the ambition that many businesses have and working with sector representatives across the economy. Month after month, I hope we can work together to secure the ambition in A New Era for Irish Tourism, which is significant with regard to the growth we are planning and obviously have to realise, with a 7% target for less mature markets, and 6% and 7% targets, respectively, for overseas and domestic visitors, and try to grow our jobs from 228,000 to 250,000, which would be a significant ambition and challenge.

I took a view when we were drafting A New Era for Irish Tourism that if you cannot measure something, you cannot manage it. That is why we now have key performance indicators over our 71 objectives in our new tourism plan. This is to ensure we are managing the actions of our State agency, Fáilte Ireland, and the work it does, and that we can measure that and see the output from the capital spend. That will be important.

I will take a number of important actions this year. We will have a new culinary strategy. It is important that we bring together our distilleries, artisan food producers and the exceptional offering we have for food in this country. I note from some of the research coming through in markets in which we are under significant pressure, particularly European markets, that many have a very different view of the food offering in Ireland until they come here, taste it and see the huge offering and authenticity of the produce, and the exceptional, sustainable way we have

of producing our food. People are so impressed. I want to draw that together with our distilleries, put together a solid package this year and develop a strategy to grow that sector.

We will also come forward with an accommodation strategy. I note there are many counties in which viability is a significant question in trying to construct hotels and high-quality accommodation. We have the strategy open for public consultation right now. It will be important that we look at other ways in which the State can help to grow our accommodation, particularly the delivery of hotels. We know that in many towns and villages hotels are a focal point for many of the milestones in life. People share so many of their milestones in the setting of a family hotel. I am focused on working with the hotel sector to try to grow it and ensure we get more high-quality hotels in the country.

A number of Deputies raised the matter of short-term lets. The Government is clear about the direction we are taking here. First of all, we know the sector has grown by about 10% per annum over the last number of years. It is very difficult to have a sector grow at that scale when there is no regulation underpinning it. It is clear to me, as tourism Minister, that a number of counties rely on short-term lets to capture the opportunity that tourism presents and bring life into many local communities. There are far too many counties in the midlands, on the west coast and south coast and in parts of the east coast where it is essential to have a viable short-term letting proposition to bring tourists in. I am focused on ensuring that, in our big cities, where there are acute shortages of accommodation in our long-term rental market, we bring that accommodation back into the long-term market, and that where we have areas with a population of less than 20,000, which we set as a reasonable metric in the most recent census, we can continue with strong short-term letting accommodation. We will provide a mechanism through the work we are doing and which we are finalising. It is important that people who are in that cohort continue to offer the operation they have. I am also working on areas that are part of the curtilage or premises, or, to put it quite simply, are not suitable for the long-term market. A bit of common sense is needed to ensure they can continue to operate in that regard.

I have met representatives of all the short-term letting agencies. I have been very accessible. They were in Leinster House and I brought them to my Department. I met eight or nine representatives. I met a number of them in many different counties. We had a by-election recently in Galway, where I met many of them in Galway West. That is why I am clear that I want a balanced approach. We extended the registration period to the end of December, so people can regularise and the gun will not be to their head immediately. There will be a clear pathway for areas with populations of less than 20,000 to ensure that sector can continue. The last thing I want is to see communities where we need that accommodation miss out on that tourism opportunity.

Equally, we have to be clear that, given the huge need for long-term rental accommodation and the huge challenge with homeless people in our society, the Government cannot stand idly by and allow a sector grow incrementally each year. When we see that in the cities accommodation is only utilised for three or four days a month, we have a real concern. That is why the needs of society and rural communities need to be balanced. As a member of a rural community, I know very well what is needed. Critically, with our accommodation strategy, we have reduced the number of hotels contracted out to the State very significantly. Some 13% of hotel accommodation was under State control. That has gone down to under 6%. We want to continue that progress so that those hotels come back into community use and are available for

visitors and tourists alike. They can then use them and bring life back into the night-time economy, which is critical. I am committed to doing that as part of our tourism strategy.

I should also mention our strategic air access fund. It supports new routes. We have about 23 routes to North America. When we get boots on the ground, we market it and drive the opportunity through to ensure we are capturing people coming into the country through those new routes. That will be critical.

Later this year, Fáilte Ireland will bring forward a number of capital programmes that will look at how we are developing the 46,000 businesses in our country to capture the opportunity for tourism. People coming into our country do the vast majority of their research on the web. They use the Internet to research their bookings, to book and to look at what attractions are on offer. About 30% of people use generative AI to plan their itineraries. If there are attractions and a large numbers of events in communities which cannot be captured by those search engines, we have a real problem. That is why I want to drive digitalisation and supports into many of the businesses so that they get picked up in those searches, as well as supporting them with regard to viability and utility bills, which are challenging. Much work will be going on with businesses over the course of this year, with our new capital programmes and looking at our attractions.

As Deputy Kelly pointed out, the spine of the country is critical. Much work has been done with the Wild Atlantic Way and coastal areas, but the spine of the country and our less mature markets need a lot of attention. Our tourism plan will be looking at how we can develop the centre of the country, from north to south, to ensure that all communities around the country get to experience the opportunity and value that tourism brings, and what it brings to our rural communities. I pointed out earlier the number of jobs in the tourism sector, at 228,000.

I want to continue to grow the North-South link, which we will work on through our shared island programme. Deputies will have seen Fermanagh come into Ireland's Hidden Heartlands, the work on Narrow Water bridge, Carlingford Lough and all the other areas that can be expanded. We also have the causeway coastal route linking with the Wild Atlantic Way.

There is a huge opportunity ahead. We will do our best to ensure we chart this sector through an uncertain geopolitical landscape. I am well aware that there is an opportunity for Ireland because what we have to offer has never been greater.

Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Prohibition of Importation of Goods) Bill 2026: Second Stage

Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Helen McEntee): I move: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time".

I am pleased to introduce the Bill for the consideration of the House. I am conscious that the Bill has been the subject of much debate not only in this House and the media but also among the wider public. The Government fully understands the depth of feeling in Ireland and in this House on the subject of Palestine. We share these deeply held concerns. They are a product of our history and of our shared humanity. I personally understand and share the depth of feeling in this House. It is consistent with our core values - respect for human rights, dignity

and international law - and it is the approach that this Government, and many Governments before us, have taken to different situations around the world where human rights and international law are not respected.

I am also very conscious that behind every debate we have in this House are people whose lives are shaped by the decisions of governments and institutions. It is in this context that I would like to clearly set out the purpose of this Bill, including the motivation behind it and what we hope to achieve by enacting it in this way.

I would like to address the situation on the ground in Gaza and the reality for ordinary Palestinians more broadly, which is the backdrop for our debate. I have mentioned many times my visit to the Rafah border crossing between Egypt and the Gaza Strip earlier this year. This is something that will always stick with me particularly because of the painful contrast. On one side, we had warehouses full of food that was going out of date because the labelling was not correct, significant volumes of medical supplies that could not be provided because there was metal in them and it was being suggested they were weapons and children's toys left sitting there. All that was left ready to deliver on one side while, on the other, more than two million people in Gaza were enduring conditions no one should be forced to survive. Men, women and children have lost their lives, countless more have been injured and entire families and communities have been utterly devastated. Behind every statistic is a human life cut short, a child deprived of a future and families living with unimaginable grief.

Today, the people of Gaza continue to endure unimaginable suffering. Intolerable conditions persist, as mass displacement and poor shelter conditions expose civilians to rising public health risks linked to pests and rodents, alongside ongoing Israeli strikes, shelling and gunfire. The food security situation remains precarious, while essential services are at risk of collapse. That is why Ireland has consistently and persistently provided and called for unhindered humanitarian access to people in Gaza. The situation continues to deteriorate in the West Bank. We are witnessing the massive expansion of settlements alongside rampant and escalating settler violence, which continues in an atmosphere of impunity. The scale, speed and severity of displacement and demolitions is unprecedented. In April, the Israeli security cabinet approved 34 new West Bank settlements, the largest approved by any government at one time. The planned E1 settlement near Jerusalem threatens to cut the West Bank completely in half, calling into question the viability of a Palestinian state.

The actions of this Israeli Government consistently contravene international law and are part of an established pattern to create a new *status quo* in the occupied Palestinian territory. Their actions are explicitly designed to bury the idea of a two-state solution. This is happening by design; not by accident.

Ireland will continue to defend a Palestinian state consisting of Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the right of Palestinians to self-determination, a right already enjoyed by Israelis.

We are committed to working with those who want to achieve a just and lasting peace where Israelis and Palestinians live side by side in two states, Israel and Palestine, in peace, security and dignity based on the 1967 borders. The cycle of violence that has brought suffering to both Palestinians and Israelis needs to be brought to an end.

During my visit to Rafah earlier this year, I announced that we would continue to provide the humanitarian assistance that is urgently needed but I would again use this opportunity to reiterate the need not only for Ireland or the EU but for international partners to continue that support.

The Bill we are discussing will contribute positively to Irish and international efforts to prevent unilateral actions that impinge upon the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and upon the viability of the two-state solution. I thank Senator Frances Black and others who have supported this legislation and other Bills for bringing them forward. The two-state solution is the only viable long-term solution. It is as important for Israelis as it is for Palestinians. Those who reject it appear to have no alternative plan. The current cycle of violence cannot be allowed to continue indefinitely. Let me be clear: at the same time, this Government has consistently condemned the appalling terrorist actions of Hamas on 7 October and the need for those responsible for the brutal murders of innocent civilians to be held accountable.

I must also reiterate the Government's view that the appalling and worsening situation in Gaza, the accelerating and rampant settler violence and settlement expansion in the West Bank, coupled with the ongoing situation in Lebanon can never be justified and demand serious and concrete actions in response.

The Bill will contribute positively to Ireland's efforts to uphold and comply with international law, including the findings of the 2024 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, ICJ. Because of our own experiences on this island, we feel a deep and personal affinity with those who seek self-determination, and who simply seek to live in dignity and peace. The actions that the Government is taking, including the progression of this Bill, are designed to advance these central objectives. On 19 July 2024, the ICJ delivered an advisory opinion on the legal consequences of the policies and practices of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory, a case in which Ireland and more than 50 other states made written and oral submissions. The court concluded that states should "take steps to prevent trade or investment relations that assist in the maintenance of the illegal situation created by Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory".

The Bill also represents the fulfilment of a clear commitment made by this Government in our programme for Government where we committed to progressing legislation to prohibit the importation of goods from Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. Today, we are beginning the process of that commitment. Again, I remind all of us we are talking about people. We are doing this on behalf of families who want safety, children who deserve a future and communities who have endured far too much loss and suffering.

We thank this House for the considerations that have taken place since the Government approved the general scheme of the Bill in June last year. This includes the pre-legislative scrutiny of the general scheme undertaken by the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade and published its report in July 2025. This report and its recommendations have been carefully considered in the period since publication and in the development of the Bill.

I will outline the detailed provisions of the Bill, with a particular focus on the key sections of the Bill. Sections 1 and 2 are standard provisions setting out the relevant definitions, and how the related regulations and orders will be dealt with.

Section 3 empowers the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, following consultation with the Minister for Finance, to proscribe by order certain postal codes that correspond to Israeli settlements. It should be noted that these postal codes are already set out under a technical arrangement concluded between the EU and the government of Israel. This is to ensure that importers are aware of which locations are not eligible for preferential tariff treatment under the EU-Israel Association Agreement. As the postal codes listed under the EU-Israel Technical Arrangement are periodically updated, section 4 allows the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, following consultation with the Minister for Finance, to amend or replace the list of proscribed postal codes. If new settlements are constructed, they will therefore be captured by the updated list of postcodes at the EU level, and our own list of proscribed postcodes will be updated accordingly. Practically speaking, the approach set out in the Bill essentially develops and updates Ireland's implementation of the existing obligations placed upon operators and customs authorities to distinguish between goods from the State of Israel and settlement goods under the EU-Israel Technical Arrangement, to ensure compliance with international law.

Section 5 prohibits the importation of goods originating in postal codes proscribed by order of the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade. Any such importation will thereby become an offence under section 14 of the Customs Act 2015.

The Bill does not create any new offences in and of itself. It is proposed that, under the legislation, goods originating in Israeli settlements would become "goods subject to any prohibition or restriction on importation" within the meaning of that phrase for the purpose of the Customs Act 2015. Once the Bill is enacted and commenced, it will be an offence under section 14 of the Customs Act to import settlement goods, and the provision of that Act concerning search, seizure and forfeiture will be available in respect of settlement goods. There has already been some disinformation suggesting that this Bill will target individuals. I will provide clarity on this point. The Bill will prohibit the import of commercial goods from Israeli settlements. A standard exemption is provided for those goods of a non-commercial nature that form part of an individual's personal baggage and are intended for his or her personal consumption or use. This applies in other areas as well.

Sections 6 and 7 deal with the matter of possible exemptions and appeals. As I mentioned earlier, a list of postal codes that correspond to Israeli settlements are set out under a technical arrangement concluded between the EU and the government of Israel. Some of these postcodes encompass an area that includes both a settlement area, and an area within Israel proper, and therefore even under the current system they already require some basic checks to determine the precise origin of the goods. Section 6 is aimed at addressing this issue. An importer from one of these postal codes can apply to the Revenue Commissioners for an exemption if their goods originate in the non-settlement part of the listed postal code. Before issuing such an exemption, the Revenue Commissioners will make inquiries via the European Commission, or if necessary via another body such as the Embassy of Ireland in Tel Aviv, to ascertain the precise origin of the goods. This process for checking more or less replicates the current system we have. To facilitate the implementation of the process set out above, section 7 sets out the amendments to be made to section 45 of the Customs Act to allow for the importer to be notified of the decision of the Revenue Commissioners and to provide the importer with the right to appeal. Section 8 provides for information sharing and is designed to allow the relevant bodies to work together to effectively enforce the Bill. The remaining sections are all relatively standard provisions and deal with issues such as data protection and other technical issues.

There has been a lot of focus on what is not covered by the Bill with several suggestions that we are perhaps watering down the Bill because it does not cover services. I will address this directly. This Government has always been clear on what is possible in bringing forward legislation. We have a responsibility to ensure that any legislation is legally robust and able to withstand challenge. This would not be the case with respect to services. The Government has sought and received advice from the Attorney General on the legal permissibility of an EU member state adopting measures to prohibit trade in services with a third country or territory. In the case of goods, a public policy exemption exists in the EU regulation that controls the import of goods. This allows member states to adopt prohibitions on the import of goods for public policy reasons. There is no equivalent or similar broad public policy exemption relating to external trade in services.

Second, it is the Government's considered view that there would be huge challenges regarding the effective implementation and enforcement of restrictions on trade in services. By its very nature, trade in services is broad and wide-ranging. Services are in many cases digital or intangible and subject to a number of different regulatory regimes. The World Trade Organization's General Agreement on Trade in Services regulates global trade in services classified into 12 separate sectors and 150 subsectors. The European Single Market is a lot less harmonised in respect of trade in services than it is for trade in goods. It splits services across a variety of EU legislation. Essentially the implication is that the implementation of this becomes significantly more challenging.

The Government must ensure at all times that there is balance in all of the measures it takes, including consideration of any potential economic consequences. This Government will always take a responsible course of action. This contributes more broadly to our ability to lead internationally and to make a difference in progressing the overall objective here. To that effect, Ireland has shown leadership on this issue. We were the first EU country to announce our intention to prohibit the importation of settlement goods and the Government stated clearly at the time that we hoped this would encourage other countries to follow our example. This is what has happened. Spain has introduced legislation. The Netherlands and Belgium are also aligned with our progressive legislation. They are progressing their own legislation, as is Norway. We of course hope to see many others. All are primarily focused on the prohibition of the importation of goods from Israeli settlements.

Since taking on this role last November, I have ensured that Ireland remains at the forefront of every effort to support peace and human dignity by ensuring we uphold international law and that this issue is raised at every Council meeting I attend. Under the leadership of then Taoiseach, Deputy Simon Harris, Ireland recognised the State of Palestine. We did this alongside Spain and Norway. When it became clear that the prospects of both were diminishing, Ireland did not hesitate to lead on recognising the State of Palestine. We took this decision, despite some strong criticism, because we believed it was the right thing to do. Every decision we have taken with regard to Israel, Palestine and the current situation in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon have been based on the right thing to do.

This brings me to actions at EU level. While we are moving ahead on settlement trade at national level, which is the legislation we are discussing today, our preference as stated to this House many times is that collective action be taken at EU level. This will have a much greater impact. I am absolutely convinced that if the EU were to act to progress legislation at European

level and all 27 member states responded collectively and effectively, we would have a greater ability to change the direction and actions of the Israeli Government. I fundamentally believe this. We need to do more. The EU has not done enough. I have consistently called for further action and will continue to do so throughout our Presidency. At Foreign Affairs Councils I have consistently called on the European Commission to bring forward proposals to prohibit EU trade with Israeli settlements on the basis of the EU's Common Commercial Policy. A ban on trade with Israeli settlements at the EU level has the scope to be more comprehensive, have a wider impact and, in our view, is essential to ensure that the Common Commercial Policy meets the requirements of international law. Working closely with European partners, we have managed to build a greater consensus. We have for the first time built a consensus for sanctions against violent Israeli settlers responsible for attacks on Palestinian communities in the occupied West Bank, while also supporting EU sanctions against Hamas leaders and those responsible for the atrocious terrorist violence on 7 October. I have reiterated Ireland's previous calls to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement, or at a minimum to suspend the trade element of the agreement as previously proposed by the President of the European Commission. This in itself would have a significant impact in monetary terms on the overall Israeli economy. I believe it would impact change in its decision-making.

Ireland's position has increasingly been echoed across Europe. From November when I took on this role to the most recent meeting I attended, the number of member states speaking out and speaking up and that actively want to see Europe to take a stronger stance, and a stronger position has changed and increased. Ireland along with many other member states has brought us to that position. I also welcome today that 460 former and current European political leaders, diplomats and public figures published a joint appeal calling on the European Union to take stronger action in response to Israel's conduct in the West Bank. It is welcome, and I hope it will show progress and a greater level of support for the actions I have outlined.

The Taoiseach wrote to European Council President in the past month reiterating Ireland's position on the EU trade ban with Israel and requesting an urgent discussion among EU leaders, so we are not just discussing this at a Foreign Affairs Council or the European Council, but that this is front and centre in Council meetings. As Minister, I have repeatedly called for member states to sanction extremist settlers and entities and those that enable them. I was pleased that agreement could be reached on this in the past month. We next need to ensure that focus and pressure remain. When I attend the next Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Luxembourg, I will reiterate that we do not just focus on banning travel for extremist ministers in Israel or on the need for a vote to suspend the trade element of the EU-Israel Association Agreement, but that at national level we replicate what we are doing in this Chamber and that the EU support a full ban on trade with the occupied territories at European level.

It is clear that our position has been consistent. We have led from the front on the recognition of Palestine. We have led from the front on the issue of trade with settlements and we will continue to lead on the need for effective EU action. I say this not just as a representative of the Government. We have all that in this House from an Irish perspective. Throughout this debate, we are reminded that this is essentially about people. It is about protecting the possibility of a just peace. We cannot lose sight of the immense human cost of this conflict in the lives lost, the families shattered and the generations of Palestinians and Israelis who deserve a future free from violence and fear.

5 o'clock

I look forward to working with colleagues in this House as we continue our discussions and progress this important legislation in the coming weeks. I hope we can work together collectively to implement this legislation. We might not agree on every element but I sincerely believe that implementing this legislation will send the strongest message possible that we do not accept the actions of the Israeli Government, that we fully support the need to protect the possibility of a two-state solution, which is the only possible solution for peace within the region, and that we will continue to do everything we can to support those who are suffering unimaginable humanitarian issues at the moment. I believe that Ireland can continue to lead in this regard.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: Tá an Bille seo lag. Is cinnte go bhfuil na fiacra bainte de. Níl sé maith go leor ar chor ar bith. Cuirfimid an Rialtas faoi an-bhrú chun é a fheabhsú mar níl sé maith go leor faoi mar atá. It has been eight years, four months and 12 days since Senator Frances Black and others initiated the occupied territories Bill. What is in this Bill and more should have been on the Statute Book two general elections ago. This should already be Irish law. The Minister talked about showing leadership. My experience and interpretation of the last number of years is that this Government has been dragged kicking and screaming every bit of the way.

The initial response to the original occupied territories Bill, the one with substance rather than this watered down toothless affair, was to say that it was impossible and could not be done. Since that Bill was published, it has become a clarion call for all who are sympathetic to the Palestinian cause and who want to see justice, respect, human rights and self-determination for the Palestinian people. That is not because they suffer from a delusion that it would transform the situation, although it would have an impact in encouraging other states, but because of the statement that it makes, which is that the law has to apply. The law has to apply to Israel and in the occupied territories just as it should apply everywhere else. The experience we have had time and time again as regards Israel's actions against the Palestinian people, in Lebanon and against European and Irish nationals who were kidnapped on the high seas, is that Israel pays no attention to international law. That is why people who want to show solidarity with Palestine have taken this Bill to their hearts and believe it is a vitally important statement.

At one stage, Fine Gael quite trenchantly opposed the Bill but it took on all the more urgency and ultimately the presence of a genocide, the greatest crime of all, involving some of the most appalling scenes and crimes we have seen in this century, dragged the Government parties to it in advance of the last general election. None of this can be understated. At least 70,000 people have been killed and millions have been displaced. It has been said many times but it needs to be said again that behind each of those numbers is a person and a story. I think of the story of Hind Rajab, a five-year-old girl, just one year older than my own daughter. That story has resonated with people. Her family were waiting for assistance as they were trying to flee Gaza. There were all these warnings to flee. She was fleeing when she was left alone, waiting for assistance that never came, while her family were shot and killed. She was ultimately killed as well. There are many other stories and examples. Some 20,000 children have had their whole families wiped out. Whole generations have been wiped out and whole communities erased.

The Bill therefore took on all the more urgency and, belatedly, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael went to the Irish people during the last general election campaign saying that they would pass an occupied territories Bill. The votes were counted, a government was formed and we were no longer looking at an occupied territories Bill. The considerations had suddenly changed and we were told that the Government might do something in relation to goods but it was not so sure about services. I am not sure that even this limited Bill would be anywhere were it not for the scenes we have seen in recent weeks. It is a poor reflection on the governments of Europe that it takes scenes of European citizens being abused for them to act in concert even in the imperfect way they are now talking about.

The Government should put out what the Attorney General has said to it because that same Attorney General told it a number of years ago that pursuing Senator Black's Bill would be a political choice rather than a legal choice. As far as I am concerned, the arguments are thin. The Minister and other Ministers have talked before about the effectiveness of the Bill. It talks about making this an offence under section 14 of the Customs Act 2015. I agree there are circumstances where it will be complex to identify a breach of this provision in respect of services but that does not mean it should not be put on the Statute Book. We cannot capture every instance of assault. It is not possible to convict someone in every instance of assault or theft but that does not mean we do not legislate for it. It does not mean we do not provide for people to be prosecuted where proof exists. There is no reason the same attitude should not be adopted here.

The issue of goods and services was discussed at length by the Oireachtas joint committee. It is true that there is a specific clause in the import regulation on goods and services that allows for public policy exemptions. Professor Panos Koutrakos told the committee that there is a public policy exemption to be found in Article 62 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, read in conjunction with Article 52. He went on to say:

It would be very odd if EU law were interpreted to mean that the powers of member states to restrict trade in services with third countries was significantly more curtailed than the power to restrict trade in goods, capital and in trade in services. In our view such a conclusion would be problematic and it would be justified by neither a systematic nor a purposive interpretation of EU law.

The reality is that this is a political decision. The public policy exemption exists, albeit in a different place. It is a crude analogy but it is like saying that we can act on goods because of a provision in primary legislation but not on services because we would have to rely on the Constitution. That is a crude comparison but it is effectively the same thing. There exists in the basic law the basis for a public policy exemption.

In any event, the Spanish have done it. The Minister said that the Spanish legislation related to the advertisement of services. Ultimately, Spain is over the line. Infringement proceedings could be taken against Spain in the same way they could be taken against us were we to move on services. That has not happened. It would be ideal if Spain would go the full hog in terms of services but, having acted on the advertisement of services, it is over the line. Its legislation provides the same basis for infringement proceedings. That has not happened. The road is clear for us. The Minister has talked about leadership before. The reality is that Ireland is no longer leading. I pay tribute to Senator Frances Black and the other Senators who initiated this

legislation. They showed leadership but the Government has fallen behind. Other countries are moving ahead.

I am close to the end of my time but I will make two final points. The clear objective of the Israeli Government is to close off the possibility of a viable independent Palestinian state. The Minister has talked about European co-ordination and so on and so forth. If we can do that, we should, but the EU has clearly been found wanting. The situation on the ground is profoundly urgent. We need to do everything we can. That includes passing a Bill with teeth. The Government has watered it down and taken the teeth out of it. Two thirds of trade with the occupied territories is trade in services. That is no less immoral than trading in goods with those territories. It is not one bit less immoral or one bit less wrong.

Deputy Seán Crowe: When the Irish people made their desire for an occupied territories Bill plain during the last election, the then Taoiseach, Deputy Simon Harris, said it would be passed within the first year of any government he was part of. It was clear then and it is clear now that Irish citizens want to see the Government take up a more robust and active policy in support of Palestinians, who are treated as second-class citizens in their own land. Since that election, we have waited 18 months and this Bill is all the Government has managed to produce in all that time. An occupied territories Bill that does not include services might soothe the Government's collective conscience but it will not trouble the genocidal Israeli regime in the slightest. There must be an effective ban on all trade, including trade in services, with Israel's illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem. Occupiers must not be allowed to legitimise their occupation through trade, let alone profit from it.

The Israeli Government is committed to making it impossible for Palestinian people to maintain a viable homeland. It respects no international laws or norms as it pursues a policy of scorched earth tearing down everything that the Palestinian people have built, including homes and businesses, and burying them beneath the rubble. Sinn Féin supported the original occupied territories Bill that was introduced by Senator Frances Black back in 2018. The only party to oppose the Bill back then was Fine Gael. Little has changed since it has taken every opportunity to drag its feet and water down the Bill until we are left with this token gesture. Why does this Government have such trouble in doing what is obvious, doing the right thing? Irish people rightly demand that we take a principled stance against genocide, and the Government continues to make lame excuses. A truly effective Bill would include services. Nothing else will send a strong, unambiguous statement from Ireland that there can be no impunity for Israel's genocide and its continued illegal occupation, ethnic cleansing of Palestinians and the forced removal from their land.

Deputy Rose Conway-Walsh: There is a fundamental flaw at the heart of this Bill. That is the exclusion of services. It is no more complicated than that. I certainly wish to pay tribute to Senator Black who showed leadership when successive Governments refused to act. Senator Black's occupied territories Bill set out a clear and principled position. Before the 2024 general election, Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael promised the Irish people that the occupied territories Bill would be enacted. Instead, what we have before us is a watered-down version that excludes services. I do not know how the Minister can stand over that when 70% of trade between Ireland and the occupied territories is in services. If trading in goods from illegal settlements is wrong, why is the provision of services to those same settlements acceptable? If trade helps

to sustain illegal Israeli entities in the occupied territories, why does it matter whether that activity is a good or service? It makes zero sense and compromises all credibility. The Government cannot acknowledge the illegality of the settlements on one hand and then carve out exemptions that allow trade with those settlements on the other hand. The Government says that it wants to ensure that Ireland is not complicit in the occupation of Palestinian land. If that is true, then the services must be included.

We are witnessing one of the greatest humanitarian catastrophes of our time - a genocide happening in real time before our very eyes on our phones and televisions in plain sight. More than 70,000 Palestinians have been slaughtered. Entire families have been wiped out. Homes, hospitals, schools and communities have been reduced to rubble. How many more Palestinian lives must be lost before the Government is prepared to include the services in this legislation? It has to scrap this hallow Bill, pass the original occupied territories Bill, including goods and services, and ensure that Ireland plays no part directly or indirectly in supporting Israel's illegal occupation of Palestinian lands and their genocide.

Deputy Pádraig Mac Lochlainn: The International Court of Justice's advisory opinion issued in July 2024 concluded that all states are under an obligation "to abstain from entering into economic or trade dealings with Israel concerning the occupied Palestinian territory or parts thereof which may entrench its unlawful presence" and "to take steps to prevent trade or investment relations that assist in the maintenance of the illegal situation created by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories". It could not be clearer. In 1984, some workers in Dunnes Stores refused to handle South African fruit from the apartheid state. It was grassroots action. That then led to our State leading the way in sanctions against South Africa. We did not wait for everybody to fall in line. We did not wait for complete consensus internationally. It started with ordinary people, ordinary workers and trade unionists taking a stand. That is the moral thing to do. We did that because we had independent foreign policy. That was the mindset.

What has happened with our Government is an absolutely minimalist approach all the way even when we had genocide broadcast through our televisions and social media every single day and even when 81% of the properties, schools, homes, buildings, churches and mosques were destroyed. Imagine if 81% of the buildings in Dublin were damaged and most of them destroyed. The population of this city is very similar to the population of Gaza. Even in the face of that level of destruction, devastation and loss of lives, our response is absolutely minimalist even with the ICJ's decision giving us full clearance. We will be judged very harshly by future generations. They will compare it with how we dealt with South Africa's apartheid regime but this, and the South Africans will say this, is much worse. This is a scale that is unprecedented in relation to what has happened there in terms of the level of destruction and devastation. There is no honour for the State in this legislation that the Government has brought forward. I am sorry to say it. It is minimalist and absolutely not good enough.

Deputy Darren O'Rourke: There is no legal or moral excuse for what this Government has done to the occupied territories Bill. For eight long years, it stalled and delayed. Now, it has cynically gutted the legislation by excluding services. Almost 70% of our trade with the occupied territories is in services. If we exclude services, this Bill will fall far short of its potential and what is necessary, appropriate and right. The Government claims legal impediments. That is a hallow argument. It is no argument at all. The International Court of

Justice makes no distinction between goods and services. Spain has led the way. It has banned the advertising of services from illegal settlements. If I cannot advertise an AirBnB property, then I cannot sell it. The Government should not pretend that banning advertising amounts to nought. It is effectively a ban on the sale and supply of services. The Spanish Parliament voted decisively to do this. If Spain can do it, Ireland can do it. That, of course, is the whole point. It is not the case that the Government cannot include services, it does not want to. Instead, it wants to blunt the impact of this law. How do we know if it could include services if it wanted to? It is because they already are. The Government already applies sanctions on services in Russian occupied Ukraine. It knows how to do it. It is simply refusing to apply the same standard to the rogue state of Israel. This is a political decision - plain and simple. It is incomprehensible. The Government must work with the Opposition to pass an occupied territories Bill that includes goods and services. No more excuses. No more double standards. Apply international law and act now.

Deputy Mairéad Farrell: The Minister is relatively new in the role as the Minister for foreign affairs. I am really concerned about the route she is going down on a number of issues. This week is outlining the Minister's policy position in terms of the Department of foreign affairs. The Government is looking to dismantle the triple lock, totally against the wishes of people. That is the dismantling of our neutrality. Now, the Government is looking at completely and utterly hallowing out the occupied territories Bill by excluding services from that Bill. Again, it is going completely and utterly against the wishes of the people. There are other governments and states that do not have the people on their side when it comes to Palestine or when it comes to passing the likes of the occupied territories Bill and including services. However, the Government does. It has the people on its side in relation to this. The people have been extremely clear that they want services included.

The Bill the Minister has brought forward today has been gutted. It has been stripped of its original intent and purpose. The Government has decided to hollow out this legislation and shy away from standing up to the Israeli Government and its genocidal violence. That is what the Minister is doing by bringing forward the legislation in this form. Excluding services blunts the impact of this legislation against the rogue Israeli State. We know where the money lies. It lies with services and to not include services in this Bill is simply outrageous. As other colleagues have said, the Government could do this. This has been done but the Government is choosing, politically, not to do it.

The third issue I have with the Minister's policies in the Department of foreign affairs relates to the Security Action for Europe, SAFE, legislation. The Minister has been quoted in the media as saying that she would like to see Britain included in SAFE. Has she not read the report of the Oireachtas committee on finance on the SAFE legislation? Has she not seen the recommendations that came out of that report, which were completely opposed to the policy intent of the Minister?

Deputy Sinéad Gibney: I welcome the opportunity to speak on this Bill. Like many others I am really disappointed that the Bill has taken this pathway, first, that it has taken so long to get here, despite the Government's electoral commitment and, second, that it is now watered down. Despite what the Minister said in her speech, everybody on the Opposition benches will agree that it is watered down.

I will speak first, as the Minister did, to the existing situation and what is going on and then I will get into the nuts and bolts of the legislation itself a little later on. I am really glad that the Minister used the term "self-determination" because we have lost sight of that, a little bit, at times. We are so focused on the atrocities that Israel is committing, the crimes it is committing and the methods it is using in its ethnic cleansing and expunging of people from the land they are from, that we lose sight of what we are actually trying to work towards here, which is the self-determination of the Palestinian people. I am really heartened to hear that it is, as she said in the top of her speech, something that she is still absolutely focused on.

I will also pick up on the two-state solution the Minister mentioned throughout her speech. Although that is obviously the stated goal of the Palestinian authority and most governments, it is rapidly slipping away from us. Israel is building its cities and its occupation on top of Gaza. There will be no opportunity for a two-state solution unless urgency is brought to the global response to Israel. That, for me, is deeply concerning because the people of Palestine are looking on as the supposed tools of international law are completely flouted on a daily basis in their existence but also in our response, as states, globally. They are looking at that response of a two-state solution slip from their grasp and are wondering how they are ever going to have their right to return realised. The phrase that is not in the Minister's speech, which we need to focus on again as international actors, is that right to return. I have heard Palestinian civil society contributions recently on how five generations of refugees will still name their village of origin in the West Bank or in Gaza, even though it is now occupied or under rubble. They will speak of how they cannot go outwards because of the occupation and so they must go upwards. Cities become refugee camps because of the very geographical fragmentation that Israel has imposed on Gaza, the West Bank and now on Lebanon.

Some of the research that I have done recently and some of the people I have spoken to in civil society have raised a question for me that I want to throw out today. I have raised this in the last couple of days in various debates. One of the lines from that which frustrates us all is when the Government says it is a leader, that it is doing everything it can, that it is lauded internationally and that the Palestinians thank us for it. I find that last part really hard to take. Of course they are going to thank us for recognising the State of Palestine and for providing aid. Of course they are not going to turn their back on that but I want the Government to delve a little deeper. I want it to go beyond the Palestinian authority. There are parts of civil society in Palestine who will say that the Palestinian authority is an Israeli mechanism. It is there to support a two-state solution but it will oppress leaders who are emerging from civil society right now in Palestine. I urge the Minister to listen to those voices, to listen to the people who are talking about what it is like on the ground and who are seeking that self-determination beyond the two-state solution and that right to return. These are the people we must all listen to now and I urge the Minister to do that.

I have also been prompted to cast my mind back to two and half years ago and to think about what those first few months were like for us all when the genocide started or, rather, escalated into the phase that we are now in because obviously this has been going on for decades. I will get to that in a minute but two and half years ago we were discussing things like "Have they really bombed a hospital?", "Was it an accident?" or "Was it intel that was dodgy?" Then we had the propaganda flowing from Israel to say that it had not committed any war crimes and this was all legitimate. Slowly, slowly, our respect for Israel's legitimacy was eroded over that period. It is really important to remember how we got here because now we are at a point

where life is so depraved in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon. We have to just think about this for a minute.

I was graphic this morning and I am going to get a little graphic again now. Apologies, I am not doing this gratuitously but I want us to remember the agony and the persecution that people are going through. One of the things I am hearing again and again from civil society in Palestine is that the situation for political prisoners is beyond at the moment. It is too much. There are 10,000 people in 20 prisons. Nineteen of those prisons are in Israel so those people cannot be visited by their loved ones. An estimated 50% of those political prisoners have had no trial or charge laid against them. We all know now that the death penalty looms over these people because the Knesset has approved that. In those prisons, torture is routine. We have heard the stories. It is not isolated. It is systemic torture, rape and brutality. Scabies is allowed to flourish in the prisons. The Israelis will not treat it because they do not want to and other diseases are starting to flourish as well. This is what is happening right now, on a daily basis. There are children in these prisons as well.

The settler policy is essentially allowing Israel to distance itself from what is happening on the ground. Israel brings in settlers who are violent and extremist people, no question, but that is done on purpose so that the Government can slightly distance itself and say it is the settlers who are doing it. Settlers will take the land of a Palestinian family while they remain in their home right beside it. This family will have to watch as Israeli settlers farm their land, violate them and pour aggression after aggression on to them. That is what is happening and it is allowing Israel, as a State, to distance itself from it. It is insidious. Israel is doing this so that when it annexes the West Bank, it will be an easy process for it. There is no question on the "if". Israel is right there, poised and ready to go for this. That is why remembering the self-determination is so important.

I will also talk about how we have got to this point. I urge the Minister to read Francesca Albanese's book, *When the World Sleeps*, because it gives us such a better understanding of how we have got to this point. This is the last phase of Israel's activities over the last number of decades. Its policies of fragmentation have got us here. Fragmentation is about dividing the geographical land and communities. It is about pulling from one family a child, or an adult, and keeping them detained long enough so that their community is suspicious of them when they are returned. It is about keeping people apart and sowing suspicion and division within families, villages and communities across Gaza. That fragmentation is a written policy. The Israelis want to wipe out the Palestinian people.

Public opinion here in Ireland is so clear on this. It is so clear where we need to be and I have said before that this Government has squandered that mandate. This week I remembered that during the 2024 election I canvassed a family. It must have been in September or October of that year. When they answered the door, it was one of the few times that I have actually cried on a doorstep. This family were so upset. They said they were watching the news every night, eating their dinner and crying at the atrocities that were happening. That was two years ago. It was after the ICJ ruling, by the way, that we are only now dealing with.

I have no faith that in response to any of this, we have seen the appropriate level of urgency, ambition or leadership from this Government. The thing that stands above everything else as an exemplar of that is the Government's treatment of the occupied territories Bill.

I want to use some of my time to dispel some of the myths around the occupied territories Bill that I have heard from the Government in the last few months. When it comes to decisions like the exclusion of services from the Bill, which is a political decision the Government has made, we deserve honesty and transparency on the real motivations that inform its rationale. We cannot and must not have a difference between what we say and what we do. First, services need to be included because of the ICJ ruling. The 2024 July advisory ruling by the ICJ is what the Government cited as freeing it up to pursue the occupied territories Bill. If that is the case, this Bill should be about bringing us into compliance with the ICJ ruling, but this legislation simply just does not achieve that.

I remind the Minister, Deputy McEntee, that in the negotiations with Senator Black, in one of the first meetings I had with her, I asked why the Bill was restricted to the occupied territories in Palestine. I asked why we should not broaden it so that all occupied lands across the world have sanctions against them given that we should not be trading with any occupied territories. The answer was that it makes it more compatible with the ICJ ruling, so we will go with that because we know we can secure it. Not only did that ruling give clarity on our obligations, but it clearly called for action on trade with all of the settlements. It noted that all states are under an obligation to abstain from entering into economic or trade dealings with the settlements. The Government at the time said it would pass the occupied territories Bill on that basis, yet there is a gap between what it said and what it is now doing.

Second, trade law does not discriminate. We know that in international trade law there is no legal distinction between goods and services - trade is trade. We had that confirmed by the committee during pre-legislative scrutiny. We heard from legal experts who, time and again, told us that there is no legal distinction between goods and services when it comes to fulfilling our obligations. The Government's own analysis stated that "the only reasonable reading of the International Court of Justice advisory opinion is that a complete prohibition on trade with Israeli settlements is required". Yet, there is this gap between what the Government says and what it is now doing.

Let us take a look at the Government's argument about jobs. Once we have made our way through the double-speak on why services are not included in this Bill, we get closer to the real reason. When we get past the barrier of "It is not possible", we uncover the truth, which is that "We do not want to". The Government has caved in to threats and weasel words from corporate lobbyists whose views and wants are more important than international law, the will of the Irish people and the lives and livelihoods of the people of Palestine who face daily threats, violence and apartheid from the occupation. Letters signed by a handful of members of the US Congress matter more to the Government than the tens of thousands of letters, emails and phone calls from the Irish people who elected us to this Chamber.

Another myth is the Government's attempt to say that services do not matter. After the Cabinet met on 26 May, the Taoiseach, Deputy Micheál Martin, tried to conflate two things. He said that a ban on services was "not implementable" and he tied it to the impact on US multinationals. This tells us that it is not that the Government cannot ban services, as many legal experts showed us it could do during the pre-legislative scrutiny, but that it does not want to. Spain is home to many US multinationals that host Airbnb and *booking.com* listings of homes stolen from Palestinians in the West Bank. Spain included services in its legislation and now those listings, about 200 of them, are gone. That might not seem like a lot to this

Government but it means a whole lot to the Palestinians who have had their homes stolen. Spain did it, so why can we not do it? Despite Spain including bans on services, it has not seen US companies shut up shop. The US is still one of the country's biggest trading partners and these bans on services do not touch its federal and anti-boycott laws. The sky the Government keeps telling us will fall in still seems to be doing just fine over Spain. Spain's courage has shown us that if we fail to include services, it is a political choice in the face of empty threats from business lobbyists, while genocide, apartheid and occupation are happening in front of our eyes.

Leadership means including services, shifting the dial and pushing our colleagues to do the same. It does not mean sweet words in this Chamber, promises at election time and excuses that never, ever stand up to scrutiny. We hear vague inferences about economic impact but no figures. We also hear from the Government, when it is trying to minimise the importance of this Bill, that trade with the occupied territories is minimal. The Government cannot say the trade is so little that it does not matter and so large that it will pull down the Irish economy, and expect us to accept that.

Finally, let us tackle the largest myth that it is legally not implementable to include services. Legal experts said that it is doable. The Minister does not have to take my word for it. She can take the word of leading global experts such as Professors Panos Koutrakos and Takis Tridimas. She can take the word of Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh or 400 of Ireland's leading lawyers who signed a letter to that effect, or she can take the word of her own Attorney General who said it was a political choice to exclude services. There is a clear public policy exemption under EU law when it comes to trade. If we can rely on it for goods, we can rely on it for services. Pass the occupied territories Bill, and in full.

Deputy Rory Hearne: I thank Deputy Gibney for outlining very clearly why services need to be included in this Bill. I will further develop that case because the Government is making a fundamental mistake in not including services. I will outline some of the international law, practice and findings in relation to the West Bank and what is going on. It is deeply disappointing that the Government has decided to exclude services from the Bill. This effectively significantly reduces the impact of the changes. The argument that Blinne Ní Ghrálaigh has made is that this is going to be more negative than if it had not been done at all. I will outline why that is the case. I will also outline the reality of what trade in services means right now and what is happening.

We know what the ICJ has found. We know Ireland's legal obligations under that ruling in terms of settler violence and illegal settlements in the West Bank. I will talk about one specific case which will highlight the reality and take this discussion down to a human level when we talk about excluding services. It is the issue of Airbnb letting properties in the West Bank. I have done some research on this. There is a particular Israeli settlement called Tekoa near Tuqu'. In September last year, the Secretary General of the United Nations outlined how this particular settlement has expanded, removed Palestinians from their land and occupied it. In his report, the Secretary General found that Tekoa is one of the largest single land expansions from a single settlement to date. According to Palestinian residents in the Tuqu' wilderness, settlers from the nearby outposts and settlements co-ordinate surveillance, harassment and attacks to force Palestinians from the area. This report is from September just gone. This settlement expansion and displacement of Palestinian herders was accompanied by the

construction of military outposts, settler patrolled roads and a metal gate to restrict Palestinian access, indicating a degree of co-ordination between settlers and the state. Infrastructure projects include electricity lines, internal roads connecting the Tekoa settlement to the surrounding outposts, and earth mounds erected to block key routes, isolating Palestinian communities and restricting movement. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights has documented settler attacks that forcibly displaced families from the wilderness around Tuqu'. One family of three brothers, their wives and eight children were displaced five times between October 2023 and late 2024. The report goes on.

I went on to the Airbnb the site today and I looked up information on renting an Airbnb in Palestine. What came up but Tekoa, that very place. A number of properties are on Airbnb to rent on land that is illegally occupied and where the UN has found people have been displaced. One guest suite in Tekoa is advertised as a fully furnished luxury apartment isolated in the village. It is described as a 15-minute drive from Jerusalem. The apartment offers a locally authentic resting spot and a clear view of the desert where no one has set foot, which is of course completely untrue with regard to Palestinians. The advertisement also describes a "wide and beautifully decorated" house in another area where you can "forget all your worries here". This is what Ireland is facilitating via Airbnb and data centres in this country. We are facilitating that. The commercialisation, commodification and exploitation of illegal settler land is being facilitating by removing services from this Bill.

To quote directly from a human rights barrister who is lauded by the Government in terms of her work on the ICG case:

There is no basis in international law for differentiating between trade in goods and trade in services in the manner ... [you are proposing], and no international law justification for legislating for less than full compliance by Ireland with an international obligation articulated by the ICJ.

That could not be clearer. The Government is effectively saying to the international law that it is not going to oblige by it. She went on to say:

The flipside is that, if Ireland were to pass selective or restrictive legislation that did not fully comply with its obligations [which this is], that could have a very negative impact. It could be used by other states to say "this much but no more". It is not overstating the case to say that doing so could be extraordinarily harmful not only to the international legal order but to the very people and the very rights Ireland would be purporting to protect through this legislation ... We are at a stage when the fundamental precepts and structures of international law are under quite severe assault. For the Government to pass legislation that it does not believe to be fully compliant with its obligations would be deeply regrettable.

Why is the Government trying to have passed a Bill that does not fulfil our obligations under the international Court of Justice ruling in relation to genocide? This Bill should not be passed as it is and should include services.

Deputy Tom Brabazon: I welcome this Bill being progressed and the opportunity to speak on it today. This is very important and, frankly, overdue legislation. Like all Members of the House, I am appalled and horrified by the treatment of the Palestinian people at the hands of the Israeli authorities and I condemn the Israeli Government, the genocide it has committed,

the ongoing occupation of Palestinian lands, the destruction of homes, the forced displacement of families and collective punishment of an entire people.

The Palestinian people have endured decades of oppression, dispossession and injustice. They have had their land stolen, their basic rights denied and have been subjected to a system that no person should ever have to live under. Ireland has been one of the strongest supporters of the Palestinian people and our support has been unwavering. We know from our own history what it is like to experience oppression, abuse and discrimination. We know what it means to be denied dignity and freedom, and that gives us a particular understanding and responsibility to speak out on behalf of the Palestinian people. This Bill is not perfect, and we are all aware of the calls for the inclusion of services. I support the inclusion in particular of the advertisement of services, and if the Government could see its way to include services fully, I would support that also. We should follow what the Spanish have done. It would be helpful if the Government published the legal advice it has received on the inclusion of services.

The European Union must also do far more. The EU cannot lecture the world about human rights, freedom, and democracy while some member states fail to take meaningful action and are blocking the suspension of the EU trade agreement with Israel. EU sanctions have significant weight and influence. The EU must use that power and influence to prevent the suffering of the Palestinian people and the destruction of their land.

We should be clear about what the illegal settlements are and what they mean in reality. They mean families forced from their homes, people being spat at, abused and degraded by violent and thuggish settlers, and children harassed on their way to and from school and prevented from playing freely as all children should. It means the Palestinian people do not have the chance to live normal, safe and dignified lives. These settlements are illegal and wrong, and we cannot trade with them as normal. We cannot condemn the settlements and actions of the Israeli authorities on one hand and allow for occupation on the other. I urge Ireland, the European Union and the international community to stand up for the Palestinian people and continue to take further action. We have the influence and we must use it. The Palestinian people deserve freedom, justice and dignity. We owe it to the people of Palestine to show them that the world will not watch their suffering in silence but will instead stand up and take action.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: At the outset, I commend the work of Senator Frances Black on this Bill. She has led from the front on it for many years. I acknowledge in this House the Ministers of State, Deputies Dooley and Collins, who worked with Senator Black to introduce this legislation to the House, albeit in a different form than the Minister has presented today.

On 19 July 2024, the International Court of Justice delivered an historic advisory opinion. Its findings were unequivocal. The court held that Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territories is unlawful and must end as rapidly as possible, and Israel must cease all new settlement activity, evacuate the settlers, and make reparations for the damage caused. That is the considered judgement of the world's highest court. The court told every state it must not aid or assist in maintaining that unlawful situation. This Bill is part of Ireland's response to that judgement and to the dire conditions in which the people of Palestine live today. Ireland has, of course, recognised the State of Palestine and intervened in the South African genocide case at the ICJ. We have funded UNWRA when others moved to defund and

dismantle it and stood at the United Nations and the European Council, often almost alone among our partners, and refused to soften the truth of what was being done to tens of thousands of people in Palestine, that is, famine in our time, and we are a people who know what famine is, and the destruction of homes and hospitals.

With this legislation, Ireland joins the first group of EU states to prohibit the importation of goods originating in those illegal settlements. I hope we will be joined by many others. Once enacted, such importation becomes an offence under the Customs Act. The Bill uses the postal codes already identified under the EU-Israel technical arrangement, so it is precise, workable, and built to withstand challenge.

There are many who have discussed the issue of services, and as somebody who would wish to see services included in this Bill, I have listened carefully to what the Minister has informed us of. She has sought advice from the Attorney General. It seems that for goods, the EU provides a public policy exemption that lets a member state act for goods. However, no equivalent exemption exists in regards to services. We have to examine the practicality and legality of implementing that. There are more than 120 subcategories of services and that makes it incredibly complex and difficult to implement. People have referenced Spain and I note Spain has not banned trade in services but the advertisement of those services, and I would support the Government including such an amendment in the legislation.

I note also that there are people in this House who have voted for a full boycott of the entire Israeli state. We have to be conscious of what a sanctions regime should do. Government must act in a way that holds in law and does not wound our people more than those we wish to hold to account. All sanctions regimes have, as their principle, the core that we hold the sanctioned state to account more than the countries which implement the sanctions. That is the case with the Russian sanctions. They apply to certain services, companies and individuals. People in this House who voted for a total boycott of Israel have not thought out fully the implications of that for Irish people and the jobs of Irish people. That is not in any way to say that just because somebody works for a company that might have a small office in a part of the Israeli state, somehow that person working in Leixlip is complicit with genocide. That is an abhorrent thing to say. Many people who are working for multinational companies condemn what is happening in Gaza. Simply because they work for a certain company should not mean they should be punished. Who should be punished is the Netanyahu government and the Israeli state committing this genocide in Gaza.

Deputy Denise Mitchell: It has taken the Government eight years to finally bring this version of the occupied territories Bill before this House - eight years of delays, eight years of dithering and eight years of blocking the Opposition. During those eight years, Israel has gone on a genocidal rampage in Gaza, murdering 70,000 people: men, women, children and babies. It has established dozens of illegal settlements and moved tens of thousands more settlers onto Palestinian land in the West Bank. After all that, the Minister comes in here with a Bill that has been gutted.

Some 70% of the trade between Ireland and Israel is in services, but this Bill allows that to continue because only physical goods will be subject to the ban. The International Court of Justice makes no distinction between goods and services. It says that states must prevent all trade and investment with illegal settlements.

What, then, is the Bill before us? I will tell the Minister what it is. It is a half-arsed attempt to be seen to do something. It does not go far enough. We need to have some guts on this issue and include services in this Bill. If Spain can do it, so can we.

Deputy Réada Cronin: How can the Minister justify banning trade with Israel without including services? Services are such an essential part of the occupied territories Bill, yet the Government continues to downplay their importance. Take Airbnb, for example, on which there are roughly 300 properties listed for rent in the occupied West Bank, homes stolen from Palestinians by Israeli settler thugs who then lease them out for profit. That is utterly depraved and completely illegal. These 300 properties represent only a fraction of the more than 8 million properties available worldwide on Airbnb, but for Palestinians whose homes have been stolen and who had lived in those homes for several generations, the sick thing is that they would not be allowed to lease those houses because they would not be allowed to use the apartheid roads to get to these places, as Conor O'Neill from Christian Aid told us yesterday. To suggest that Ireland blocking Airbnb from renting these properties will threaten jobs is farcical. The properties account for less than 0.00004% of the industry but it is 100% the right thing to do.

Including services in the Bill now also has a precedent, thanks to the Spanish Government. The Government should not try to mislead us that Spain banned only advertising services. Airbnb cannot list properties in the occupied territories under the occupied territories Bill. It is not just advertising. Our Taoiseach downplaying that to mere advertising is disgraceful. Spain has not seen any kind of financial or economic backlash from the United States, as so many have said would happen to us here. Nobody has lost their job in Spain over this and no company has moved abroad.

This genocide is not hidden from us; it is unfolding in front of us in real time, before the eyes of the world. Every day we witness unimaginable suffering. Future generations, including our children and grandchildren, will ask who spoke out, who acted and who cowered when courage was called out for. My generation often ask what we would have done if we had seen the Nazi Holocaust. Would we have remained silent and looked away? This is no longer a hypothetical question today. Ireland must send a clear message that we believe "never again" means never again. Including services in the Bill will not end the genocide - that is true - but years from now, when people look back on history, when our kids are reading their history books, they will see that Ireland did not just choose the bare minimum. Let it be said that when we were confronted with a genocide, Ireland gave it 100%. This partial Bill the Government is bringing forward brings dishonour on Senator Black's original intent.

Deputy Duncan Smith: I acknowledge the presence and work of Senator Frances Black. It requires some degree of fortitude to deliver a Bill from the Opposition or as Independents in the Seanad and to see it through to this point, eight years later, in the Dáil. I offer my heartfelt commendation to the Senator on getting the Bill this far, although it is clear that this is not the Bill she wrote. She is, however, the impetus and the source behind it. I also acknowledge to the Minister that two Thursdays ago in the Dáil, I accused her of mothballing the occupied territories Bill. I did not believe she was going to bring this Bill to the floor, and she has done, so I apologise for that and say to her "fair play" for bringing it forward.

What I am not surprised about is that the Bill that has found its way to the floor is not the Bill we wanted to see. It is not the Bill we discussed and recommended through pre-legislative scrutiny last summer with unanimous agreement. It does not include both goods and services. The Minister, as Minister for justice previously, would have stated on a number of occasions how Fine Gael is the party of law and order. That is a tagline Fine Gael members have attached to their party over many years. However, Fine Gael is ignoring international law when it comes to this Bill because the ICJ and international law make no distinction between trade in goods and trade in services. In committee, the Minister's own Department of foreign affairs legal advisers accepted that a ban on goods alone would be only "partially compliant" and would move us "towards compliance" with international law. These are important points, and I know that they were made because I was at every committee hearing last summer. I worked with Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael backbenchers, along with everyone in opposition, to unanimously recommend that both goods and services be included in the final Bill. Now those same backbenchers are going to support a Bill that goes against the recommendations of that committee. It is absolutely ludicrous and it shows, if there was any doubt, where the real power lies in this country. It is not with the majority of people who, poll after poll, have demonstrated support for this Bill to include both goods and services. There is a disproportionate amount of power with American multinationals and the Trump Administration, whose finger has been very clearly put on the scale. The threats from ambassadors and members of Congress in written form have had an impact. We have seen a capitulation in terms of this Bill, with the removal of services and accusations that the Opposition are dealing in fantasy economics. The truth, however, is that the only one dealing in anything of the sort is the Government in terms of its cowardice in overly bending the knee to the United States and the Israeli lobby. No matter how this is spun, the simple truth remains: a euro flowing into the settlements from trade in physical products provides the same support and recognition as a euro flowing into trade in services. What does it say about our courage of convictions if the only thing we can do in response to war crimes is pass a watered down version of a Bill that has become totemic not just for Senator Black or for those of us in opposition but also for the Government, since the Government parties included it in their election manifestos and their programme for Government?

Israel is committing and has committed huge atrocities, war crimes and genocide. There is no longer any debate about that. Every day that passes, every day the West turns its head away and pretends that what is happening is not happening, allows Israel to get away with it. There will be more families who will have lost loved ones today, more children who will die just because they were born in the wrong part of the world. We have an opportunity to do things, and this is one of them, but, unfortunately, what has been put before us in the Chamber today is not as strong as it should be.

People want leadership from the Government. They are crying out for it and they deserve that leadership because it is how they feel in towns and villages all over this country. I am struck when the Taoiseach gets up at Leaders' Questions and tells the Chamber that he has met with the Palestinian ambassador or some other official and that they are thankful to the Irish Government, as if that is full support for everything we are doing. Of course they would be thankful, because they are seeking any form of support they can get in a world that has turned its back on them. However, the Government cannot argue seriously that it is the champion of this legislation. This legislation that has come through, unfortunately, is lacking, as I have laid

out. The Government could not even lead from the front when it came to the football game, which has been debated yesterday and today. It is always found wanting when it comes down to the crunch. That is not to say the Government has not done things that are important. The recognition of the State of Palestine is important, and I acknowledge that there is work being done with other nations in Europe in terms of sanctions. However, in dealing with this Bill and its potential, we cannot help but feel the Government is leaving stuff behind and leaving out services due to pressure from the outside.

We talk about Israel in this Chamber so often and we get accused by Israelis and supporters of Israel of all sorts.

6 o'clock

We have been confident and strident in our view that Israel is acting as a criminal, rogue and genocidal state, and we need to pull every single lever that we possibly can. Every piece of legislation that we bring in should be as strong as possible.

I am keeping my temper as even as possible because we have delivered many emotional speeches in this Dáil, but we are now at the meat of the issue in terms of this Bill. I imagine this is going to go to Committee Stage and we are going to do everything we can to get services added to strengthen the Bill. I urge Government Members to return to the spirit of the summer of 2025 in the foreign affairs committee and to open their minds and hearts to the Palestinian people and look to change this Bill.

We have the figures on the deaths, the genocide and the killings. We have put them on the floor of this Dáil so often, but they cannot lose meaning and impact. A total of 18,000 children have been killed in this conflict since 7 October. We spent the last two days talking about two football games. That is 18,000 children who will never get to see a football game or a sporting event of any sort. It is 18,000 children whose lives have been taken away by this criminal regime.

We know that this Bill will do very little to save lives, but it will send a strong message. The stronger this Bill is, the stronger the message it will send, which is why services matter so much. That is where the real sanctions lie. As a modern open economy, 70% of Ireland's trade with the wider world is in services and just 30% is in goods. The same is true of Ireland's trade with Israel. While the CSO has not published the data specifically on trade in services with the illegal settlements, the direction of travel is clear and tallies with other research. Physical goods like dates and olives are only a fraction of the economic relationship. The Government's legal advice excuse just does not wash. Frankly, it is insulting that it continues the pantomime about it when we all know the Government has been spooked by potential economic scare impacts, ignoring the work of the foreign affairs committee and all the experts. Even when we had IBEC in, when we tried to pin down anyone who may have been pro diminishing or diluting this Bill, they could not give us any facts or numbers for potential job losses or economic impact. They just do not have it because all they can rely on is scare tactics and scare economics. We have the facts. We have the moral justification. I urge the Minister to please open herself to include services on Committee Stage, to strengthen this Bill and make it all that it can be.

Deputy Ged Nash: I am pleased to see our colleague, Senator Frances Black, here this evening. It is only right and correct that she is here. I was proud to have been one of the co-signatories of the originally intended occupied territories Bill back in 2018 - the Bill, the Minister will not need reminding, that included services. The addition of services is legally complex but it is also permissible. It is politically difficult for this Government. That is the reality and that is why it is being excluded. My colleague, Deputy Duncan Smith, set out in very clear terms the position of my Labour Party colleagues and me. We are of the very clear and unequivocal and unambiguous view, that the legislation produced in 2018 - the legislation we need to see here today - should be reflective of that text and spirit. In fact, the legislation published back in 2018, which passed Second Stage in the Seanad, ought at this stage to be on the Statute Book already.

We in the Labour Party did not need Israel's genocide in Gaza, the illegal detention of peace activists by Israel or the actions of fascists like Ben-Gvir a few weeks ago to persuade us that a serious and practical stand needed to be taken against the genocidal regime in Israel. It is never the wrong time to do the right thing. Services should be included. They should be at the heart of this Bill for all of the reasons my colleague, Deputy Duncan Smith, has outlined. I accept this is a contested space. To me, the debate on where one stands on this issue is not one of legal interpretation. It does not break down on legal lines, it breaks down on political, ideological, moral and ethical lines. To say the least, the debate in the public sphere on this proposition over the last three years has been interesting.

I was not born yesterday. I have been around quite a number of years. I have a very keen ear attuned to economic trends and questions of investment in Ireland and jobs. I am a member of the Labour Party. My principal purpose in politics is to ensure that the material conditions of the Irish people are looked after and improved, and that we have meaningful, good, decent, well-paying work with good conditions, but the kind of shape-throwing we have seen by commentators who say they have an insight into the minds of US investors about the impact on Ireland of taking a stand like this, including services in this Bill, is, to say the very least, overdone. As we know, capital has no conscience. Investment will stay here despite all of the protestations to the contrary. We cannot and should not relent on the basis of some form or threatened form of imagined economic blackmail from US politicians or anyone else. Even the war criminal, Netanyahu, is losing the support of Trump and he needs to wake up to that reality.

In any case, this is hardly the point. We have a moral and ethical responsibility and a legal and political responsibility to take every conceivable action, to use every lever available to us, as Deputy Smith has said, to oppose, counter and stop genocide. The question here this evening is whether we all, as legislators, public representatives and citizens of this Republic, can truthfully and honestly say we have done that to the best of our ability. We accept that Ireland has taken a leadership role on Palestine internationally. We have done that over the decades but, by God, the bar internationally is disgracefully low. We need to include services in this Bill for it to have a meaningful impact, the kind of impact we all want to see.

Deputy Conor Sheehan: I thank the Minister for her statement. I want to be constructive in the time I have. I welcome the fact that we, belatedly, have an occupied territories Bill. I rise here with my colleagues in the Labour Party to be critical of the Government for failing to include services because I personally feel, and we in the Opposition can feel, almost by

extension, the orange fingerprints of Donald Trump all over the exclusion of services from the Bill. There has been so much economic scaremongering and attempted bullying coming from the US in relation to this matter. It is important to remember that many of the letters that were written came from a small but vocal minority of people from the US Congress.

There is a precedent for the inclusion of services. We have seen how it can be done in Spain. We have also seen how it has not resulted in economic Armageddon. I would argue that if Spain can take a principled, legally sound stand without bringing economic ruin to its industries, then so can Ireland. If we ban the import of goods but allow the exchange of lucrative services, we are making a mockery of our own values and we are giving a green light to economic activity that entrenches this illegal occupation. An occupied territories Bill without services is a Bill without much impact. I am very conscious that we are taking on the EU Presidency. As I said last night in the Chamber, we had Kaja Kallas only 200 metres from us last night. As we take up the EU Presidency, it is an opportunity for us to lead by example, which I believe we have done, but we need to go further than we are going with this Bill.

While we are one of the first countries to pass this legislation, I urge the Government not to introduce a watered-down Bill because every EU member state that follows will use our weak legislation not as a bar, but as a floor to do the bare minimum. When we look at the systematic torture that Israel is inflicting upon Palestinians, including the use of sexual violence, the persecution and torture of political prisoners and the indiscriminate shooting of innocent children, it shows us clearly why now is the time for us, as a country, to be brave and take a stance. I acknowledge that this Bill goes some way towards taking that stance but as the ICJ and international law does not distinguish between goods and services, we need to go further.

Deputy George Lawlor: As we all know, there are moments in the life of a nation when hesitation becomes moral failure. This evening, Ireland stands at such a moment. The occupied territories Bill is not simply another Bill. It is a test of our values and courage and our willingness to act when international law is being trampled upon and human dignity is being denied. As we all know, for decades, the world has watched the expansion of illegal settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory. These settlements are built in direct violation of international law, condemned by the United Nations, the International Court of Justice and human rights organisations across the globe. These settlements are the daily machinery of dispossession with homes demolished, land seized, families uprooted and entire communities pushed aside. This should ring so strongly and deeply, in our psyche. Ireland cannot continue to speak the language of human rights while refusing to legislate fully in the defence of these. Passing the occupied territories Bill in full, with services included, is the minimum moral response required of a country that claims to stand for justice.

There are, of course, those who will say we must wait, we must seek the permission and we must not upset our powerful partners in the USA or Israel. Human rights are not conditional, however, and international law is certainly not optional. Ireland's sovereignty and our right to legislate in accordance with our values must never be outsourced to the likes of America or Israel. The world is witnessing a catastrophe in Palestine that can only be described as unbearable. Entire families are being wiped out. Neighbourhoods are being reduced to rubble as we see on our TV screens. Children are being pulled lifeless from the ruins. This is not a conflict; this is the systematic destruction of a people. The scale of suffering inflicted by the Israeli state on Palestinians is a stain on the conscience of humanity. No people should ensure

such relentless bombardment, starvation or displacement. To stay silent is to be complicit. The Palestinian people deserve protection, justice and the full recognition of their humanity urgently, unequivocally and without delay. The Bill must not be anti-anyone. It is pro-law. It should be pro-justice and pro-human dignity. It simply states that Ireland will not be complicit economically, politically or symbolically in the ongoing violation of international law through settlement expansion. Ireland has a proud history of standing with the oppressed. We must not shrink from that legacy now because the world is watching and history is watching. The people of Ireland expect leadership, not excuses. We must not have a watered-down Bill. I commend Senator Black on eight years of work on this very important legislation.

Deputy Barry Ward: I support the Bill. This is not an issue to which I am a stranger. I have spent quite a lot of time in the occupied territories in the West Bank and Gaza. I have witnessed the way the Israeli Defence Forces have behaved. I have thankfully never been a direct victim but I have had stones thrown at me by Israeli settlers in Hebron, so I have seen first hand what is there. I have seen sonic bombs being flown over Gaza city. I understand what is happening there.

I have consistently over 25 years been appalled by the manner in which Israel has behaved towards Palestinian people and the disgraceful attitude and actions it has perpetrated over that time and long before that. There is no doubt but that this legislation is entirely morally justified and important from the point of view of the principle that is at stake. However, we should not be dishonest either or unrealistic about what it is actually going to achieve. The reality is that banning trade with the occupied territories, whether that includes goods and services, is going to have very little impact in real terms on the conflict that shocks and disgusts us all. For that reason, I did not support Deputy Boyd Barrett's Bill recently, which sought to introduce sanctions on Israel. However much I morally supported it and thought it would be wonderful to put in place, it is not reasonable to suggest to people that can be done because legally it cannot.

We, as Members of this Chamber, are bound by the restrictions of international law and, indeed, European Law and the abilities we have to restrict trade, for example. It is important for us, absolutely and unequivocally, to condemn what Israel has done and is doing and to equally condemn the precipitation of the most recent attacks since October 2023 by Hamas and the way it has essentially sacrificed its own population of ordinary innocent civilians on the altar of its political and war ambition. It is disgraceful for them but the resulting overreaction from Israel is unconscionable, illegal and genocidal. This Bill, therefore, makes sense in that regard but we also have to have regard to what it can and cannot achieve. I regret that the Bill does not include services. I think it should. I recognise that it is largely unenforceable. I recognise that fact, but there are lots of laws in this country that are not enforceable. We are not saying, for example, that nobody speeds. We are not saying that no people under 18 buy alcohol. We are not saying that people do not break the law. The fact that a law can be broken or is difficult to enforce is not a good reason not to put it in place. I understand that argument against it.

I also understand that there may be consequences from other jurisdictions in terms of passing this, but we do not make laws in this Chamber on the basis of what other countries think about those laws. I also recognise the reality of the situation, however. I would not underestimate the effect that Ireland has had on this conflict. When Hamas committed that

attack in October 2023, it precipitated a reaction from Israel that was entirely predictable, if appalling. For a long time after that, however, Ireland was the only voice in the western world and in the European Union speaking against that. We were certainly the first country to come out and actually voice what was happening to the Palestinian people. There is a bravery in that that I fear has never been properly recognised in this Chamber, certainly by anybody in the Opposition. It is worth recognition because although there has been relentless criticism of the Government's action since then, the reality is that the Government, the Ministers for foreign affairs, Deputies McEntee and Harris, the Taoiseach and the Tánaiste have built a coalition of European countries that are now supporting action against Israel and supporting criticism of Israel whether that is Spain, Malta, Slovenia, Belgium or the Netherlands. That is the way we will actually achieve something here. We cannot do it alone. No matter what Bills we pass here, we cannot stop the slaughter in Gaza but Europe can. The disappointing thing is that we have not yet brokered that real confidence at European level to stop this from happening, and that is what we really need to do.

Deputy Emer Currie: The Bill will not on its own end the unimaginable suffering people have experienced and are experiencing in Gaza. However, it sends out a clear message to Israel and the wider international community that there economic, political and reputational consequences for the continued expansion of illegal settlements, the occupation of Palestinian territories, genocidal action and grave violations of international law. As a country with a long tradition of peacekeeping, peacebuilding and multilateral diplomacy, the Bill helps build international pressure and encourages other states and entities to make meaningful action. Ireland's response has been consistent and sustained and is based on a deeply felt commitment to human rights and the right to self-determination. By the end of 2026, Ireland will have provided approximately €144 million in humanitarian support to the Palestinian people. We have engaged in international legal processes, including the ICJ and work through the United Nations and with our European partners to strengthen the international response. We have called for this suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement in response to the humanitarian situation and continue to press for necessary and stronger collective European action, including European-wide measures on trade with Israeli settlements. Alongside this diplomatic work, we have taken practical humanitarian action. We have facilitated the medical evacuation of seriously ill children from Gaza, accompanied by family members, for treatment in Ireland and supported over 300 people to leave Gaza since the conflict began.

Ireland has recognised the State of Palestine and consistently advocated for a two-state solution and the only viable long-term solution. Our objective remains collective action at European level, which would have a greater reach and impact than the national measures alone. However, where there is the absence of consensus, we have also taken necessary action. No state should be immune from scrutiny when it comes to compliance with international law, and that is why this legislation matters. Peaceful societies are built on foundations of justice and accountability. History shows that injustice endures, retraumatises and perpetuates cycles of tension and conflict until it is confronted, something Ireland knows only too well. We criticise all violence, including the 7 October attacks. I acknowledge there is a legitimate debate about how far this Bill goes. It is a practical and principled step that ensures compliance with international legal obligations as identified in the ICJ advisory opinion of 2024, including the obligation on states to take steps to prevent trade of investment relations that assist in maintaining the illegal situation created by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory. It will

not resolve the conflict today or tomorrow. However, it has contributed and will continue to build on a growing momentum for collective, concrete and meaningful action. It reflects Ireland's commitment to ensuring that human rights and international law are respected, upheld and protected. Several member states are moving on this and we are seeing that momentum. Ireland must do everything it can to support the Palestinian people, to support peace, tackle injustice and work on a humanitarian level. I thank the Minister for bringing forward the Bill.

Deputy Louise O'Reilly: The Bill the Government has published is a hollowed-out version of what people want and expect. The Minister has not advanced a legal argument because there is not one. She should be honest with people and say that this is purely and simply a cowardly political decision. For eight years we and the Government have talked about and around the occupied territories Bill. The Minister knows that including services gives this legislation teeth but she has chosen to propose a hollowed-out version. She clearly does not want this Bill to have real teeth or any real impact and that is the only conclusion I can draw. It is worthwhile reading back over the coverage of the great and the good discussing what we should not do back in the 1980s when there was a weight of public opinion in favour of Ireland leading by example and challenging apartheid South Africa. It took a shop steward from Dunnes Stores and her colleagues, with the eventual backing of her trade union, to really show that leadership. If the Minister looks back at the coverage, she will see the same types of people who are now telling us that we should settle for second best. They are saying we are too small to make a difference. They said that back in the 1980s and they were wrong. They said we would be isolated and that there would be consequences. They said that in the 1980s as well and the Government is saying it now. The Government was wrong in the 1980s and it is wrong now. The Government knows the difference between action for the sake of it and real action. It knows what the right thing to do is. The Bill should include services.

Deputy Johnny Mythen: Everyone understands the definition of genocide, the definition of illegal Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories and the definition of enforced apartheid. Everyone also understands the definition of goods and services and what that exactly entails. Most countries in the world, as a rule of thumb, trade on the basis of 70% services and 30% of goods, which roughly equates to our trading position with Israel. If the Government is committed to upholding international law and international human rights, surely, as a small nation whose foundations are based on the very principles of liberty, equality and justice, we have a duty to stop individuals and companies profiteering from goods and services from the occupied Israeli settlements. We know that without the inclusion of services, this Bill will have a minimal effect. We have to make a stand and one that matters. Services are where the money is.

The only thing that will have any effect at all is to sanction services such as shipping, finances and tourism. Let us imagine a family who lived in the West Bank for over 80 years and who were forced out of their homes by Israeli settlers. Now, that same home is being rented out through Airbnb as a sun destination for tourists, yet that family are exiled and can never return to their ancestral home. We, of all people, know that history. We have suffered centuries of foreign military and colonial occupation, yet managed to protect our national integrity and self-determination. We all believe in freedom and justice as the fundamental principles of international law. This is not a time to lower the bar. In fact, it is rather the opposite. This is time to say "No" to genocide, "No" to oppression and "No" to apartheid. This

is time to stand with the downtrodden and the oppressed. Sanctions of goods and services do matter because they force the perpetrators of this abhorrent regime to justify themselves in the eyes of the world. The Government has the chance to shine that beacon of truth and to stand with the likes of Spain and include services in the Bill. We all will be asked by history where we were when all this was happening.

Deputy Richard Boyd Barrett: The Government is engaged in the most cynical exercise to try to convey to the public the idea that it wants to sanction Israel for its obscene crimes against the Palestinian people while actually making sure that no serious sanction whatsoever is imposed. The Government wants to dance to the tune of corporations that profit from their involvement with Israel and from states that continue to arm and support the State of Israel while it is committing its genocidal crimes. That is why the Government does not want to do anything. Against a background where we have €4 billion worth of goods coming from the Israeli regime into this country, we end up with a Bill that may impact on €200,000 worth of vegetables and a few goods from a few settlements in the West Bank, which will have no impact whatsoever, but that is the point. The Government does not want to have any impact. That is why it has excluded services on the completely dishonest basis that they are too complicated. I can give a solution to dealing with the complexities of services that does not involve gutting the Bill but in fact could make it have a real impact. We should impose sanctions not just in the occupied territories but all across the board against the Israeli regime. That would solve the complexity. We just would not do business in goods or services or any business whatsoever with the Israeli regime because the state is underwriting, orchestrating and enforcing the occupation of the Palestinian territories. When I asked the question about the purpose of sanctions against Russia, the Government said: "It was with the aim of weakening Russia's economic base, depriving it of critical technologies and markets, and significantly curtailing its ability to wage war." In other words, the Government did not just sanction the occupied territories of Ukraine; it sanctioned the Russian regime's ability to sustain its war effort and that occupation. That is what we should be doing if we are serious about dealing with the illegal occupation of the occupied territories. We should sanction the regime that is underwriting that in total but the Government will not do that because it does not have a problem with the Israeli regime and it is just gaslighting the Irish public about its real intentions.

Deputy Brian Stanley: People up and down the country, and certainly people in County Laois, are infuriated by the war crimes carried out by Israel and what it has got away with: the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands, the genocide and slaughter we witness on our television screens evening after evening, the ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian West Bank, the occupation of southern Lebanon, the massacre of Lebanese people and the deliberate efforts to prevent any hope of a two-state solution. Then there is the Israeli torture and abuse of Palestinian prisoners on the orders of the war criminals - they are not a government - who pose as an Israeli government. As a supposedly sovereign Parliament we have the power here to take action. All trade in goods and services to Israel, I believe, should be stopped. However, this Bill is about the occupied territories and we should ban all goods and services from the occupied territories. There should be no dancing around that and no ifs or buts.

We must also continue to demand and work with other EU states to cancel the EU preferential trade agreement. Anything less is a cop out. Of the trade between Ireland and the occupied territories, 70% is in services. The EU and Ireland were quick to ban trade and to put

sanctions on Russia, and rightly so. Yet, when it comes to Israel all we hear are excuses. What is worse, a lot of EU states are actually helping to sustain Israel's war in terms of supplying it with arms and the materiel for arms. The International Court of Justice has decreed not just that we can do it, but that we are obliged to do it due to the war crimes being carried out.

Over 400 prominent lawyers have stated that we can ban trade in goods and services with the occupied territories but the Government said there are legal issues, that it is complicated and referred to the Attorney General's advice. They say the banning of services would be impossible to implement and so on. The Government should publish the Attorney General's advice. Spain has been able to impose a ban on goods and services and the advertisement of services. Other EU states are taking similar steps. There are clear parallels here with the boycott against South Africa and it may have been a small step at the time over in Dunnes Stores on Henry Street but that snowballed and was huge in terms of isolating the apartheid regime.

Trade with the occupied territories in Ireland will not amount to billions of euro but that is no excuse not to stop it. People are angry and people want action. There is massive support for penalties against Israel. It is time for action. We have had eight years of dithering. We cannot have it any longer. Ban trade in goods and services, use the forthcoming EU Presidency to push for similar measures at EU level and work towards the full suspension of the Israel-EU trade agreement.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I am actually embarrassed for the Minister of State, to be frank. I remember in 2019 Fianna Fáil jumping up and down on this. It was Fianna Fáil that introduced the concept of this Bill and now here they are with a bit of an occupied territories Bill in a bit of the occupied territories. There is no moral backbone to this Government whatsoever, be it about trade, football or anything at all. Of our trade with the illegal settlements, 70% is in services according to Trócaire. Yet, due to pressure from US big business and capitalism, the Government has decided to leave that out of the Bill. The Bill is also focused on the West Bank goods specifically.

We know it can be done because Spain and Slovenia have done it. They are two countries the Government says it is working with in Europe. So, there is no reason Ireland cannot do it except for the form of capitalism the Government has developed in this country for the last 50 to 60 years whereby foreign direct investment and multinationals rule the roost and we do not have our own independent policy. I commend Francis Black. Apart from relentlessly pursuing this and having the patience of an absolute saint, I commend her for dealing with all the ins and outs of this.

There is no legal impediment despite the nonsense the Taoiseach keeps saying. Hundreds of lawyers have said that. Now the Attorney General has said it was a political decision, not a legal decision. Academics Patrick Bresnihan and Patrick Brodie have pointed out that this has been done primarily for Airbnb and insurance brokers who advertise in those areas, and that seems to be why we now have this situation. Of course, we are the second biggest trader with Israel primarily because of one company, Intel, which is a company that invested \$25 billion in Israel last December. We are complicit up to our oxters in this genocide because of the economic model that Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael have slavishly developed. Even David McWilliams is saying how enmeshed the multinationals are with trade and that we are

shamefully complicit, refusing to even ban sales to the IDF throughout 2024. The Government can take unilateral action. It was laughable listening to Deputy Currie reciting the mantra. She must be looking for a future ministership or something because Austria, Canada, France, New Zealand, Norway and the UK have taken action on these issues.

Deputy Roderic O'Gorman: I appeal to the Government to listen to the sentiment of the House this evening and to accept Opposition amendments to include services in this Bill or, even better, to bring forward its own amendments in later Stages. The vote on the occupied territories Bill does not need to be divisive but the Government has chosen division by deciding to exclude services from the content of the Bill before us today.

This is despite the original draft presented by Senator Francis Black. This is despite the very detailed recommendations of the joint Oireachtas committee. This is despite the legal view of many legal experts and it is despite the very clear legal opinion from the International Court of Justice from July 2024. Let us recall that decision. Let us recall what the International Court of Justice held was a state's obligations. It said all states are under an obligation "to abstain from entering into economic or trade dealings" and to "prevent trade or investment relations" with the settlements. That is a very clear statement. The Court was very clear that trade included goods and services. Indeed, even the Irish Government and the Department of foreign affairs legal experts who gave testimony at the joint Oireachtas committee accepted that point.

So, why is the Government presenting us with a Bill that excludes services? The Government used to tell us that it was for legal reasons. The argument continuously trotted out was the Attorney General's advice. That was despite the fact the Attorney General's advice from 2024, which I was lucky enough to see and have presented to me, made it very clear there was no distinction made between goods and services. Indeed, when we look at the sanctions regime Ireland has signed up to in respect of Russia, it sanctions both trade in goods and services with Russia without any difficulty.

Indeed, if we look at the whole body of European Union law, there is a detailed body of case law and legislation specifically on the question of services. The issue is not a legal one. It is a political one. In fairness, that has become even clearer from remarks made by Government spokespeople and the Taoiseach in recent days. It is clear that it is fear of the Trump administration that is driving this decision and illogical arguments that the Trump administration might tolerate a Bill that bans goods but if we bring forward a Bill that covers trade in services that will somehow be a step too far for the Trump administration. Now is not the time to allow our values as a country to be shaped by fear of the Trump administration. I appeal to the Minister of State to bring forward amendments that include services in this Bill.

Deputy Charles Ward: I share the disappointment of my colleagues with what has been produced before us today. This Bill falls far short of what was promised and what is required, despite delays repeatedly over the years and despite Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael promising in the last election that this would be a priority. As far as I am concerned, the Government parties' election promises were nothing more than a box-ticking exercise. For years, campaigners in this House have tried to push forward this occupied territories Bill and today I think about the Opposition TDs who have been pushing for this for years, Senator Francis Black and the person who used to sit in the chair beside me, Catherine Connolly.

I cannot help but feel disappointment when I look at this and the original occupied territories Bill has been diluted to the point now where it is ineffective. The Government's decision to exclude services from the Bill is devastating and it means that the Bill loses any sort of meaningful impact and accountability. There is no legal justification for this. The decision appears to be purely political rather than actual legal necessity.

The Government is trying to pass this Bill as meaningful action, and is just living up to its pre-election promise and ticking the box to say it produced a document.

Since October 2023, Israel has killed more than 70,000 people and 20,000 of them are children in Gaza. One out of every 33 people in Gaza has been killed. Let us think about those numbers. The equivalent of five TDs in this House, when it is filled up, have been taken out and killed. One child has been killed every hour 24 hours a day for two years. That is a shocking statistic, which is down to a regime that is out of control and Benjamin Netanyahu, who is a war criminal. Every time this happens, it is normalised because we do not say anything about it. This was an opportunity the Government had to have the courage that Spain and Slovenia had but it is a missed opportunity. History will dictate on this. History will say we had the opportunity to stand up and do the right thing but we failed. We did not fail; the Government failed.

Deputy Seamus Healy: Ireland's long and dark history of British imperial domination and our imperially imposed genocidal famine gives Irish people a deep understanding and appreciation of the genocide being perpetrated by Israel on the Palestinian people in the occupied territories. Ireland has both a moral authority and a moral responsibility to lead a campaign to exclude Israel from all economic, social, cultural and sporting activities.

Israel is creating mayhem and devastation in the occupied territories. It is pursuing ethnic cleansing, driving Palestinians from their homes, farms and businesses and illegally occupying their lands. In July 2024, the International Court of Justice concluded that Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories is unlawful, that Israel should end that occupation, that it should desist from creating new settlements and evacuate existing settlements, and that it should pay reparations for land and property seized. Israel, of course, has refused to comply with that ruling. The court went further and confirmed that under international law, member states, including Ireland, are under an obligation to abstain from entering into economic or trade dealings with Israel concerning the occupied Palestinian territories or parts thereof, which may entrench its unlawful presence in the territory, and to take steps to prevent trade or investment relations that assist in the maintenance of the illegal situation created by the State of Israel in the occupied territories. This includes both goods and services.

In 2025, the Oireachtas foreign affairs committee unanimously recommended that services be included in a ban on trade with the illegal occupied territories in Palestine. There is no legal basis for the Government's decision to exclude services from this Bill. We know that from the opinion of the Attorney General. We know it from the opinion of the Department's own legal adviser, who told the Oireachtas committee that "trade is trade in goods and services".

This Bill, produced under public pressure, is a tokenistic measure designed to be ineffective. It is a political choice taken by this Government. Slovenia and Spain can include services; why can Ireland not? I ask the Minister to take back this legislation and bring in an amendment including services.

Deputy Paul Murphy: What this debate is about is the shameful decision of the Government to gut Senator Frances Black's occupied territories Bill by excluding services. It only took up a tiny fraction of the Minister's opening statement but everybody knows that is what this debate is about. It is about the Government's decision to ignore the unanimous position of the foreign affairs committee and this Dáil. It is about its decision to ignore the fact that Spain has implemented measures on services with no comeback and no legal action from the European Commission. It is about its decision to ignore the position and the decision of the International Court of Justice, which made no distinction between goods and services when it said that states must abstain from entering into economic or trade dealings with Israel concerning the occupied Palestinian territory.

The Government has been scratching around for some sort of legal justification to hang this upon. What it has come up with is the idea that the public policy exemption only applies to goods. I do not think the Minister believes it. I do not think she has any legal authority to base it upon because I presume she heard the evidence of expert after expert and eminent lawyer after eminent lawyer in the foreign affairs committee who said, one after the other, that public policy also provides a derogation not only for the free movement of goods but also the freedom to provide services.

However, everybody knows it is not about law. The Minister knows it is not about law. In 2018, in response to the original occupied territories Bill, the Minister said, "The first and essential reason [we cannot support it] is that the essential purpose of the Bill is contrary to EU law and requires the State to do something which is not in its power." The Minister said then that legally, we could not do goods or services - neither - but European law has not changed an iota since then. The European law in relation to trade is the same. What has changed is politics. What has changed is that the Minister is under pressure on this issue. It is all about politics. The Attorney General said it was about politics. In the leaked advice, the Attorney General said that the decision to replace the occupied territories Bill is "a political choice".

What is the political choice? It is not to annoy Donald Trump and the US Administration too much. That is the bottom line. We know that 90 minutes after the US ambassador wrote to Micheál Martin saying the US had concerns about this Bill, Micheál Martin said the Bill was going to be reviewed rather than progressed. I think it is disgraceful. It is utterly disgraceful to prioritise relations with Donald Trump and US imperialism over standing up against genocide and apartheid. Public pressure is going to come to bear over the coming weeks to insist that we, at the very least, have a Bill that includes goods and services.

Deputy John Lahart: I have observed, over the past year or so and before then, that the biggest critics of the Irish Government are the Netanyahu government and Members of our own Opposition, regardless of what the Irish Government does and the esteem in which it and the Irish people are held internationally in relation to their stance on Palestine and their defence of Palestinians. I have met many of these representatives in this House and abroad who hold Ireland up as an exemplar. It is never enough for the Opposition but I will focus, in my own brief contribution here, on the following points.

This is a good day for the people of Palestine. In the programme for Government, we committed to progressing legislation prohibiting importation of goods, albeit a small amount, from occupied Palestinian territories following the July 2024 International Court of Justice

advisory opinion. This Bill is designed to provide for compliance by the State with that international legal obligation as identified by the ICJ in that advisory opinion, to take steps to prevent trade relations that assist in the maintenance of the illegal situation created by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory and, for that purpose, to prohibit the importation of goods originating in certain Israeli settlements.

I chair the Oireachtas foreign affairs committee and chaired the meetings that carried out scrutiny of the Government's proposals in this Bill. Yes, the committee recommended unanimously that services be included in the Bill. The committee never divided on any of the amendments proposed for the Bill. In other words, we were never forced to a vote, such was the unanimity of the members of the committee who undertook the scrutiny. The committee also unanimously recommended that the Government continue to pursue its optimal policy scenario of action, which is being taken in relation to Gaza at EU level. It also recommended that the Government undertakes efforts to publish and establish a range of scenarios on the potential repercussions of the measure in respect of both international relations and economic effects, and to comprehensively engage with business.

That recommendation arose out of how reluctant business was to engage with the committee in its deliberations on the Bill. We were and are grateful that IBEC did engage in detail with the committee. This is what IBEC said: it warned that any deterioration in US trade with and investment in Ireland would have material impacts for households and businesses. It advised it is important that consideration of the merits of the Bill includes a recognition that these reputational costs may impact on Irish workers, households and businesses. IBEC advised that it was clear from IBEC members and their feedback that the costs for US businesses and for Ireland's reputation will be substantially greater should services be included in the scope of the Bill.

My comments in the preface to the report on scrutiny of the Bill included:

As Chair, I am also conscious of the different roles and responsibilities of parliamentary committees and government. Government has access to more information and carries heavier burdens in areas of governance, than a parliamentary committee.

Like the Leas-Cheann Comhairle, I have represented my country on many international forums, where Ireland's commitment to enacting an occupied territories Bill is widely admired and where I expect it to be mirrored. Ireland has taken so many steps at EU level. Everywhere I go, Palestinian representatives acknowledge and recognise the leading role that Ireland played, continues to play and will always play when it comes to defending the rights of and advocating for the people of the occupied territories and of Gaza. At every meeting I attend, and as chair, I meet many representatives. I continuously advocate for Palestine, as do my colleagues, robustly and without fear. I abhor the manner in which the Israeli Government has smeared and attempted to undermine the Irish Government at every turn.

I would argue that the sanctioning of two Israeli ministers by the Minister for justice, Deputy Jim O'Callaghan, last week, is far more impactful than any potential impact of an occupied territories Bill, including goods and services or not. I mentioned the critics here. I say to them that today is a good day. Is it a perfect day? No, it is not. There is always more to be done. In 2024, though, when we went before the people, we said we would enact an occupied territories Bill. We stand resolutely with the Palestinian people. Ireland stands always with

Palestine. We are its strongest advocate at EU and international level. To answer the question asked by the Opposition today, history will show that today we fulfilled one commitment to enact an occupied territories Bill and that that process began in this parliamentary Chamber in Ireland today.

Deputy Shay Brennan: I have been a member of the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade through the scrutiny of this Bill. I think it is the right thing to do, not because it will in itself change the situation on the ground but because Ireland has obligations under international law and we should meet those obligations. Ireland was among the first countries in the world to call for Palestinian statehood. When Ireland formally recognised the State of Palestine in May 2024, it was the product of decades of consistent engagement that has given Ireland credibility on this issue that very few European countries can claim. The Palestinian Authority has acknowledged that and said to us clearly and on many occasions that what it needs from Ireland is not only action at home, but leadership in Brussels. It wants us to use that credibility to bring about a collective European response, because it understands, as we should, that collective European action is where the real impact lies.

This Bill responds to the ICJ's advisory opinion of July 2024, which found Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territory to be unlawful under international law and placed an obligation on third states to take steps to prevent trade that sustains that situation. Ireland is taking that step and I welcome it. The committee on which I serve recommended extending this Bill to cover trade in services as well as goods. I supported that recommendation. The ICJ's advisory opinion draws no distinction between goods and services, and there is no moral distinction either, but the legal advice is clear. The 2015 EU basic import regulation provides a public policy exception for goods. There is no equivalent for services under EU law. A Bill that includes services would face a real risk of infringement proceedings without solid legal ground to stand on. I have come to the view that a Bill which takes effect from day one and does what it sets out to do is preferable to a broader Bill that faces the real risk of getting tied up at length in a legal challenge. A measure that never comes into force serves nobody.

On scale, settlement goods imported into Ireland amounted to around €200,000 in 2024, mostly fruit and vegetables. The direct economic impact of this measure on Israel is modest. The agreement that would actually economically impact Israel in a way it cannot ignore is the EU-Israel association agreement, which underpins trade worth €42 billion annually. The Commission proposed a partial suspension of that agreement's trade provisions in September 2025, but was blocked by a small number of member states. Were that suspension to be achieved, the economic consequences for Israel would be of a different order entirely to what our Bill delivers. We should pass our Bill nonetheless, because our legal obligations do not depend on the size of the economic impact and because Ireland acting here adds to the pressure on other member states to also act.

I raised one matter at the committee that I want to put on the record. The regulatory impact analysis acknowledges that this Bill could prompt a response from third countries, notably the United States, with what it calls a potentially significant adverse impact on Irish economic interests. US companies employ around 250,000 people in this country and anti-boycott laws at federal and state level can result in companies being excluded from procurement contracts where they are seen to be participating in a boycott of Israel. At the committee, I tabled a recommendation which was adopted unanimously, that the Minister develop and publish a

range of likely economic scenarios so that the Oireachtas could assess the potential diplomatic and economic consequences for Ireland. The committee's assessment were that those repercussions were, in its word, unknowable. We should pass this Bill and we should do so knowing what might follow.

Deputy Keira Keogh: We have an international obligation to stand up for international law and progressing this Bill is part of fulfilling these obligations. The Bill is an important contribution to upholding international law and supporting Palestinian self-determination. It also fulfils a specific commitment contained in the programme for Government to progress legislation banning imports from Israeli settlements. Those goes along with a line of decisions that we have already taken, recognising the State of Palestine, intervening in the ICJ case, sending over €150 million in aid, and evacuating about 300 people, including sick and injured children. We have also co-sponsored a UN resolution and most recently sanctioned two Israeli ministers.

Today, we are taking an important step based on the advisory opinion the ICJ gave on 19 July 2024, which stated that states should take steps to prevent trade that assists with maintaining the illegal situation in the occupied Palestinian territories. I understand that many are disappointed that this Bill does not include services, but I believe the Department and Minister have done the best they could with the advice that they received. This Bill will not bring an end to the dire situation on the ground in Palestine, but it is a symbol, similar to when we recognised the State of Palestine alongside Spain and Norway, and we are hopeful that other countries will follow suit just like that, and we will move closer to the overall objective of a peaceful two-state solution.

Our reputation in Ireland is one of peace-building. This has to continue to be our focus. While we see escalating violence and expanding settlements in the West Bank, we must continue to try to build consensus at an EU level to seek collective action, such as suspending the EU-Israel agreement. I know that, just yesterday, the Taoiseach and Minister met the EU High Representative, Kaja Kallas, to discuss this. We know that a vote is imminent and a collective majority most likely still has not been achieved. We must also try to seek a proposal to ban trade in the occupied Palestinian territories at an EU level. We know that trade in goods with Ireland is only about €200,000, but we know that at an EU level, it could be in the billions and it would have a real impact.

This Bill should be seen as an important signal. Ireland progressing legislation must be a signal for our EU counterparts to act decisively and collectively. I welcome the recent sanctions that were approved on violent settlers and also on Hamas leaders of the 7 October massacre. I continue to condemn, along with our Government, the multiple breaches of international law, and the recent regressive move to bring back the death penalty for Palestinians, which is absolutely abhorrent and repulsive. From our own history, the Irish people deeply understand and respect the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and we must continue until we see a full and absolute peace.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: This is not the Bill that Senator Frances Black intended that the Dáil would pass. Others have outlined the differences already and I will not repeat them. Given Israel's actions since the Senator first published her occupied territories Bill, a watering down of the intent is not what is or was required. Given the slaughter in recent years by Israel,

I reiterate my full support for calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions. The Israeli state's barbarity against Palestinians and neighbouring countries is comparable to very few regimes in modern history. It is genocide through and through. Seventy-five thousand are dead in Gaza, 175,000 are wounded, and 1 million have been displaced in the space of two and a half years. This is being funded by large companies, which have to be boycotted, divested from and sanctioned.

7 o'clock

The company that the Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, has endorsed to demolish the historic Moore Street site, Hammerson, is now in partnership with a company that has been named by the UN as having sustained Israel's settler colonial project of displacement and replacement of the Palestinians in the occupied territory and is profiting from Israel's economy of illegal occupation, apartheid and now genocide.

The Allianz asset management subsidiary, PIMCO, purchased nearly €1 billion of Israeli war bonds. We need to boycott Allianz, boycott Israel and impose sanctions. Along with others in this House, I have seen with my own eyes, the confiscated land, the clearances, the apartheid road, the contaminated farm lands, the demolished homes and businesses, the destruction of olive trees which take decades to grow, the harassment and interference with the day-to-day lives of Palestinians and the detention of hundreds. Last month alone, there were 1,695 attacks by Israelis - by military and settlers - against Palestinians in the West Bank. That needs to end.

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin: Can the Minister imagine being an Irish person who had been farming their land for hundreds of years when violent, entitled, deluded thieves from Brooklyn, New York, Ukraine or Russia crossed the world, having decided they wanted to come to her community to terrorise her off her land, set dogs on her sheep, raze her ancestors' olive groves to the ground, rob her farm at gunpoint and then want to trade its fruit with us here in Ireland? Ireland knows about dispossession better than anyone. Trading with the occupied territories represents blood money. I think of the beautiful song "Strange Fruit" popularised by Nina Simone: "Blood on the leaves and blood at the root". We do not need Israeli blood money, nor their strange fruit nor their services. Services must be included in any Bill or otherwise it is meaningless.

It was a great privilege for me to stay among these lovely hospitable people in several places across the West Bank and Gaza. Unfortunately, I could not get into Lebanon at the time. The world can plainly see what an evil, violent, warped, deranged and depraved society Israel has become. I do not want to be graphic but it is one that rapes children in mass concentration camps, trains dogs to perform unspeakable acts on detainees - this is all coming out now - bulldozes children into large pits, deliberately starves children, forcing them to run the gauntlet and then shoots them for sport in a sick kind of a "Squid Game". They proudly post that on their social media. This is celebrated in Israeli society. It is mainstream. People who shoot babies through the head for target practice. Incinerating half-starved children with white phosphorous, which they are doing in Gaza, the occupied territories and now Lebanon. In Lebanon, Israel is now searching for Muslims being hidden and sheltered in the attics of their Christian neighbours. This is not like Europe 1944. They have taken the Nazi doctrine, they have refined it and they have made it for themselves.

An Ceann Comhairle: Thank you, Deputy.

Deputy Fionntán Ó Súilleabháin: Ireland does not need their blood money nor their services. We are better than that.

An Ceann Comhairle: Deputy Gogarty's colleague is not here. If he does not turn up, the Deputy has ten minutes.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I understand he may not be able to turn up. I will speak as long as I am able.

Like everyone here, we are appalled at the Israeli state's absolute dismantling of the West Bank over the years, whether it is allowing settlers to de facto annex parts of it in their own right or whether it is the state policy of dividing it up so as to make the West Bank no longer viable. This has been going on for decades and it is absolutely abysmal and reprehensible. It is on the same level as they have been treating the people of Gaza, although the more recent behaviour and genocide there goes to a totally new level. The West Bank has been subject to a systemic policy over many years.

I had conversations with Senator Black when she was trying to get her Bill agreed to by the Government. She was quite optimistic some years ago. She can speak for herself - I am not speaking for her – but the feeling I got from her was that she knew there would have to be some level of compromise or discussion on what legally could be and could not be done, but I do not think we have brought the ban as far as we can. Yes, arguably Ireland has done more than any country in the world to call out the Israeli atrocities as a neutral, non-aligned state with a history of brutal colonialism. We have done a fantastic job but at the same time we cannot slap ourselves on the back because it seems, within a European context, we are one of only a handful of countries with any moral compass. Whether it is the guilt of the Germans, the Danish rescue of Jewish citizens during the Second World War, the very close geographic relationship that Cyprus has with Israel, or the Austrian guilt, there are a lot of reasons, including association with the Holocaust, why other countries would not want to be seen to call out Israel for doing exactly the same thing in more recent years. However, countries like Spain and Norway have called out the Israeli state. We have been accused of antisemitism by the Israeli state, we have been put under pressure by the US Administration but we have persisted. This is where I want to praise the Government because we still persisted with our ICJ support and in finally getting to this Bill. I welcome that this Bill has finally come to the House. If it comes to a vote on whether to support the Bill, I will certainly vote for it.

However, as my colleagues have said, in banning goods alone, the Bill is not even going a fraction of the way because Ireland's trade with Israel is mostly in services. According to the CSO, between 68% and 72% of Ireland's exports to Israel in recent years have been in services and not goods. However we look at it, that means the Bill leaves the majority of relevant economic activity untouched. While a lot of the arguments here may be symbolic, they must have some meaning. We are arguing among ourselves as to which is the best body to decide on whether to play the Israeli football team, but this is something that has many times more legal issues. This is not a theoretical debate. The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in its 2023 update on companies operating in settlements, stated that digital,

financial and logistical services are structural enablers of settlement expansion. That is from its database of business enterprise 2023. Therefore, when we exclude services we are basically excluding the sectors that sustain settlement economies: the cloud hosting, the payment processing, the tourism platforms, the Airbnbs, which have been mentioned before, and property management systems.

All the people who know about this, the international legal experts, have been clear on this point. Professor Marco Sassòli, one of the world's leading scholars on occupation law, wrote in the *International Review of the Red Cross* that state responsibility extends to any economic activity, goods or services, that contributes to maintaining unlawful situations. Dr. Valentina Azarova, in a 2020 legal briefing for the European Parliament, stated service provision is a core component of modern supply chains and cannot be excluded from due diligence obligations. If we want a Bill that actually stops Irish economic activity from supporting the illegal settlements, then we have to include services or at least we have to try to do so. That is what I mean when I say we should push the boat out. Maybe there are barriers, such as those the Government has spoken of before, but let us push it out and see the legal action taken against us. If we take the business argument about how it might impact on businesses in Ireland, we could phase in the services aspect of it.

The ICJ 2024 ruling, which others have referred to in relation to our legal obligations, says that governments cannot be prevented by the European Union from acting alone. The advisory opinion states that all states are under an obligation not to render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation created by the illegal presence of Israel in the occupied Palestinian territory. That is basically the highest court in the world interpreting international law, which supersedes European law. Even the *European Journal of International Law*, in its 2024 commentary on the ruling, said that the ICJ opinion removes ambiguity regarding member state competence to restrict trade linked to illegal settlements. The former UN special rapporteur told a Chatham House briefing that states are required to take unilateral measures to avoid contributing to internationally wrongful acts. I also want to reference the former Attorney General and now Senator Michael McDowell, who knows not just a little about the law.

He said that nothing in EU law prevents Ireland from acting where international law imposes obligations. We have a legal and moral obligation. To make the Bill robust we have to reference the ICJ ruling in the preamble and we have to try to target the corporations in the occupied territories and not ordinary people. It is a fair point that we have not gone into the nuances of the legislation and how this law might impact on ordinary people in the occupied territories. That needs to be looked at in more detail as we get to Committee and Report Stages.

I focus specifically on the argument about how we might annoy the USA and put ourselves in great peril. Some Members on the other benches have argued that strengthening the Bill will irreparably damage our relationship with the US. We know how tied up the current US Administration is with the Israeli regime. We have seen it with the war on the admittedly despotic and murderous Iranian regime. However, it is an unjust and illegal war and Netanyahu's atrocities in Lebanon have basically been sanctioned by the Trump administration. If it stopped supplying weapons, they would dry up soon enough.

The argument is put that this will have a chilling effect on the relationship between Ireland and the US. I did some research, and I found out that the US already restricts imports from illegal settlements. A 2016 directive from US Customs and Border Protection stated that

products from Western Sahara must be marked to indicate their origin. That is similar to what we are looking at. The US, when it suits it, will create its own types of laws. We have seen that in international law. The Trump administration basically says that what it says goes, rather than trying to take a multipolar approach where everyone has input and basic international law is respected.

We have taken independent positions before and been criticised. One was the recognition of Palestine. You could argue even that could have angered the Americans to the point where we would not be their best buddies any more and they would impose some sort of sanction on us. That did not happen. We did not support the illegal invasion of Iraq which led to a lot more people being killed than there were lives saved. If you look at the *Realpolitik*, the current President of the US is a bit of a lame duck. The mid-term elections will provide a massive kick in the face for his administration's policies. While there is a strong Israeli lobby in the US, the bottom line for the companies operating here is profit. What the collective Opposition is requesting in terms of services is not impacting in any major way on US companies' operations globally. That argument does not hold up to scrutiny. The political threat is that it will impact us economically, but the threat being made does not have any economic impact on the US companies. They are making a political argument rather than one that is intrinsically talking about how their bottom line will be impacted by our unilateral move. If, as the Minister says, it is not legally possible to do what the Opposition is arguing for by expanding the Bill to cover services, then I go back to the point I made a few minutes ago that we will be found out through some form of legal action that I do not believe it is possible to take. There is the argument about moral and sinister threats not to annoy our big cousins in the United States. I think we are bigger than that. We have stood up for ourselves before without major clawback. The Israelis will kick and scream. We will be called antisemites even more. However, we will basically be living up to our principles as an independent state.

I ask the Minister, on Committee Stage, to maybe explore and support Opposition proposals to include some level of services in the legislation. As it stands, this legislation is one third effective because two thirds of the on-the-ground impact relates to services. We can hold our hands up and say Kumbaya, we have done our little bit and we are all great. We have to remember that it has taken years to get to this point. It has taken years to get to a watered down Bill. That is shocking in its own right. While I welcome the legislation and will vote for whatever finally comes through the Houses because it sends a message, until that point we have a moral obligation to put the international legal argument, as well as the moral argument, that this should be the strongest legislation possible. If others can prove there are holes in it, let them come back after and refer it to the President to see if it is constitutional or not. That is something we should do. We should make the legislation as strong as we believe it can be. If we have a 70:30 or 30:70 uncertainty on the services aspect, let us put that to the test. Otherwise, it will be a watered down Bill. I urge the Minister, even at this stage, to try to strengthen it.

Deputy Albert Dolan: I welcome the progression of the Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Prohibition of Importation of Goods) Bill. I am pleased the Government is now bringing forward legislation that reflects Ireland's long-held position on this issue. Ireland has consistently stood on the side of international law, human rights and the pursuit of peace. We have been among the strongest voices internationally in condemning the horrific

loss of civilian life on Gaza, calling for an immediate ceasefire, demanding the release of hostages, supporting humanitarian access and advocating for a lasting solution.

The scenes we have witnessed over the past number of years, particularly in recent months, have shocked people across Ireland and the globe. Thousands of innocent civilians have suffered enormously. Families have been displaced, communities devastated and countless lives lost. It is right that Ireland continues to speak clearly and consistently against actions that undermine peace and deepen human suffering. This legislation is an absolutely critical step.

The position of Ireland is clear and the European Union's position needs to be clearer. Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories are illegal under international law and undermine the prospects of a viable two-state solution. The Bill sends a clear message that Ireland will not facilitate trade in goods originating from settlements considered illegal under international law. I welcome that. It demonstrates that our commitment to international law is not merely rhetorical but can be reflected in practical action. I also welcome our Government's effort to continue pursuing broader action at European level. I believe we must use our EU Presidency to do so. While Ireland has taken a national step today, lasting impact will come through collective, international action and renewed diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving a sustainable peace settlement.

Ireland has a proud history of supporting the Palestinian people and advocating for their right to self-determination. Last year, Ireland formally recognised the State of Palestine, reaffirming our belief that both Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live in peace, security, dignity and freedom. Ultimately, this legislation is about standing up for international law, supporting the prospect of a genuine two-state solution and ensuring that Ireland remains consistent in its commitment to justice, human rights and peace.

I welcome the introduction of the Bill and look forward to its passage through the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Deputy Colm Burke: I very much welcome the publication of this Bill and the fact that it is proceeding through the House. In dealing with this issue, it is important that we bring other countries with us. I have experience of dealing with this issue. I was in Gaza in 2009 after the changeover of the American President. During the period of that changeover, on 27 December 2008, Israeli forces went into Gaza, bombing the area and killing 1,400 people, 400 of whom were children. They kept working until 18 January. The new President was sworn in on 20 January. Israel used that opportunity. No action was taken against Israel at that time. Its forces used cluster munitions, which are the same as the IRA nail bombs, and they used white phosphorous, in violation of all international law. No action was taken. If action was taken at that stage, 72,000 people would not have been killed in the last three years. It is therefore extremely important that we are careful in our approach to bringing the international community with us and that we manage it very well. The Minister and previous Ministers for Foreign Affairs have worked very well in this area.

It is about bringing all of Europe with us. I was in Washington in 2009. I was part of a joint committee of the European Parliament and the US Congress. There was no support for the Palestinians on that committee. I was probably the only person on that committee who was in any way supportive of Palestine and critical of Israel as a result of what happened on that occasion. We are now 17 years on and we have still not brought all of Europe with us on this

issue. It is therefore extremely important that we work on that front. That is why it is important that the legislation we bring forward is moderate while still challenging what Israel has done.

The human cost of this conflict extends far beyond those killed and injured. Displacement has become a defining feature of the crisis. Families are uprooted from their homes and communities and deprived of security, stability and dignity. Amnesty International released a report today documenting that, between January 2023 and April 2026, 3,407 Palestinian homes in the occupied territories were demolished, resulting in the displacement of thousands of people. These figures serve as a stark reminder that behind every statistic is a family forced to leave behind their home, their livelihood and their future. We must recognise that displacement is not simply a humanitarian challenge; it is a profound human tragedy. Children lose access to education, communities are fragmented and generations face uncertainty as to whether they will ever be able to return to the places they call home. The protection of civilians from forced displacement must remain a core principle of international humanitarian law and a priority for the international community.

Equally concerning are efforts to obstruct or undermine humanitarian initiatives intended to assist civilians in Gaza. The international community has a responsibility to uphold international humanitarian law and to ensure that all parties to conflicts are held accountable for their actions. In September 2025, the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel published its conclusions that Israeli authorities and security forces had committed four of the five acts defined as genocide in the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide.

The human cost of this conflict remains devastating but it is important that, no matter what we do, we bring other countries within Europe with us. We must also work at an international level to bring countries with us to ensure decisive action is taken against Israel over this conflict, which has been allowed to continue. In the last 17 years, over 75,000 people have been killed.

An Ceann Comhairle: If I may delay Deputy Neville, I am looking up and I think I may be able to see Daniel Wiffen. My eyesight is not as good as it was and the light is shining. I am not sure who is with him, but he is most welcome to the Parliament.

Deputy Joe Neville: It is Brendan Griffin.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: It is the former Deputy, Brendan Griffin.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is the former Deputy, Brendan Griffin. Excuse me, my eyesight is bad.

Deputy Joe Neville: He is a former Minister of State.

Deputy Martin Kenny: It is a Wiffen and a Griffin.

An Ceann Comhairle: It is a most interesting debate to be involved in. Mr. Wiffen is most welcome as an Irish champion.

Deputy Joe Neville: I have met the former Minister of State many times but to have an Olympic gold medallist looking down on us is indeed an honour for us all. I congratulate Mr. Wiffen on all his work, what he has done for the country and how he raised the country's spirits during his time. His talent has inspired many people in this country. I thank him for being present and for taking the time to come to watch us in the Chamber.

To move to more pressing matters and the matter we came here today to discuss, I believe that Ireland has been and continues to be on the right side of history in relation to the oppression in Palestine. On 28 May 2024, Ireland recognised the State of Palestine, which was a huge step. Ireland committed new funding of €42 million for the people of Palestine for 2026 and many millions of this funding has already been provided. Ireland has provided a total of over €112 million in support of the people of Palestine since January 2023. Over €100 million of Irish support has been provided since October 2023. By the end of 2026, Ireland will have provided €144 million since January 2023. Indeed, Ireland's 2026 support continues a commitment of €20 million in core funding to UNRWA this year, bringing our total support to €78 million. The people of Palestine know that we are on their side. We have shown that support through our words but also through our funding. We are now taking the next step. The countries of Europe also know that we are on the side of the Palestinians. Indeed, the Americans know it too.

As I have outlined, we have led internationally and we continue to show solidarity with the people of Palestine through this Bill. We also need to ensure that the message goes out clearly from this Chamber that the Irish Government is against the occupation of these territories and the ongoing oppression taking place there. However, I am also conscious that some of the words used here may be wilfully misconstrued and echo differently in the political halls of Washington and the corporate rooms of America, where they might impact jobs in this country. I want to highlight businesses like Intel in my hometown of Leixlip, which the Taoiseach has previously referenced in this Chamber in relation to this matter. The Leixlip Intel campus employs 5,000 workers directly and many more indirectly. We need to ensure that people there are not impacted by loose language used by Opposition Members and that we make clear the goal of this Bill so that it cannot be used against us as a country.

While Ireland is showing leadership, real change will only happen if the rest of the EU and other countries take the same brave stance the Irish Government is taking. Surely, the Chamber should recognise that.

Deputy Martin Kenny: It is now eight years since the occupied territories Bill was first proposed. Fianna Fáil said that it would support that Bill and that it wanted to see it move through the Oireachtas. For those eight years, there has been foot dragging every time the Bill has come up. The reality is that the people who live in the occupied territories continue to suffer under a cruel and harsh regime that continues to take their land and their houses from them and that allows them to be attacked by settlers with the protection of the military. It is a deplorable situation. International law says that it has to stop and that it is wrong and yet we are presented with an occupied territories Bill this evening that is only a half-measure. It leaves out trade in services, which is absolutely vital. The Government can make all kinds of excuses

but, at the end of the day, we have to make a stand sometime. Many people live long and weary lives and go to their graves without ever having taken a stand for anything but that is what we are about in this place. We are about making a stand. We have to be leaders on this on the international stage.

Ireland of all countries, which was the victim of centuries of colonisation and imperialism, knows what it means to have somebody to lead. When the rest of the world was under the yoke of imperialism, Ireland stood and said that there can be a different way. We struck a blow in 1916 for freedom. It lit a torch that inspired oppressed people in every corner of the world and we still have an obligation to inspire oppressed people in every corner of the world. That is why what we do here is important. At the end of the day, we have an opportunity to make this so much better. That is why we appeal to the Minister to include services, to make the full stand that we need make and stand up for what is right and to ensure that the people of Palestine and the world know that Ireland of all places stands firmly with them.

Deputy Mark Ward: I acknowledge the work that Senator Black has done on this Bill over the past number of years. I commend her on getting it this far because she ran into so many obstacles on the way. In 2022, I was lucky enough to visit Palestine. I spent a fair bit of time there as part of a sports and cultural exchange. There were boxers from Belfast and Dublin taking part in the Shamrock and Olive Tree Boxing Project with the shamrock being from Ireland and the olive tree being from Palestine. I saw the settlements at first hand. I could talk about how I was treated over there, but it is not about me. There is this idea of settlements and we think of the wagons across the prairie. They are not like that. They are fortified. They are on high ground. They have military members of the IDF armed looking down like imperialists on the Palestinian population below them. They have separate roads. There is not even a bump in the roads they are that well put together that only Israelis are allowed to drive on. Palestinian civilians are not allowed to drive on these roads. The Palestinians have restricted movements going from A to B because they are in these occupied territories.

The thought of doing any business with these occupied territories, fortified institutions and these robbed and stolen lands sickens me to the core of my stomach. I do not just mean goods; I mean goods and services. We have spent eight years on this Bill. The Government dillyed, delayed and blocked. Now, in my opinion and most people's opinions, the Government has completely gutted this Bill. This is a cynical act by the Government. A total of 70% of trade between Ireland and the occupied territories is in services. What we are asking for is something very simple. We are asking for no trade in goods and services that originate in the occupied Palestinian territories, lands that have been stolen by military force by Israel.

Deputy Barry Heneghan: Tá a fhios ag madraí na sráide cén chaoi a sheasaim ar an ábhar seo. Tá a fhios ag an domhan cá bhfuil na daoine in Éirinn ar an ábhar seo. Bhí mé ag caint ar maidin agus inné faoin gcluiche agus faoi Alaa Al-Dali, an t-aon fhear a bhí ag rothaíocht ar son na Palaistíne. Bhí sé chun a bheith ina Oilimpeach ach rinne an IOF urchar a scaoileadh lena ghlúin agus bhris siad a ghlúin. I would have loved to have seen services included in this. I would have loved to have seen the Attorney General's advice. When I sat over there in the House and I voted for the amendment of this Bill, I was told that there was legal advice. The Attorney General came out later saying that it was a political decision. I would have preferred if we saw now why services cannot be included. I will support the Bill because I want

something rather than nothing. I ask if we could add services at a later stage if implemented correctly like Spain has done for the advertising of services in the occupied territories. I would love for more of the occupied territories across the country to fall under the remit of the Bill. Correct me if I am wrong and they do. However, from my understanding of the legislation, they would not directly apply to other occupied territories.

I commend Senator Black on her patience, hard work, determination and an obair ar fad atá déanta aici. Níor stop sí. Bhí sí ag fáil go leor rudaí ar líne ó na bots agus na daoine atá ag cur brú leis an mBille a scriosadh ach níor stop sí. I understand from the meetings that a lot of people would have preferred the inclusion of services, but I prefer something rather than nothing. That is always my political view on anything as an Independent TD. I would rather get something rather nothing. This is the same view that I am taking on this. I would love if the Bill inflicted that change. I would have loved to have seen what the Attorney General said. At an EU level, if it would have not passed is what we were told, can that be published? Has it already been published? I could not find it over the past few months. From listening to the Minister, I understand that there will be an EU trade complication. I commend the work that our diplomats and the Minister have done getting like-minded EU countries together. Other Deputies have acknowledged that Ireland's power would be best united on an EU front. Ireland's power has never been our strong military. It always been our worldwide respect as a peacekeeping country. That is why it is good that we are passing this now ahead of our EU Presidency, but it would be a lot better with services.

I listened to all the Deputies in my office. There is no other government that would have as much of a mandate apart from the Palestinian Government to enact this legislation. Look and listen to the people of Ireland. Look at the surveys. They want the legislation to include goods and services. At a later stage if it can be amended to include services, that should be done.

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Thomas Byrne): I thank colleagues who have contributed to the debate. We are witnessing in plain sight the persistent and ongoing human rights abuses that Palestinian people endure under occupation. We are witnessing an appalling and worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza. We are witnessing the deteriorating situation in the West Bank with massive expansion of settlements alongside rampant and escalating settler violence, all of which leads us to conclude that the actions of the current Israeli Government contravene international law. On the question of how best to respond, while we have moved ahead on prohibiting settlement trade in goods at a national level, our preference, which we have said this time and time again, is to work at an EU level and that collective action be taken at an EU level. This will have a much greater impact. Those who are quick to criticise the Government's approach are slow to take account of the broader realities, including the debates happening at the EU level. Ireland has led from the front on this issue. We were the first EU country to announce our intention to prohibit the importation of settlement goods. Others have followed our lead, not the other way around. Other member states have come to agree with us. In the past week, Slovenia has had a change of government, and it has completely changed its policy on Israel. It has had a complete reset in relations. We have to deal with the realities of all of this around the European table.

Ireland has repeatedly called for the suspension of the EU-Israel Association Agreement or, at a minimum, to suspend the trade elements of the agreement, as previously proposed by President Ursula von der Leyen. In advance of the Foreign Affairs Council next week, the

Minister has asked the Commission to bring forward a proposal to prohibit EU trade with Israeli settlements on the basis of the EU's Common Commercial Policy. A number of member states supported this call in the Commission and were equally clear that proposals sanction certain Israeli Ministers cannot be a substitute or an alternative for an EU ban on trade with illegal Israeli settlements. The Taoiseach also wrote the President of the European Council, António Costa, on 20 May reiterating Ireland's position on the EU's trade with Israel and requested an urgent discussion of these issues among EU leaders at the meeting of the European Council next week. I will ask for this as well at the General Affairs Council that I will attend next week.

Member states reached political agreement last month to sanction Israeli extremist settlers and entities and those who enable them. That was hard fought for around the table. Every member state has a veto on that issue. The political reality is that we have to deal with that around the table. We hold the veto dear every time we have a referendum. The previous Hungarian Government held up that particular provision for some time. I welcome that the position has changed and moved on. The politics changes in both directions. Actions taken at EU level in response to the appalling situation in Gaza have a much greater impact than those taken at national level.

We will always stand up for human rights and international law within the EU and for accountability when it comes to breaches of international law.

The question of services has been the main issue in this debate. This Government and any government has a responsibility to ensure that any legislation is legally robust, capable of being implemented and can withstand legal challenge. In the case of goods, a public policy exception exists in the EU regulation which controls the import of goods. This exception allows EU member states to adopt prohibitions on the import of goods for public policy reasons. For the avoidance of doubt, there is no equivalent or similar broad public policy exception relating to external trade in services.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: There is in the treaty.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: I acknowledge the point made by Deputies in respect of the absence of services from the Bill but no political view, however well meaning, whether expressed on this side of the House or the opposite side, can trump the rule of law. We cannot trump the law.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: We can do it through the treaty.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: At the European level, the Single Market is a lot less harmonised in respect of trade in services than it is for trade in goods. The regulation of services is split across a variety of EU legislation and there would be huge challenges regarding, as the Taoiseach has said, the effective implementation and enforcement of restrictions on trade in services. Again, on the issue of services and actions taken by the Spanish Government, there are some misunderstandings. Spain has not implemented a ban on trade in services, so it is incorrect to suggest that it has done so. It has introduced a targeted amendment to its consumer protection law to prohibit the advertisement in Spain of services provided in Israeli settlements.

Deputy Donnchadh Ó Laoghaire: That is the same thing, effectively.

Deputy Thomas Byrne: This is the only aspect of the Spanish legislation that relates to services. The focus of the Spanish legislation is on the prohibition of the importation of goods. National legislation being taken forward by other EU member states is similarly focused on goods. Again, I remind the House that Ireland was the first EU country to announce its intention to prohibit the importation of settlement goods and other EU member states have followed that lead.

On the potential economic implications, the Oireachtas committee asked the Government to look at this. The Government does not have the luxury of putting forward proposals without fully working through all of the potential consequences. That includes potential implications for the economy and for jobs. These have been outlined in debates between the Taoiseach and Deputy Boyd Barrett in here. The Government has taken the time to carefully consider all of the options as well as the proposals that have been made as part of the debate in this House and during the pre-legislative scrutiny process. For those who dismiss the potential economic implications or who feel we should gamble or take a risk with them, the question is whose jobs they are willing to sacrifice. What companies do they want to see leave Ireland? That is a question that some people are quite prepared to answer in this House. I am not accusing the Deputies opposite but there are Deputies who are more than happy to answer that question. We need to be honest with people. The Government's job is to protect the interests of Irish people and to use that interest to make our voice heard at international level.

The Government has a track record of taking action in response to the actions taken by the Israeli Government which contravene international law. We are fulfilling our programme for Government commitment and this Bill is significant legislation. It is possible, because of the findings of the 2024 advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, that it will also contribute positively to Irish and international efforts to prevent unilateral actions that impinge upon the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination and upon the viability of the two-state solution. The two-state solution is the only answer here, to have Israel and Palestine, side by side, in peace and security. Who was the first Western politician to put forward that as a serious proposition? It was Brian Lenihan senior, in 1980, when he was Minister for Foreign Affairs. This Irish Government and Irish governments in general have led from the front on all of this. We have led from the front on the issue of trade with settlements and on the recognition of Palestine. We will continue to lead on the need for effective EU action.

On Friday, at the invitation of the French Minister for foreign affairs, Jean-Noël Barrot, I will represent the Irish Government at the second edition of the Paris call for the two-state solution. As a Government, our overarching approach encompasses our commitment to working with key partners to end the conflict in Gaza and to advance a sustainable peace plan ending the conflict and addressing the huge challenges facing Palestinians in Gaza. It encompasses our commitment to supporting a Palestinian state consisting of Gaza and the West Bank, including east Jerusalem. It also encompasses our commitment to achieving a just and lasting peace where Israelis and Palestinians can live side by side, in two states, Israel and Palestine, in peace, security and dignity within agreed borders based on 1967 borders. We have always been clear that our goal is for both Israelis and Palestinians to live in peace and security. The cycle of violence must be brought to an end. The suffering of Palestinians and Israelis needs to end. We must always be careful to remember that and to leave space for the people to people contacts that have always been the most valuable part of the relationship between

Ireland and Israel. As a Minister of State in this Government, I want to stress that we must distinguish between the policies of the Israeli Government and the Israeli people. From our own history on this island we know that the politics of division never advances a peaceful outcome. Ireland's position on the Middle East is firmly rooted in respect for human rights and international law in both word and deed. Collective action at the EU level would be most effective in this case. The Government is proceeding with this Bill in accordance with its commitments under the programme for Government and I thank Members for their contributions to the debate on this Bill.

Question put and agreed to.

Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Prohibition of Importation of Goods) Bill 2026: Referral to Select Committee

Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Thomas Byrne): I move:

That the Bill be referred to the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs and Trade pursuant to Standing Orders 103(2)(b) and 188(1).

Question put and agreed to.

Estimates for Public Services 2026: Message from Select Committee

An Ceann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Agriculture and Food has completed its consideration of the following Supplementary Estimate for public services for the year ending 31 December 2026: Vote 30 - Agriculture, Food and the Marine, programmes A, B and C.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar fionraí ar 7.46 p.m. agus cuireadh tús leis arís ar 8 p.m.

Sitting suspended at 7.46 p.m. and resumed at 8 p.m.

Gnó na Dála - Business of Dáil

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: I understand that the Government Chief Whip has a proposal for a minor amendment to the business for the week.

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Mary Butler): It is proposed, notwithstanding yesterday's Order of Business, that the motion regarding the report of the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform entitled Rotas and arrangements for Leaders' Questions, Questions Nominated for Priority and Private Members' time shall be taken on the conclusion of proceedings on the Air Pollution (Amendment) Bill 2025 [Seanad], without debate, and any division demanded thereon shall be taken immediately.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is that agreed? Agreed.

Criminal Law, Civil Law and Defence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026: Instruction to Committee

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I move:

That Standing Order 194 is modified in accordance with Standing Order 241(2) to provide that it be an instruction to the Committee to which the Criminal Law, Civil Law and Defence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026 may be recommitted in respect of certain amendments that it has the power to make amendments to the Bill which are outside the scope of the existing subject matter of the Bill in order to:

(a) make amendments to the International Criminal Court Act 2006 to:

(i) give effect to the ratification by the State of the 2010, 2017 and 2019 amendments to Article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court which extend the specified acts that may constitute war crimes to include intentionally using starvation of civilians as a method of warfare in a non-international armed conflict and the use of certain weapons,

(ii) clarify the legal obligations of Ireland to co-operate with the International Criminal Court with respect to requests concerning all offences under the Court's jurisdiction, and

(iii) enable the Government by order to designate any future amendments or additions to the crimes contained in the Rome Statute as crimes in respect of which Ireland can provide co-operation to the Court,

and

(b) provide for an application-based scheme to enable the disregard of certain historical convictions and other determinations relating to consensual homosexual activity,

and to change the title of the Bill and make other consequential amendments required to take account of the changes above.

8 o'clock

In my opening remarks on Committee Stage of this Bill I indicated my intention bring these amendments on Report Stage. I will first speak on the proposed amendments to the International Criminal Court Act. These amendments give effect to Ireland's intended ratification of the amendments to Article 8 of the Rome statute, and also ensure that there is an unambiguous basis for Ireland's full co-operation with the ICC in respect of all crimes within the court's jurisdiction, including those that are not offences in Irish law.

The amendments have three objectives to ensure that the definition of war crime in the 2006 Act is aligned with Ireland's proposed ratification of the amendments to Article 8. This will have the effect that the offence in Irish law of committing a war crime is expanded to include the use of microbial or other biological agents or toxins, the use of weapons whose primary effect is to injure by fragments, which in the human body escape detection by X-ray, and the use of laser weapons. Additionally, the offence in Irish law of committing a war crime in a

non-international armed conflict will be expanded to include the following acts that already come within the definition of a war crime when committed in an international armed conflict: the use of poison and poisoned weapons; the use of asphyxiating poisonous gas; the use of bullets which expand; and intentionally using starvation on civilians as a method of warfare. Expanding the domestic definition of war crimes in this way will enable the State to give full effect to the principle of complementarity. This principle obliges State parties to exercise jurisdiction over crimes committed in their territory or by their nationals so that the ICC is used only as a court of last resort.

The second objective of these amendments is to take account of the Kampala amendments on the crime of aggression.

The third objective is to make it wholly clear and unambiguous that Ireland's co-operation with the ICC is not to be confined to those crimes that are domestic offences pursuant to section 9(1) of the 2006 Act, namely, genocide, a crime against humanity, a war crime or an ancillary offence, but that such co-operation also extends to other offences within the jurisdiction of the ICC, in particular the crime of aggression or offences against administration of justice by the court. Bringing this legislative clarity will ensure there is no impediment to Ireland fulfilling its obligations under the Rome statute to co-operate with the ICC.

Finally, it is also proposed to add into the Act an order-making power allowing the Government to designate any future amendments of the crimes contained in the Rome statute as crimes in respect of which Ireland can provide co-operation to the ICC. This would not criminalise the offences in Irish law but would ensure that in a scenario where Ireland may not yet have ratified such an amendment Ireland would still be able to fulfil its obligations to co-operate with the ICC.

I will now turn to the proposed legislative scheme for the disregard of certain historical convictions and other determinations, those other determinations being formal Garda cautions and probation orders. As I have previously stated, the Victorian era laws that criminalised consensual sexual activity between men are now widely recognised as a historical injustice driven by ignorance and prejudice. The offences in question were enacted under British rule but very regrettably continued in force for the first 70 years of the Irish State before finally being abolished in 1993. However, consenting adults who were convicted of such offences still carry the entirely undeserved stain of a criminal record. We cannot rewrite history but we can try to undo the pain and hardship those convictions inflicted upon so many men and their families. What our Legislature can do is create a basis by which such a conviction can effectively be nullified so that its recipient is treated in law as if it never happened. Unfortunately, that cannot be achieved by the expedient of a blanket disregard. This is because the offences in question, and hence the recorded convictions, made no distinction between consensual and non-consensual acts, nor between adults and minors. Any given case must, therefore, be assessed on its merits by reference to information provided by the applicant and whatever records are available.

In that context, a multi-stakeholder working group reported in 2023 with detailed recommendations on an application-based scheme for the disregard of such convictions. The proposals now before this House have been carefully crafted to align as far as practicable with those recommendations while ensuring the scheme is legally and procedurally robust and that it is efficient and accessible for those who wish to apply. These proposals are being put forward

as a new part of the Bill set out across 14 sections, which variously provide for: the offences within the scope; the criteria for a disregard and who may apply, including where the person who received the conviction is now dead; the appointment of an independent person to consider applications and make recommendations to the Minister; the main processes involved in considering and determining applications and issuing successful applicants with certificates of disregard; the legal effects of a disregard, which are comprehensive; the procedures by which a disregard can be refused or, where it is found to be necessary, revoked; and provisions for the independent review of a refusal or revocation where requested by the applicant.

I am confident that these proposals provide a workable, equitable and accessible means by which those who were unfairly criminalised can finally seek the removal of this unwarranted blemish on their good name. They and their loved ones have waited a long time for a disregard mechanism and we now have an opportunity to pass it into law in a matter of weeks. I hope I can count on the support of the House for achieving this objective.

I recognise the very significant contributions made by Deputy Ó Snodaigh, Deputy Nash and other Deputies who put forward their own legislation previously. Certainly, their advocacy on this issue was a major catalyst and influence on me in trying to ensure we can get this law enacted promptly.

While the amendments to the International Criminal Court Act and to provide for a disregard scheme are obviously completely different from each other thematically, what they have in common is they have each been a long time coming and are time-sensitive in their own ways. Both are also appropriate for inclusion in a miscellaneous criminal law Bill currently before the House. I think this legal instrument offers the most expedient route to get them on the Statute Book and into force. This is why I commend the motion to the House.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I want to put on record that the way in which the Minister has handled this entire piece of legislation is in no way satisfactory, not even talking about the guillotine that is in place later on this evening. This is the second motion to instruct the committee we have had to the House where the Minister has added new and completely unrelated matters to a Bill that already covers a range of unrelated matters. Even the Title of the Bill has changed since we discussed it on Second Stage. Effectively what that means, and where the concern is, is there are matters within this Bill that have not been and will not be properly scrutinised by the Dáil, not as part of the pre-legislative scrutiny process and not as part of the justice committee's examination of the Bill. I appeal to the Minister to not have a repeat of this situation, to stop the guillotine and the rushing, and to actually allow proper Dáil scrutiny of legislation.

This debate focuses on the inclusion of provisions for the disregard of historical convictions for homosexual activity and the measures to give effect to amendments to the Rome statute, clarifying Ireland's obligation to co-operate with the International Criminal Court. I doubt if there will be an opposition voice against either. Therefore, it is regrettable that it has been brought in a manner which is itself, in my view, controversial. On the issue of disregard of certain historical convictions, I will take this opportunity to commend my party colleague Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh, along with those from across the Opposition benches who have brought forward a Bill to provide for this. It would absolutely have made more sense for the

Minister to work with his Opposition colleagues in facilitating that Bill rather than introducing these provisions at this late stage in its Dáil consideration.

Aside from that, this issue should have been dealt with decades ago. Although homosexuality between consenting men was eventually decriminalised in 1993, there was little acknowledgement of the profound harm inflicted on generations of men who were convicted in the years prior to this. In the ten years leading up to the decriminalisation, the State had commenced criminal proceedings in 309 cases that resulted in 94 convictions.

It is amazing that in our lifetime people were being convicted for their sexuality. It has to be said that for decades, gay men in Ireland lived under an repressive system that criminalised their identities and fostered widespread fear, isolation and persecution. We know that many gay Irish men felt they had no choice but to emigrate, and others felt they had no choice but to keep their sexual orientation a secret, sometimes for their whole life. At moments like this, we have to acknowledge what must have been profound hardship for people who were forced to live a lie their entire life.

Criminalisation had a real and devastating consequence for many people. During the AIDS crisis we know there was a stigma attached to homosexuality that meant little public support and often open hostility. In June 2018, the Government issued a formal apology, acknowledging that laws criminalising homosexuality were discriminatory, violated human dignity and caused significant harm to those affected. We have moved on. This is a welcome move but it should have happened long ago. There are different ways it should have been brought forward.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Tá buíochas ag dul don Aire as seo a chur os ár gcomhair inniu. Mar a dúirt mo chomhghleacaí, is trua nach raibh sé os ár gcomhair roimhe seo agus nach raibh an dul chun cinn déanta go dtí seo. I welcome this legislation. This is not the way to do this; it should have been done in a stand-alone Bill. This is substantial legislation, which is welcome, of course. We are not going to get the proper time to tease through all of the implications and the bits that are missing. Hopefully, when the Bill is in the Seanad, the Minister will be able to address some of the shortfalls or omissions that have been pointed out already by the LGBT+ Restorative Justice Campaign, which has raised issues. There are simple, technical issues which can be addressed and I hope we will have time, when discussing amendments, to point to some of those.

This is about correcting a wrong this State presided over, even if all it did was continue a tradition of the British where the abominable crime deserved penal servitude for life, or death as a felon because of, according to them, "outrages of decency". There are no exact figures for the numbers of people convicted of the offences during the reign of this State. Some figures suggest there were 1,000 or more convictions between the 1920s and 1993. However, there were probably thousands more because sometimes when people were charged, they jumped bail. Others evaded the courts. Some were acquitted. There was stigma attached to them. Some had cases dropped as they had funds or because of the scandal associated with it. Others died of suicide in that period. These are the types of people whose families or loved ones, hopefully - because many of them have passed this stage - will be able to apply for the disregard and the independent person will be able to make quick adjudications and will have the access because I do not think the range of files that will be needed is complete. The Mental Health

Commission, for instance, controls all of the papers from Portrane and places like that. Some of the people charged were put into what at the time were called "lunatic asylums". Maybe those places are where the paperwork is to be found. Maybe between this Stage and the Bill being taken in the Seanad, we can look at making sure that those who are required to give records are defined broadly enough so as to ensure that if there is an eventuality, there will be no restriction or any way that a State organ can refuse or block any such access to records.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Is Deputy Gannon sharing time?

Deputy Pádraig Rice: I will speak for two minutes. I welcome the disregard amendments. I was delighted, on behalf of the Social Democrats, to sign the cross-party Opposition Bill, with Deputy Ó Snodaigh and others, to advance this issue. It is also an issue I campaigned on before my election to the Dáil. I welcome these amendments and thank the Minister for bringing them forward.

It should not have taken the State 33 years to get to this point; it should have happened much sooner. However, we welcome that it has happened. As I said previously, lives have been destroyed by these arrests and convictions. So many men across generations have been impacted. I have no doubt that those who lived through the 1980s and the HIV-AIDS crisis were impacted. More should have been done for those people.

I will take a minute to highlight some of the concerns raised by the LGBT+ Restorative Justice Campaign, in particular the omissions under military law. The 2022 working group report recommended including relevant offences under military law. That group was set up by the then Minister for Justice, Deputy McEntee. Those issues should have been addressed. Similarly, convictions prior to the establishment of the State should have been included.

Provisions related to how relatives and friends can apply are too limited. Many of us in the LGBT community call our friends our chosen family. They should be able to apply.

I welcome the awareness campaign. That is a crucially important part of the measure. It needs to go right around the world. This issue is of a global nature because people left. There is a real opportunity to remove the legal scars caused by criminalisation, but this is just one step. This is just one thing. For true restorative justice, we need so much more, including transgender healthcare, closing gaps in family law, banning conversion practices and updating equality laws. Those of us campaigning and marching in Dublin Pride in a couple of weeks' time will be sending the message that we need much more to be done on this.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I acknowledge the work done in this area across the Chamber, in particular by my colleague, Deputy Rice. The provisions related to disregarding historical convictions are not only welcome, they are overdue. It is sometimes easy to talk about progress as though it is inevitable and Ireland simply arrived at a more equal place by accident. The reality is those rights were hard fought for. They were won by grit, determination, hurt and harm and by those who chose to believe in better. It is not some distant chapter of history in which homosexuality was criminalised in this country; it is within living memory. There are people alive today who grew up in a State that told them there was something wrong with who they are. These are people who carried not only the stigma of discrimination but, in some

cases, the weight of a criminal conviction for consensual relationships. That was wrong, and where the State has done wrong, it has a responsibility to put it right.

At a time when we are seeing attacks on LGBTQ+ communities re-emerge across the world, and there are still countries where people face imprisonment simply for being gay, it is important that Ireland continues to move in the opposite direction. It is fitting that we are discussing these measures during Pride month. Pride continues to be a hugely important recognition of those who came before us, a recognition of the harm that was done and that equality is not something that can ever be taken for granted.

These provisions matter because they acknowledge a simple truth, namely, people should not spend the rest of their lives carrying the consequences of laws which should have never existed in the first place. For that reason, we will be supporting this important provision. There are aspects of the Bill which are particularly welcome, such as the inclusion of those convicted as juveniles. We know that some young people were caught up in a system that not only criminalised them but, in some cases, led them into institutions where the consequences followed them for years afterwards.

The recognition of discriminatory policing is also significant. For many gay men it was not simply the laws themselves which caused harm but the way in which those laws were enforced. Practices of entrapment and targeted policing ruined lives and careers and left many carrying a burden that lasted decades.

The recognition that many people were forced to leave this country to escape persecution is also welcome. We should never forget that for many Irish people, emigration was not a choice made in pursuit of opportunity, but an escape from a society that refused to accept them for who they were.

While we welcome the scheme overall, there are still issues that deserve further consideration. I am concerned that former members of the Defence Forces who may have been dishonourably discharged or otherwise penalised under parallel military provisions do not appear to be fully covered. The proposed timeframe may also be too restrictive. We know from every other historical injustice this State has attempted to address that trauma does not operate on a Dáil timetable. It can take years for people to feel ready to come forward. That challenge will be even greater for those now living abroad.

These are not reasons to oppose the scheme; far from it. They are reasons to continue to improve it. If this legislation proceeds quickly to the Seanad, as appears likely, I hope there will be an opportunity to examine some of those issues further. While I welcome the substance of these provisions, I have to say that the process by which multiple complex policies have been added to this legislation at the last minute is deeply frustrating.

Once again, we are looking at a Bill that has become a vehicle for pretty much everything the Minister has chosen to add into it, without scrutiny. It deals with community sanctions, the use of incapacitant spray in prisons, counselling records in rape trials, firearms legislation, Defence Forces powers, European arrest warrants and now it deals with international criminal law and historical convictions. Many of those issues deserve attention and many deserve reform, but every single one of them deserves proper scrutiny.

Let us take the issue of counselling notes in sexual offence trials. We are talking about legislation that will affect survivors of rape and sexual violence and that goes to the heart of privacy, dignity, access to counselling, fair trial rights and the administration of justice. This is one of the most sensitive areas of criminal law this House has legislated for. The same can be said of the Defence Forces provisions inserted into this Bill. Hugely significant new statutory powers around State security and aid to the civil power have been added into a miscellaneous provisions Bill. These are powers that warrant detailed examination, detailed questions and detailed debate, yet here they sit alongside a huge range of unrelated matters, all bundled together under one legislative umbrella, and that is a problem. If legislation affects the most vulnerable rights of citizens, if it affects the victims of crime, if it affects civil liberties and if it affects State powers exercised, then it deserves the time and attention required to get it right. Instead we increasingly seem to be treating miscellaneous provisions Bills like legislative suitcases into which anything can be packed so long as there is room. The public cannot properly follow what is happening, civil society groups cannot properly engage and Members are expected to navigate a growing list of complex and unrelated issues within the same Bill. The irony is that some of the most important legislation we pass in this House often receives the least focused attention because it arrives bundled together with so many other measures. While I am delighted to see provisions that relate to historical convictions, and I support ensuring that Irish law keeps pace with developments in international criminal law, it is not unreasonable to ask why all these issues are being dealt with in this way. Important legislation deserves scrutiny, and legislation that will impact lives in the most profound ways should not be rushed, bundled together and pushed through as part of an ever-expanding miscellaneous provisions Bill.

This is really starting to look like a tactic. All of us have an important role in this House in scrutinising legislation, making amendments, engaging with groups that have been impacted, hearing from civil society groups, getting into committees and being deliberate and focused in our work. This is an eight-minute speech. Shortly after it, we will have a guillotine that falls after 90 minutes. That is no way of processing legislation. It undermines this House. We have seen it before with the International Protection Bill and we are back here again. It is a poor way of doing legislation and a poor way of treating Parliament.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I have the guts of 20 years' service as a national public representative, but this is the most mental Bill I have ever dealt with in here. It is crazy. There is lots of really good stuff in it but, as regards the structure of a Bill, it is beyond comprehension. It gives "miscellaneous" a new meaning. It is so diverse. It is not good practice; it is the worst kind of practice. I can nearly guarantee the Minister that there will be issues arising out of this legislation because it has not been scrutinised to the level required. I respect that time is of the essence with some of these provisions. I know there is pressure, particularly from the Opposition, in relation to a range of issues, for instance, the disregards being brought in today, which we 100% support, but this is no way to do it. The list of stuff going through this Bill is like an A-to-Z of everything in the Department. It is crazy stuff.

Deputy Matt Carthy: And another Department.

Deputy Alan Kelly: And other Departments, including the Department of Defence. It is a Who's Who. We are doing the ICC Act and the disregard of convictions for homosexuality-related offences today, and there are provisions relating to arrest warrants, prisons, the Minister's capacity to ask for Defence Forces' help, counselling notes, sex for rent, DNA, pepper spray, community service orders, face coverings - there is so much-----

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Good. We are getting a lot done.

Deputy Alan Kelly: Yes, but if the Minister were sitting here a few years ago, there is no doubt he would be saying what I am saying. I recall quite clearly his criticism of the previous Minister for justice, whom he now sits beside, in relation to lots of legislation. I have to be honest about this. This is no way to do legislation. For instance, the disregard is such an important topic on its own. The issues in relation to the ICC Act and the Rome Statute are critical. They have potential domino impacts on the triple lock discussion, which I will point out in a second. In addition, from the point of view of the administration of democracy, it is borderline impossible for us to do our jobs here because of the manner in which this is constructed with the cross-references, from a legislative point of view, the drafting, the manner in which we have to approach it and the volume of legislation covered.. Even versioning is a problem in relation to this Bill.

In relation to the disregard of convictions for historical offences for people in same-sex relationships, I acknowledge all the work that has been done by many different people down through the years. I have named them in the House previously. I am delighted that the Minister is dealing with this issue and that he has honoured that commitment. I also acknowledge over a decade's work by my colleague Deputy Ged Nash who has been in the Minister's ear about this since he was appointed. It is very rare you get to say it about the person sitting beside you, but, as a colleague whom I have known for many years, Deputy Nash has continuously been on about this for well over a decade. I acknowledge that while he is present.

The second issue is relates to the ICC Act and the Rome Statute. I want to reference part of this and, particularly, the issue of the four components in relation to the act of aggression. Where there is an act of aggression by a state, the crime requires that the act "by its character, gravity and scale, constitutes a manifest violation of the Charter of the United Nations". Not every unlawful use of force will give rise to a manifest charter violation. However, since the ICC has not previously prosecuted in this regard, there is a possibility here, basically, of unintended consequences if the Government gets rid of the triple lock, and that is what I am trying to warn the Minister about.

Deputy Ged Nash: I very much appreciate the Minister's acknowledgement earlier in his opening contribution that the legislation I produced nine years ago was, in essence, the catalyst for the disregard propositions before us. For the bulk of the history of this State we made criminals of gay men because of who they were and who they loved. Many of those we did not criminalise received public order records, cautions and so on. They were imposed on them by an uncaring State at a very different time in our history. The Bill I presented in 2017 referred to the need for exonerations of men who had criminal records for having sexual relations that were no longer offences under the law. The first part of my Bill, the Minister will recall, called for a formal State apology for the wrongs this State and our society perpetrated by our laws

and our actions against the LGBT+ community. I was very proud that, arising from that legislation, the then Government agreed to issue a formal State apology in both Houses of the Oireachtas in the summer of 2018, marking the 25th anniversary of decriminalisation.

Tonight is a milestone. It is a landmark. I pay tribute to people like Kieran Rose, Karl Hayden, who is with us here this evening, Eddie McGuinness, Brian Sheehan and other members of the LGBT restorative justice campaign, as well as successive Ministers, including Mr. Charles Flanagan, Deputy McEntee, the current Minister and others, and their officials for the contribution they have made to getting us to this point. My only regret is that the time given to this Bill by the Government is not in any way in accordance with the significance of what we are doing here tonight.

That is regrettable. I hope it is something the Minister reflects on. I also hope sufficient time will be provided in the Seanad for amendments on Committee and Report Stages to finesse and nuance the legislation and deal with the gaps. It is of such historic significance that I believe the Minister should give it due recognition and the time it deserves to be debated properly and nuanced and finessed.

Deputy Paul Lawless: There are some positive elements in the Bill that I would very much like to vote for and then there are difficulties with it as well. It is very broad and diverse. It would have been much more positive if we had the opportunity to engage with the issues on an individual level and discuss them in detail.

We support the proposal on counselling notes. People who have suffered, in particular from sexual assault, should not have their private counselling notes spilled out in a courtroom. The reforms in that regard are a step in the right direction.

However, there are some major concerns about the community service aspect of the Bill. One part of this legislation - it is quite clearly outlined - will potentially allow drug dealers, who in some cases would have been considered for a two-year prison sentence, to basically get community service. We wholeheartedly oppose that. It is very clear that the objective here is primarily more to do with prison capacity than the safety of citizens or anything else. The solution of a community service order is because of the fact that prisons are so overcrowded. In 2024, more than 1,000 prisoners were released on temporary release within 24 hours of being sent to prison. In reply to a parliamentary question, the previous Minister, Deputy McEntee, told Aontú that her officials were selecting candidates for early release due to capacity issues in prisons. It is deeply concerning that this is happening. We need to have a serious conversation about it. The Minister must ensure that prison capacity is significantly expanded so that legislation like this is not necessary. The idea of community service being used as a tool to try to alleviate the capacity difficulties in prisons should concern us all.

In 2024, some 700 prisoners went missing from the system. By the end of that year, 131 prisoners unlawfully at large were still unaccounted for. It is very worrying as well that currently 66% of prisoners in Ireland are repeat offenders. The system is crumbling and the fact that in some cases people are being released within a day of incarceration is simply not good enough. Prison capacity has an impact on the alarmingly high reoffending rate. It impacts on programmes that should be taking place and in some cases cannot because of the difficulties in the Prison Service. This is a obviously totally unacceptable.

Deputy Paul Nicholas Gogarty: I am just here in the nick of time. I welcome the opportunity to speak on this legislation. As others have said, it is a mishmash, and probably worse for that fact. I want to focus on the section dealing with access to counselling records in sexual offence trials. Last week, Beyond Surviving conducted a focused consultation with survivors - 52 individuals who engaged between 6 and 9 June. These are people who know the harsh reality of the courtroom and understand the consequences of how legislation is drafted in a way that does not respect their needs and wishes. The message from survivors is that the Bill is welcome but it does not give them full protection. Section 13 strengthens the existing framework by requiring that all applications for counselling records must go before a judge. That is welcome. It is a shift away from informal or administrative disclosures. Survivors recognise this as a necessary safeguard. Amendments that introduce a presumption of non-disclosure, create a form of statutory privilege and extend protection to other sensitive records such as medical or child protection files are important steps. The Bill does take cognisance of the fact that counselling notes are very intimate information given in a context that does not have a court in mind. They are reflections of trauma. They are supposed to help people to heal from that trauma rather than prepare them for a court date. I welcome some moves in that respect, as do survivors.

The Bill reinforces the justification clause for disclosure and that there would be some form of judicial oversight. I was contacted by survivors and that is why I am emphasising them in particular. I know the Bill covers a whole lot of other areas in terms of historical convictions, the Department of Defence, etc. As others have said, the one point I want to emphasise is that, as far as I can see, the stated intention relating to the presumption of non-disclosure does not appear in the text. If the law does not operate as it is intended, it is not going to work. We must have an explicit presumption, not an implied one.

Second, the Bill does not set out what survivors describe as a clear statutory test in terms of relevance, necessity and proportionality in a way that ensures consistency in practice and in case law. Survivors told me about the failure of section 19A and vague drafting about broad intrusive requests. As one put it "the drafting needs to be precise. The failures of section 19A cannot be repeated".

The Bill also gives survivors no agency in decisions about their own counselling notes. They have no right to be heard. It is their notes and their life being discussed, yet they have absolutely no input. The waiver should stay in place as it provides autonomy. That loss of control is not addressed. Those are a couple of the points they have raised. I hope they will be taken on board.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: Like the other speakers today, I appreciate that it is a huge technical challenge to try to put together the overall meaning behind each section of the Bill because, by its very nature, it is a miscellaneous Bill. The Minister has the benefit of his own advisers in the Department and the expertise of the Department of justice, but no doubt as a former Opposition spokesperson on justice he has sympathy with the rest of us who have to have to try to put it together.

Deputy Matt Carthy: He has no sympathy at all.

Deputy Paul McAuliffe: The one thing I would say is that we were all here at a previous Stage and, notwithstanding changes that have been made, very significant elements of this Bill were already before us, as complex as they were then and as they are now. I look forward to speaking on some of the 72 amendments that have been tabled. Let us not fool ourselves: the reason there is pressure to get this Bill through is not because the Minister wants to get it through, but because many of the issues it covers are things that are being called for by members of the public and groups that have worked very hard and campaigned on them.

I acknowledge the work of Deputy Nash on historical convictions. In this House we often wonder whether we achieve anything at all and maybe on days like this people like him can take note that the work he undertook has reached completion. It is for that very reason I say that sometimes facilitating Bills in this way is really important because it is about getting stuff across the line as well.

I take on board comments made by members of the Opposition. I had that issue in the last phase of this Bill. I have done a little bit of homework since, however. There is a lot in this Bill that is to be commended. There is one significant area I have been waiting on for some time and that is the work of the Apartment Owners' Network under the guidance of Pat Montague, which has been seeking the transfer of responsibility for multi-unit developments and the legislation and regulation of that over to the Department of housing. That is incredibly important. We are about to pour millions of euro into an apartment defect scheme. The people with responsibility for spending and delivering that are private entities and private limited companies in the form of owners' management companies. We need to have a way to make sure we regulate those companies, and we cannot do that while the responsibility sits with the Department of justice and has to be transferred over to the Housing Agency. That is one of the many things this Bill does and we are waiting desperately for it to happen.

I understand the concerns raised by the Opposition, but I underline the point that the provisions in this Bill are needed and required. That is why I am glad to see them before the House and to see they will be enacted.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I thank all the Deputies for their contributions. I am not a very philosophical person, but one thing I do know is that ministerial careers come and go very quickly and as Deputy McAuliffe said----

Deputy Alan Kelly: That is for sure.

Deputy Ged Nash: Tell me about it.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I am well aware of it.

Deputy Matt Carthy: The Minister is in for the long haul.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I hope individuals in this House have the great privilege to be Ministers at some stage in the future----

Deputy Alan Kelly: Been there, done that.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: -----but it comes and goes-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: Bad ones go quicker.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: -----and the officials, with the greatest respect, are outstanding people but they will be there for many years. If you want to get something done as a politician-----

Deputy Alan Kelly: Fair point.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: -----you have to push it through. I know people are, at one level, criticising me because this Bill contains a whole variety of different issues. It does. I have tried to squash as many issues as possible into this Bill because I want to get these provisions enacted for the benefit of people, such as men in Ireland who were convicted of homosexual offences prior to decriminalisation. In fact, it was Deputies Ó Snodaigh and Nash who raised it with me in my earlier days as a Minister and said they wanted this done. I went back to the Department and I recognised that the quickest way to get it done was to put it into a miscellaneous provisions Bill. With the greatest of respect, had I not done that and had I not put it into the miscellaneous provisions Bill, we would not even be near pre-legislative scrutiny at this stage. We have the report that is sitting there. One of the criticisms-----

Deputy Matt Carthy: The Minister did not need to guillotine it.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: One of the criticisms that is regularly made is that I am not getting things done and I am sitting on things, as the Deputies are all perfectly entitled and obliged to say to me if things are not being done. I know they are not asking me to, but I am not going to apologise for trying to get important measures that are of benefit to the public enacted as quickly as possible. I think we all agree that the disregard scheme, as everyone has said, is something that should have been done decades ago. I was not going to allow a situation to develop where I found myself, maybe in the third year of being Minister for justice, wondering whether I would get it over the line. I have driven it and I want to get it done. By the way, I appreciate all the contributions that Members in this House make. It is not the case that they have not scrutinised the matter or given me their views on these issues. In many respects, I have been listening to them for the length of time I have been Minister and I hear them all the time in terms of saying what they want to get done.

I will deal with some of the other issues that were raised. The most important thing that was raised in respect of the disregard scheme was the issue about military law. Deputies Rice and Nash raised it. In the course of consultation on the drafting of this, there were significant legal concerns about including any case in which a person had been court-martialled for military misconduct. On careful consideration, I concluded that these offences could not appropriately be included. There were two principal difficulties. First, it would be legally questionable but also impracticable to attempt to determine whether a particular court martial was brought purely because of the homosexual nature of an act rather than because it involved a disciplinary infraction, such as abuse of rank, which would equally have been the case had

the act been heterosexual in nature. Second, the relevant misconduct offences under the 1954 Act remain in force and, according to the Department of Defence, continue to be used today. Their inclusion will open the possibility of misconduct convictions right up to the present day and into the future being relitigated under a scheme intended to address an historical injustice. Equally, to impose a cut-off date, such as the 1993 decriminalisation, would almost certainly be challenged as arbitrary and unfair. For those reasons, I consider that the inclusion of these offences would not be legally or operationally viable. However, military convictions for the repealed offences of buggery, attempted buggery, gross indecency and importuning are within the scope of the scheme.

The second point of principle, which was raised by Deputy Rice, was about including convictions prior to the establishment of the State. This country, this Government, has no responsibility for acts that were done prior to the declaration of the Irish Republic and our Independence. I cannot go back historically and start operating a disregard scheme because of the criminal justice system that operated in Ireland under the crown. I applied that in respect of the granting of pardons as well. It is a different country. This Republic is not responsible for what happened prior to our Independence.

I very much welcome the discussion on this. I know there is a lot in the Bill. Everyone in this House wants to get these provisions enacted, not for the benefit of Deputies or Ministers or anyone else but for the benefit of members of the public, who all need to see this legislation enacted.

Question put and agreed to.

Criminal Law, Civil Law and Defence (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2026: Report and Final Stages

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Deputy Jim O'Callaghan): I move amendment No. 1:

In page 7, line 23, after “2004,” to insert “the Criminal Justice Act 2006,”.

I will deal first with amendments Nos. 1, 21 and 32.

Amendment No. 1 amends the Long Title to include a reference to the Criminal Justice Act 2006.

Amendment No. 21 is a technical amendment to section 16(1)(b) to substitute a reference to the singular "subsection" with a reference to the plural "subsections".

Amendment No. 32 is a technical amendment to section 18 to substitute a reference to “section 38(1) and section 45” with a reference to “sections 38(1) and 45”.

Amendment agreed to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: We will move to amendment No. 2. A recommittal is necessary in respect of this amendment and the other related amendments as they do not arise from committee proceedings and relate to the motion to instruct to the committee. Amendments Nos. 2, 33, 35 to 45, inclusive, and 72 are related and may be discussed together.

Bill recommitted in respect of amendments Nos. 2 and 3.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 2:

In page 7, line 32, after “trial;” to insert the following:

“to give effect to the ratification by the State of certain amendments to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to further enable authorities in the State to cooperate with the International Criminal Court, and for those and other related purposes to amend the International Criminal Court Act 2006;”.

I am pleased to introduce these amendments, which propose a number of technical amendments to the International Criminal Court Act 2006 to give necessary effect to Ireland's intended ratification of the amendments to Article 8 of the Rome Statute. The main objective of these amendments is to amend the International Criminal Court Act 2006 to make clear that war crimes within the meaning of the Act include Article 8 of the Rome Statute. Expanding the domestic definition of war crimes in this way will enable the State to give full effect to the principle of complementarity, which I spoke about earlier. These amendments will also provide a legislative basis to ensure that Ireland can fully co-operate with the International Criminal Court, ICC, in respect of all crimes.

Amendment No. 2 inserts new text into the Long Title of the Bill.

Amendment No. 36 is a standard definition that defines the International Criminal Court Act 2006 as the "Act of 2006". Amendments Nos. 33 and 35 are consequential on that.

Amendment No. 37 inserts some new terms for definition in the interpretation provision in section 2 of the 2006 Act. First, the definition of the Rome Statute is updated. Second, it defines the term "crime of aggression". Third, it defines the term "crime within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court". Fourth, in order to future-proof the extent of Ireland's ability to co-operate with the ICC, a new order-making power is inserted as a new section 64A in the 2006 Act. Finally, it inserts a new subsection (1A) to clarify that the term "crime within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court" includes an act for which criminal responsibility is provided for by Articles 25 to 27, inclusive, of the Rome Statute.

Amendment No. 38 inserts an additional subsection into section 6 of the 2006 Act to clarify that where following the commencement of the section, a relevant amendment has been adopted with respect to Articles 6 to 8, inclusive, of the Rome Statute.

Any reference to an article of the Rome Statute in section 6 should be construed without having regard to that relevant amendment.

Amendment No. 39 replaces section 8(1) of the 2006 Act with a new subsection clarifying that, in addition to applying to genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, ancillary offences under the 2006 Act shall apply with respect to offences against the administration of justice, but not with respect to the crime of aggression. A new subsection (1A) will also be inserted in section 8 to clarify that for the purposes of subsection 1 account shall not be taken of any future relevant amendments that may be adopted to articles of the Rome Statute.

Amendment No. 40 ensures that no retroactive effect is given to the new domestic offences created by the amendments to the definition of the Rome Statute.

Amendment No. 41 clarifies that when the State exercises extraterritorial jurisdiction over war crimes, the referenced Article 8.2 of the Rome Statute shall not be construed as that Article, as amended by a relevant amendment.

Amendment No. 42 clarifies that the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration shall be able to request the ICC to provide assistance with a domestic investigation or prosecution of an offence against administration of justice, in addition to ICC offences or serious offences.

Amendment No. 43 inserts a new section 64A into the 2006 Act in order to confer an order-making power whereby should future amendments be adopted by the state parties to the Rome Statute definition of genocide, war crime and crime against humanity or the crime of aggression, an act specified in that amendment may be prescribed by the Government on my request, having consulted with the Minister for foreign affairs.

They are the amendments until we come to amendment No. 44, which makes a number of technical amendments to sections 4, 19, 22, 31, 37, 38, 50, 50A, 51, 52, 53, and 63 of the 2006 Act.

Amendments Nos. 45 and 72 insert an additional Schedule 1A into the 2006 Act. Part 1 of the Schedule will set out the three sets of amendments to Article 8.2.1.b and Article 8.2.1.e of the Rome Statute, concerning war crimes committed in international and non-international armed conflicts respectively, adopted in 2010, 2017 and 2019.

Part 2 will set out the amendments to the Rome Statute providing for the exercise of jurisdiction over the crime of aggression.

Amendment agreed to.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Pursuant to Standing Order 194(3), it is reported to the Dáil that the Long Title has been amended.

An Leas-Cheann Comhairle: Amendments Nos. 3, 8, 12, 46, and 51 to 64, inclusive, are related and may be discussed together.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 3:

In page 8, line 6, after “2021;” to insert the following:

“to provide that the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration may, in respect of applications made to the Minister, issue to certain persons certificates of disregard in respect of certain historical convictions and other determinations relating to consensual sexual activity;”.

The amendments I am moving in this group are in respect of the disregard scheme. Amendment No. 3 is grouped with amendments Nos. 8, 12, 46 and 51 to 64, inclusive. These amendments collectively provide for an application-based scheme to enable the disregard of certain historical convictions and other determinations relating to consensual homosexual activity. The other determinations in question are formal Garda cautions given in lieu of prosecution and probation orders given in lieu of conviction. The substantive amendments

providing for the scheme are amendments Nos. 51 to 64, inclusive, which collectively insert a new Part 14 into the Bill, comprising 14 sections.

Amendment No. 51 inserts an interpretation section for the new Part 14. It includes the key definition of "relevant conviction or other determination", which includes convictions in a criminal or military court for the offences of buggery, attempted buggery, gross indecency and importuning. It also defines the categories of persons that come within the definition of an immediate family member and that of a relative. This is relevant for the purposes of applications that may be made on behalf of deceased people.

Amendment No. 52 inserts a new section which sets out the criteria that are to apply to the granting of a disregard application. Those criteria of course include that the relevant person did not cause any other person to participate in the sexual activity without their consent.

Amendment No. 53 inserts a new section setting out certain key provisions in relation to the making of an application. This includes provision that a disregard application may be made by a relevant person, namely, the person who incurred the conviction or by someone nominated by the relevant person to make the application on his behalf. It also provides that where the relevant person is deceased, a disregard application may be made by an immediate family member, or if no immediate family member can or wishes to make an application, by a relative, provided there is no objection from an immediate family member.

Amendment No. 54 inserts a new section providing for the appointment of suitably qualified or experienced independent persons to consider applications and independent reviewers to carry out reviews in cases where the Minister proposes to refuse an application and the applicant seeks such a review.

Amendment No. 55 inserts a new section providing for a preliminary assessment of an application by the independent person in order to satisfy himself or herself as to whether the applicant is the relevant person or is otherwise eligible to make an application on behalf of a deceased person. Where the independent person is not satisfied, the same provision is made that he or she shall not consider the application further and shall notify the applicant and the Minister accordingly.

Amendment No. 56 inserts a new section providing for the substantive consideration of the application by the independent person and the subsequent making of a recommendation to the Minister as to whether the independent person is satisfied that the conviction should be disregarded. The section includes a provision that any public body which may hold records relevant to the application shall provide those records to the independent person on request.

Amendment No. 57 inserts a new section providing that the Minister shall consider the independent person's recommendation and either issue a certificate of disregard or else notify the applicant that the Minister is not satisfied that the conviction should be disregarded. The section provides that where a disregard certificate is issued, the Minister shall notify all relevant public bodies and that they shall annotate any relevant records they may hold in order to clearly reflect the disregard.

Amendment No. 58 inserts a new section setting out the general effect of a certificate of disregard. The section effectively provides that the relevant person shall, to all intents and purposes, henceforth be treated as if the conviction never occurred and that there are no

circumstances in which the disregarded conviction shall be disclosable, other than where the relevant person chooses to disclose it.

Amendment No. 59 inserts a new section to provide that an applicant may seek an independent review of the matter, either where the Minister has proposed to refuse a disregard or where the independent person is not satisfied that the applicant is a person eligible to make the application. In either case, the application shall be examined afresh by an independent reviewer other than the person who originally considered the application and a recommendation submitted to the Minister as to whether or not to reaffirm the decision in either case.

Amendment No. 60 inserts a new section to deal with a scenario where, subsequent to issuing a disregard, the Minister receives information giving rise to the reasonable belief that the application included or was supported by false or misleading information and the Minister is no longer satisfied that the conviction should be the subject of a certificate of disregard. The section provides that the Minister shall in any such case notify the applicant that the Minister intends to revoke the disregard and that the applicant may seek a review, which shall be carried out by a retired judge of the Circuit Court, High Court or Court of Appeal appointed by the Minister.

Amendment No. 61 inserts a new section to provide that where the Minister proceeds to revoke a disregard, he or she shall notify the applicant and also the relevant public bodies which shall be required to re-annotate their records to reflect the revocation.

Amendment No. 62 inserts a new section to provide that the Minister shall make appropriate efforts, including a public information campaign, to raise awareness, particularly among relevant persons in the State and beyond, of the disregard scheme and the effects of a disregard.

Amendment No. 63 inserts a new section containing a number of provisions relating to the protection of personal data under the scheme. This includes provisions for the redaction of any non-relevant convictions held by a relevant person, if alive, or any information that could identify any other living person in connection with any offence.

Amendment No. 64 inserts a new section to provide that nothing in this Part shall create any new rights or any cause of action, nor impose any liability on any person or on the State. This is provided for the avoidance of doubt.

Finally, there are a number of technical, consequential amendments as follows. Amendment No. 3 amends the Long Title of the Bill to take account of this new Part, while amendments Nos. 8, 12 and 46 each amend a number of definitions and references to enactments elsewhere in the Bill to take account of related references introduced by the new Part.

9 o'clock

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: This is basically the time where we get some discussion on the content of the amendments. As said earlier, I welcome the disregard scheme that is announced. I also welcome those members of the LGBT disregard campaign who are present in the Visitors Gallery. I thank them and other Deputies for all their hard work and for, thankfully, as the Minister has admitted, putting pressure on him, who in turn put pressure on the officials.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Yes, certainly.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: We are where we are and we have it before us. Between now and the debate in the Seanad, there may be small technical issues, as there always is with legislation, especially historical pieces. There was a question about why we are not going pre-1922. There have been pardons given by Presidents. Why 1922? Why was it not 1937 with the Constitution? Why not 1948 when the executive authority Act was repealed?

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: 1962.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: Why not 1916, 1867 or if we want to go back to the first republic of 1626? That is something the Minister will have to answer himself or I will keep raising it.

In the main, the value of this is for families who have, in living memory, loved ones who have passed and who have had the smog or shadow of convictions upon them who were affected and those who are still alive, because there were still people before the courts well into the 1980s and early 1990s. The fact they were before the courts hung around like a bad smell on them and affected all of their work.

One of the public bodies that may have information is adoption. As someone who sought adoption of a child would be refused if they had a conviction, that may be one of the bodies. I mentioned the mental health institutions. The Department of education was also always very scrupulous about digging out people and throwing them out if they were anyway suspect in its eyes. There is the question of the employment records of people and whether they are kept. I do not know whether it is the Department of public expenditure or whatever. It is one of the provisions here that the Minister shall "as soon as practicable, notify, or cause to be notified, each public body". That is not just the public bodies that I mentioned, it could be other public bodies. It is to ensure that.

In the private sector with social media, there exists the right to be forgotten. One of the problems with some of this is that the names, and addresses in some cases, in the convictions are available online if one searches newspapers and so on. It is not necessary that we look for it today but it is something to look at to see whether an equivalent right to be forgotten can be done and that people who had that disregard could approach the social media companies, the newspapers or whoever to blank out those reference in order that they do not come up in a search. I believe that is the method used in the right to be forgotten. That was brought in to protect people with small or low-grade convictions to ensure it was not held against them when they went for employment or through other types of vetting processes.

It is welcome. Court documents will be key in this in many ways because when I did the research on convictions, which was only cursory, the newspapers carried very little specific detail. The Minister is right that distinctions have to be made and sometimes they did not make the full distinction of the background of whatever case. The churches are another case in point. They would have records of people. Suicides are another record.

If the Minister can manage to stick to the timetable that set out two months for the records to come back from any Department, in this country that would be very interesting. It will not

be the Minister but rather the independent assessor and they must then make the judgment within two months of that. I would welcome that. The Minister has set himself a high bar. In addition to access to the National Archives, the other main one is the military services records as well. There are records there. There were people who were not necessarily court-martialed but were cashiered out of the Defence Forces rather than being charged. They would have those records in personnel files. This is not to add a burden; it is just to make sure. It might just be a provision at the end of the list of the public bodies that says, "and any other public body that the independent assessor deems fit". I do not know whether that would cover it. It is just in case there are instances because it might be people in the Coast Guard or in other services. I am not an expert on all of this because, as I said, when one researches this, the research is quite closed. It is welcome that we are trying to close a very dark chapter in our history.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I just have a few brief comments to make. The issue in relation to the pre-1922 convictions is obviously different to what the working group said, which is a pity and the previous speaker spoke about military archives as well. How do we deal with that?

The working group proposed a dedicated independent body as the first contact, modelled on the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, IHREC. This is the first time we are getting this component of the legislation put into this Bill. We will not go back and talk about that again. However, was that something the Minister considered or does everything have to be transmitted through the Department of justice and the Minister himself? Everything is basically being routed one way. Does the Minister think that is the best way of doing it? If that is going to be the Minister's style with regard to everything, that is fine. In many other scenarios they would have gone through some form of independent process to cross-check and review everything one step away. Ministers usually like to be one step away but in fairness to the Minister in this case, he is right in there. On having no first point-of-contact body with support and advocacy, it is more the advocacy part of it that I am on about. There will be a lot of emotion in this regard in many cases and there is no standing panel of assessors.

The working group also proposed a hierarchical but flexible approach regarding representatives for deceased people. The query relates to the structure that is there for immediate family members, including cohabitants and partners, having a priority. If nobody immediate is willing to put forward the case for somebody, can somebody who is a close friend do it? Is there any process? I ask because there will be circumstances like that, given the nature of what we are discussing. Is there any potential pathway for somebody to act on behalf of somebody who is deceased to honour their wish, if there was a wish, for this to be dealt with?

The working group also devoted a dedicated chapter in the form of statements as the mechanism for cases where records no longer exist or are insufficient. It made specific recommendations on how such statements should be sought and assessed but the Bill does not contain an equivalent provision. So, there is no express mechanism for disregarding a conviction where no records can be found. Independent persons may seek information from public bodies but there is no formal statement procedure as a substitute where a person or persons would make a formal statement but where there are no records.

There can be reasons why records cannot be found, which the Minister has spoken about himself before in relation to other matters. Is there a process where the Minister could consider

that formal statements could constitute a submission to this? He might look at that in the Seanad because I think it is probably the most important point I am going to make here as regards any amendments to this.

The review process the Minister has proposed in relation to a 28-day timeline is fine but it is different from what the review said as well.

I have a couple of final points. The working group recommended that the State apology of 2018 be reiterated on the launch of this scheme, and that individualised letters of apology from the Minister be provided to successful applicants. That is not in the Bill. Is that something the Minister would consider? It is quite an emotional issue, so I think it would be very nice. It is not a must-do but it would be a nice thing to do, in fairness, given the topic we are talking about.

The working group also recommended a fixed time limit for making applications. The Bill imposes a 24-month limitation period but I have read there that the Minister has discretion to extend that, so that is probably okay.

They are my honest contributions. There may be a couple of issues there, particularly in relation to where statements could be made in support where there is no documentation available. The Minister might consider that.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I will keep it brief because I do not want to reiterate the points that have already been made. The Minister might be able to answer me: is he still open to making amendments at the Seanad stage in regard to improving some aspects of the Bill?

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I am.

Deputy Gary Gannon: He is. I thank the Minister.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I thank the Deputies for their contributions. I will start with Deputy Ó Snodaigh. Like him and other Deputies, I should also commend people who are not Members of the Oireachtas but who really led the campaign to see this injustice righted, in particular, Karl Hayden and Kieran Rose. I commend them and acknowledge the excellent work they did.

Deputies Ó Snodaigh and Kelly have both asked why the Bill does not apply to convictions prior to 1922. As I said to Deputy Ó Snodaigh earlier on, I have a very strong view that this State does not have responsibility for convictions that were imposed when Ireland was a colony of the United Kingdom. We were not autonomous in exercising and operating our own criminal justice system. Consequently, it would be dishonest and inappropriate for us to go back and say that we have a responsibility for what happened prior to the declaration of the Irish Republic. Really, 1922 is the year that is picked because that is the time when, in effect and notwithstanding the earlier declaration of the Republic, that Irish people became responsible for their own affairs and we operated our own criminal justice system. That is the reason I made the policy decision, and got the approval of the Government, that we would not be going back into the 18th or 19th centuries and issuing pardons to people where we have no liability for what happened to them. Tone and Emmet were convicted of high treason. Are we going

to say that we, in some way, are responsible for their convictions and that consequently we could pardon them? I do not think so.

Deputy Ó Snodaigh also mentioned the court documents. The court documents are going to be extremely important. I agree with him in respect of that.

Deputy Kelly spoke about the pre-1922 convictions and I have already answered. He spoke about there not being an independent body but it is going through the Department of justice. There will obviously be independent people appointed as reviewers but I think this is the most efficient way to get it operating, acted out and achieving the objective as quickly as possible. I do not want to set up some separate statutory agency that has glossy reports, takes a year to get up and running and has PR. We just want to get this thing done and this is the best mechanism by which to do it. There is an independent process in respect of it.

I agree with Deputy Kelly about advocacy being very important. That is why we will be advertising this scheme. I know everyone in this House will co-operate in regard to making people aware of it.

Deputy Kelly also asked if I would give consideration to repeating the apology of 2018. I will consider that and listen to what Deputies and people outside have to say. However, I have to say that if you keep repeating an apology, it sometimes lessens the significance of the original apology. I thought that apology in 2018 was very significant and I do not want to take away from it.

Deputy Gannon asked if I was open to considering amendments in the Seanad. Of course I am-----

Deputy Alan Kelly: I refer to the query on statements. Will the Minister accept them if there is no record? That is most important.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Yes. It could be the case that there are no records. The scheme is flexible enough to permit statements.

Another thing the Deputy mentioned was the friend. There is a very broad definition of a "relative", which is contained in the scheme and in section 42. This is going to apply in respect of a deceased person. There are mechanisms whereby it could be considered. The person may have nominated a person who is not a relative to make the application on their behalf after they are deceased. However, legislation necessarily discriminates. You identify a group of people that you want to try to benefit. There may be hard cases at the edges and I will give consideration to that in advance of the Seanad but the primary purpose of the Bill is, I think, sound in regard to the ability of people who are living to make an application and also for persons who are nominated by them to make an application on their behalf, or the "relative" definition. It is a very broad definition of "relative" that includes grand-nephews, grand-nieces and others involved. That is why it is important to make people aware of this scheme. There are people who may not be aware that they have a great-uncle who was convicted and they could bring the application.

Deputy Gary Gannon: I did not intend to come back in but the Minister said something I profoundly disagree with. On the idea of having the cut-off at 1922 because the State should

not be responsible for what happened when it was a colony, the Minister began his contributions earlier on by talking about how he inherited this system from the UK. It is not like we radically transformed the system right afterwards. What we did was maintain it, enforce it and became part of it. The idea might be that we must have a cut-off time because we cannot be responsible for what happened when we were a colony, but we did not deviate from it one iota when we were not. In regard to how we treated people, the Minister said that we inherited the system--

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Judges were appointed by the Crown.

Deputy Gary Gannon: -----but we also maintained the system. A person who was imprisoned in 1921 for what were homosexual offences at the time would still have been in prison in 1922 or potentially in 1923.

We have become custodians of our own history. We cannot just draw a line. If the Government is not going to apologise, we can find the means by which we can honour, acknowledge, respect and say that we became complicit because it was not like we changed tack. We had this system right up until 1993, so I think we could find a way of acknowledging it. I appreciate we cannot do something about what happened when we were a colony but we can acknowledge and honour the fact that we did not deviate when we were not straight afterwards.

Amendment agreed to.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Pursuant to Standing Order 194(3), it is reported to the Dáil that the Long Title has now been amended.

Bill reported with amendments.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach Deputy Cathal Crowe: Amendment Nos. 4, 7 and 69 are related and may now be discussed together.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 4:

In page 8, line 9, after “1997,” to insert “the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005,”.

Amendment No. 69 inserts a new section into the Bill to amend Schedule 5 of the Social Welfare Consolidation Act 2005 in order to add the Courts Service to the Schedule. This will mean that the Courts Service will be a specified body for the purposes of specified provisions of the 2005 Act relating to the personal public service number, PPSN, and thereby enabled to use the PPSN where permitted in accordance with the 2005 Act.

Section 20 of the 2020 miscellaneous provisions Act, which provides an enabling basis for the transmission of documents and information by electronic means to and from courts and civil proceedings, envisaged the use of the personal public service number, PPSN, to verify the identity of persons transmitting documents and information by electronic means. This is also envisaged in court rules made pursuant to section 20. However, the 2005 Act was not consequentially amended by the 2020 Act to add the Courts Service to Schedule 5. This

amendment addresses that gap and means that the identity of relevant court users can be authenticated via the PPSN as envisaged by the 2020 Act.

Amendment No. 4 amends the Long Title consequential on the insertion of the new section. Amendment No. 7 amends section 1(4) of the Bill to provide that the amendment to the 2005 Act, along with the amendment of the Defence Act 1954 in Part 4 of the Bill - introduced on Committee Stage - will be commenced on enactment rather than by ministerial order.

I want to flag that I am considering further commencement of the Bill generally and that subject to this consideration, I may introduce amendments in the Seanad to enable other provisions in the Bill to commence on enactment rather than by ministerial order.

Deputy Pa Daly: On the family law section, I want to raise one issue with the Minister. I was the beneficiary of the criminal legal aid scheme for many years. Concerns have been expressed by people who are on the scheme. As the Minister knows, a flat fee payment is coming in from 1 July and people will only be paid at the very end, when a case finishes in court. If people appear once or if they appear 20 times, they will only be paid at the very end. There are scenarios, particularly for vulnerable people, children, and people who do not have English as a first language, where the cases go on and on, sometimes appearing 12, 15 or 20 times, and those representing them are only paid once. We saw with the family law courts, in Kerry, for example, that there are only three or four solicitors left on the scheme after the introduction of a flat fee. Will the Minister review where people appear more than five or six times, because there could be a scenario where someone represents someone eight, nine or even ten times, then the client changes solicitor, and the new solicitor could get paid for one appearance and the person who has been there eight or nine times is not paid at all? There will be learnings from it. From the family law courts, just learn that the number of people representing has gone down. Just like in family law, where it is important that people receive representation and there is access to justice, it is the same with criminal law cases.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: In fairness to Deputy Daly, it would be a bit rich of me if I objected to him raising a matter that is outside the scope of the Bill, since the Bill is so broad in any event.

Deputy Matt Carthy: It must be the only thing that is outside the scope of the Bill.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I hear what Deputy Daly says. The scheme that is being brought in on 1 July is designed to improve efficiencies in the criminal legal aid scheme and the District Court. I fully appreciate the important role played by solicitors under that scheme. I have met the Law Society and Bar Council in respect of it. The system would be greatly improved and there will still be proper payment for solicitors in the very significant work that is done in the District Court. I will take into account what the Deputy said.

Deputy Gary Gannon: On what basis is the Minister making the assumption that the scheme would be improved? Nobody else but the Minister seems to believe it. The Law Society and the Bar Council do not believe it. I have not seen any research that points to it. In fact, the evidence that those in the system would have says that we will have to develop another two-tier criminal system where those who can afford to pay will get better treatment, and because

the system is no longer not only profitable but also, realistically, workable, people will be lost from the criminal justice system.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I am conscious that we have many amendments to get through.

Deputy Mark Ward: Do not guillotine it.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: If Deputy Gannon wants to table it as a Topical Issue matter, I am happy to come in. The scheme that operates at present means that people get €260 for the first appearance and €60 for every appearance after that. That incentivises inefficiencies. Research has been completed in the Department that shows that the hearing of criminal cases in the District Court which are governed by the criminal legal aid scheme moves much more slowly than those which do not have the benefit of the criminal legal aid scheme. There are a number of anomalies, as I am sure the Deputy is aware, with certificates being granted for a whole series of offences in respect of the same person or indeed for a whole group of defendants who are effectively accused of the same type of offences and the same issue. I can assure Deputy Gannon that it needs to be reformed, but I am happy to come back to discuss it with him if he wants to table it as a Topical Issue matter.

Amendment agreed to.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Amendments Nos. 5, 6, 70 and 71 are all related and may be discussed together.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 5:

In page 8, line 11, to delete “and” and substitute “, the Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023,”.

Amendments Nos. 70 and 71 are small technical amendments to both the Family Courts Act 2024 and the Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023 that are necessary ahead of the standing up of the first family courts next year. The amendments are to fix a legislative lacuna that will otherwise arise when certain provisions of the Family Courts Act 2024 are commenced. The commencement of section 5 of the 2024 Act will repeal provisions of certain enactments, including sections 40 and 40A of the Civil Liability and Courts Act 2004, which provides for the *in camera* rule of proceedings under relevant enactments as defined in section 39 of the Act. Included in relevant enactments is section 37 of the Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023, which provides for the *in camera* rule to apply to court proceedings under sections 28 to 30 of that Act, which in turn relates to applications for civil orders where there is the fear of violence or where serious alarm or distress is being caused by a person's behaviour. When I commence sections 96 and 97 of the 2024 Act, they will replace the repeal provisions and relevant enactments will be defined in section 95 of the 2024 Act. However, section 37 of the 2023 Act has not been defined as a relevant enactment for the purposes of the 2024 Act. That is why it is therefore necessary to make these technical but important amendments to fix this lacuna.

Amendments Nos. 5 and 6 amend the Long Title, consequential on the insertion of the new sections to amend the Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act and the Family Courts Act 2024.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 6:

In page 8, line 12, after “2023” to insert “and the Family Courts Act 2024”.

Amendment agreed to.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 7:

In page 8, line 25, after “Act” to insert “(other than *Part 4* and *section 44*)”.

Amendment agreed to.

Bill recommitted in respect of amendment No. 8.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 8:

In page 8, to delete line 31 and substitute the following:

“ “Act of 2007” means the Prisons Act 2007;

“Act of 2017” means the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017;”.

Amendment agreed to.

Bill reported with amendment.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I move amendment No. 9:

In page 9, between lines 2 and 3, to insert the following:

PART 2

AMENDMENT OF POLICING, SECURITY AND COMMUNITY SAFETY ACT 2024

Amendment of Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024

4. The Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024 is amended by the insertion of the following section after section 98:

“Intimidation

98A. A person who attempts in any way to coerce or intimidate a member, or any other person, in connection with the performance by the member of his or her functions as such a member shall be guilty of an offence and shall be liable—

(a) on summary conviction, to a class A fine or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months, or to both, or

(b) on conviction on indictment, to a fine not exceeding €30,000 or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years, or to both.”.”.

We spoke about this previously and the Minister said he would look at it, so I gave him time to look at it. I did not see anything coming forward in relation to this. We are trying to ensure that if members of An Garda Síochána or their family members are intimidated in any way in the performance of their duties, this would be an offence. We know very well, given what has happened in the recent past in our jurisdiction, with the way in which gardaí and their family members have been treated, with their houses having been targeted and how, at its national conference, the GRA referred to the manner in which members of An Garda Síochána have received significant intimidation when going about their lives off duty, that their capacity to function and perform as gardaí has been affected. The Minister said that, as part of this miscellaneous Bill, which we have spoken about as so wide-ranging, that he would look at this with regard to this Stage. I am wondering if he has looked at it. I took on board what he said previously, but I resubmitted the amendment on the basis that he said he would look at it.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I did say that and I looked at it. I support the intention behind the legislation to ensure that there is legal recognition of the fact that gardaí deserve to be protected. My problem was that I need to have broader consideration of the legislative proposal in light of other legislation that exists at present. For instance, one of the things that was brought to my attention was that section 19 of the public order Act provides substantive protections for members of An Garda Síochána and other peace officers such as prison officers and members of the fire brigade in the execution of their respective duties. If I am going to introduce this provision, I am going to have to think of what the response will be from those other emergency workers or people who are involved in the prison service or fire brigade. Section 91 of the 1994 Act provides that any person who assaults or threatens to assault a peace officer, including a member of An Garda Síochána, is guilty of an offence.

There are very significant penalties there. On summary conviction a fine not exceeding €5,000 or a term of imprisonment of 12 months and on indictment to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 years or both or a fine at the discretion of the court. It is an issue I am worried about. I cannot just put it in now because I need to consider the impact on other workers and groups but I will give the Deputy the commitment that I will give further consideration to it. I know he will not be hesitant about bringing this forward again. It is something I am aware of. The mischief is there where some people are becoming increasingly aggressive to An Garda Síochána notwithstanding the fact that we all know the overwhelming majority of Irish people are very supportive of the Garda. I cannot accept the amendment at this Stage. I would need to give it more consideration, I am afraid, but I will not run away from it in the future.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I take the Minister's word for it. I will pursue this issue. I honestly believe we need to reach another bar not only when it comes to gardaí but all uniformed personnel. I am thinking of the intimidation of uniformed personnel in this country and the manner in which they are being treated, including off duty, and the way in which their families and homes are potentially targeted. We have reached a different threshold in relation to this issue in this country and we need to deal with it. There needs to be respect. The people who wear the uniforms obviously need to have respect as well and the great majority do. I am bringing this forward because I believe there is a need for it and the GRA has asked for it.

In conjunction with that, in order to protect An Garda Síochána, we also need to bring in legislation for pursuit and offences for pursuit where gardaí are being prosecuted on their own licences on the basis of pursuits. In some cases that is really wrong.

On the basis of what the Minister said, that he will bring something forward, I will withdraw the amendment. If he does not I will and I hope he will support it.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Amendment No. 10, in the name of Deputy Kelly, has been deemed out of order.

Amendment No. 10 not moved.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I move amendment No. 11:

In page 9, between lines 2 and 3, to insert the following:

“PART 2

AMENDMENT OF NON-FATAL OFFENCES AGAINST THE PERSON ACT 1997

Amendment of Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act 1997

4.The Non-Fatal Offences against the Person Act 1997 is amended by the insertion of the following section:

“Obstructing free movement of member of House of Oireachtas

9A.A person who, by violent means or any form of intimidation and without lawful authority, obstructs or impedes the freedom of movement to or from any place of a member of either House of the Oireachtas is guilty of an offence and is liable—

(a) on summary conviction to a class A fine or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 12 months or to both, or

(b) on conviction on indictment to a fine or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 5 years or to both.”.”.

This relates to the Non-Fatal Offences Against the Person Act 1997. It inserts a provision which relates to every one of us in the Dáil as well as Ministers and Senators. It relates to the obstruction of the free movement of Members of Houses of the Oireachtas. This is particularly pertinent because societally everything has changed. There has been numerous cases where people in this House have not been able to go about their business. We all know there are constitutional protections in relation to access to and from Dáil Éireann but there are also cases where Members of this House, including members of the Government in recent times, have been restricted in their movements for a period of time and the manner by which some people dealt with them was far from acceptable and An Garda Síochána may not have been available at the time.

This amendment makes it an offence to deliberately, and for an ongoing period, obstruct free movement of Members of the Houses of Oireachtas so that a person who, by violent means

or any form of intimidation and without lawful authority, obstructs or impedes the freedom of movement to or from any place of a member of either House of the Oireachtas is guilty of an offence. I can guess the Minister's response will be that this will also need broader consideration but my party and I believe that we need to look broadly at how we will ensure that people who are elected to these Houses can go about their business as representatives of the people of this country, while respecting protest, without being intimidated or unlawfully dealt with or violently threatened in any way, shape or form.

Deputy Matt Carthy: Unfortunately because of the way the Minister has framed this debate, a 90-minute debate is just not enough. It is not fair because there have already been lots of amendments which Deputies would have wished to speak for.

I want to put on the record that I do not support Deputy Kelly's amendment. Anybody who is preventing others by unlawful means, whether by obstructing them or impeding their freedom of movement, should be held to account before the law. It should not matter whether the person who is being impeded is a Member of the Oireachtas or not. I do not believe that in a republic you provide particular privileges to Members of the Houses. The Constitution has provision which protects unimpeded access to this House in order to fulfil our constitutional duties and I think it would send out the wrong signal if the Oireachtas was to pass legislation protecting Members of the Houses and not others.

Returning to my point about time, this debate started 40 minutes ago. We have only 90 minutes to deal with a wide range of areas. I do not know if it is in order but will the Minister propose an amendment to the Order of Business to extend this debate to ensure that particularly the debate we all want to have on counselling notes will have sufficient time?

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: I ask Deputy Kelly to withdraw this amendment for a number of reasons. We are giving out about things being added onto this Bill. Here is another important issue being added on at this Stage.

I do not agree with the amendment. As much of a nuisance as it is going in and out of this Dáil on many an occasion, I do not agree we should curb civil liberties and the right to protest late at night without proper discussion in this Dáil. This would introduce something that would remove any form of intimidation which can be interpreted in lots of ways.

We are here in a disgraceful situation - and it is not the Deputy's fault, it is the Minister's fault - where there are survivors of sexual and gender-based violence in the Gallery tonight. They have been campaigning for a year and have spoken to the justice committee. I was told by the Taoiseach earlier today that they would have their issues heard. He said extra time had been added on but it added on extra time to other issues but not this issue. There are very important issues under discussion here, and I am not blaming any Deputy for raising them, but we are going to be in a situation that, unless the Minister agrees now to extend this debate, survivors will leave this Chamber with this Bill rammed through without any of their amendments heard, without the Rape Crisis Centre's amendments heard and lots of other issues. I think that is an absolute shame and it would send a horrifically bad message out about how this Government treats the issue of gender-based violence. I need to jump in now and support the call for the Order of Business to be changed. This is an absolute disgrace. I have never seen anything like it in my years in the Dáil.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): The Deputy has made her point. We have to try to speak to the amendment but I hear what she has said.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I am not supportive of Deputy Kelly's amendment. I do not find it frequently the case that my access or the access of many colleagues coming in and out of the Houses of the Oireachtas is blocked. I do not recall ever being blocked coming in or out. I suppose the purpose of it is to say we do not tolerate intimidation of elected Members of the Oireachtas and I think that is valid.

It is important to point out that I am aware that since October 2022, there have been approximately ten convictions of people for intimidation or violence against Members of the Oireachtas or people associated with it. We all know the case involving the Tánaiste, there was a case in respect of the Taoiseach and one in respect of Deputy McDonald. If people start intimidating politicians online the law is there to meet them and if people start to intimidate or harass politicians, or anyone else, physically the law is there and the law is responding to it fairly vigorously. The laws in place are sufficient to ensure that happens.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Does the Deputy wish to press the amendment?

Deputy Alan Kelly: I will save time.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Bill recommitted in respect of amendments No. 12.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I move amendment No. 12:

In page 10, line 38, to delete "Prisons Act 2007" and substitute "Act of 2007".

Amendment agreed to.

Bill reported with amendment.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Amendments Nos. 13 and 14 are related and may be discussed together.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I move amendment No. 13:

In page 14, to delete lines 25 to 40, and in page 15, to delete lines 1 and 2.

This amendment seeks to delete lines 25 to 40. Back in April at the height of what are now called the fuel protests, the Minister added fuel to a volatile situation. He essentially called for the Defence Forces to be deployed to assist gardaí in removing fuel protest blockades. It was a serious escalation and provocation at a time when the Government should have been focusing, and all Ministers, particularly the Minister for justice, should have been focusing on de-escalating the protests. We then had a situation a few weeks later. Out of the blue there were amendments brought forward by the Minister for Defence, added to the Minister for justice, to expand the deployment of Defence Forces under aid to civil power. There has been no

explanation as to what happened to bring this situation about. When the Minister for Defence was before the justice committee on Committee Stage, she was completely evasive or ignorant. She was certainly unable to answer specific questions on why now and what additionality would be allowed or provided to the Defence Forces that is currently not provided in law. We do not know where the impetus to make these changes came from at this time, and why they are being made in such a rushed manner as part of a miscellaneous Bill, which as we have already discussed, covers a huge range of unrelated matters.

We have been clear in Sinn Féin. There are issues, particularly regarding our naval services, contained in these measures that we fully support. We support the concept in principle of aid to civil power. However, we also believe there has to be utmost accountability and transparency. There are serious concerns about what the Government and the justice and Defence Ministers are bringing forward and why they are doing it in the manner they are. The provisions on aid to civil power raise serious questions as to whether the Government, in an underhand way, is trying to amend the law so it can become common practice for the Defence Forces to be used for the policing of protests. We know An Garda Síochána is the primary civilian policing authority, and any Defence Forces support has to remain exceptional, timebound and tightly controlled. Amendment No. 13 proposes the deletion of the provision in the Bill regarding aid to civil power. If those powers are needed, let us deal with them where they should be dealt with as part of a defence Bill where there can be proper scrutiny by the sectoral committee responsible for that and proper analysis of what exactly the Government is proposing and why. The Government should tell the Minister for Defence to bring forward a Bill that deals with that.

Amendment No. 14 would require an annual report and review of these sections in the event that the Government refuses to accept amendment No. 13, to allow a bit of democratic scrutiny of something that is crucially important. It deals with the policing of protests and many other areas. There are huge concerns about this provision. It is not so much what is in the provision as why it has been brought forward in the manner it has been.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I was at the committee hearing as well, as was Deputy Carthy. He got a straight answer from the Minister for Defence when she told him that these proposals were put before the Government before any fuel protest. His suggestion that there is an attempt to link them is completely untenable. I will deal promptly with this because, like others, I want to get to the counselling notes amendment, which is amendment No. 17. I am not going to accept amendments Nos. 13 and 14. I think it is appropriate that the legislation should make express provision for the long-standing role of the Defence Forces when they assist the gardaí. I think that aid to civil power role is better off being set out on a statutory basis.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I ask the Minister not to be disingenuous by talking about wanting to get to the counselling notes issue. He has been asked by two Members to ask the Chief Whip to come in to amend the Order of Business to give more time. I have decided against every instinct in my body not to call a vote on this amendment, which I think it is crucially important. The reason I am not going to call a vote is because of the people in the Gallery and their right to hear this House discuss a matter of utmost importance that has come about as a result of them telling us their personal testimonies. I ask the Minister not to be so disingenuous. However, I will be calling a final vote on this Bill, and I will be voting against it. The primary

reasons for that vote will be the manner in which this has been brought forward; the Minister's entire attitude towards this debate; and his decision - it was the Minister's decision - to curtail this entire debate. There is a myriad of measures involved here, with new provisions added at the last minute to a 90-minute debate.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Matt Carthy: I move amendment No. 14:

In page 15, between lines 17 and 18, to insert the following:

“Review and annual reporting on operation of Part IIIA

40D.(1) The Minister shall, in respect of each calendar year, carry out a review of the operation of this Part.

(2) A review under subsection (1) shall include an assessment of the exercise of powers under sections 40A, 40B and 40C, including the frequency and circumstances of their use.

(3) The Minister shall, as soon as practicable after the completion of a review under subsection (1), prepare and publish a report containing anonymised data relating to—

(a) the number of occasions on which powers under sections 40A, 40B and 40C were exercised,

(b) the general nature of the operations or deployments concerned,

(c) the use of force in the exercise of those powers, and

(d) any other information the Minister considers appropriate for ensuring transparency in the operation of this Part.

(4) The Minister shall cause a copy of a report under this section to be laid before each House of the Oireachtas as soon as practicable after its publication.”.”.

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Amendments Nos. 15 and 16 are related and may be discussed together.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 15:

In page 17, line 33, to delete “paragraph” where it firstly occurs and substitute “paragraphs”.

I will again be brief because I want to get to the next section, which is really important. This section is also important. Amendments Nos. 15 and 16 were proposed by a group of academic researchers and experts in probation services. Most of them gave their time to the joint committee as witnesses. They are experts in community sanctions, judicial attitudes, sentences and use of research and evidence in criminal justice policy. I know they sent these amendments to the Minister. I withdrew them on Committee Stage because he said he would consider bringing something forward himself. I will not argue the rest of the case. I want to hear if the

Minister has considered bringing forward similar amendments. If he has not, what is the reason for not doing so?

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: I considered it, and my concern is that the proposed amendment is seeking to merge and align community service and probation. The Deputy knows they are different statutory regimes. The Probation of Offenders Act deals with a court being able to dispose of a summary offence either by dismissing the charge or by discharging the offender conditionally. Obviously, community service is something different. Having given it consideration, I thought the way the amendment was drafted was merging those two schemes inappropriately. They are distinct. I identify the objective of what the Deputy is doing, and I have no difficulty working with him in the future on proposals to ensure we have schemes in place in respect of community service and community sanctions. The Deputy also knows there are a lot of provisions in this Bill that deal with that, but I cannot accept the amendment.

Deputy Mark Ward: It is ironic that the Minister is talking about merging Acts. He has merged a whole panoply of issues into one Bill here. I listened to the previous debate, and he wanted to squash everything in. I am sure there was a way to get this done. I will bring something forward on this again in my own time, probably as Private Members' business.

Amendment put and declared lost.

Deputy Mark Ward: I move amendment No. 16:

In page 18, between lines 3 and 4, to insert the following:

“(ab) Where a court, by or before which an offender stands convicted, is of opinion that the appropriate sentence in respect of the offence of which the offender is convicted would, but for this Act, be one of imprisonment for a period of 24 months or less, and where, having considered in accordance with subsection (3) whether to make a community service order, decides not to make such an order, the court shall, as an alternative to that sentence, consider whether to make a probation order in respect of the offender and the court may, if satisfied, in relation to the offender, that such an order is appropriate, make a probation order in accordance with this section.

(ac) Where a court, having considered in accordance with paragraph (a) whether to make a probation order, decides not to make such an order, it shall give reasons for its decision.”,

Amendment put and declared lost.

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): Amendments Nos. 17 to 20, inclusive, 22 to 26, inclusive, and 65 are related and may be discussed together. Amendments Nos. 18 to 20, exclusive, are physical alternatives to amendment No. 17. Amendments Nos. 19 and 20 are physical alternatives to amendment No. 18. Amendment No. 20 is a physical alternative to amendment No. 19. Amendment No. 65 is consequential on amendment No. 20.

Deputy Alan Kelly: I move amendment No. 17:

In page 18, to delete lines 31 to 35, to delete pages 19 to 22, and in page 23, to delete lines 1 to 18 and substitute the following:

“Amendment of section 19A of Criminal Evidence Act 1992

16.(1) The Criminal Evidence Act 1992 is amended by the substitution of the following section for section 19A:

“Disclosure of third-party records in certain trials

19A.(1) In this section—

‘Act of 1950’ means the Nurses Act 1950;

‘Act of 1985’ means the Nurses Act 1985;

‘Act of 1995’ means the Civil Legal Aid Act 1995;

‘Act of 2005’ means the Health and Social Care Professionals Act 2005;

‘Act of 2011’ means the Nurses and Midwives Act 2011;

‘applicable record’, in relation to criminal proceedings for a sexual offence, means a child protection record, a counselling record, a medical record or a social work record—

(a) in relation to which there is a reasonable expectation of privacy,

(b) which was not compiled for the purposes of, or in contemplation of, the investigation into, or the prosecution of, the sexual offence concerned, and

(c) whether or not the service the subject of the record was provided for remuneration;

‘child protection’ means an intervention or a series of interventions designed to safeguard children from abuse, neglect, violence, exploitation or harm and to promote their safety, wellbeing and rights;

‘child protection professional’ means a person who has undertaken training or study resulting in a qualification, or who has professional experience, relevant to child protection;

‘child protection record’ means any record, or part of a record, made by any means, by a person who was a child protection professional at the time of the making of the record, in the course of investigating or managing concerns, or carrying out assessments or interventions, in relation to the safety, welfare, or protection of a complainant when the complainant was a child;

‘competent person’ means a person who has undertaken training or study or has experience relevant to the process of counselling;

‘complainant’ means a person in respect of whom a sexual offence is alleged to have been committed;

‘counselling’ means listening to and giving verbal or other support or encouragement to a person, or advising or providing therapy or other treatment to a person;

‘counselling record’ means any record, or part of a record, made by any means, by a competent person in connection with the provision of counselling to a complainant;

‘court’ means the District Court, Circuit Criminal Court or the Central Criminal Court;

‘disclosure application’ has the meaning assigned to it by subsection (2);

‘medical professional’ means—

- (a) a registered medical practitioner,
- (b) a registered nurse, or
- (c) a registered midwife;

‘medical record’ means any record, or part of a record, made by any means, relating to the medical treatment of a complainant by, or ordered or initiated by, a person who was a medical professional at the time of the making of the record;

‘registered medical practitioner’, in relation to a particular point in time, means a person—

- (a) who was a registered medical practitioner within the meaning of section 2 of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007,
- (b) whose name was entered in the General Register of Medical Practitioners established under section 26 of the Medical Practitioners Act 1978, or
- (c) who was registered in the Register of Medical Practitioners prepared and established under the Medical Practitioners Act 1927,

at that point in time;

‘registered midwife’, in relation to a particular point in time, means a person whose name was entered in—

- (a) the midwives division of the register of nurses and midwives established under section 46(1) of the Act of 2011,
- (b) the midwives division of the register of nurses established under section 27 of the Act of 1985, or
- (c) the midwives division of the register of nurses maintained under section 41 of the Act of 1950,

at that point in time;

‘registered nurse’, in relation to a particular point in time, means a person—

- (a) whose name was entered in the nurses division of the register of nurses and midwives established under section 46(1) of the Act of 2011,
- (b) other than a registered midwife, whose name was entered in the register of nurses established under section 27 of the Act of 1985,
- (c) other than a registered midwife, whose name was entered in the register of nurses maintained under section 41 of the Act of 1950, or
- (d) who was registered in the register kept in pursuance of the Nurses Registration (Ireland) Act 1919,

at that point in time;

‘sexual offence’ means an offence referred to in the Schedule to the Sex Offenders Act 2001;

‘social care worker’—

- (a) in relation to a particular point in time prior to the establishment under section 36 of the Act of 2005 of the register of members of the profession of social care worker, means a person who was practising as such and who held a qualification that is listed opposite the profession of social care worker in the third column of Schedule 3 to the Act of 2005 or a qualification that is a corresponding qualification, within the meaning of Part 9 of that Act, to that qualification, or
- (b) in relation to a particular point in time following the establishment of that register, means a person whose name was entered in that register,

at that point in time;

‘social worker’—

- (a) in relation to a particular point in time prior to the establishment under section 36 of the Act of 2005 of the register of members of the profession of social worker, means a person who was practising as such and who held a qualification that is listed opposite the profession of social worker in the third column of Schedule 3 to the Act of 2005 or a qualification that is a corresponding qualification, within the meaning of Part 9 of that Act, to that qualification, or
- (b) in relation to a particular point in time following the establishment of that register, means a person whose name was entered in that register,

at that point in time;

‘social work record’ means any record, or part of a record, made by any means, by a person who was a social worker or social care worker at the time of the making of the record, as part of a professional practice relating to

assessing or supporting the welfare of a complainant or any related intervention by the social worker or social care worker.

(2) There shall be a presumption against the disclosure of all applicable records. The presumption against disclosure may only be rebutted in accordance with subsection (11) and (12), furthermore—

(a) applicable records may not be disclosed to the accused in proceedings for a sexual offence without the leave of the court in accordance with this section, and

(b) no one shall request access to a counselling record nor shall a counselling record be disclosed to the prosecutor or to the accused in proceedings for a sexual offence without the leave of the court in accordance with this section.

(3) Where, in criminal proceedings for a sexual offence, the prosecutor or the accused is of the opinion that an applicable record ought to be disclosed to the accused under subsection (11), the prosecutor or the accused, as the case may be, shall make an application (in this section referred to as a ‘disclosure application’), in writing, to the court setting out—

(a) the specific applicable record sought, or particulars identifying same,

(b) cogent reasons for seeking the applicable record which engage with the facts of the case, and

(c) the grounds relied upon to establish that it is likely to be relevant to an issue at trial.

(4) A disclosure application under subsection (2) must be made within 28 days of service of the book of evidence (or the service of a précis of evidence in the District Court) and must be made on notice to the prosecutor or accused, as applicable.

(5) Where a disclosure application is made under subsection (3), the court shall consider the application and where it is satisfied that the grounds relied upon in the application—

(a) establish that the record is likely to be relevant to an issue at trial, the court shall order that a hearing referred to in subsection (8) be held, or

(b) do not establish that the record is likely to be relevant to an issue at trial, the court shall refuse the application.

(6) Where the court orders, under subsection (5)(a), that a hearing referred to in subsection (8) be held—

(a) the court may order that the person who has possession or control of the applicable record concerned shall produce the record to the prosecutor not later than the beginning of such period in advance of the hearing as may be prescribed in rules of court but the court may not make such an order in respect of counselling records,

(b) the court may order that the person who has possession or control of the applicable record concerned, including a counselling record, shall produce the applicable record to the court only, in a confidential manner as prescribed in rules of court, and not later than the beginning of such period in advance of the hearing as may be prescribed in rules of court, and

(c) without prejudice to subsection (7), the prosecutor shall, not later than the beginning of such period as may be prescribed in rules of court, notify the person who has possession or control of the applicable record concerned, the complainant, and any other person to whom the prosecutor believes the applicable record relates of the order of the court under subsection (5)(a) and, where applicable, paragraphs (a) and (b).

(7) The court may, at any time, order that a disclosure application be notified to any person to whom it believes the applicable record may relate.

(8) The court shall hold a hearing to determine whether the content of the applicable record should be disclosed to the accused.

(9) The person who has possession or control of the applicable record, the complainant and any other person to whom the applicable record relates shall be entitled to appear and be heard at the hearing referred to in subsection (8).

(10) In determining, at the hearing referred to in subsection (8), whether the content of the applicable record should be disclosed to the accused under subsection (11), the court shall take the following factors, in particular, into account:

(a) the extent to which the record is necessary for the accused to defend the charges against him or her;

(b) the probative value of the record;

(c) the reasonable expectation of privacy with respect to the record;

(d) the potential prejudice to the right to privacy of any person to whom the record relates;

(e) the public interest in encouraging the reporting of sexual offences;

(f) the public interest in encouraging complainants of sexual offences to engage with the provision of services by a child protection professional, a competent person, a medical professional, a social care worker or a social worker;

(g) the effect of the determination on the integrity of the trial process;

(h) the likelihood that disclosing, or requiring the disclosure of, the record will cause harm to the complainant including the nature and extent of that harm;

(i) whether disclosure of the applicable records is sought on the basis of a discriminatory belief or basis.

(11) Subject to subsections (12), (13) and (14), a court shall not, after the hearing referred to in subsection (8), order disclosure of the content of the applicable record concerned to the accused, and where applicable, the prosecutor, unless the court is satisfied, having examined the record, that—

- (a) the record is likely to be relevant to an issue at trial,
- (b) the information contained in the record cannot reasonably be obtained by any other means, and
- (c) one or both of the following apply:
 - (i) there would be a real risk of an unfair trial in the absence of such disclosure;
 - (ii) it is otherwise in the interests of justice to so order.

(12) The Court shall not order disclosure of the content of a counselling record to the accused, and where applicable, the prosecutor, unless the court is satisfied, having examined the record, that the information contained in the record cannot reasonably be obtained by any other means and there would be a real risk of an unfair trial in the absence of such disclosure.

(13) The provisions within this section are mandatory. However, a complainant may, either in response to an application under this section or of their own motion through their own legal representation, indicate their consent to the disclosure of an applicable record to the court. Such consent should be fully-informed, based on legal advice and should be given directly to the court. In the event that a complainant wishes to provide their consent of their own motion, such application should be made on notice to the prosecutor and the accused within 28 days of service of the book of evidence or the précis of evidence as the case may be.

(14) (a) Where an order is made pursuant to subsection (11), (12) or (13), in the interests of justice and to protect the right to privacy of any person to whom the applicable record relates, the court shall only grant disclosure of such specific material as is strictly necessary and the court may impose any condition it considers necessary on the disclosure of the record.

(b) Without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (a), one or more of the following conditions may be included in an order made pursuant to subsection (11), (12) or (13)—

- (i) that a part of the content of the applicable record be redacted,
- (ii) that a copy of the applicable record and not the original be disclosed,
- (iii) that the applicable record be viewed only at the offices of the court,
- (iv) that no copies, or only a limited number of copies, of the applicable record, be made,

(v) that information concerning the address, telephone number or place of employment of any person named in the applicable record be redacted from the record, or

(vi) that the applicable record be returned to the person who owns or controls the said record.

(c) An applicable record that is disclosed to the accused pursuant to subsection (11), (12) or (13) must only be used for the purposes of the criminal proceedings for which the record has been disclosed and may not be disclosed to any person without leave of the court.

(15) The court shall provide reasons for ordering, or refusing to order, disclosure of the content of an applicable record pursuant to subsection (11) or (12).

(16) Where, upon application by the accused, the court considers that the interests of justice require the making of a disclosure application after the period permitted in subsection (3), the court may direct that such an application may be made.

(17) For the purposes of a hearing pursuant to subsection (8), all persons, other than officers of the court, persons directly concerned in the hearing and such other persons (if any) as the court may determine, shall be excluded from the court during the hearing.

(18) In addition to the meaning assigned to that expression by section 27 of the Act of 1995, 'legal aid' in that Act means representation by a solicitor or barrister, engaged by the Legal Aid Board under section 11 of that Act, on behalf of a complainant or witness in relation to an application pursuant to this section.

(19) Where any applicable record or counselling record containing opinion, interpretation, or third-party summaries is admitted in evidence, the judge shall issue a warning to the jury that such material is indirect, interpretive, may contain factual errors and should not be treated as a verbatim account of the complainant's words or actions in particular where the complainant did not have any opportunity to review or correct such contents.

(20) The Minister shall, within 18 months of the commencement of this section, conduct a review of its operation and lay a report of that review before both Houses of the Oireachtas."."

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: How much time is left?

An Cathaoirleach Gníomhach (Deputy Cathal Crowe): There are 26 minutes left.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: Okay.

Deputy Alan Kelly: We should be spending hours discussing this instead of 26 minutes. I am not going to take up all the time because I have spoken on this at length in the committee.

On behalf of the Labour Party, I am putting forward an amendment drafted by Lorcan Staines SC for the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. It proposes a compromise to deal with this highly sensitive issue. Our justice committee had harrowing, very upsetting and detailed evidence given to us directly. Many of us in that portfolio will also have heard about it personally. There is a pendulum here that we have to deal with. We must consider the constitutionality of what we are trying to achieve. I respect that. However, we must also push it as far as we possibly can. That is what this amendment tries to do. When it comes to the actual detail, it is a question of the independent review panel and what is being proposed in the legislation versus the phrase the Minister has introduced, "in the interests of justice", which moved the pendulum. That is where the debate was the last day. We are back here without any change so I have submitted the amendment again.

In spirit, all of us, whether in government or opposition, are of the one mind as to how we need to deal with this. Counselling notes should not be used. It is as simple as that. As legislators, we need to ensure we deal with the issue in a manner that meets constitutional, legal and technical requirements. I am definitely not going to go through it in the same level of detail as I did on Committee Stage, but it is proposed that panel members would create a narrative and that there would be limitations on the information provided in that narrative. That is the format by which we should deal with counselling notes. As a consequence, victims would not be retraumatised and counsellors would be protected. That is what I am trying to achieve. That is what the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre and the Labour Party are trying to achieve. It is why we spent so much time supporting this, speaking on it and voting on it on Committee Stage.

I believe there is spiritual support for this within the Minister's own party and within the Government. We believe this extends to the limits of what is achievable constitutionally. It would address the issue of how to deal with counselling notes. It would also ensure that victims are protected. It meets all of the requirements we need to meet within the limitations of what we can do constitutionally. That is why I have pushed the amendment forward again. At this late hour, I ask the Minister to reconsider this and to look at it again because, as I said on Committee Stage, I do not think anybody is going to be happy with the way the Bill is currently drafted by Government. Even if they are willing to walk through and vote for it, I do not think the Minister's own Government colleagues will be happy. As an Opposition Member, I am trying to create a compromise and to ensure we have something we can all support.

Deputy Matt Carthy: It seems a long time ago that the justice committee considered the heads of this criminal and civil law Bill. A lot more heads have been introduced since. One of our criticisms of the heads of the Bill was that there were huge aspects of the Bill we were not able to spend any time on. We did not get to deal with the sex-for-rent provisions and a whole load of other areas at all. We could only deal with written submissions. We discussed this aspect of the Bill quite a lot, however. There was cross-party agreement. The Minister will know that pre-legislative scrutiny reports sometimes get nodded through and that sometimes somebody proposes something without others realising. This was a considered debate and discussion and all members of that committee agreed that there should be a complete and unconditional ban on the use of counselling records in sexual offence trials.

We all have a responsibility in this area but, as Chairperson of that committee, I feel a particular responsibility to bring forward and stay true to that position and to outline how that decision was come to. Crucial to reaching that decision was listening to what victims and

survivors had to say both through written testimony - there was quite extensive written testimony - and through oral evidence from organisations that have first-hand experience. I will particularly mention Hazel Behan, who addressed the committee and made a profound impact on all of us, leading to the position being agreed.

Survivors have strongly asserted and told us that the practice of their counselling notes being used in criminal trials, potentially in defence of the person who attacked them, causes severe psychological harm and heightens suicide risk. That is the evidence we heard. I have not heard a single person disagree with the need to protect the right to a fair trial, but we also have a duty to victims and survivors. We must also keep that duty at the heart of our justice system. That includes not subjecting victims and survivors to degrading treatment. That is what this is. It is degrading treatment if a person discusses their most personal, intimate details with a professional only for that professional's notes, however elaborate or otherwise, to be demanded by the courts, the purveyors of justice in this State, to be used to defend the person who was the reason that person needed counselling in the first place. It is absolute lunacy.

Banning the disclosure of counselling notes is about recognising that they are hearsay evidence. It is about rebalancing our justice system so that there is not only a fair trial but a fair justice system for victims and survivors. The amendment I have put forward, No. 18, provides for a full ban on the disclosure of counselling notes, because that is what is needed. We have discussed it at length. We have heard from victims and survivors. We have heard about the trauma of intimate details being shared.

I will also speak briefly to amendment No. 24, which seeks to remove the Minister's wording "in the interests of justice". Again, we discussed this in quite a lot of detail on Committee Stage. Above all else, that amendment to the original Bill brought forward by the Minister is the cause of concern. We all know that solicitors and barristers are going to have an absolute field day discussing that wording. We know that term will allow some defence attorneys to secure the counselling notes of some victims. That is why we have brought forward that amendment.

Amendment No. 25 is the last resort. It was submitted on the advice of Rape Crisis Ireland. It proposes that, in the event of these types of notes being brought forward, there would be a very clear instruction to jurors that they are hearsay evidence. I hope that would dissuade some defence counsel from seeking them in the first place. However, what is actually needed is that full and unconditional ban. That is what the Oireachtas committee recommended.

10 o'clock

That is our job. We are tasked with analysing the heads of the Bill and bringing forward recommendations to the Minister. I express my sincere thanks for those people who have told their stories. I have mentioned this before. In order to save others from the trauma that they have gone through, they have told the world their most intimate details. They have gone beyond the counselling room to try to make that a safe place for others. I thank all of those, including some of them who are in the Gallery and many others whom I have had the privilege of meeting. I acknowledge and recognise Deputy Coppinger's effort throughout all of this. I say this to my shame, but the first time that I became aware that this was an issue was when Deputy Coppinger brought a Private Members' Bill before this House. It is not too often on a Thursday late evening debate that you are moved by an issue, but I was moved by an issue.

The argument appeared unassailable then and it is still unassailable as far as I am concerned. Even at this late stage, and we have the Stages in the Seanad and all of the rest of it, I implore the Minister to find a way to make all of those efforts worthwhile and find a way to ban a cruel and inhumane practice.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: How much time have we got left?

An Ceann Comhairle: Fifteen minutes.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: There are other Deputies who wish to speak.

An Ceann Comhairle: There are two more Deputies if Deputy Coppinger wishes to go ahead.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: The situation is disgraceful that we are in. We are rushing and rushing on very important things. Everybody has already raised, including Deputy Carthy and others, about how important this issue was to the justice committee. This should not be happening. It is disgraceful. I have not seen a Bill being pushed through with so many different things in it in this way at this time. It could have been extended. I have been here for other debates that went on for much longer.

I acknowledge the survivors who are in the Gallery tonight, including Hazel Bean, Paula Doyle and Sophie Brady. Hazel and Paula in particular have been campaigning on this. Telling the story does not do justice. They have campaigned in a real way in so many different forums. Paula, for example, was recognised by the Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. Hazel testified to the justice committee but has campaigned and organised protests, photo stunts, press conferences and so on. Sophie, I hope she does not mind me saying, has not attended therapy because this law exists. That is shocking and disgraceful that a young woman cannot avail of something because of how it might be used against her in trial. People are having to choose between trial or therapy. Unfortunately, with the changes that Minister proposes, that still exists because the chilling effect is still there.

I wish to mention people who are not here and many who have been here before and packed out the Gallery: Lisa Marie, another survivor who has done a huge amount of work on this, and in particular, a therapist, Bairbre Kelly, who has paved the way in raising this in the professional bodies. Therapists and psychologists right until today have made a statement that the Minister's changes do not go far enough and he has not dealt with the issue at all. There are three options in front of us tonight but we do not have adequate time to debate them. There is the Minister's option, there is a total ban as advocated in my motion and another Sinn Féin motion, and then there are attempts by pretty much all of us to mitigate the damage that the Minister's proposal is still inflicting on complainants by asking the Minister to do what he promised to do, which is to put in a presumption of non-disclosure written into the law to make it much stronger. All the survivors have asked for that if the Bill is not going to ban it totally. There should be warnings issued by judges. Therapy is not evidence and these notes should have a massive health warning in any trial.

I want to deal with some of the issues. The Minister launched the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre's annual report which showed a massive increase in calls. All of the service organisations say the same. They are people who have made contact, but there are so many people who do not report anything, do not talk to anybody and do not pursue a legal case. One of the reasons is because of this type of situation that is hostile, intimidating and retraumatising and where their own personal thoughts can be used against them by the person who did the most horrific crime to them. There is no doubt about it that character references are another major problem. Nearly every survivor has come out from court and named this as being something that should be changed.

In Tasmania, which is an Australian state, they have a total ban where the complainant must give their consent. That is another thing that the Minister is removing with his proposal. We all that there was a problem with the waiver, but he is taking away agency completely. He is taking away the right to say "No" to having a complainant's notes being handed over. He is passing it directly over to a judge who, by the way, is not trained in analysing therapy notes, how therapy works - the fluid way that it works - and the way people can potentially say things that could be seized upon. He is also not introducing very high bars. I will run through some of the key things that the proposal does not deal with. The explicit presumption of non-disclosure should have been written in. The Bill does not require the accused to engage with the facts of the case at application stage. It is very loose to have that it might be relevant to an issue in the case. The Minister has put in a real risk of an unfair trial, but then has watered it down with this huge proposal of in the interests of justice, which any decent lawyer is going to argue exists. He continues the violating practice of raw counselling records and notes being handed to teams of lawyers and the accused. The Minister could have put huge barriers in the way. He promised to do that, but it is still not done. The system he is bringing in seems to mirror the Canadian model, a system whereby there is a mandatory hearing for every single case. That is currently being reformed due to the damage that it has been found to have done to survivors.

It is worth mentioning, and it is just a statement of fact - I am not going to comment on the trial as I do not want to impinge on the outcome of it - that counselling notes have been used in the Donaldson trial in the North. That just speaks to how these notes are being used all the time. I obviously cannot say too much more about it; I do not want to effect it in any way. How damaging that is for any complainant who might be a victim of child sexual abuse is unbelievable. The Minister says a total ban is impossible. I believe there are other contending rights. Let us look at having a referendum in this country because we cannot continue to have a system that traumatises survivors.

Deputy Paula Butterly: Like everybody else in this House, I would have had loved to have plenty of time to speak to my amendment, which is No. 20. Out of respect to Deputy Gannon, who I presume is going to want to speak on this, I am going to be quite brief and to try to contain myself to two minutes. Amendment No. 20 very much reflects Deputy Kelly's amendment, which was also reflective of my thoughts on counselling notes right from the very outset. It also reflects the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre. It essentially is looking for a halfway house on what the Minister has proposed and what we would like to see. We have accepted that a total ban on counselling notes is not possible. We are asking, urging and pleading with the Minister to please reconsider. Let us have a look at it again. Let us have amendments

brought to the Seanad where we will have an expressed presumption of non-disclosure. We cannot continue to put women through this again and again.

The standard or bar must be very high. If we do not have this, we are just going to go around in circles again and again and we will be arguing, like lawyers do, on the head of a pin. We will find ways, if it is not express, clear and unambiguous, to work around this so it has to have an express presumption of non-disclosure. If not, all we have is a flood of applications coming into the courts which will clog the system and be costly to the system and ultimately, it will have no regard for the alleged victims.

I would also like the Minister to consider what we consider to be the relevant tests for this. Necessity and probative values are important but most importantly, no judge should issue a disclosure order unless he or she believes that there is a real risk of an unfair trial without disclosure. I am rushing, if not galloping, through this because I am very conscious of time. I would like the Minister to take amendment No. 20 in its entirety. It also talks about a timeline after the book of evidence so that these applications happen at the beginning of the process, not nearly towards the end or a day or two before a trial begins. I would like the Minister to look at that. I would also like him to include the District Court when considering the courts that can have the applications.

Deputy Gary Gannon: There is not a lot of time left. This is an issue of such importance that I am going to concede my time, if it is okay with the Minister, so that we can have a vote on this particular issue. That might require the Minister to allow a vote to happen. I think that is fair.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Do I have time to start, Ceann Comhairle?

An Ceann Comhairle: You do. You have an opportunity to tell them what you want-----

Deputy Gary Gannon: We will not have time to finish, though.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: What is the Deputy saying to me? Is he saying that I should not speak for too long to allow for a vote on this?

Deputy Gary Gannon: Yes, just to allow the vote to happen because once-----

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: Okay. Can I have two minutes?

An Ceann Comhairle: That is up to you.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: The first thing I want to say is that I have listened to people in the House. I acknowledge the presence of survivors in the Gallery and I commend them because the law is being changed because of the advocacy of campaigners. We all agree on one thing, which is that the current situation is unacceptable. The current statutory scheme that operates is unacceptable and needs to be changed. It needs to be changed in order to weigh the balance between a fair trial and the right to privacy more in favour of the right to privacy. I

believe that is what I am doing. I cannot ban counselling notes. I simply cannot do that because of the legal advice that I have received. The Labour Party recognises that. People in this House recognise that.

In terms of the proposal from the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre, I gave consideration to it and have prepared a response in respect of it. I just want the House to know that its scheme is not that different from what I am operating, except that it would have a panel of barristers deciding it, as opposed to a judge.

Finally, on the interests of justice, the reason I left it in is because the advice I received is that counselling notes can be very beneficial to the prosecution of sexual offences and rapes. They corroborate what a complainant is saying and are very beneficial in terms of getting people convicted because the counselling notes confirm what the complainant is saying.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: My amendment allows for that.

Deputy Jim O'Callaghan: That is why I have left them in and the advice I have received is that they have been of assistance in achieving convictions. I am conscious of what Deputy Gannon has said and I want to allow a vote.

Deputy Ruth Coppinger: People can consent to give their notes.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 68; Níl, 78; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Boland, Grace.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Brady, John.	Brennan, Shay.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brophy, Colm.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Browne, James.	
Cairns, Holly.	Burke, Colm.	
Carthy, Matt.	Burke, Peter.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Butler, Mary.	
Collins, Michael.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Cronin, Réada.	Cahill, Michael.	
Crowe, Seán.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Cullinane, David.	Calleary, Dara.	
Cummins, Jen.	Canney, Seán.	
Daly, Pa.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Devine, Máire.	Chambers, Jack.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Clendennen, John.	
Ennis, Daniel.	Collins, Niall.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Connolly, John.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Cooney, Joe.	

Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Gannon, Gary.	Cummins, John.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Currie, Emer.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Daly, Martin.	
Gould, Thomas.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Graves, Ann.	Devlin, Cormac.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Dillon, Alan.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Dolan, Albert.	
Healy, Seamus.	Dooley, Timmy.	
Hearne, Rory.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Kelly, Alan.	Foley, Norma.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Kenny, Martin.	Geoghegan, James.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Grealish, Noel.	
Lawless, Paul.	Harkin, Marian.	
Lawlor, George.	Healy-Rae, Michael.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Heneghan, Barry.	
McDonald, Mary Lou.	Heydon, Martin.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Keogh, Keira.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Lahart, John.	
Murphy, Paul.	Lawless, James.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Lowry, Michael.	
Nash, Ged.	Maxwell, David.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	McCarthy, Noel.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	McCormack, Tony.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	McEntee, Helen.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McGrath, Séamus.	
O'Hara, Louis.	McGreehan, Erin.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Murphy, Michael.	
Quaide, Liam.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Neville, Joe.	
Sheehan, Conor.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Sherlock, Marie.	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
Smith, Duncan.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Stanley, Brian.	O'Meara, Ryan.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Shea, John Paul.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Roche, Peter.	

	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	
	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Alan Kelly and Ruth Coppinger; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Amendment declared lost.

An Ceann Comhairle: The time permitted for this debate having expired, I am now required to put the following question in accordance with an order of the Dáil of 9 June: "That amendment No. 30, and the amendments set down by the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, and not disposed of, including those in respect of which recommittal would, in the normal course, be required, are hereby made to the Bill, Fourth Stage is hereby completed and the Bill is hereby passed."

Question put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 102; Níl, 45; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Brady, John.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Buckley, Pat.	
Boland, Grace.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Carthy, Matt.	
Brennan, Shay.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Brophy, Colm.	Collins, Michael.	
Browne, James.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Burke, Peter.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Butler, Mary.	Cronin, Réada.	
Butterly, Paula.	Crowe, Seán.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Cullinane, David.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Daly, Pa.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Devine, Máire.	
Cahill, Michael.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cairns, Holly.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Calleary, Dara.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Canney, Seán.	Gould, Thomas.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Graves, Ann.	
Chambers, Jack.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Healy, Seamus.	
Clendennen, John.	Kenny, Martin.	
Collins, Niall.	Kerrane, Claire.	

Connolly, John.	Lawless, Paul.	
Cooney, Joe.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Crowe, Cathal.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Cummins, Jen.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Cummins, John.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Currie, Emer.	Murphy, Paul.	
Daly, Martin.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Dillon, Alan.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
Dolan, Albert.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
Dooley, Timmy.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Ennis, Daniel.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Foley, Norma.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Gannon, Gary.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Geoghegan, James.	Stanley, Brian.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Ward, Charles.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Ward, Mark.	
Grealish, Noel.		
Harkin, Marian.		
Hayes, Eoin.		
Healy-Rae, Michael.		
Hearne, Rory.		
Heneghan, Barry.		
Heydon, Martin.		
Kelly, Alan.		
Kenny, Eoghan.		
Keogh, Keira.		
Lahart, John.		
Lawless, James.		
Lawlor, George.		
Lowry, Michael.		
Maxwell, David.		
McAuliffe, Paul.		
McCarthy, Noel.		
McConalogue, Charlie.		
McCormack, Tony.		
McEntee, Helen.		
McGrath, Séamus.		
McGreehan, Erin.		
Moran, Kevin Boxer.		
Moynihan, Aindrias.		
Moynihan, Michael.		
Moynihan, Shane.		
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.		

Murphy, Michael.		
Nash, Ged.		
Naughton, Hildegarde.		
Neville, Joe.		
O'Brien, Darragh.		
O'Callaghan, Cian.		
O'Callaghan, Jim.		
O'Connell, Maeve.		
O'Donoghue, Robert.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Quaide, Liam.		
Rice, Pádraig.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Sheehan, Conor.		
Sherlock, Marie.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smith, Duncan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Wall, Mark.		
Ward, Barry.		
Whitmore, Jennifer.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Matt Carthy.

Question declared carried.

Estimates for Public Services 2026: Message from Select Committee

An Ceann Comhairle: The Select Committee on Fisheries and Maritime Affairs has completed its consideration of the following Supplementary Estimates of the areas within its remit for Public Services for the service of the year ending on 31 December 2026: Vote 30 - Fisheries and Maritime Affairs.

Media Regulation Bill 2026: Report and Final Stages

Bill received for final consideration and passed.

Air Pollution (Amendment) Bill 2025 [Seanad]: Report and Final Stages

Bill received for final consideration and passed.

An Ceann Comhairle: A message will be sent to the Seanad acquainting it accordingly.

Report of the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform: Motion

Minister of State at the Department of the Taoiseach (Deputy Mary Butler): I move:

That Dáil Éireann adopts the rotas and arrangements recommended in the Report of the Committee on Standing Orders and Dáil Reform entitled "Rotas and arrangements for Leaders' Questions, Questions nominated for priority and Private Members' Time", a copy of which was laid before Dáil Éireann on 10th June, 2026.

Question put and agreed to.

Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2026: Second Stage (Resumed)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must deal with a deferred division relating to the Second Reading motion on the Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2026, taken on Thursday, 28 May 2026. On the question, "That the Bill be now read a Second Time", a division was claimed and the division must be taken now.

Question put: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 102; Níl, 44; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Ardagh, Catherine.	Brady, John.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Buckley, Pat.	
Boland, Grace.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Carthy, Matt.	
Brennan, Shay.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Brophy, Colm.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Browne, James.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Burke, Colm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Burke, Peter.	Crowe, Seán.	
Butler, Mary.	Cullinane, David.	
Butterly, Paula.	Daly, Pa.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Devine, Máire.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Cahill, Michael.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Cairns, Holly.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Calleary, Dara.	Gould, Thomas.	

Canney, Seán.	Graves, Ann.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Chambers, Jack.	Healy, Seamus.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Kenny, Martin.	
Clendennen, John.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Collins, Niall.	Lawless, Paul.	
Connolly, John.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Cooney, Joe.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Crowe, Cathal.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Cummins, Jen.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Cummins, John.	Murphy, Paul.	
Currie, Emer.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Daly, Martin.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
Devlin, Cormac.	O'Flynn, Ken.	
Dillon, Alan.	O'Hara, Louis.	
Dolan, Albert.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
Dooley, Timmy.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
Ennis, Daniel.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Foley, Norma.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Stanley, Brian.	
Gannon, Gary.	Ward, Charles.	
Geoghegan, James.	Ward, Mark.	
Gibney, Sinéad.		
Grealish, Noel.		
Harkin, Marian.		
Hayes, Eoin.		
Healy-Rae, Michael.		
Hearne, Rory.		
Heneghan, Barry.		
Heydon, Martin.		
Kelly, Alan.		
Kenny, Eoghan.		
Keogh, Keira.		
Lahart, John.		
Lawless, James.		
Lawlor, George.		
Lowry, Michael.		
Maxwell, David.		
McAuliffe, Paul.		
McCarthy, Noel.		
McConalogue, Charlie.		
McCormack, Tony.		
McEntee, Helen.		
McGrath, Séamus.		
McGreehan, Erin.		

Moran, Kevin Boxer.		
Moynihan, Aindrias.		
Moynihan, Michael.		
Moynihan, Shane.		
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.		
Murphy, Michael.		
Nash, Ged.		
Naughton, Hildegard.		
Neville, Joe.		
O'Brien, Darragh.		
O'Callaghan, Cian.		
O'Callaghan, Jim.		
O'Connell, Maeve.		
O'Donoghue, Robert.		
O'Meara, Ryan.		
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Quaide, Liam.		
Rice, Pádraig.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Sheehan, Conor.		
Sherlock, Marie.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smith, Duncan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Wall, Mark.		
Ward, Barry.		
Whitmore, Jennifer.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Joanna Byrne and Pádraig Mac Lochlainn.

Question declared carried.

Broadcasting (Amendment) Bill 2026: Referral to Select Committee

An Ceann Comhairle: I understand it is proposed to refer the Bill to the Select Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport, pursuant to Standing Orders 103 and 188.

Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment (Deputy Darragh O'Brien): I move:

That the Bill be referred to the Select Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport pursuant to Standing Orders 103 and 188.

Question put and agreed to.

Public Health (Alcohol) (Amendment) Bill 2025: Second Stage (Resumed) [Private Members]

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a deferred division relating to the Second Reading motion on the Public Health (Alcohol) (Amendment) Bill 2025. On Thursday, 28 May 2026, on the question, "That the Bill be now read a Second Time", a division was claimed and that division must be taken now.

Question put: "That the Bill be now read a Second Time."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 68; Níl, 81; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ahern, Ciarán.	Ardagh, Catherine.	
Bacik, Ivana.	Boland, Grace.	
Boyd Barrett, Richard.	Brabazon, Tom.	
Brady, John.	Brennan, Shay.	
Buckley, Pat.	Brophy, Colm.	
Byrne, Joanna.	Browne, James.	
Cairns, Holly.	Burke, Colm.	
Carthy, Matt.	Burke, Peter.	
Clarke, Sorca.	Butler, Mary.	
Conway-Walsh, Rose.	Butterly, Paula.	
Coppinger, Ruth.	Buttimer, Jerry.	
Cronin, Réada.	Byrne, Malcolm.	
Crowe, Seán.	Byrne, Thomas.	
Cullinane, David.	Cahill, Michael.	
Cummins, Jen.	Callaghan, Catherine.	
Daly, Pa.	Calleary, Dara.	
Devine, Máire.	Canney, Seán.	
Doherty, Pearse.	Carrigy, Micheál.	
Donnelly, Paul.	Chambers, Jack.	
Ellis, Dessie.	Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	
Ennis, Daniel.	Clendennen, John.	
Farrelly, Aidan.	Collins, Michael.	
Farrell, Mairéad.	Collins, Niall.	
Gannon, Gary.	Connolly, John.	
Gibney, Sinéad.	Cooney, Joe.	
Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	Crowe, Cathal.	
Gould, Thomas.	Cummins, John.	
Graves, Ann.	Currie, Emer.	
Guirke, Johnny.	Daly, Martin.	
Hayes, Eoin.	Dempsey, Aisling.	
Healy, Seamus.	Devlin, Cormac.	

Hearne, Rory.	Dillon, Alan.	
Kelly, Alan.	Dolan, Albert.	
Kenny, Eoghan.	Dooley, Timmy.	
Kenny, Martin.	Feighan, Frankie.	
Kerrane, Claire.	Fitzmaurice, Michael.	
Lawless, Paul.	Foley, Norma.	
Lawlor, George.	Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	
Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	Geoghegan, James.	
McDonald, Mary Lou.	Grealish, Noel.	
McGettigan, Donna.	Harkin, Marian.	
Mitchell, Denise.	Healy-Rae, Michael.	
Murphy, Paul.	Heneghan, Barry.	
Mythen, Johnny.	Heydon, Martin.	
Nash, Ged.	Keogh, Keira.	
Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	Lahart, John.	
Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	Lawless, James.	
O'Callaghan, Cian.	Lowry, Michael.	
O'Donoghue, Robert.	Maxwell, David.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	McAuliffe, Paul.	
O'Gorman, Roderic.	McCarthy, Noel.	
O'Hara, Louis.	McConalogue, Charlie.	
O'Reilly, Louise.	McCormack, Tony.	
O'Rourke, Darren.	McEntee, Helen.	
Ó Broin, Eoin.	McGrath, Séamus.	
Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	McGreehan, Erin.	
Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	Moran, Kevin Boxer.	
Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	Moynihan, Aindrias.	
Quaide, Liam.	Moynihan, Michael.	
Rice, Pádraig.	Moynihan, Shane.	
Sheehan, Conor.	Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	
Sherlock, Marie.	Murphy, Michael.	
Smith, Duncan.	Naughton, Hildegard.	
Stanley, Brian.	Neville, Joe.	
Wall, Mark.	O'Brien, Darragh.	
Ward, Charles.	O'Callaghan, Jim.	
Ward, Mark.	O'Connell, Maeve.	
Whitmore, Jennifer.	O'Meara, Ryan.	
	O'Shea, John Paul.	
	O'Sullivan, Christopher.	
	O'Sullivan, Pádraig.	
	Ó Cearúil, Naoise.	
	Ó Muirí, Naoise.	
	Roche, Peter.	
	Scanlon, Eamon.	
	Smith, Brendan.	
	Smyth, Niamh.	
	Timmins, Edward.	
	Toole, Gillian.	

	Troy, Robert.	
	Ward, Barry.	

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Pádraig Rice and Cian O'Callaghan; Níl, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie.

Question declared lost.

**Stop the Game Campaign and FAI Participation in Matches against Israel: Motion
(Resumed) [Private Members]**

The following motion was moved by Deputy Joanna Byrne on Tuesday, 9 June 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

notes:

— the findings of major international human rights organisations, including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Palestinian human rights organisations, that Israel operates a system of apartheid against the Palestinian people;

— the ongoing military occupation of Palestinian territories, the expansion of illegal settlements, restrictions on freedom of movement, collective punishment, and repeated attacks on civilians in Gaza and the West Bank;

— the 2016 United Nations (UN) resolution, which reaffirms that Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, have no legal validity and constitute a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to a two-state solution;

— the Advisory Opinion issued by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in July 2024 entitled "Legal Consequences arising from the policies and practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem", which determined that Israel's settlement policies, annexation and exploitation of natural resources violate International Law, and mandated Israel end its occupation, dismantle settlements and pay reparations to the Palestinian people;

— the Prevention of Genocide 2024 and 2025 provisional measures issued by the ICJ, that concluded that Palestinians are at risk of irreparable damage and ordering Israel to prevent genocidal acts that fall under the UN Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and to comply with international humanitarian law;

— that FIFA's statutes prohibit member associations and their clubs from playing on the territory of another member association without that association's approval, Israeli clubs based in illegal West Bank settlements continue to play under the Israel Football Association within the territory of the Palestinian Football Association (PFA), without the PFA's consent, and thus contrary to this rule;

— that UEFA, as a confederation, is obliged to comply with, and enforce, FIFA statutes and decisions;

— that at least 1,008 athletes, players and sports officials have been killed in the genocide, and close to 300 sports facilities in Gaza and the occupied West Bank have been destroyed by Israel;

— that at least ten Israeli football clubs are located in occupied Palestinian territory, in violation of the ICJ Advisory Opinion of July 2024, and Article 64.2 of FIFA's statute; and

— Israel's policy of mandatory military service means that team members may have fought with the Israel Occupation Forces when war crimes were committed;

further notes:

— the historic role sport played in isolating apartheid South Africa, and the importance of sporting boycotts in challenging systems of racial segregation and oppression;

— FIFA and UEFA banned Russia in 2022, in response to the decision of the football associations of Czechia, Poland and Sweden to refuse to play Russia in international competition, and no action was taken by FIFA or UEFA against these associations for refusing to play Russia, thus setting a clear legal and moral precedent;

— the UN International Convention against Apartheid in Sports (1985), which recognised that sporting contacts with apartheid states undermine international efforts against racial discrimination and oppression;

— that in November 2025, 93 per cent of Football Association of Ireland (FAI) members voted to instruct the Association to call on UEFA to suspend Israel;

— in May, FAI general assembly members secured the numbers to call an Emergency General Meeting to vote on Ireland's participation in the football matches;

— the growing support across Ireland for the "Stop the Game" campaign, calling on the FAI to refuse participation in international fixtures against Israel, while violations of international law and apartheid policies continue; and

— the strong tradition of solidarity in Ireland with oppressed peoples and anti-apartheid struggles internationally;

recognises that:

— sport cannot be separated from fundamental questions of human rights, equality, and international law;

— Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, affirms every child's right to play and participation in sporting life as integral to their dignity and development, and that the systematic killing of child athletes and destruction of sporting infrastructure in Gaza therefore constitutes not only a violation of international humanitarian law, but a direct and catastrophic assault on the fundamental rights of Palestinian children;

— under the UN Guiding Principles (UNGPs) on Business and Human Rights, all business enterprises, including sport's governing bodies, have a responsibility to respect human rights', and FIFA and UEFA have each voluntarily committed to meeting this responsibility by incorporating the UNGPs into their statutes and governance frameworks;

— allowing normal sporting relations with states accused of apartheid, and grave breaches of international law, contributes to the normalisation of oppression; and

— Irish sporting bodies, and the Irish Government, have moral and political responsibilities to uphold human rights standards and international law;

believes that UEFA and FIFA should uphold their stated human rights commitments and suspend Israel from international football competitions, until it complies with international law and human rights obligations; and

calls on the Government to:

— support calls from the Irish football community, which includes the Professional Footballers Association of Ireland and Irish Football Supporters Partnership, for the FAI to refuse to participate in the proposed matches against Israel, scheduled for September 27th and October 4th, in protest on legal and moral grounds;

— uphold its obligations under international law to not engage in economic or trade dealings with Israel which may entrench the illegal occupation by implementing meaningful legislation and sanctions, and this extends to sporting and cultural life within illegal settlements, i.e., settlement football clubs, because engagement contributes to the normalisation of occupation and apartheid;

— support the application of the principles contained within the UN International Convention against Apartheid in Sports to states operating systems of racial domination and oppression, and to sign up to this Convention;

— deny any Israeli football players and staff, Israeli officials, including Israeli Minister of Culture and Sports, Makhlof Zohar, and President of Israel, Isaac Herzog, and Israeli fans who have participated in violations of international law, entry into Ireland;

— agree to cover the costs of any financial penalty that the FAI may incur through refusing to play the games; and

— send copies of this motion to the FAI, UEFA and FIFA.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 2:

To delete all words after "Dáil Éireann" and substitute the following:

"notes:

— that the Irish people are deeply concerned about the conflict in the Middle East and Gulf region, particularly the situation in Palestine, and that the Government is committed to working with key partners to end the conflict;

— that Israeli actions in Palestine consistently contravene international law, and the Government continues to press for appropriate action, both at European Union (EU) and international level, in response to egregious Israeli breaches of human rights and democratic principles;

— Ireland's commitment to working with key partners to end the conflict in Gaza, and to advancing a sustainable peace plan and addressing the huge challenges facing Palestinians in Gaza;

— the Government's grave concerns about the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, with intolerable conditions;

— that Israel must immediately remove restrictions on aid access and facilitate essential supplies and services to reach people across the Gaza Strip;

— the Government's condemnation of the law passed by the Israeli parliament to expand the scope of the death penalty and revive its implementation in Israel and occupied Palestine;

— the particular concerns about the discriminatory nature of the law as it relates to Palestinians, and that the implementation of this law would give rise to serious breaches of international human rights law and international humanitarian law;

— the approval and publication of the text of the Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Prohibition of Importation of Goods) Bill 2026, noting that the Bill fulfils the commitment set out in the Programme for Government, to progress legislation to prohibit the import of goods from Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, and further noting the proposed introduction of the Bill in Dáil Éireann this week;

— that, in line with the Taoiseach's statement, Ireland will act to prevent those members of the Government of Israel who have been instrumental in fomenting the unfolding disaster in Gaza, and the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration has instructed immigration officers to refuse entry to Itamar Ben-Gvir, Minister of National Security of Israel, and Bezalel Smotrich, Minister of Finance of Israel, should they seek to enter Ireland;

— Ireland's support of an EU-wide prohibition on trade with Israeli settlements, and that at both the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and the FAC Trade in May, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, requested that the European Commission bring forward proposals for a prohibition on EU trade with settlements, on the basis of the EU's Common Commercial Policy, and furthermore, that the Minister also reiterated Ireland's longstanding position that the EU-Israel Association Agreement should be suspended or, at a minimum, that the trade elements should be suspended;

— that a number of other member states supported Ireland's call for stronger collective EU action, and agreed that targeted sanctions alone cannot substitute for meaningful measures relating to trade with illegal settlements; and

— that the Taoiseach also wrote to European Council President, António Costa, on 20th May, reiterating Ireland's position on EU trade with Israel, and requesting an urgent discussion of these issues among EU leaders at the next meeting of the European Council on 18-19 June;

in relation to sport, further notes that:

— the performance and integrity of our top athletes on the international stage have a very positive representational impact for Ireland, as Irish sport provides the world with a window into Ireland and the Irish people, both at home and abroad;

— international success for our top sports people enriches our country in a variety of ways, and Ireland's achievements on the global sporting stage have been a cause of both celebration and inspiration for the Irish public, and will continue to be so into the future; and

— the Government is committed to supporting Irish athletes competing at the highest level of international competition; and

recognises that:

— national governing bodies of sport, such as the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), are independent, autonomous bodies responsible for the governance of their own sports, including the organisation of sporting fixtures, whether in domestic or international competitions;

— it is the role of the FAI to decide to fulfil its UEFA Nations League fixtures against Israel in September (home) and October (away);

— the FAI has stated that it intends to fulfil both fixtures against Israel; and

— the Government acknowledges the FAI's independence and autonomy in arriving at this decision and any decisions it may make in the coming days."

- (Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a deferred division relating to the ministerial amendment to the motion on the Stop the Game campaign and FAI participation in matches against Israel. Yesterday, on the question, "That the amendment be made", a division was claimed and the division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 81; Níl, 68; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ardagh, Catherine.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Boland, Grace.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Shay.	Brady, John.	
Brophy, Colm.	Buckley, Pat.	
Browne, James.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Burke, Colm.	Cairns, Holly.	
Burke, Peter.	Carthy, Matt.	
Butler, Mary.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Butterly, Paula.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	

Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Chambers, Jack.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Clendennen, John.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Collins, Michael.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Collins, Niall.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Connolly, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cummins, John.	Gould, Thomas.	
Currie, Emer.	Graves, Ann.	
Daly, Martin.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Healy, Seamus.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dolan, Albert.	Heneghan, Barry.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Kelly, Alan.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Kenny, Martin.	
Foley, Norma.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Lawless, Paul.	
Geoghegan, James.	Lawlor, George.	
Grealish, Noel.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Harkin, Marian.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Keogh, Keira.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lahart, John.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lawless, James.	Nash, Ged.	
Lowry, Michael.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Maxwell, David.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Murphy, Michael.	Sheehan, Conor.	

Naughton, Hildegard.	Sherlock, Marie.	
Neville, Joe.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Denise Mitchell.

Amendment declared carried.

Amendment No. 1 not moved.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 81; Níl, 68; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ardagh, Catherine.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Boland, Grace.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Shay.	Brady, John.	
Brophy, Colm.	Buckley, Pat.	
Browne, James.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Burke, Colm.	Cairns, Holly.	
Burke, Peter.	Carthy, Matt.	
Butler, Mary.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Butterly, Paula.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	

Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Chambers, Jack.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Clendennen, John.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Collins, Michael.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Collins, Niall.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Connolly, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cummins, John.	Gould, Thomas.	
Currie, Emer.	Graves, Ann.	
Daly, Martin.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Healy, Seamus.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dolan, Albert.	Heneghan, Barry.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Kelly, Alan.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Kenny, Martin.	
Foley, Norma.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Lawless, Paul.	
Geoghegan, James.	Lawlor, George.	
Grealish, Noel.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Harkin, Marian.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Keogh, Keira.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lahart, John.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lawless, James.	Nash, Ged.	
Lowry, Michael.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Maxwell, David.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Murphy, Michael.	Sheehan, Conor.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Sherlock, Marie.	
Neville, Joe.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Wall, Mark.	

O'Connell, Maeve.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Pádraig Mac Lochlainn and Denise Mitchell.

Question declared carried.

11 o'clock

Exclusion of Israel from Sporting Fixtures: Motion (Resumed) [Private Members]

The following motion was moved by Deputy Sinéad Gibney on Wednesday, 10 June 2026:

That Dáil Éireann:

agrees that:

- the State of Israel is committing an ongoing genocide in Gaza, something which both the Taoiseach and Tánaiste have publicly acknowledged;
- since 7th October, 2023, nearly 75,000 people have been murdered by Israel in Gaza, including more than 20,000 children;
- of the more than 170,000 Palestinians who have been injured in Gaza since October 2023, 43,000 have sustained life-changing injuries, including amputations, spinal cord injuries and severe mobility impairments;
- all of Gaza's infrastructure, including water, energy, healthcare and education systems, have been systematically and deliberately destroyed by Israel;
- Israel has repeatedly violated a so-called ceasefire agreement that was announced in October 2025, with nearly 1,000 Palestinians being killed since then;
- on 28th May, Israel's Minister of Defense, Israel Katz, confirmed that he was committed to the ethnic cleansing of Gaza, through large-scale forced migration of Palestinians from Gaza;

- on the same date, 28th May, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, announced that he had directed the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to increase its occupation of Gaza to 70 per cent of the territory;
- since October 2023, nearly 1,500 Palestinians have been murdered in the West Bank;
- violent settlers are acting with complete impunity in the West Bank, murdering Palestinians, razing Palestinian villages to the ground, and forcibly expelling Palestinians from their homes;
- since 2020, Israeli courts have not handed down any jail sentences to settlers found responsible for the deaths of Palestinians;
- Israel's bombardment of Lebanon has intensified in recent weeks, with approximately 20 per cent of Lebanon now occupied; and
- according to a statement from the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), on 29th May, 11 children are being killed or injured every day in Lebanon by the IDF;

notes that:

- on 18th May, 2026, the IDF boarded a Gaza aid flotilla in international waters, and kidnapped humanitarian activists, including 13 Irish citizens;
- those citizens were assaulted and abused by members of the Israeli military and publicly goaded by far-right Israeli Minister of National Security, Itamar Ben-Gvir, before being deported from Israel;
- at the time, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade stated that the treatment of detained activists was "unacceptable" and "appalling";
- the East 1 settlement construction, East of Jerusalem in Gaza and the West Bank, is currently being pursued by the State of Israel, in breach of international law;
- both the European Union and the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, have condemned the East 1 plan being carried out by the State of Israel, stating that these actions damage the viability of a two-state solution, and are in breach of international law; and
- this represents the ongoing denial by Israel of the Palestinian people's right to self-determination, is forcible transfer, and constitutes a war crime;

further notes that:

- sportswashing is a known method for apartheid States to distract from breaches of human rights and other unethical conduct, including war crimes;
- the Irish women's basketball team were not financially supported by the Government to boycott playing Israel in the FIBA Women's EuroBasket 2025 qualifier, despite "strong concerns" expressed from Basketball Ireland over the fixture;

— in 1999, the then Fianna Fáil Government prevented a Euro 2000 qualifying match between Ireland and Yugoslavia from taking place, because of Serbian atrocities in Kosovo;

— the Government acted, despite UEFA turning down a request from them to cancel the game;

— at the time, the then Taoiseach said "It is not for a government to force a sporting decision on a body. But if the body refuses to make a decision, then we will have a decision to make";

— in February 2022, FIFA and UEFA banned Russia from all club and international games, after Poland and Sweden refused to play World Cup qualifiers with the team;

— on 5th December, 2025, the Taoiseach described RTÉ's decision to boycott the Eurovision as "an act of solidarity";

— Irish athletes, such as Wheelchair Rugby player Alan Dineen, have stated they will refuse to play against Israel in international competitions;

— the removal of a fixture from grounds within the Republic of Ireland does not represent an appropriate measure, while the support of this measure is a continued endorsement of the fulfilment of fixtures against a State currently in breach of international law; and

— on 28th May, 2026, the Minister for Culture, Communications and Sport and the Minister of State at the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport, announced their intention to boycott the upcoming Ireland-Israel game; and

calls on the Government to:

— advocate, at national and international level, for Israel to be excluded from all international sporting competitions, as long as the genocide and illegal occupation continues; and

— support Irish sporting bodies to boycott fixtures, events, and competitions, where Israel is competing, as long as the genocide and illegal occupation continues.

Debate resumed on amendment No. 1:

To delete all words after "Dáil Éireann" and substitute the following:

"notes:

— that the Irish people are deeply concerned about the conflict in the Middle East and Gulf region, particularly the situation in Palestine, and that the Government is committed to working with key partners to end the conflict;

— that Israeli actions in Palestine consistently contravene international law, and the Government continues to press for appropriate action, both at European Union (EU) and international level, in response to egregious Israeli breaches of human rights and democratic principles;

— Ireland's commitment to working with key partners to end the conflict in Gaza, and to advancing a sustainable peace plan and addressing the huge challenges facing Palestinians in Gaza;

— the Government's grave concerns about the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza, with intolerable conditions;

— that Israel must immediately remove restrictions on aid access and facilitate essential supplies and services to reach people across the Gaza Strip;

— the Government's condemnation of the law passed by the Israeli parliament to expand the scope of the death penalty and revive its implementation in Israel and occupied Palestine;

— the particular concerns about the discriminatory nature of the law as it relates to Palestinians, and that the implementation of this law would give rise to serious breaches of international human rights law and international humanitarian law;

— the approval and publication of the text of the Israeli Settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Prohibition of Importation of Goods) Bill 2026, noting that the Bill fulfils the commitment set out in the Programme for Government, to progress legislation to prohibit the import of goods from Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territory, and further noting the proposed introduction of the Bill in Dáil Éireann this week;

— that, in line with the Taoiseach's statement, Ireland will act to prevent those members of the Government of Israel who have been instrumental in fomenting the unfolding disaster in Gaza, and the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration has instructed immigration officers to refuse entry to Itamar Ben-Gvir, Minister of National Security of Israel, and Bezalel Smotrich, Minister of Finance of Israel, should they seek to enter Ireland;

— Ireland's support of an EU-wide prohibition on trade with Israeli settlements, and that at both the Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) and the FAC Trade in May, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, requested that the European Commission bring forward proposals for a prohibition on EU trade with settlements, on the basis of the EU's Common Commercial Policy, and furthermore, that the Minister also reiterated Ireland's longstanding position that the EU-Israel Association Agreement should be suspended or, at a minimum, that the trade elements should be suspended;

— that a number of other member states supported Ireland's call for stronger collective EU action, and agreed that targeted sanctions alone cannot substitute for meaningful measures relating to trade with illegal settlements; and

— that the Taoiseach also wrote to European Council President, António Costa, on 20th May, reiterating Ireland's position on EU trade with Israel, and requesting an urgent discussion of these issues among EU leaders at the next meeting of the European Council on 18-19 June;

in relation to sport, further notes that:

— the performance and integrity of our top athletes on the international stage have a very positive representational impact for Ireland, as Irish sport provides the world with a window into Ireland and the Irish people, both at home and abroad;

— international success for our top sports people enriches our country in a variety of ways, and Ireland's achievements on the global sporting stage have been a cause of both celebration and inspiration for the Irish public, and will continue to be so into the future; and

— the Government is committed to supporting Irish athletes competing at the highest level of international competition; and

recognises that:

— national governing bodies of sport, such as the Football Association of Ireland (FAI), are independent, autonomous bodies responsible for the governance of their own sports, including the organisation of sporting fixtures, whether in domestic or international competitions;

— it is the role of the FAI to decide to fulfil its UEFA Nations League fixtures against Israel in September (home) and October (away);

— the FAI has stated that it intends to fulfil both fixtures against Israel;

— the FAI has made this decision in accordance with its obligations as a member of UEFA, the governing body and confederation for football in Europe; and

— the Government acknowledges the FAI's independence and autonomy in arriving at this decision and any decisions it may make in the coming days."

- (Minister of State at the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Deputy Timmy Dooley)

An Ceann Comhairle: I must now deal with a deferred division relating to the ministerial amendment to the motion on exclusion of Israel from sporting fixtures. Earlier today, on the question, "That the amendment be made", a division was claimed and that division must be taken now.

Amendment put:

The Dáil divided: Tá, 81; Níl, 68; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ardagh, Catherine.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Boland, Grace.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Shay.	Brady, John.	
Brophy, Colm.	Buckley, Pat.	
Browne, James.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Burke, Colm.	Cairns, Holly.	
Burke, Peter.	Carthy, Matt.	
Butler, Mary.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Butterly, Paula.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	

Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	
Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Chambers, Jack.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Clendennen, John.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Collins, Michael.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Collins, Niall.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Connolly, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cummins, John.	Gould, Thomas.	
Currie, Emer.	Graves, Ann.	
Daly, Martin.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Healy, Seamus.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dolan, Albert.	Heneghan, Barry.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Kelly, Alan.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Kenny, Martin.	
Foley, Norma.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Lawless, Paul.	
Geoghegan, James.	Lawlor, George.	
Grealish, Noel.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Harkin, Marian.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Keogh, Keira.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lahart, John.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lawless, James.	Nash, Ged.	
Lowry, Michael.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Maxwell, David.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	

Moynihan, Shane.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Murphy, Michael.	Sheehan, Conor.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Sherlock, Marie.	
Neville, Joe.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Stanley, Brian.	
O'Callaghan, Jim.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Sinéad Gibney and Cian O'Callaghan.

Amendment declared carried.

Question put: "That the motion, as amended, be agreed to."

The Dáil divided: Tá, 81; Níl, 68; Staon, 0.		
Tá	Níl	Staon
Ardagh, Catherine.	Ahern, Ciarán.	
Boland, Grace.	Bacik, Ivana.	
Brabazon, Tom.	Boyd Barrett, Richard.	
Brennan, Shay.	Brady, John.	
Brophy, Colm.	Buckley, Pat.	
Browne, James.	Byrne, Joanna.	
Burke, Colm.	Cairns, Holly.	
Burke, Peter.	Carthy, Matt.	
Butler, Mary.	Clarke, Sorca.	
Butterly, Paula.	Conway-Walsh, Rose.	
Buttimer, Jerry.	Coppinger, Ruth.	
Byrne, Malcolm.	Cronin, Réada.	
Byrne, Thomas.	Crowe, Seán.	
Cahill, Michael.	Cullinane, David.	
Callaghan, Catherine.	Cummins, Jen.	
Calleary, Dara.	Daly, Pa.	

Canney, Seán.	Devine, Máire.	
Carrigy, Micheál.	Doherty, Pearse.	
Chambers, Jack.	Donnelly, Paul.	
Cleere, Peter 'Chap'.	Ellis, Dessie.	
Clendennen, John.	Ennis, Daniel.	
Collins, Michael.	Farrelly, Aidan.	
Collins, Niall.	Farrell, Mairéad.	
Connolly, John.	Gannon, Gary.	
Cooney, Joe.	Gibney, Sinéad.	
Crowe, Cathal.	Gogarty, Paul Nicholas.	
Cummins, John.	Gould, Thomas.	
Currie, Emer.	Graves, Ann.	
Daly, Martin.	Guirke, Johnny.	
Dempsey, Aisling.	Hayes, Eoin.	
Devlin, Cormac.	Healy, Seamus.	
Dillon, Alan.	Hearne, Rory.	
Dolan, Albert.	Heneghan, Barry.	
Dooley, Timmy.	Kelly, Alan.	
Feighan, Frankie.	Kenny, Eoghan.	
Fitzmaurice, Michael.	Kenny, Martin.	
Foley, Norma.	Kerrane, Claire.	
Gallagher, Pat the Cope.	Lawless, Paul.	
Geoghegan, James.	Lawlor, George.	
Grealish, Noel.	Mac Lochlainn, Pádraig.	
Harkin, Marian.	McDonald, Mary Lou.	
Healy-Rae, Michael.	McGettigan, Donna.	
Heydon, Martin.	Mitchell, Denise.	
Keogh, Keira.	Murphy, Paul.	
Lahart, John.	Mythen, Johnny.	
Lawless, James.	Nash, Ged.	
Lowry, Michael.	Newsome Drennan, Natasha.	
Maxwell, David.	Ní Raghallaigh, Shónagh.	
McAuliffe, Paul.	O'Callaghan, Cian.	
McCarthy, Noel.	O'Donoghue, Robert.	
McConalogue, Charlie.	O'Gorman, Roderic.	
McCormack, Tony.	O'Hara, Louis.	
McEntee, Helen.	O'Reilly, Louise.	
McGrath, Séamus.	O'Rourke, Darren.	
McGreehan, Erin.	Ó Broin, Eoin.	
Moran, Kevin Boxer.	Ó Laoghaire, Donnchadh.	
Moynihan, Aindrias.	Ó Snodaigh, Aengus.	
Moynihan, Michael.	Ó Súilleabháin, Fionntán.	
Moynihan, Shane.	Quaide, Liam.	
Murnane O'Connor, Jennifer.	Rice, Pádraig.	
Murphy, Michael.	Sheehan, Conor.	
Naughton, Hildegard.	Sherlock, Marie.	
Neville, Joe.	Smith, Duncan.	
O'Brien, Darragh.	Stanley, Brian.	

O'Callaghan, Jim.	Wall, Mark.	
O'Connell, Maeve.	Ward, Charles.	
O'Flynn, Ken.	Ward, Mark.	
O'Meara, Ryan.	Whitmore, Jennifer.	
O'Shea, John Paul.		
O'Sullivan, Christopher.		
O'Sullivan, Pádraig.		
Ó Cearúil, Naoise.		
Ó Muirí, Naoise.		
Roche, Peter.		
Scanlon, Eamon.		
Smith, Brendan.		
Smyth, Niamh.		
Timmins, Edward.		
Toole, Gillian.		
Troy, Robert.		
Ward, Barry.		

Tellers: Tá, Deputies Mary Butler and Emer Currie; Níl, Deputies Sinéad Gibney and Cian O'Callaghan.

Question declared carried.

Is féidir teacht ar Cheisteanna Scríofa ar www.oireachtas.ie.

Written Answers are published on the Oireachtas website.

Cuireadh an Dáil ar athló ar 11.16 p.m. go dtí 8.47 a.m., Déardaoin, an 11 Meitheamh 2026.

The Dáil adjourned at 11.16 p.m. until 8.47 a.m. on Thursday, 11 June 2026.