DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA AGUS TRÁDÁIL, AGUS COSAINT

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE, AND DEFENCE

Déardaoin, 18 Bealtaine 2017

Thursday, 18 May 2017

The Joint Committee met at 3 p.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Teachtaí Dála / Deputies	Seanadóirí / Senators
Seán Barrett,	
Seán Crowe,	
Fiona O'Loughlin,*	
Maureen O'Sullivan.	

* In éagmais / In the absence of Deputy Darragh O'Brien.

I láthair / In attendance: Senator Frank Feighan.

Teachta / Deputy Brendan Smith sa Chathaoir / in the Chair.

United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs: Mr. John Ging

Chairman: Today we are meeting in public session Mr. John Ging, director of the operational division at the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs, OCHA. On behalf of the committee, I welcome you here today and look forward to hearing about your work with the OCHA in co-ordinating a global humanitarian response, humanitarian financing, policy development and humanitarian advocacy. This committee recently heard presentations from members of Dóchas and Médecins sans Frontières on their work in these areas in Africa and Yemen, particularly regarding famine, and they presented to us first-hand accounts of the unimaginable suffering that people are going through on a daily basis. Indeed, it seems that every week we hear of desperate and indescribable cases where urgent humanitarian assistance is required, not only in Africa, but also of course in the Middle East, in the Mediterranean, and up to the shores of Europe. We also have under-reported and forgotten crises in other areas.

We are very glad, Mr. Ging, that you were able to join us and I apologise for the meeting being delayed due to votes in the Dáil Chamber. We hope to be also joined by other committee members. Some other committees with which we have an overlap of membership are currently meeting as well. The format of this meeting is that we will hear your opening statement, before going into a question and answer session with members of the committee.

Before we begin may I remind members, witnesses and those in the public Gallery to ensure that their mobile phones are switched off completely for the duration of this meeting, as even on silent mode they cause interference with the recording and broadcast equipment in the committee room. I also remind members of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or makes charges against a person or body outside the Houses, or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. By virtue of section 17(2)(*l*) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the joint committee. If they are directed by the Chairman to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given, and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable. Mr. Ging, I call on you to make your opening remarks.

Mr. John Ging: I thank the Chairman and the committee for the opportunity to be here and to be able to communicate to you the humanitarian situation that we face globally. I also express my appreciation to Ireland for its steadfast support, both politically and financially, in helping the most needy people across the globe, and I will be pleased to provide evidence in that regard.

We opened 2017 with what was regarded as the greatest caseload in humanitarian need since the Second World War. Unfortunately, that caseload has continued to increase through the first half of this year. Sadly, 80% of the caseload can be found in conflict-affected states. This is the result of man-made crisis, which means it could be prevented. It was preventable and it most definitely can also be ended. There is a very important message around the urgency to bring the drivers of this deplorable humanitarian situation in so many of these countries that are affected to an end through better political processes where we can resolve and end conflict.

To give the members a sense of the scale of the global challenge we face, we opened the year

with 128.6 million people from 33 countries requiring international humanitarian assistance. Some 65 million of those have been forcibly displaced by conflict. The humanitarian community opened the year seeking and appealing for US$22.2 billion to respond to the needs of 92 million of those 128 million who are targeted as the most vulnerable and the most dependent on assistance. Since the start of the year, the numbers have continued to increase. We now have a global appeal which amounts to US$23 billion to reach 99.3 million people in 37 affected countries. So far this year 26% of that global appeal has been funded.

I will briefly outline some of the key crises and give the members a sense of what the people are suffering and the scale of their plight in those countries. I will group, in the first instance, four counties, which are in peril of famine and one of which has already been affected by famine. They are South Sudan, Nigeria, Somalia and Yemen. In the case of those countries, 20 million people are on the brink of famine and in the case of South Sudan 1 million people have already been affected by famine. In all of these cases, these countries are affected by conflict. Famine is the result of people not being able to access their livelihoods, particularly agriculture. It is an entirely preventable and recoverable situation. It is not driven by drought and while it is exacerbated by harsh climatic conditions, particularly in Somalia, at the root of the issue is the fact that these countries are affected by conflict.

The largest number of people affected in these countries is in Yemen. Among the global landscape of countries affected by humanitarian crises, Yemen does not get adequate attention. It does not have the level of realisation and understanding that is required because it is the largest single case load in humanitarian need, coming from a very poor base in terms of its humanitarian status, even prior to the conflict that is now impeding the conduct of normal life in Yemen. People in Yemen are suffering not only from food insecurity but from a lack of medical care. There is an outbreak of cholera there and it is one of the fastest deteriorating situations that we face.

South Sudan is also a very large and fast-moving crisis because conflict there is intensifying and much of the state infrastructure is collapsing whether it be law and order, the economy or people being able to engage in their livelihoods and so forth. South Sudan is the one country where famine has been declared. Equally, it is the country where the special representative of the Secretary General has highlighted the ominous threat of a genocide such is the intensity of the conflict being conducted and the gravity and barbarity of the violence being visited on the civilian population. It is a truly appalling situation.

Regarding the other large-scale crises, the members will be familiar with Syria, which has been in crisis since 2011. It continues to deteriorate year on year. It is the seventh year of the conflict. A total of 13.5 million people have been in humanitarian need in that country, including 6.3 million people displaced internally and 5 million refugees in the neighbouring countries and beyond. There are some of the worst practices of conflict anywhere in the world inflicted on the civilian population in Syria, including mediaeval sieges affecting more than 625,000 people. That means they are cut off from all assistance and access to assistance. The members can imagine how dreadful their subsistence is in such circumstances. It is about the killing of civilians, the suffering arising from the lack of access to medical care, basic social services and the deterioration in the livelihoods.

The members will also be aware of the crises in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in the Central African Republic, across the Sahel in Mali and South Sudan. These crises have been driven at their core by conflict. They have been protracted, which means that they have been going on for many years. In every single case we see a measurable large deterioration,

with an increased number displaced and an increased number who are subjected to unnecessary human suffering.

I have just returned from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, North Korea, which is in the headlines for another issue. While we hear much in the global news media about the missile and nuclear issue, we do not hear anything about the humanitarian situation and the human suffering. I want to bring to the members' attention that 30% of the children in North Korea are stunted. That means that the population is chronically under-nourished. We are proud of the work the United Nations is doing in North Korea, helping people at a very subsistence level to survive in what is another of these very difficult circumstances. When one goes to that country one sees the human toil there. It is a country that is cut off form the rest of the world. It does not have much mechanisation, agricultural machinery and so forth, which means that human beings are hand-planting the corn in the fields. They leave the cities at the planting season to hand-plant the corn. It gives a sense of the scale of the challenge that they all face in that country.

I want to take this opportunity to thank Ireland for its support. Ireland has been at the forefront in leadership on the sustainable development goals. This is an agenda that has been adopted by all member states, to end need and leave nobody behind by 2030. Ireland's ambassador in New York is co-chairing, with the Kenyan ambassador, the development of those goals and also shepherding through very strong global commitment for action. We commend Irish leadership on that issue.

Turning to action, we have many actions that are urgently required in the humanitarian field. I have given numbers of those affected and for funding. I thank Ireland for its generosity to date. Ireland is, for us in the humanitarian field, one of the most generous donors proportional to economic wealth. It has been in the top ten of the donors to the central emergency response fund, which is a very important mechanism that enables us to respond rapidly to escalating crises, and also to respond to the crises that are chronically underfunded. It gives us this resource and we hugely appreciate Ireland's support to that fund, but also to the very many crises across the world. I know that the committee has a paper on that, so I am not going to read out every single case. I want to highlight that.

We have a G20 of financially rich countries, and then we have a different list of the financially generous countries. Here in Dublin today, I am very proud to be an Irishman as well as a UN official, since Ireland is on the list of the top 20 generous countries, even if it is not on the list of the top 20 financially rich countries. I would urge Ireland to continue on this track. Please also recall that if the sustainable development goals are to be achieved, we have to get to 0.7% of gross national income, GNI, in overseas development aid, ODA. There are only five countries in the world that reach that - Ireland's next-door neighbour, the UK, Luxembourg, Denmark, Sweden and Norway. I would encourage Ireland to join them and set a global standard for this. It is in every country's self-interest to contribute to an end of global need. It will contribute to a better world for everybody, everywhere. It is all there in the documentation that has been adopted. With that said I will conclude my opening remarks with a high level of appreciation for this opportunity to engage with the committee. It would be most productive to give the committee the chance to raise the issues and questions of most interest to it.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Ging and appreciate him putting on the record Ireland's ongoing substantial contribution to overseas development aid, and also the work of Mr. David Donoghue in advancing the sustainable development goals. During this committee and over the course of the previous Dáil, we had a very good exchange with Mr. Donoghue here in advance of the September meeting, when development goals were being finalised. Mr. Ging's contribu-

tion is comprehensive, graphic and sobering in regard to the many crises in so many regions throughout the world. I think the fact that Mr. Ging mentioned that, at the start of this year, there was the greatest caseload of humanitarian need since the Second World War, and that in the meantime, that caseload is increasing, it is not even remaining static or decreasing. I think Mr. Ging also makes the valid point that the crises are arising from conflict which could be avoided. I presume he does not want to go into the general political scene. I appreciate that, but I am sure that the political instability throughout the world, be it in Europe, in the United States, or elsewhere, is not helping to advance decisions that would try to eliminate these conflicts or at least reduce them.

We recently had presentations here from Médecins sans Frontières, MSF, and other NGOs. There was one very striking presentation by a midwife, an Irish nurse who had returned from working in South Sudan. Her description of the absolute poverty and suffering of the people in those areas was alarming. One of the messages that the nurse, Ms O'Connell I think it was, and her colleagues brought to us is that there are a number of areas where no humanitarian assistance reaches. She referred in particular to north east Nigeria and Yemen. Assistance is not even reaching the most deprived people to any extent to try to improve their lot. Does the OCHA see any way of trying to improve the provision and distribution of aid, particularly to areas that have been inaccessible to date? I think Mr. Ging mentioned Syria himself and so many people there being denied access to assistance. It is very much the same picture that the MSF people painted for us that day as well.

Mr. John Ging: On the Chairman's first point about the global political attention being consumed by many issues, there are many challenges that global leadership faces within its own countries, but also within the collective global endeavour. We have seen much political transition in many countries as well. All of us have to be aware that that may cause leadership to be distracted from the type of issue I am raising here today. At the heart of what is driving the misery, the death and the killing in so many countries is conflict, which is the product of political failure to resolve disputes, which requires external support to resolve. If countries could solve it themselves, then it would already be done. All of us need to continue to raise the profile and awareness among global leadership, in whatever format, whether the European Union format, the Security Council format, or in other bodies that come together to mobilise effective political action. They have to have what is driving these humanitarian crises on their agenda, beyond hand-wringing that there is not anything that they can do. There is much that we can do globally. We need to do much more than we are doing across the board. We need to do much more politically. We need to do much more in financial support for humanitarian action.

On the Chairman's second point, which is the question of gaining access to people who are dying due to the lack of basic supplies - whether medicine, food or so on - we find in too many of these conflict settings that there is no respect for innocent civilians. In fact, what is even more alarming is that there is a deterioration in respect for aid workers. I would like to commend the heroic aid workers who are not just risking their lives, but losing their lives in so many of these countries. We see, year on year, an increasing number of humanitarian colleagues - doctors, nurses and aid workers - losing their lives. They are being killed because the parties to conflict do not respect the responsibility or duty of care to people who are doing nothing more than coming to help to save lives.

Irish NGOs are to be commended as they are at the forefront of humanitarian effort in all the crises I have mentioned. I do not believe I have gone to any country where I have not found the presence of Irish NGOs. This is part of the best tradition of the State. We should, however, be

alarmed about the attacks on aid workers, on medical facilities and on other aid facilities. We are finding this to be an escalating challenge. In addition, and the Chairman made reference to it, there are so many places where we cannot get to the people because those who conduct the conflict prevent us from getting there. Their denial of aid is a weapon in the conflict. They have the view that the aid will help people but they want the people to surrender and give up. This has been said publicly. They use the prevention of access to aid as part of their weaponry in the conflict. This is in violation of international law and of all things decent and humane. It takes us to a very bad place in our current world where there are so many violations of the laws of war, of international humanitarian law and of the principles that make us civilised in how we conduct ourselves. There is no justification at all for the starving of people, now or at any time. Yet, this is what we see happening in too many places.

Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan: It is very good to hear of the critical work that OCHA is doing and Mr. Ging has outlined the caseload in that respect. Mr. Ging spoke of staff and I believe that staff are crucial. I hear, however, that some of the staff appointed by OCHA are on short-term contracts and do not enjoy the same conditions as staff who are on longer-term contracts. Mr. Ging spoke of duty of care but I would like to hear of OCHA's duty of care to all staff regardless of whether they are on short-term or long-term contracts and to acknowledge that the staff are in extremely difficult situations, as Mr. Ging has said.

The work of OCHA is humanitarian and emergency. Let us consider the offices it still maintains in the Philippines and in Myanmar, with large staff numbers. I know there are humanitarian needs there but those areas do not have the emergency needs that, for example, Nigeria or the other places as cited by Mr. Ging have. I am involved in African issues and it is my understanding that at the early stages there was very poor co-ordination in Nigeria, the quality staff was not there, the leadership was not there, although I know it has changed now, and this exacerbated the difficulty. The question must be asked as to why staff who were not in emergency situations could not have gone to Nigeria. I presume that in time OCHA will develop the skills of local people and national staff so they can take over.

I would like to hear about the management structure of OCHA. Perhaps the witness will also outline exactly what OCHA is doing in Yemen and how that happens. I note from Mr. Ging's biography that he worked in Rwanda. We do not hear about Rwanda and I presume it is a good story, but I am interested to hear if there are other issues in Rwanda.

Mr. John Ging: On the question of UN Staff contracts, Deputy O'Sullivan is absolutely right. When I say that the global humanitarian appeal is only 26% funded, it puts a lot of pressure on all parts of the endeavour. It means that we only have a quarter of the money we need for the food, medicine and so forth. The people who are working in the United Nations and elsewhere on the aid effort also have to adjust their budgets according to the global shortfall. For our organisation, the UN entity that co-ordinates humanitarian action, it means we have had to reduce our budget in line with the reductions that have been suffered across the entire system. It has been very tough. As one of the senior leaders in our organisation we must address this with our colleagues, all the time and every day. We would like to be in a more financially sustainable situation

I am delighted that Ireland is taking on the chairmanship of OCHA's donor support group. To have the office that co-ordinates humanitarian affairs on a more financially sustainable basis will be welcomed by everybody and it will put us into a position where we would be able to make long-term commitments to staff. We cannot make long-term commitments when we do not have the long-term funding. There is a direct correlation between being able to give a staff

member a short-term contract with today's money versus having the confidence that we will have the money next year and the following year. We only get our budget each year; we do not have a multi-annual budget. We are voluntarily funded and are not like other UN entities that have an assessed contribution, which is where member states pay their percentage as long as the entity is in place. It is a different formula. The humanitarian component is every year and is voluntary. We have regular funding from countries like Ireland, but there are countries whose funding goes up and down depending on their spending decisions. We must then calculate what cadre of staff we can have on longer-term contracts and what cadre of staff we must be honest with and say that we cannot guarantee that we will have the funding in the next year for their positions. Crises in different countries come and go and that is part of the emergency nature of the organisation also.

Deputy O'Sullivan asked about Myanmar and the Philippines. We had an annual mission in Myanmar by our leading donors involving the donors who give most money to OCHA. As the co-ordinator we invited them to come to Myanmar to see what we do there and to see that it is value for money. Myanmar does not get the same degree of attention as Syria or Yemen in respect of its humanitarian caseload. We must look at the caseload globally, not just from a numbers perspective but also with regard to the gravity of the situation and the catalogue of issues being faced. In Myanmar there are 1 million Rohingya people who, by any international measure, are living in appalling circumstances. There is also a conflict raging in Kachin in the north of the country. This has created huge displacement of people, as conflict always does. Notwithstanding the humanitarian caseload within the country, Myanmar is on a positive trajectory. In Myanmar we are endeavouring to transition from the international humanitarian effort to a more sustainable effort in partnership with its government on the development side. This is not progressing as quickly as we would have hoped because the plight of the Rohingya people has been deteriorating at quite an alarming rate over the last year. Two years ago we thought we would have a smaller configuration in Myanmar but we must also react to the situation we find. We had also hoped for more progress in the north east of the country where the conflict is raging.

We have just three international staff in the Philippines. As members are aware, in December 2013 the Philippines experienced a massive and devastating cyclone In the Philippines, we are working with the government to build that national capacity Deputy O'Sullivan spoke about for our exit. As I said, we have now reduced the number of our international staff to just three. We rely on Philippine staff, building their capacity and transitioning that capacity over to the national structures, particularly the national disaster management structure. It is very much a matter of working with a country that is very committed to stepping up its own capacity but needs our global help in doing so. Therefore, the work we do there very much concerns the capacity-building, disaster risk reduction and preparedness for crisis that come from natural disasters. As I said, we are on an exit trajectory from the Philippines, but we do not want to have to return because we did not finish the job we should have done of building the capacity there.

Deputy O'Sullivan is absolutely right that we must be able to rationalise across the world where the international staff and limited resources we have are deployed. She is also correct that the speed of scale-up in north-east Nigeria was not what it should have been. However, while I will embrace, as one of the managers of the global effort, the responsibility and accountability for areas where we fall short, wherever they might be, I must tell the committee that with 26% funding, we will not get 100% result. It is just not possible. Therefore, if the committee's expectation is that we will deliver 100% with 26% funding, I ask it to adjust that expectation. I am not hiding behind the shortfall in funding; I am just referring to it as a starting point.

Can we do better? Yes. We have stepped up in some areas but we have also as a consequence scaled down elsewhere. Deputy O'Sullivan could also have raised with me the question why we are absent from Zimbabwe with such a high caseload and why we have exited countries across southern Africa where climate change has had a devastating effect. The answer is that we have made a calculation that those countries do not need the international presence of my organisation because they have their national capacity. They would benefit from our presence, for sure, but they do not need it. Therefore, we transition that resourcing into places such as north-east Nigeria and, as I said, we are doing that all the time because the situation there is not stable at present. We did not have at the start of the year the four famines we have now. We must scale up for those famines in an environment in which resourcing does not follow. We are not seeing the scaling up in resourcing with the scaling up of the need. Therefore, hard choices - impossible choices - must be made, and I am very grateful to Deputy O'Sullivan for raising the consequences of what happens when those choices must be made.

Yemen was an incredibly impoverished country before this most recent round of conflict. Some 80% of the food was imported. The numbers in poverty were among the highest in any country in the world. All of this has now been exacerbated by conflict. What does my organisation do in Yemen? We facilitate the working of humanitarian organisations; the composition of appeals for humanitarian action; access; engagements with the various authorities on the ground, negotiating with them to get the aid effort into the conflict-affected regions; and the provision of support to the humanitarian organisations on the whole range of operational issues they face. Most importantly, we help them with the fund-raising they need to be able to do the good work they do.

I have been through Rwanda in recent times, and it is fantastic to see a country that was completely and utterly devastated by genocide in 1994 now doing well. Economically, Rwanda is doing well. We should always recall that there are ways forward out of these awful situations. I do not want to oversimplify the politics of the situation in Rwanda or be misunderstood at all in that regard, but Deputy O'Sullivan's simple question was whether a difference can be seen. Yes, a very positive difference can be seen for people in their daily lives in a country that was completely ruined by a genocide. Again, this is why we should never give up. I also feel that sense of fatigue in hearing about crisis after crisis, but we should not get tired. We should redouble our efforts because, as I said, these crises are also in the majority of cases preventable.

Deputy Seán Crowe: Mr. Ging's opening submission details the scale of the challenge, and the numbers are absolutely staggering. He talked about the danger to staff, people being killed and so on, and that is the environment in which people work. It is also true to say that more and more people around the world are coming out of poverty. It is a very slow process, but if one considers the number of conflicts in the world ten or 20 years ago, it is a safer world, even with all the current conflicts. It is important we give that hope to people as well, that the work carried out by NGOs and organisations such as OCHA is successful and delivers for people on the ground.

Mr. Ging mentioned that Ireland is taking on the chairmanship of OCHA's donor support group. What difference does he think this will make? He mentioned the number of donations pledged but not delivered. I suppose most of us and the people listening at home to these proceedings will not be able to get their head around this. Why would a country bother making such a pledge at a conference and then not deliver? What is Mr. Ging's assessment of the system of pledging? How might an improvement to it be achieved? Is it the case that countries make pledges and are discouraged afterwards from following through on them or told it was a

mistake to make the pledge and that they should not get involved in certain countries? Is this part of the difficulty? If the targets are not met, instead of getting two meals a day do people literally only get one? In the work OCHA carries out on the ground, is it involved in education or medicine?

Regarding refugees, the readmission agreements with the EU have been raised in the committee. I am thinking particularly about the agreement with Turkey, designated as a safe country of origin. We met an MP from the Halkların Demokratik Partisi yesterday who talked about the awful things happening in Turkey: 130,000 people arrested, 47,000 in jail, the near genocide that has gone on against people, people being burnt alive in buildings, members of the political opposition being arrested, newspapers being closed down and so on, yet this is seen as a safe country of origin. It would not sound like one to most people hearing this catalogue. I am a member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which has agreed to monitor Turkey on the basis of some of the things that have happened there such as the recent referendum. Does Mr. Ging agree with my comments? Is he allowed to comment on such matters? I am not picking on that country; there are others as well.

Mr. Ging mentioned North Korea. How does UNOCHA operate in that Orwellian society? He mentioned stunting. I am sure the regime would not be too pleased that such a high percentage of children are starving to death and suffering from malnutrition.

There are areas generally that are not safe, and an increasing number of countries are moving against NGOs. Does that impact on Mr. Ging's organisation? NGO representatives who have appeared before the committee say they are being labelled as working with terrorists when they work in a particular area the regime is not happy with.

Reference was made to the Horn of Africa and the figures are staggering. Ireland has a long-standing relationship with countries in this region and Mr. Ging mentioned the positive work we do. Are we punching above our weight in those countries? What could be done differently? There is criticism of funding and it is believed there is better monitoring if funding is channelled through Irish Aid or if Irish Aid is involved in projects. I recognise the pluses of pooling resources and delivering projects more cheaply and so on but, as part of that, less attention is paid to some projects. If I am asked whether I can stand over Irish Aid projects, I can say I have visited a number. I have visited countries where the system is not working and it is leaking. How can that be addressed?

Mr. Ging talked about man-made crises. I am conscious of what is happening in Palestine. There were reports earlier of an Israeli settler opening fire on a peaceful protest and people being killed. What is happening in Gaza? This is a man-made humanitarian crisis and conflicts keep breaking out in the area. The UN reports say the area will be uninhabitable by 2020 as a result of Israeli military operations, an almost decade-long blockade and economic and infrastructural issues. How important is it that organisations such as the UNOCHA, politicians, and other NGOs go into conflict zones such as Gaza, Syria and Iraq? How important is it that politicians who are comfortable in Dublin or Europe obtain second-hand information as through meetings such as this rather than visiting those areas?

Reference was also made to Yemen, cluster bombs and the number of people facing starvation as a result of another man-made conflict. There is, however, clearly a link between countries that supply weaponry and so on to countries such as Yemen and the refugee crisis. What can be done differently? The cluster munitions agreement was adopted in Dublin and signed by 120 countries. It bans the use of cluster bombs yet countries are supplying them. There is

something missing in the middle. Has the UNOCHA recommendations in this regard? Does Mr. Ging agree that Ireland and the international community must challenge the Saudi regime about using these bombs? How can they be challenged? Does he agree that weapon sales to these countries should be suspended? That would be a solution but will it happen? There are borders going up in Europe and the arms trade involving many European countries is contributing to these conflicts. Many of the people fleeing these conflicts are travelling to these European countries seeking support and a safe haven. That is the eternal cycle.

My questions are negative. Has Ireland still an important role in securing the cessation of these conflicts? How important is its role in not only sending aid but also in trying to assist in the transition from conflict to peace? Perhaps we should redouble our efforts in this regard.

Deputy Seán Barrett: I welcome both witnesses and I apologise for being late but unfortunately I was detained elsewhere. I will concentrate on one area, although other areas are equally important. I was in Somalia 25 years ago with a few Members. It was one of the most devastating experiences I ever had. When I returned, I said if anyone mentions the word "poverty" to me in Ireland, I will scream. What I witnessed was unreal. When I read through the documentation for this meeting, it stated Somalia is facing a crisis again. I am worried when we discuss these countries that whether €25 million or €55 million is provided, the money is not solving the problem. The witnesses have given up their lives to look after these countries and they must be more frustrated than I am because they are at the coalface. My vivid memory, as if it was yesterday, is of walking into Baidoa where we had troops who were responsible for bringing aid in from Mogadishu. They were protected by an Indian force that was there. No building in Baidoa had a roof on it. The doctor who dealt with the Irish troops was the only medical person in the region. It was so horrific that one could not explain it to people unless one saw it. Is our policy of doing bits and pieces in different areas the wisest policy or should we concentrate on one or two areas until they get up and running? After 25 years, one submission states, "Somalia is the most fragile state in the world". It seems that despite all the attention and all the aid, nothing has been sorted. Many of these problems are the result of the regimes in these countries, which are not being tackled. There is a flow of people trying to get into Europe and drowning in the process. The whole thing is frightening and I am lost for words. I congratulate Mr. John Ging on the work he is doing. Can he advise us on how we should tackle these problems? Even if we were to sort out one or two regions over a period, would it be better than throwing bits here and there and not really getting anywhere? Does Mr. John Ging believe there is an urgent need to change policy or direction?

Mr. John Ging: I thank members for their comments, questions and feedback.

On the whole issue of not giving up and looking to a better future while looking back on what has been achieved, notwithstanding what Deputy Barrett said about Somalia, the wrong narrative would be that what we have been doing in the past has not made a difference. It has made a difference. It has saved a significant number of lives and reduced suffering. However, it has not solved the problem of conflict. There is no humanitarian solution to a conflict. The humanitarian response in a conflict has a single objective, namely to save lives and reduce humanitarian suffering. It will not solve the conflict, however. It will go on as long as the conflict creates the suffering and the need. That is why we say we have to have political resolution to conflict. We also have to have investment in development to ensure we are actually helping people out of a dependency on aid in order that they can work towards a better life and livelihood. This is why the sustainable development goals, signed up to by global leadership for a 2030 target, are important.

In the meantime, we cannot take our foot off the accelerator in mobilising the life-saving. If somebody needs medicine, clean drinking water or food to survive, then we have to do that and the other stuff. First, one has to save the life. Then one can actually help to rebuild their livelihoods and life in more general through conflict resolution and sustainable development.

My fear is that as we see the failure to resolve conflicts, which are raging on and intensifying, their consequences are immediately felt by civilian populations who either have to flee with their families as a life-saving measure in the first instance, not to be killed by the bullets and bombs, or, as their whole livelihood infrastructure collapses because the economy collapses, they are left with nothing, as Deputy Barrett witnessed in Somalia, trying to scratch out an existence with some support from international assistance, praying for the day when the conflict will end in order that they can start rebuilding their lives, put their children back in school and so forth.

What must we do? We must not distract ourselves from our responsibility to help people in such circumstances. No matter how many of those circumstances there are, we cannot ignore any of them. We cannot say to the people of north-east Nigeria that we are focused on Somalia and whatever happens to them does not concern us because we are going to do a good job in Somalia. We have to extend ourselves on the basis of where are those who are suffering most and in most peril of death. With the limited resources we have, we have to be accountable to those we are not helping. We have to say to them that because we are only 26% funded, we are not giving a little bit everywhere but actually giving absolutely what we have to give where it is most urgently needed. That will translate into giving a little in a lot of places and not just because we are handing it out to be present.

In many places, many people are dying unnecessarily. For example, in North Korea, 400,000 children are suffering severe acute malnutrition. We have the funding to help 125,000 of them. What happens to the other 300,000 or so kids? Over time, if they survive, they will be stunted - that is why 30% of the North Korean population is stunted - or they will die. Thousands of them die just from malnourishment. It is not a matter of access but of funding. We have the access, we know where they are, we can get to help them but we do not have the money to do so. It is up to us globally to answer to those kids.

That comes back to Deputy Crowe's point about whether politicians should visit conflict areas. Yes. I am now in UN headquarters for my sins but I spent most of my career out there. When I was out in the countries myself, there was nothing like a visit from decision-makers to see for themselves. One will be confounded by the simplicity of the situation and the complexity of the briefings one will receive before one goes. No matter how complex the situation that might be represented, at a human to human level, one can do lot more. That is why it is important that visits by political figures engage directly with the people. There is also the accountability issue in showing how money is used. Committee members are the decision-makers. They have to be convinced that the way the funding is being decided and utilised is the right choice on behalf of, in this instance, the Irish people. I encourage members to do that. I myself have a long experience of Irish politicians going out there on to the front line, taking the risks physically to engage with the people who are being helped. I know those politicians who did so have also heard back from the people who are being helped how much they appreciate the assistance coming from Ireland and the other countries.

Ireland has a high reputation because Irish Aid is delivered with integrity. We should continue to strive to ensure to keep that standard. Ireland assuming the chairmanship of the donor support group is significant. Ireland will bring its values to this position. It will bring the

integrity on its side in terms of how it conducts its aid effort, including aligning its words and commitments with its actions. The Deputy was correct on pledging. If we get a pledge from Ireland, we can actually start the actions because we know that money is real. With other pledges we receive, we have to figure out if that is old money that was pledged previously or money going through different mechanisms which are not the multilateral or NGO mechanisms. One really has to get into dismantling what that pledge actually means when we have asked for new money for the humanitarian appeal we have presented and not for international action in the given country. We have a humanitarian response that we want to provide. It is correct to say there is frustration about these pledging events and that we must all work to simplify matters. We must also ensure that when we communicate that we have received "X" amount for "X" country, the money will translate into activity in that country in a specified timeframe. Ireland can be very influential in that regard. The major benefit is that it leads by example. As I said in my opening remarks, there is a G20 of rich countries and a G20 of generous countries. There has to be greater alignment of the two because unless those who have the financial capacity actually live up to their responsibilities, the gap will not be filled by those who do not have the financial capacity or means to do so. Ireland provides leadership aligned with its means that encourages others with greater means to step up to the plate. We are leading by example.

I encourage the committee to drive on towards meeting the global commitment to provide 0.7%. Five countries have met that target and have done so not with an altruistic agenda but with a rational agenda. They have recognised that this is the way to have a better world for everybody. The consequences of not meeting the target will be felt in the countries that do not live up their responsibilities, as well as in the countries where people are dependent on aid. We did not step up and help Lebanon and Jordan to cope with a massive influx of people in the early days of the Syrian crisis. Lebanon has a population around the same size as that of Ireland, but it became home to 1 million refugees. Imagine the impact that had. The impact of 1 million refugees was keenly felt in Europe, which has a population of 350 million. Lebanon which has a population of 4 million people received 1 million refugees, but we stood back. We did not step up to the mark and help the Lebanese to develop the infrastructure necessary, including health clinics, schools and so forth, to cope with such a massive influx of people. Then we wondered why people got on boats and risked their lives to cross the Mediterranean, so desperate were they to get out of that hopeless situation. We needed to do better and need to do better in so many other places.

There were many questions about the drivers of conflict, including the arms industry, politics and so forth. I have my opinions, but I have come here to talk about the humanitarian crisis. If I stray into offering my opinions on politics, I will be doing a disservice to my humanitarian message. It is not that I am hiding behind my humanitarian message, but that is my job. I have to convince people to mobilise on the humanitarian front. However, I will answer the questions posed in the following way.

There are many entities that have to work a lot harder at their jobs. I will work on my mine, which is saving lives and reducing humanitarian suffering. In doing so, however, I will communicate that it is not a solution. It is, of course, a life-saving response that is urgently and desperately needed, but it is not a solution for the people. We help by providing food, medicine, clean drinking water, sanitation and the very basics of life like blankets and shelter. That is what we do. We do not educate the children who are displaced. We should do so, but we do not even have the money to feed them. That is the travesty for them. They do not get a second chance. If one takes the seven years of war in Syria as an example, half of the kids are not being educated. What future do they have? How do we recover from those seven years? As it is

not possible, we need to speed up the mobilisation of much more than humanitarian action. My plea is to those entities that have responsibility for mobilising political solutions at the global level to move much faster and much more effectively because what we are seeing on the ground is a direct consequence of their failure to do so. We absolutely need to align our responsibilities with global peace and development and the actions that will contribute to them and stop the actions that are undermining them and promoting, supporting or sponsoring conflict. Too many conflicts are about not just the people who are fighting in the country concerned but also about the external assistance they are receiving in resources and other supports. There must be a step change in the way we address conflicts for which there is no humanitarian solution. However, the fact that there is no humanitarian solution does not mean that we are forgiven for not mobilising a humanitarian response. We absolutely must do so. The first thing we have to do is mobilise a humanitarian life-saving response, but we should, in parallel, be mobilising much more effective political engagement in resolving the issues that are driving the conflict. We must look honestly at how conflicts are being supported externally by the provision of resources, weapons and so forth. I am fully in agreement with what was behind the questions posed about conflict.

Questions were also asked about the Irish role. I grew up in this country at a time when a lot of the rhetoric held that the conflict on this island was unsolvable. There was a lot of evidence to support that argument, yet I have had the privilege of seeing that conflict addressed successfully and the transition away from violence to a political process and so forth. There are lots of lessons that can be translated and utilised elsewhere. One of the key lessons is that if one is coming from afar, one is not going to bring the solution. The solution is home-grown. The question is how do we support the people who have it in their hands to deliver the solution from within. That was experience of those who delivered peace on this island - it was not imposed externally, although it was supported externally. The solution was home-grown. Ireland has a lot of experiences to share in conflict resolution. Its complexity is also lost in the simplicity of global politics today. Oversimplification, a black and white and right and wrong view of conflict, takes no account of the complexities involved. An awareness must be brought to bear by practitioners and people with experience who can see how one can navigate through the complexity to a place where there is common ground and start to build out from there. That is a very important point that should be promoted.

Of course, the more Irish politicians who go out and see situations first hand and engage, the more they will be able to bring back. Throughout human history the first casualty of conflict has been the truth. People create a narrative to support their side of the conflict. Dismantling these narratives is the first step towards the correct narrative to start driving actions. As long as there is the wrong narrative, we will have the basis for the wrong actions. As we all know, however, it is easier said that done. The more people who have influence, credibility and impartiality who can start promoting the more honest narrative around what are the drivers and issues, the more likely we are to have more effective actions because they will be based on honesty and a reality with which we can then connect. I hope this gives at least some of the answers sought.

A question was asked as to how anything can be done in the DPRK. What is very interesting is we have a situation on the ground in the DPRK where the humanitarian organisations have free access to 95% of the country whereas several years ago we had access to approximately one quarter. On a mantra of no access no aid, the government has had to adjust and now we have access. Our problem today is we do not have the resourcing to deliver the aid to the people we can actually access. In terms of the integrity of aid delivery, there is no country in the world where our aid is more scrutinised, and that is fine. We have very sophisticated aid monitoring with the full-time deployment of international monitors who spend all of their time out in the

countryside monitoring on a daily basis what is going on. They do this with a very sophisticated computerised system, which reports outside of the country and not within the country, because, again, we want no doubt there is any issue with what is being done, where it is being done, who is getting it and how it is being monitored. It would be a very convenient soundbite to state that nothing can be done in North Korea because everything is controlled by the government. Our aid effort in North Korea is not controlled by the government. It is controlled by us and we are happy to demonstrate this to anybody and everybody, because it is extremely important that everybody knows it and we can prove it. The other thing I would say about the aid effort I witnessed in North Korea recently is it is having a significant positive impact. Simple activities are having a significant positive impact. We can also speak to this, which is extremely important, that if money is put in this is what we get for it.

Deputy Barrett spoke about Somalia. What a travesty and a tragedy 25 years on. There has been no political solution since he was first there. It has rolled on and on. The absence of a political solution, which could put the country back on its feet and get out of the conflict it has been trapped in for so long, leaves us today, 25 years on, speaking about the same issues. The country should not be in peril of famine but, unfortunately, because we did not have the political will to stay the course over the past 25 years and do the things with the Somalis to help them get to where they needed to be, this is the situation they are in today.

I would also say in answer to all of the questions, if the aid effort were not in the four famine-affected countries they would all be in famine. They are one step away from famine because the aid effort has kept them in that situation. If they did not have the aid effort they would all actually be in famine. Committee members know it is not just about the loss of life and the human suffering when it comes to famine. The financial cost of recovery from famine is eight times higher than preventing it. Feeding the children before they becomes severely malnourished is eight times cheaper than the therapeutic feeding required to help them recover from severe acute malnutrition. We still have to continue to feed them after this except, of course, they will have lost cognitive ability because there is no recovery from some of the devastation caused to the body, including to the brain, when people fall into severe acute malnutrition. It makes sense from all aspects no matter how it is calculated. I would argue in the first place from a human perspective, but I can also argue the finances on this.

Deputy Fiona O'Loughlin: I have long been a fan of Mr. Ging's work. It is absolutely inspirational to sit here and listen to the passion and compassion he has for the people on the ground with whom he deals in such an important and strategic way. The work he carries out on a humanitarian level is absolutely phenomenal. I apologise that I did not get to hear the presentation. I was at another meeting. I am not a member of this committee but I wanted to come in to hear about some of the work. Deputy Darragh O'Brien, who is a committee member, contacted me because he knew this is an area in which I am interested. It is refreshing to hear on a number of different levels the impact of Irish Aid and the fact it is so well monitored. I have seen some experience of this and I certainly add to this. There is also the fact that the work Ireland carries out as a small country is very much appreciated and held up to a very high standard. Accountability is hugely important in terms of where our funds go and to ensure we have the optimum impact for the money spent.

Bringing it back a little to the Irish record on the current crisis with refugees and the migration crisis, the Oireachtas passed a motion eight or ten months ago that we would bring in 200 unaccompanied minors, those who have been left devastated without family, country or any support. To date there are only four here, which is hugely regrettable. It is a poor indictment

on the Government. There is also the fact it was agreed we would take 4,000 refugees from the Syrian crisis. To date we have taken in only 760, 241 of whom are refugees and 519 are under the resettlement mechanism. We are moving at a very slow pace and I and my party believe we need to do far more in terms of bringing refugees and those whom we can resettle to the country and ensuring the conditions are there for them, so schools have the appropriate places and can give the appropriate support to these people who are fleeing from their homes carrying nothing but the shirt on their back and taking hugely arduous journeys which many do not survive. I am always conscious that while those on the *LE Eithne* did a wonderful job saving people in the Mediterranean, for which they have been awarded medals, we need to do far more than just pull people from the Mediterranean. As a country we absolutely need to step up and do so much more at a humanitarian level. I accept what Mr. Ging said about the political and conflict resolution side of it being different, and it is a huge part of the story, but on a humanitarian level as a country we absolutely should and need to do far more.

Mr. John Ging: I wish to make a point about Irish politicians visiting. When I worked in Gaza I had the privilege to be visited by Deputy Enda Kenny, the now Taoiseach, the leader of Fianna Fáil, Deputy Micheál Martin, the leader of Sinn Féin, Deputy Gerry Adams, and the President, who came to Gaza prior to being elected to that position. I want to highlight that we have had so many important visitors. I could list many others but I just want to give the committee some examples of people, who also came in other capacities. When Deputy Kenny came he was not the Taoiseach at the time, and when he became Taoiseach he had it in his understanding. As Deputy Barrett knows from having gone to Somalia 25 years ago, it does not leave one. It is an impression that stays with one. I want to re-emphasise the importance of this.

There is much talk about aid integrity, accountability and so forth, and rightly so. However, we must also talk about our responsibility to the people who are dying and suffering in, I would hope, even greater measure because as I go to committees around the world, they keep talking more and more about how we guarantee that we did not lose a bag of flour, and that every dime and dollar went to where it went. It is like asking the fire brigade if it realises there is a global shortage of water, while it is putting out the fire. The reaction one get is: "Do you want me to put out the fire, or do you want me to save water?" In the Somalia scenario, in 2011 there were such restrictions on the so-called aid integrity issue that the aid remained, in large part, in warehouses in Nairobi. This was because we could not meet those standards, because if anybody at a checkpoint were to steal a bag of flour, it would be denoted that we were supporting terrorism. The reality on the ground is that if zero loss in a conflict scenario is the standard, then we cannot deliver aid. What happens? The kids on the other side of that armed group's checkpoint starve because one cannot get through effectively.

It gets much more difficult when one has to deal with reality on these issues. Is one sack out of 100 okay to lose? In pubs, there is a spillage allowance that is written off every day, not as theft, just as the reality of the spillage of beer. Yet there is no understanding of the equivalent situation in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, between the truck travelling 100 miles and the truck arriving with a bag of flour broken, or whatever, because the assumption is that any loss must be fraud. This issue has been overly politicised. I again ask the committee to help us on this issue as we try to stay with the reality of saving lives in a conflict setting. We have to make sure that there is the highest possible standard of accountability that any normal man, woman or child would expect for their funding for the aid effort, but that this standard does not go into a stratosphere which is disconnected from reality. This is what resulted in the shame that we had in the Somalia famine back in 2011 where, because the restrictions were so zero-tolerant of the risk and reality that one faces day-to-day in a conflict zone, the aid was not

deployed. Over 200,000 people died because we could not send the aid in under those circumstances, and that is not acceptable either.

I just wanted to take the opportunity to bring up this issue because I know that this committee is very grounded in reality. There more members that travel and see at first hand, the better. We also have to address this issue in a way that does not allow anybody to hijack it and does not leave us so that we are fully accountable on the one hand, and then we are just doing a paper exercise that is disconnected from the reality on the ground on the other hand. As everybody knows, that prevents one from actually doing the job that one should be doing. As I said, in the example of a fire brigade, at that moment it is about water conservation or putting out the fire. The task is to put out the fire. We have a task to save lives and there will be certain loss in that endeavour, which is a genuine reality of getting to help people and save their lives. I thank the committee.

Chairman: I want to thank Mr. Ging and his colleague, Emer O'Connell, for their attendance here today and for the very comprehensive manner in which they dealt with the queries raised by the members. The picture outlined for us of the huge number of crises throughout the world is very stark. We wish Mr. Ging and his colleagues well in the very important work they are undertaking in so many difficult areas in the world.

I also want to record our appreciation of the work of our NGOs and their sister organisations around the world, whose personnel are working in the most difficult and dangerous situations, bringing great relief and help to so many people who are destitute. I would further like to record our appreciation of the work of our ambassadors and their support staff in the partner countries because it is very important. Mr. Ging gave a clear message that Irish aid is well directed and put to very good use. That is a message that we want to send clearly to the taxpayers who make it possible to deliver that aid. Again, I thank Mr. Ging very much for his presentation.

The joint committee went into private session at 4.35 p.m. and adjourned at 4.47 p.m. until 10 a.m. on Thursday, 25 May 2017.