

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÓTHAÍ EACHTRACHA AGUS TRÁDÁIL, AGUS COSAINTE

JOINT COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND TRADE, AND DEFENCE

Déardaoin, 27 Meitheamh 2019

Thursday, 27 June 2019

The Joint Committee met at 9.30 a.m.

Comhaltaí a bhí i láthair / Members present:

Seán Barrett,	Gerard P. Craughwell,*
Noel Grealish,	Gabrielle McFadden.
Tony McLoughlin,	
Aengus Ó Snodaigh.*	

* In éagmais / In the absence of Deputy Seán Crowe and Senator Billy Lawless.

I láthair / In attendance: Deputies Jack Chambers and Martin Heydon and Senator Terry Leyden.

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

Defence Forces Pay and Conditions: PDFORRA

Chairman: Apologies have been received from Senators Bacik and Ned O'Sullivan and Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan. Deputy Ó Snodaigh is attending in substitution for Deputy Crowe and Senator Craughwell is deputising for Senator Lawless. Today we are meeting representatives from the Permanent Defence Force Other Ranks Representative Association, PDFORRA. I welcome Mr. Gerard Guinan, Mr. Mark Keane, Mrs. Amie Timmins, Mr. Martin Bright and Mr. Donogh Maguire. The members of the committee look forward to hearing their presentation and exchanging views with them.

I remind members, witnesses and those in the Visitors Gallery to turn off their mobile phones. Members are requested to ensure that for the duration of the meeting their mobile phones are turned off completely or switched to airplane, safe or flight mode, depending on the device used. It is not sufficient for members put their phones on silent mode as it will maintain a level of interference with the broadcasting systems.

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 asked to respect the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person or an entity outside the Houses or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

I call Mr. Guinan to make his opening statement.

Mr. Gerard Guinan: I am the general secretary of PDFORRA and a serving corporal in the ordnance corps. I am joined by Mr. Mark Keane, president of PDFORRA, who is a petty officer serving in the Naval Service; Mr. Martin Bright, deputy secretary general of PDFORRA and a senior non-commissioned officer, NCO, who has spent his career serving in the infantry corps, both unit and formation headquarters; and Mrs. Amie Timmins, a member of our national executive who currently serves as a corporal in the military police corps. In the Visitors Gallery is the vice president of PDFORRA, Mr. Donogh Maguire, who is a private in an infantry unit. Between us, we have given more than 130 years service to the State and its citizens, including a significant amount of overseas service. PDFORRA does not operate a military rank structure. We represent all ranks of enlisted personnel throughout the Defence Forces. I thank the committee for affording us the opportunity to appear before it.

PDFORRA was established under the Defence (Amendment) Act 1990 and represents more than 6,500 enlisted members of the Defence Forces. Depending on recruit and cadet numbers, up to 90% of enlisted personnel are members of our organisation. Our membership encompasses all branches of service, including the Naval Service, Air Corps and Army. PDFORRA has seen and welcomes the significant level of engagement by the committee on Defence Forces issues over the past year and believed it would be opportune to seek an audience with it after the publication of the report of the Public Service Pay Commission. The association believed that such engagement would provide PDFORRA with the opportunity to discuss the findings and recommendations of the report and to apprise the committee of the difficulties faced by our membership. It will come as no surprise to the committee that central to these difficulties are the issues of pay and allowances afforded to members of the Defence Forces, the application

of the working time directive and the difficulties being experienced by personnel *vis-à-vis* their contracts of service. The meeting will also afford members the opportunity to explore with us any areas they consider relevant in the context of their duties as Members of the Oireachtas.

When I requested an audience with the committee a number of weeks ago, I expected that the report of the Public Service Pay Commission would be published last week and before I submitted our written statement.

Unfortunately, however, the report was not available at the time of submission of this written statement. The delay in the publication of the report has been frustrating for our association and members and has given rise to a significant commentary on both social media and in the public sphere from people who were unaware that discussions were being held in the background on various issues associated with pay and conditions ancillary to the commission's report. Having reviewed the report of the earlier hearing with the other representative body before the joint committee, I know members are well aware of current churn and staffing levels throughout various parts of the defence organisation. These staffing shortfalls have, as articulated previously, resulted in extreme stress and anxiety for personnel and their families. The lack of proper remuneration has further impacted on the morale of personnel, which ultimately affects operational effectiveness.

PDFORRA would like to address the current crisis within the Defence Forces and, by extension, the commission's report by reference to the following: the historical context of pay movements in the Defence Forces; what PDFORRA sought in the context of the Public Service Pay Commission; and why increases were sought in the manner they were and the outcome from the commission. Members will ask about that latter aspect, but I had expected the commission to publish its report yesterday. The history of pay in the Defence Forces is a mirror of boom-bust cycles within the economy generally, with significant periods of pay lag on upswings compared to other public servants. These lags have generally been followed by significant awards. Evidence of the foregoing can be found in the Gleeson commission report of 1990. The Gleeson report shows a revision of pay rates in 1942. In 1946, awards of between 40% and 50% were made to privates. In 1949, increases of 18.2% was given to privates. In 1964, an executive award was made to enlisted personnel. In 1970, a working party made sizable recommendations on pay. In 1990, the Gleeson commission also made recommendations for increases of significant amounts. The point of this history lesson is simple. What is happening in the Defence Forces is complete madness. History repeats itself every few decades with significant turmoil in the organisation in the build-up to the awards necessary to sustain retention and encourage recruitment.

During the most recent cycle, we in PDFORRA have seen the human cost of austerity and the denial of recognition of the problems that exist within the Defence Forces. My predecessor raised the issue of pay and allowances before the Committee of Public Accounts in 2012. In 2014, the association raised the issue of people sleeping in cars. We fought tooth and nail for the reversal of the post-2013 pay scales and were ultimately successful after a difficult fight. The association brought these issues to the attention of those in power at an early stage. We saw the trends because we work on the ground. The difficulty for our association was simple. We did not have the headline numbers that now exist and hence we were called alarmist. One has to ask who is alarmist now. The foregoing takes us up to the current situation within the Defence Forces. It is not an overstatement that we have lost significant numbers of highly-qualified, outstanding soldiers, sailors and aircrew over the past few years. These personnel left with a deep sense of betrayal and disenfranchisement that will never be assuaged. They were forced

from a career that they loved and that owed them much more than they ever received. They might have stayed if only some earlier intervention had occurred.

In February 2018, PDFORRA made a comprehensive submission to the Public Service Pay Commission. It was 120 pages long, despite a request to limit it to a data-only submission. The association believed that the commission would be best placed to make a judgement when the totality of a situation was apparent. This view was articulated in our oral submission in March, which described data-led assessments as having a significant degree of survivorship bias. As part of our oral submission, PDFORRA sought increases in military service allowances and increases in duty payments. PDFORRA had sought to have duty allowances increased to a level where, at the very least, members were paid the national minimum hourly pay rate for those hours worked above normal routine. This would, in the association's opinion, have been consistent with the Labour Court recommendations regarding the sleepover allowance paid to carers in the HSE. While PDFORRA understands that significant difficulties exist in teasing out issues related to duty payments as, in some instances, they are paid flat rated such as border duty allowance and Army Ranger Wing, ARW, allowance, in other instances they are paid at a daily rate, such as patrol duty allowance, explosive ordnance disposal, EOD, duty allowance and security duty allowances. This payment regime does a disservice to all personnel. For example, members of the ARW have, over the past number of years, seen the value of their allowance fall relative to other enlisted personnel who have secured holiday pay on their security duty allowance payments. Additionally, members of the ARW saw their allowance cut in line with other duty allowances yet remain static subsequent to the provision of holiday pay. Moreover, it must be remembered that these personnel are still fighting for the retrospective payment of increases back to 2006 as the Department of Defence had always espoused the view that the increases were being held in escrow. Unfortunately and despite the guidance of the International Labour Organization, ILO, which holds that those deemed to provide an "essential service" should have access to a conciliation and arbitration scheme and that awards, once made, should be implemented promptly, these payments have not been made. Ireland has been a member of the ILO since 1923, members of the Defence forces provide essential services and cannot strike and should, thus, be treated in a manner consistent with the foregoing provision.

The failure to secure advances through the conciliation and arbitration scheme process has resulted in our association having to resort to ever greater numbers of legal actions. This approach comes at a cost of restriction of information flow to members as the legal strategy can be fluid and legal rules regarding disclosure can apply. Insofar as it gets results, PDFORRA has no remorse for undertaking legal action. PDFORRA members who give such loyal service to the State deserve results no matter how they come. However, taxpayers should question the efficacy of the prevailing norm of pushing the association into a situation where the Department knows we will go to court to vindicate the rights of our members. I have frequently told officials at conciliation and arbitration that it is disgraceful that solicitors and barristers get rich off the intransigence with regard to resolving matters at a lower level. By way of example, PDFORRA went to the Workplace Relations Commission, WRC, recently to seek the return of payment of rations to Air Corps apprentices. The claim value was approximately €800. At that hearing, we had a solicitor and a barrister and the Department had the same representation. Some 20 minutes before the hearing was to take place, an offer to settle was made. The case cost many times more in legal fees than the claim itself. This is a waste of resources and money and must be called out. The foregoing case is not unique. The O'Donnell case from last year is another example. During 2014 and 2015, PDFORRA decided on a change of industrial relations strategy as we witnessed other bodies take the approach of going to court to vindicate the rights of members. Hospital consultants had significant moneys returned to them following

issues with their contracts. A rent allowance claim for doctors was settled in 2017. All these settlements occurred without any fanfare, strikes, protests or media.

I will conclude this element of our submission as I am aware of the time constraints on the initial statement. Before I finish, however, I give the committee a piece of factual information that PDFORRA advanced in respect of the increase in duty rates. In 1990, the Gleeson commission recommended an increase in the rate of the weekday, Saturday and Sunday duties. The rates were increased by nearly 50% for weekdays and 100% for Saturdays. An increase from IR£29.14 for Sundays and Defence Forces holidays to IR£40 was also recommended. At the time of the change, the new rate of Sunday duty represented 20.5% of the pay of a private on the first point of the scale and 16.26% of the salary of a private at the top of the scale. In 2013, as part of the Haddington Road agreement, duty rates premiums for Saturday and Sunday were equalised with weekday rates and cut by a further 10%.

This has resulted in current rates only being equal to 10.9% of the salary of a private on the first point of the scale and 6.52% of the salary of a private at the top of the scale.

Accordingly, it must be appreciated that the value placed on the additional hours worked by personnel is undervalued considerably - much more so than it was 30 years ago. PDFORRA contests that no other area of the public service or Civil Service has suffered such a devaluation.

Many other areas of the association's 2018 submission remain unexplored. These must be addressed to arrest the current outflow of personnel. Failure to grasp the nettle now will result in the repeat of the mistakes of the past.

The application of the working time directive has an important bearing on the rates of pay and the feelings of being valued as employees. While the directive is primarily concerned with the welfare, health and safety of employees, when it is not implemented it leads to employees feeling that their employer does not care about their welfare.

Additionally, when CSO figures are presented on average earnings, they are given over average times. Within the Defence Forces no time records exist, yet all members know they are working far longer hours than the average, which leads to the conclusion that they are well below the average in pay, significantly above the average in time worked and, consequentially, the worst paid and undervalued public servants in the country.

Much of the current difficulties arise from a 1989 declaration to the Gleeson commission that "the provision of overtime is an anathema to military service". PDFORRA has long held the view that the member of the general staff who made that statement undermined the entitlement of our members to a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. He is, no doubt, still held in high regard within the Department of Finance.

The foregoing assertion raised the concept of duty to a level beyond the need to appreciate human dignity and basic needs of members, their wives-partners and children. Why does it have to be said, and not appreciated as a matter of course, that the welfare, health and safety of members of the Defence Forces is no less worthy of protection during non-operational periods as the next citizens?

However, many are still caught in the foregoing mindset, despite the realisation that our personnel are our greatest asset. The concept that the sum does not work without the parts has been lost on some. For example, recent discussions at conciliation and arbitration show a desire to have significant periods of our member's time exempt from the scope of consideration under

the directive. This will not work. Time has value. Our association has no intention of repeating the mistakes of the past.

I am, however, pleased to report that some progress on this issue has been made in the past number of weeks. It has again come following the initiation of legal action by our association and long arduous exchanges of correspondence. From the perspective of PDFORRA, there needs to be greater engagement with the realisation that the longer the delay in implementing the working time directive, in a bespoke manner, the greater the negative impact on both the reputation of the Defence Forces and retention of currently serving members.

Finally on the issue of contracts, PDFORRA has spent the better part of 25 years fighting for appropriate contracts for personnel. The association has expended considerable resources down through the years attempting to address an issue that goes to the heart of service. In effect, from the day and hour personnel enter service, they are counting down until they are discharged - regardless of personal circumstances or ability. This impacts on loyalty.

Currently, a lacuna exists in respect of privates and corporals who have enlisted since 1994. They are allowed to remain in service until the end of 2022, or until they reach 50 years of age. Currently, sergeants who attain 50 years of age are also to be discharged. This is wrong. This is a sinful waste of critical experience and loyalty at a time numbers departing are in freefall.

Simply put, pay and allowances for our members must be addressed appropriately or no functioning organisation will exist. Our association asks that the issue of regularisation of contracts needs to be raised by Oireachtas committee members into the future. The application of the working time directive is something that our association can, and will, press in the courts if need be.

I respectfully ask the committee to re-invite PDFORRA to discuss issues on a six-monthly or annual basis. This would not be a wasted exercise. The Defence Forces belong to the members and the citizens and, at this point in our nation's history, they need to be minded by them and the democratic institutions of the State. They need the Oireachtas to care for them through what will no doubt be a rocky road to recovery. In the foregoing respect, PDFORRA intends to honour the thoughts of Patrick Pearse when he said:

We have not lost. To refuse to fight would have been to lose; to fight is to win. We have kept faith with the past, and handed on a tradition to the future.

PDFORRA intends to fight and hand on a better Defence Forces to those who come after us, our children, our nephews and nieces, our comrades.

I thank our members and their families for standing by us, and for helping PDFORRA bolster the case for increases in allowances. On behalf of our members, I wish to thank the committee for its work.

Chairman: I thank Mr. Guinan for his presentation. We welcome the detailed presentation of the many issues confronting the members of PDFORRA and the importance of addressing them. It is clear that some of the issues can be dealt with without substantial State expenditure in regard to the working time directive rights and the pay and conditions as well. We are limited in time because I brought in PDFORRA after Senator Leyden spoke to me about the importance of hearing from its representatives. This is an additional meeting. I remind colleagues that we have another meeting at 11 a.m. , there will be a meeting of the Joint Committee on the Imple-

mentation of the Good Friday Agreement meeting at 12 noon following by another meeting of this committee at 2 p.m. We are constrained time wise. I insist on members not making statements. There will be questions only and the contributions will be grouped. The first members who have indicated are Deputies Jack Chambers and Noel Grealish and following that I will revert to Mr. Guinan.

Deputy Jack Chambers: I welcome Mr. Guinan, Mrs Timmins, Mr. Keane and Mr. Bright and Mr. Maguire who is in the Visitors Gallery.

I thank PDFORRA for its comprehensive statement and the work its representatives have been doing on behalf of the members. My first question relates to the pay commission. What is Mr. Guinan's sense of the ongoing delay and why this is continuing to be delayed, in spite of the Minister of State having read the report, as he confirmed in the Dáil in the past couple of weeks? Why is the Government fudging the issue and continuing to delay it? Leaks have confirmed that for a private of less than three years' service, he or she would receive 96 cent before tax per day. What message would that send to members if that is what the pay commission delivered in the change to the military service allowance for a serving member? There has been significant concern that it could send the wrong message and drive a greater exit from the Defence Forces.

Mr. Guinan expressed the difficulties of PDFORRA with the conciliation and arbitration scheme and that they have ended up in the courts more often than not. This has impacted on members and delayed the association's attempt to deal with significant issues. Are there serious issues with the integrity of the conciliation and arbitration scheme? Is it a delaying tactic on the part of the Department? We are deploying the Army Ranger Wing to Mali. How does Mr. Guinan feel about the ongoing delay to their payments, that have been put on the long finger by the Department?

What is the state of the relationship between PDFORRA and the Department? I know the previous association that came before us expressed the serious dysfunction and the difficulty that they have in dealing with the Department on matters of policy.

There is an issue with voting. The Minister has confirm that there is a review ongoing because many of the PDFORRA members were not able to exercise the basic democratic right to vote in the recent local and European elections as there have been a number of confirmed cases where the democratic process broke down but only for members of the Defence Forces, effectively second class citizens by the electoral system in this State in the recent local and European elections. How does Mr. Guinan feel about that? He might want to comment on it.

I would like to refer to some issues relating to health. I am aware that the association has to run some diagnostic investigations privately because the current health system is failing members of the Defence Forces. I ask Mr. Guinan to give the committee some detail about why the association needs to do this. What impact is it having on the physical and mental health of members of the Defence Forces?

In recent days, the Government has signed off on the payment of a pay award to judges. Given that it had no difficulty giving a pay award to some of the highest-paid people in the public service, how does Mr. Guinan feel about the ongoing denial of increases in pay and allowances to his members?

I would also like to mention accommodation issues. Many members of the Defence Forces are having to spend their days off sleeping in overcrowded accommodation on ships because

they cannot afford rent payments. We have heard many Government announcements and re-announcements about the provision of accommodation, but nothing has happened. Would Mr. Guinan like to share some real stories of what members of the Defence Forces are experiencing as they contend with accommodation issues?

Does Mr. Guinan feel that members of the Defence Forces are *de facto* being paid less than the national minimum wage? What is the real-life experience for them, when the hours they work each week and the weekly underpayment or under-delivery of duty allowance are taken into consideration? We know that members of the Defence Forces are the worst-paid staff in the public service. It is shocking that the State is in open breach of its own minimum wage legislation. Perhaps Mr. Guinan will comment on that. I thank the witnesses for coming before us.

Deputy Noel Grealish: I thank the members of PDFORRA for their presentation. We recently got a presentation from the Representative Association of Commissioned Officers, RACO, which painted a bleak picture like the picture that has been painted today. I will adhere to what the Chair has said in asking my questions. I am aware that PDFORRA made a submission to the Public Service Pay Commission, which has been mentioned by Deputy Chambers. What kind of engagement does PDFORRA feel the commission had with it? Is Mr. Guinan confident that something positive will come out of that engagement?

Have the pay and conditions of members of the Defence Forces been compared with pay and conditions of armed forced personnel in countries like the UK and France? If we are lagging behind such countries with regard to pay and conditions, including service abroad payments, how far behind are we? As we all know, members of the Irish Army are serving all over the world and are going to Mali shortly. I ask Mr. Guinan to elaborate on this issue.

It has been suggested that 90 members of the Defence Forces are getting the working family payment. I think that is 90 too many. Nobody in the Defence Forces should be receiving the family income supplement. According to the Department of Defence, the number is roughly 90, which is 90 too many. The number might be more or less than 90. Mr. Guinan might clarify the matter.

I asked the last group that came before us to explain where it has all gone wrong. I am sure Mr. Guinan knows Mr. Ger Ahearne, who told us that the relationship with the Department is dysfunctional and broken. Where does Mr. Guinan believe the problem lies? Who is not fighting in the higher echelons of the Defence Forces? Is it the senior officers, the officials in the Department or the Minister? Any time defence questions are asked in the Dáil, the pay and conditions of members of the Defence Forces are raised constantly. We should be focusing on the excellent work they are doing. I will conclude because I am conscious of the time constraints and I know other members want to come in. I ask Mr. Guinan to elaborate on the matters I have raised. I thank him again for his presentation.

Mr. Gerard Guinan: Deputy Chambers asked about the report of the pay commission. It would be an understatement to say we are angry. We expected the report three or four weeks ago. Words cannot express how angry I am about the fact that it has not been done. Words escape me. I know there has been engagement in the background. There was mediation on the working time directive. I am precluded from divulging the details of that. A settlement offer is on the table. I engaged in 14 hours of mediation talks a number of weeks ago. At that time, there could have been a desire to bundle everything up, if members know what I mean. The results of the mediation could have come out with the working time directive, the pay commission and a number of other issues we are working on in the background. I do not know whether

that was possible, but I know that this process is actually happening.

Members of the Defence Forces on the ground are at the end of their tether with all of this. The truth is that the hypocrisy is just lost on them. They believe that if they did their job in such a tardy fashion, they would be on the mat. They would be facing military discipline for incitement to disaffection or some other charge under military law. Members have had enough. They want to see this report, regardless of whether it is good, bad or indifferent, so they can decide what to make of it. As it is, people are walking out the door because they are tired of being treated like second-class citizens who do not matter. They matter because they are vital to this State. They undertake training that does not feature in people's worst nightmares. They walk around in NBC suits in the middle of summer. They jump from helicopters and they train to get up on ships. They run the risk of injury every single day in the jobs they do. When they look at the democratic institutions of this State, they ask why they have been failed by those institutions. As they see it, the failure to publish this report in a timely fashion is just another failure. I do not know why reports are not published. I cannot answer for Government Departments. We are annoyed. We are just at the end of our tether. I hope the committee understands our palpable frustration. The Defence Forces is a tinderbox at the moment. Morale is on the floor. I suppose I am the living embodiment of that. I am supposed to come here and represent my members, but it is impossible for me to do so to the required extent. I want to go out and scream it from the rooftops. I want to say stuff that is bad, but I know I have to go back in next week to talk to these officials and get on with them. My problem is that I have to bundle all of this up inside while representing my members at the same time. I hope everyone appreciates that we have come to the end of the rope. The report must be published now. This needs to be done.

I cannot comment on the purported pay awards to junior privates because I do not know what the position is. Deputy Chambers, who has been a strong advocate for the Defence Forces, mentioned the suggestion that there will be an award of 96 cent a day before tax. There is not a Deputy or Senator in the room I have not met in recent months. I have plagued them all. They have all been very good to us. They have raised the stuff we have asked them to raise. If it is just 96 cent, people will walk out the door. I hope to God there is more than that in the report. I believe there is more than that in it. I have to believe all of this is not for naught. We have to save people who want to remain in service. There is no alternative. It has to be better than 96 cent a day. It has been reported in the media that allowances like the military service allowance will be increased by 10%. I do not believe that will not be enough to save the Navy, which is in a dire state. Those people deserve more than that. If we included our sea area, we would be the fourth biggest country in Europe. The Naval Service patrols go out daily. They do a hard job and 10% is not enough. We are going to have to go back and fight for more for them.

The conciliation and arbitration scheme is dysfunctional. It was dysfunctional to the point that we went to the European Committee of Social Rights in 2014 with a claim for freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining. I have to thank the committee for its motion last week in favour of allowing PDFORRA to associate with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, ICTU. There was a standing joke in our office that people on the far side of the table had done the "No" course. We would look for something and the answer would be "No" as a matter of course. Effectively that is when we kicked in. The people who founded our association were visionary. They wanted to have a legal fighting fund. I looked at it and asked why did we have millions in the bank and not use the money for the benefit of the members and go to court. The association never wanted to go to court. We wanted to use the conciliation and arbitration process to improve the pay and conditions of our members but there was nothing happening, even when irrefutable claims were brought, such as the Susan O'Donnell case last year.

In 2015 I submitted a claim for Ms O'Donnell for carry-over leave. We asked for the regulation to be changed and we got nothing. We wrote again and said it would be in compliance with EU law and the answer was "No". What alternative did we have but to go to court? It is rank hypocrisy to make statements in the media that because PDFORRA undertook legal action the whole thing was delayed. What else would we do? If we do not go to court it gets stalled in the conciliation and arbitration system and we are repeatedly told "No". We are left with no alternative. The costs were approaching €100,000 in the court. Twenty minutes before we went into court, there was an offer to settle, the regulation was changed and Ms O'Donnell got all her leave back. The State is paying that money and the delay in implementing that directive affects my members. Our members lost 147,000 days' leave. If the value of a day's leave is calculated and that is multiplied by 147,000 it comes to between €17 million and €22 million. That is what the State saved off the back of my members by not affording them their entitlements. I am lost for words.

I no longer have regrets about going to court. I used to feel it as a personal failing that I could not go into a conciliation and arbitration process and argue and convince the other side that this was the right thing to do. When I write claims now I am writing them for a solicitor down the road. I never think this is going to be settled here or through the process. I think that ultimately it will be a "No" and I will send it to the solicitor.

There is a video on social media of members of the Army Ranger Wing, ARW, flying along in a boat beside a big ship, climbing up a ladder onto the ship and rappelling from a helicopter onto the deck. People do not cop that there are no safety nets. If those guys fall off that rope or out of that chopper they are injured. What do we do to them? Under current regulations, we take their allowance off them after 28 days. If they go into a hostage house and fire live bullets and get injured we take the allowance off them after 28 days. It is disgraceful. I cannot change that because of financial emergency measures in the public interest, FEMPI, legislation.

In 2010 we went to an independent adjudicator and won an award for the Army Ranger Wing to get an increase of its ARW allowance to €200. I appreciate that the financial crash came and the award was held in abeyance. We were always told it was there and would be paid once the emergency was over. That would be consistent with the International Labour Organization, ILO, guidelines, which state that if an essential service enters into a process, once the award is made by the adjudicator it is implemented and paid promptly. Nine years later, and 15 years after the back pay was due, those guys have not been paid. I believe that the person sending members of the ARW to one of the most dangerous places in the world should be worthy of those men and should pay them their money, which they are rightly owed. They should get a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. The same applies to the chefs. I do not want to forget those guys. They feed us all. Many of them have left since 2010 and have gone out with reduced pension entitlements because the award was not made. How fair is that? They worked on and through no fault of their own reached 60 and were forced to leave the Defence Forces. I have spoken to Senators Craughwell and Leyden and I know the Chairman raised it in the Dáil last week. I have spoken to Deputy Ó Snodaigh, Senator McFadden, Deputy Heydon and to the Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, Deputy Moran, about it. The dogs in the street know that this has to be paid, that it is only the fair and proper thing to do. Let us just do it. The State should not be forcing us into court to get these guys' money. The Government should do the right thing by them.

On the medical aid scheme, about two years ago we took €10,000 out of our budget and said if a member needed a medical scan or whatever we would give it to him free, if his contract

was coming up. Last year, the executive of PDFORRA had the foresight and bravery to take €150,000 out of our association funds and put it into a separate financial vehicle, the PDFORRA medical assistance, PMA, scheme. We send our members up to Kingsbridge Hospital in Belfast to get private treatment because the medical corps is on its knees. When I joined in 1990, there were three hospitals with one each in the Curragh, Dublin and Cork. I have been an inpatient in each of the three at some point over my career. There is nowhere now that a soldier can convalesce. God forbid a soldier is injured overseas for example in Lebanon, which is one of the heavily mined places in the world. A guy who was a class behind me in Army training, Gary Moloney, lost his leg out there in the 80th Battalion the year that I was there. If something like that were to happen again, we would have nowhere to put the people involved. We have nowhere for them to convalesce. Another point to consider is that there are many resident non-nationals joining the Defence Forces now who may not have their own apartments to come back to. They are young, single guys. While it would not be appropriate for them to convalesce in a barracks, we have nowhere else to put them. PDFORRA is taking care of its own now. We hope to expand the scheme to our members' families down the road and, perhaps, to veterans. We have a long-term plan for the medical assistance scheme to take care of people. To a certain extent, it is the veterans who are currently taking care of us and we would like to give back in some small measure down the road.

I refer to voting papers.

Chairman: I am reluctant to intervene, but we will have to have shorter answers. I am conscious of wanting to bring in all of my colleagues. Some of the issues will arise again. I ask for short responses if possible.

Mr. Gerard Guinan: Yes. We wrote to military management about a week before voting took place. We were apprehensive about ballot papers getting out to people. On the day, we were contacted by a number of members who told us their commanding officers had written letters to try to get them to be able to vote in their local polling stations. We have asked for an investigation, as has Deputy Chambers. It is of serious concern to us and we want it fixed. There is a loss of corporate memory within some units and who knows what else. I do not want to engage in conjecture. We will just try to get to the bottom of it.

I was asked about the relationship with the Department. It is desperately frustrating at the moment. I have given the committee the example of the O'Donnell case and the cases of the apprentices and what we have had to do to get things over the line. It is deeply frustrating for everybody. The whole industrial relations environment within the State is in chaos at the moment. We have seen what has happened with nurses and what is happening now with HSE staff so we are not unique in general. However, we are unique insofar as we cannot strike. Some goodwill has to come from that. It must. It is a restriction the political system imposes on us. We cannot get around it other than to go to court. If we lose a case, it costs us €100,000 to prove we were wrong. There must be an easier way to resolve matters.

I was asked about accommodation. I will pass over to my colleague and president, Mr. Mark Keane, to discuss that issue.

Mr. Mark Keane: We have seen many false dawns on accommodation in the Naval Service. Currently, we operate a nine-ship fleet which means we have an average of 11 or 12 people living on board. While a great deal has been said in the media recently about inward investment in the Naval Service of upwards of €65 million for a new ship, which we agree with, there are still older ships in the fleet. For example, the 35 year old *LÉ Ciara* is still in service. These ships

have 11 berths which means we have 11 personnel in a room. I ask members to picture that in the context of a 26-day cycle of patrols. During that sovereign maritime patrol, those personnel are 26 days away from a naval base and that is where they spend their time. They come back in for a 16-day self-maintenance period during which time they must remain aboard. These people work an average of 60 to 70 hours per week at sea. The larger ships do up to four months away from home, which is the norm in any navy. They come back and have a 16-day cycle during which they are back in the naval base. Personnel must also perform military duties on board the ship and are forced to live-in where they work. We would not ask anyone else to do that. We have heard a great deal in the media about citizens who cannot afford accommodation. Our members are citizens in uniform and they deserve a place to put their heads at night. They deserve a place to go whereby they can get off these ships. We speak a great deal about health and safety and wellbeing. What about the wellbeing of these personnel? We have seen a lot of false dawns on this. I can go back as far as 2002 and 2012 when all of these announcements were made. I understand the financial straightjacket the Department is in but we are asking for €11.5 million. We are not asking for a lot when one thinks about it. I ask the committee to consider that these men and women serve the country and do us proud. Members have seen them in the Mediterranean and overseas but when we bring them home, we ask them to live on these ships. That is what we give them back.

Mr. Gerard Guinan: Deputy Grealish asked whether we were catching up with other countries. It is a matter of apples and oranges. The British armed forces have a huge budget. Senator Crawford will be well aware of their allowances. They have housing, living-away allowances and allowances to get people homes. They have all manner of allowances for their service personnel. They have a different history from ourselves. It is funny but I was going through the Official Report of the Dáil recently and found that there were houses being built in Cobh before the British Navy left what was then Queenstown. There was a history of building properties. It has had a significant impact on personnel that we do not have housing or adequate accommodation for people. I interact a great deal with personnel from EUROMIL and I know that most of their armed forces have adequate housing, married quarters and so on. We stopped providing that a long time ago and it has had a deep impact on pay and allowances.

I was asked about the working family payment. We raised the issue before the Committee of Public Accounts in 2012 and it had been raised at that stage by a Deputy from Cork in the Dáil. I agree 100% that to have 90 personnel in receipt of working family payment is not acceptable. There is fear out there. The problem in the Defence Forces is as follows. Those 90 guys might be €2 or €3 under the threshold for working family payment. However, the minimum payment under the scheme is €20. If one gets a €5 raise, one is down €15. It beggars belief that soldiers are so close to the threshold. One can refer to 90 people, but there may be thousands who are so close that an increase in pay of €10 will take them out of the basket of those who are entitled to the working family payment. That is the fear people have. Imagine that soldiers are fearful of a small rise in pay because it will cost them money. It is lunacy.

I was asked where it had all gone wrong. This did not happen yesterday. It has happened over the past ten years. The FEMPI legislation contributed significantly because it imposed this false, bureaucratic system on people who are asked to do more with less. Everybody felt the pressure and all public servants came under scrutiny with certain people and certain cohorts suggesting that they were lucky to have a job. Nobody was lucky to have a job. We worked hard and we continue to do so. Nobody owes anyone a living, but one cannot work people to the bone either. People deserve human dignity and the ability to live a fair life. I do not know where it all went wrong but there is a great deal of blame to go around and to be shared among

lots of different people. That is all I can say.

Chairman: I will take Senator McFadden followed by Deputy Ó Snodaigh. We are fast running out of time, unfortunately.

Senator Gabrielle McFadden: I thank the witnesses for being here today. I thank them also for their service to their members. We feel the frustration of the association and its members. There is no one here who does not feel that frustration on their behalf. I will stick to questions, but before I turn to those, I compliment the witnesses on what they have achieved. They sound almost heartbroken that they have not achieved enough. I feel how sincere they are about that, but I note that they have achieved some things such as the review of contracts, increased pay scales for new privates and the medical assistance scheme, PMAS. Those are achievements to proud of, and we commend the witnesses on what they have done. I accept completely what they said about salaries and family income support. The argument that if only 90 people are affected then there is no problem is a disgraceful one. One person wearing an Irish uniform who requires family income support is one too many, as I have said on previous occasions.

I am particularly concerned about the four outstanding adjudications, particularly that relating to the cook technicians, which I have been talking about for a long time. It makes me sad that so many people have retired without receiving what they were promised. Two dear friends of mine in that position passed away since I started talking about this issue. I understand that an offer was made to PDFORRA on the adjudications, with payback to 1 October. I am strongly of the view that this is not good enough and that those concerned should get what they were awarded. However, I wonder whether the witnesses see any merit in accepting that offer as a starting point from which we might separate out the ongoing payment from the backlog and see how we can move the process forward for the benefit of Defence Force members? I see that PDFORRA is caught between a rock and a hard place, but might the delegates see their way to considering the offer as a starting point from which a way forward could be mapped?

I will conclude with the same question I asked the delegates at the last meeting. If the witnesses had a magic wand which allowed them to achieve three doable things in the morning, which three would they choose?

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: I thank the delegates from PDFORRA for attending this meeting and for all their help over the years in explaining things to those of us who are on the outside looking in. Sometimes the different systems and so on can be complicated, as is the case in so many areas of life. The delegates have managed to illuminate many aspects of the workings of the Defence Forces for me. The witnesses said that morale among their members is on the floor. Does having to take court cases add to that sense of low morale and not being appreciated? They are being forced to do things that they would not have imagined having to do when they joined the Defence Forces. I am sure it was none of their intention to have to pursue the Department through the courts and focus so much energy and attention to fighting it rather than fighting with it.

The witnesses referred to the sinful waste of personnel having to retire at 50 years of age. I have argued the point with the Minister and others that the Defence Forces are out of line in this regard. We have come a long way as a society and people of 50 today are much fitter and more able than they were 100 years ago. Elsewhere in the Civil Service, the movement is towards a retirement age of 68. In some parts of the private sector, people can work until they drop if they so wish. In the Defence Forces, however, people are on the scrap heap at 50 as far as the Department is concerned. Will the delegates comment further on that?

Can the fall in personnel numbers be reversed? There has been talk of the possibility of mass submissions of discharge applications on a single day, with several hundred people seeking to leave the Defence Forces at the same time. Given the chaos that is already there, we will be facing a grave situation if that happens. I understand how people might be so frustrated at the failure to deliver on what they hoped for that they decide they have had enough. In such circumstances, the Defence Forces could grind to a halt. Do the witnesses agree, as some people have argued, that the Minister and the Department are betraying their duties by not standing up for Defence Forces members? One could say that they are not fulfilling their mandate if they are not looking after the men and women of the forces.

The witnesses mentioned the positive things they have achieved, including the PMAS. I understand that given the constraints on PDFORRA's operations, other groups such as Wives and Partners of the Defence Forces have emerged to campaign on some of the issues the witnesses have raised. What is PDFORRA's view on those groups? I commend people for having the courage to take that action, but it would not have been necessary in the past when there seemed to be a greater appreciation for the role of Defence Forces personnel. That the wives and partners of members have to take to the street or otherwise seek to raise the profile of these issues is significant. I am interested in the witnesses' perspective on that development given that they have had to pursue things in a different manner.

Senator Terry Leyden: I thank the Chairman and clerk for facilitating this meeting with the PDFORRA delegates at short notice. I welcome the witnesses and thank them for their fantastic submission on behalf of their members. They are doing an excellent job of representation which might not always get the appreciation it should. They are certainly doing as much work as any registered union. The witnesses have been somewhat hard on themselves today but their frustration is understandable. They had an expectation that the Public Service Pay Commission report would be published by now and they would be able to discuss it today with the committee. It is something of a disadvantage that we do not have that report. Perhaps it is no coincidence that publication was delayed against a background where it was well known in the Department that the witnesses were coming here today to give evidence. That being said, they will have plenty of opportunities to respond publicly when the report is published. We all hope that it recommends that Defence Forces members be given the payments to which they are entitled. PDFORRA has had to go to court to fight for those entitlements and arbitration in that regard is ongoing. It should never have been necessary to do so.

The medical assistance scheme PDFORRA established is very impressive, as I discovered when I attended the meetings about it. It seems a shame, however, that the Army, Naval Service and Air Corps should have to rely on their own means to establish such a service for members. Many people in this country would find it hard to believe that an adequate scheme is not already in place for personnel. The British army has a hospital in Ireland, Leopardstown Park Hospital, where it has looked after its retired members for the past 50 or 60 years. In fairness, that army has access to much greater resources than ours could provide.

Once the report is published and the situation is clearer, I hope that the Chairman and the clerk have a short meeting with the PDFORRA representatives to discuss its contents. That might be in the autumn. I wish the witnesses well and pay tribute to the former members of their executive including founding member, Mr. John Lucey.

Senator Gerard P. Craughwell: I will dispense with welcomes and so on as the witnesses know who I am and I know who they are. We have all served. I have several questions for them. Is it true that a number of naval ships have been taken out of service because we do not

have the personnel to man them?

In regard to representation at national level under an umbrella group, there has been talk of PDFORRA affiliating with the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, ICTU. I understand that their colleague representation bodies and the Garda Síochána would prefer to see something like the Armed Forces Pay Review Body in the United Kingdom being established here. Do the delegates have a preference or would they accept either?

Is it time for another review of the Defence Forces like that which resulted in the Gleeson report and, if so, how soon would PDFORRA like it to happen?

PDFORRA has come under serious criticism for failing to write to its members to ask them to support public parades. The public is entitled to know why that was not done. I know why it was not done and the members know why it was not done, but the public is entitled to know.

The Department of Defence says that there is no problem with the strength of the Permanent Defence Force and that the organisation is at 93%. I would love that to be explained to me because I cannot see how it can be 93% - 8,300 into 9,500 is not 93%. What is the relationship with military management? Is it 100% behind PDFORRA at this stage?

My final question is on the issue of sergeants at 50 years of age. Recently, pilots were brought back to the Air Corps at captain and lieutenant colonel rank and there is an open invitation to commissioned officers to return. I have friends who are sergeants who, at 50 years of age, are coming up on discharge. They are fit, highly qualified and highly skilled men. What is happening with respect to inviting them to remain so as to keep their skills?

I will leave it at that, Chairman, although I could talk all day on this. You have been very kind.

Chairman: You can do that at the weekend. As welcome as your contribution is, Senator Craughwell, that will be all. Mr. Guinan, we are seven minutes into injury time, and we have to be out of this room and the committee has another meeting.

Mr. Gerard Guinan: I will start with Senator McFadden's question.

Chairman: Deputy Heydon, you have a quick question.

Deputy Martin Heydon: I thank PDFORRA for coming in and for the great work that it does. The points made this morning were very constructive. We know that the Public Sector Pay Commission is the mechanism to try to address the shortfalls in allowances. As a representative body, how will the reaction of members be gauged when that report comes? What will the process be afterwards? It is very important that members are given the time and space to consider all the outcomes, which we hope will be as beneficial as possible for members. We definitely want to see that. Perhaps the panel can touch on what that process will be.

Chairman: Thank you, Deputy Heydon. Those have all been asked. We are short of time.

Mr. Gerard Guinan: I will start with Senator McFadden's questions on the outstanding adjudications from 2010. If the Government wants to impose on us that it will be paid from 1 October 2018, it can argue that that constitutes "promptly". However, we cannot accept just that. These men deserve more. I have plagued Deputy Heydon, Senator Craughwell and others about the need for these adjudications to be implemented. My bottom line is this: if the Government imposes that on us, that is grand. It gives us a fighting chance to go back to the

courts to argue for the back payment. The State has accepted a liability with effect from 1 October. The Government might call that prompt but we do not, and we will argue that through the courts. We need everybody to row in behind this and get it over the line for us. I know that the Senator's dad down in Athlone was a sergeant major at one time, and I understand that she has friends who are chefs and so on. The system is grossly unfair.

I will rush through Deputy Ó Snodaigh's questions. Over the past couple of years, he has been very welcoming to me and has picked up the phone any time I am on the line. He advocates strongly for us. The Deputy asked about our relationship with the Department. It is not good, but I have to work with these people. The Defence Forces are apolitical and are bound by Defence Forces regulation A6 and section 27, which prohibits us from engaging in public commentary of a political nature. If the committee does not mind, I will leave it at that.

The dogs on the street know that there is a problem in the Defence Forces, but we try to play the ball and not the man. Our members deserve everything we can give them and the State owes them that, because they work with those restrictions.

I cannot remember whether there were other questions.

Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh: The age profile.

Mr. Gerard Guinan: The Deputy is 100% correct in what he said about the age profile. We have talked about this before. The figure of 50 is arbitrary. Back in 1994, a private could serve for 21 years, but I know privates who are 50 and who could run me into the ground. Why not have subjective criteria to select who gets to stay on in the Defence Forces, as opposed to objective criteria? We are prepared for court proceedings on that as well, if it comes down to it. There are strong advocates in military management for increasing the age for sergeants, and we have the 21-year contracts up until 2022. Let us hope that cool minds prevail and people are allowed to remain in service for longer.

The wives and partners of our members were mentioned, and we are grateful for what they do. Senator Craughwell also asked about that, so I will cut across two questions. In 2013, I marched on the ICTU day of protest, and back in the day I attended public meetings on barrack closures. The Defence Forces regulations are not specific. Provided it is not political, members can attend public gatherings. However, last September, particular circumstances gave rise to a situation. We had thought about issuing the 2013 circular which informed members of their rights, but then something happened and we could not issue it. We ended up going down the road of the courts. As much as people criticise us, we are in this for the long haul. We want rights for down the road, which would be populist. Other organisations issued letters, but they are not engaged in court actions. We are, and we know the rules surrounding that. In court, there is the principle of clean hands. If we want equity, we have to show equity. We have to play by the rules. That has not been nice, and it has been very hard for our association and my executive to try to balance the public relations aspect of PDFORRA with what members want. Members want to fight and they want to see us fighting. I have no problem fighting. I went to numerous public gatherings, including the ICTU parade, as did members of the executive. We have no problem going to public events to show our dissatisfaction. However, we are subject to military law and we have to obey it. The wives and partners and veterans have been very good to us, and we appreciate it. However, neither I nor the association can engage in public agitation and we cannot make commentary of a political nature. Those are the rules and we have to abide by them. We cannot expect respect but at the same time not give it. It hurts to see what was said about us.

Since 1994, we have wanted into ICTU, and Peter Cassells appeared at our conference at that time. I thank all Deputies who voted for that last week. Years ago, Michael McNamara had a Labour Party Private Members' Bill seeking our affiliation to ICTU. Last week, again, it was a Private Members' Bill, and I understand that it cannot be implemented. That was the same for Michael McNamara's Private Members' Bill that was passed. We want into ICTU.

In its introduction, the Gleeson report commented that it had been 60 years since there had been an independent review. His was the first independent review of Defence Forces pay and allowances. We are 30 years on from that Gleeson commission report. It is plain and simple. There is a need for a review of Defence Forces pay. I am currently working off two different pay rates, three different pensions and various contracts. I walk into a room of approximately 100 guys and if I start talking about figures, they ask, "Is that my salary, your salary or his pension?".

I am sorry but I have just remembered the question about a magic wand. Pay, pensions and the working time directive are all doable. The pensions are horrific for people who go beyond 2004. I visited every barracks in the country last year and told people about their pensions. The fact that we are compulsorily retired at a certain age and cannot get one's pension until the age of 60 is crippling people. The Minister is creating a significant moral hazard in the system. I will not go into that but pensions, pay and allowances and the working time directive are the magic wand, and they are all doable.

On the question of ships being tied up-----

Chairman: Mr. Guinan might be very brief.

Mr. Gerard Guinan: Whether ships are being tied up because of a lack of personnel is an operational matter. Navy personnel numbers are down. They are probably at its lowest ebb ever. Members can draw their own conclusions from that. In 1990, there were ships tied up at a time when we had more personnel and fewer ships. If we reverse engineer, so to speak, that answer members will find out the reason ships are being tied up.

Mr. Martin Bright: May I quickly respond to Senator Leyden?

Chairman: Very briefly, please. We are way beyond time, unfortunately.

Mr. Martin Bright: Regarding the PDFORRA medical assistance scheme, PMAS, the Senator raised, we represent some of the best people in the public service. As Deputy Jack Chambers mentioned earlier, and Mr. Guinan remarked on it in his opening statement, these are the lowest-paid staff in the public sector. What does it say about our members that they are willing to pay into a fund to make sure their own comrades get medical treatment?

Chairman: I thank Mr. Guinan and his colleagues, Amie Timmins, Mark Keane, Martin Bright and Donogh Maguire for their presentation. It is very clear from the contributions of all my colleagues that these are very serious issues. It is about respect for the members of the Permanent Defence Force. At all meetings where we discuss defence issues, we always make sure to pay tribute to the great work and the service their members give to our State. In return, the State should properly recognise that work and commitment and the dangers the members of the Defence Forces face on a daily basis.

It is clear from their presentation that this issue is not just about money. There are monetary issues that need to be addressed but there are also governance issues, relationships with the

Department and the way the Department and the Defence Forces do their business. I assure the witnesses that this committee will continue to pursue those issues. We will be having discussions with the Minister of State in the future and we will raise all of these issues in correspondence to him and the Department in advance of meeting with the Minister.

As Senator Leyden suggested, we will give the witnesses and representatives of RACO an opportunity to have further discussions on these issues in the autumn. We want to send out a clear message that the welfare, pay and conditions of the members of the Permanent Defence Force are of concern to the committee and this Oireachtas. That view is shared across all members here. Those are issues we will pursue. I come from an area that has a proud and long tradition of having substantial numbers employed in the Permanent Defence Force since the foundation of the State. I note the commitment of individuals and families, going back generations, who continue to give great service to our country. We want to ensure that is recognised. I sincerely thank the witnesses for their presentation.

The meeting is adjourned until 2 p.m. when we will meet the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade to discuss matters raised and discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting. An informal meeting will commence at 11 a.m. with representatives of the OECD.

The joint committee adjourned at 10.54 a.m. until 2 p.m. on Thursday, 27 June 2019.

Second Meeting of Joint Committee on 27 June 2019: Attendance List

The following members were in attendance: Deputy Niall Collins, Deputy Seán Crowe, Deputy Maureen O'Sullivan, Deputy Tony McLoughlin and Senator Billy Lawless.

Deputy Brendan Smith was in the Chair.

Foreign Affairs Council: Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

Chairman: We will deal with the private business after we have dealt with the public business.

This purpose of this meeting was to give the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Deputy Coveney, an opportunity to discuss matters that have arisen at recent meetings of the EU Foreign Affairs Council. Our meeting has been delayed considerably due to votes in the Chamber. I understand that the Tánaiste has commitments in Belfast and that we may have to defer this meeting with him to a future date. We will arrange another meeting as soon as possible. I know he is under pressure timewise to travel but does the Tánaiste wish to comment briefly?

Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade (Deputy Simon Coveney): I want to apologise to people because this is not the way it should be in terms of trying to rush to have conversations, questions and so on. However, I have to be in Belfast for 5 p.m. for an important commitment this evening. If I stay for an hour now I will be an hour late for that meeting and I ask for people's understanding on that.

I would like to rearrange the meeting if we could have one before we break up for the sum-

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mer. There are many foreign affairs issues on which I am sure members would like to ask me questions from the Middle East to Venezuela, Libya, Brexit and Northern Ireland, as well as some of the US relationship issues. Members probably have other issues in which they have a personal interest and I would like to give them the courtesy of a proper questions and answers session to allow us dig into some of those rather than giving them a brief summary here, which essentially is not giving any detailed information. If the committee will facilitate it, I would like us to try to reconvene the week after next, if it is possible to do so, and try to find a time that week that would be convenient for people before the Dáil breaks up for the summer. I am in the Chairman's hands. It is totally up to him. If he wants to do it in September, we will do it in September but I will certainly try to make myself available, if possible, the week after next even though there is a lot happening that week, particularly around Brexit. However, it might be an opportunity for us to have a more detailed discussion on some of those issues. We will be bringing a number of Brexit papers to Cabinet that week, and I suspect there will be statements in the Dáil that week on those papers in respect of Brexit preparedness and so on but if we could schedule an hour or two for a questions and answers session on foreign affairs issues here, I would happily try to accommodate the Chairman.

Chairman: The committee understands the pressures in that regard and wishes the Tánaiste and other participating parties well in the talks in Belfast this evening. The clerk to the committee will discuss with his office the possibility of holding a meeting the week after next.

The joint committee went into private session at 3.10 p.m. and adjourned at 3.20 p.m. until 2.15 p.m. on Tuesday, 2 July 2019.