



# IRELAND

Statement by

Mr. Simon Coveney, T.D.

Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) and  
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

at the

United Nations General Assembly General Debate  
73<sup>rd</sup> Session of the United Nations General Assembly  
New York

28 September, 2018

*Check against delivery*

PERMANENT MISSION OF IRELAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS  
885 SECOND AVENUE, NEW YORK, NY 10017 TELEPHONE 212 421-6934 FAX 212 752-4726  
newyorkpmun@dfa.ie

President,

The General Assembly is meeting this week as we mark the 100th anniversary of the birth of Nelson Mandela and as we mourn the recent death of Kofi Annan. Two great leaders from Africa whose personal commitment to the values and principles of multilateralism was unwavering - something we should reflect on and draw inspiration from, particularly at this time of global instability and open challenge to the very approach to global decision-making that has been the foundation of this institution.

Ireland was honoured to have been asked to co-facilitate the consultative process with Member States to produce the Political Declaration adopted at the Mandala Peace Summit on Monday. Nelson Mandela and Kofi Annan were revered and loved in Ireland. To do justice to their legacy, we must renew our efforts to actively work for a culture of peace, tolerance and respect for human dignity globally.

Is that not fundamentally what the UN should be about? Can we challenge ourselves to use the Peace Summit and this UNGA week to strive, with the courage and humility which marked them out, for the type of world that Mandela and Annan envisioned? We must do better – and we can do better – to live up to the aspirations they represented.

President, Geographically, Ireland may be a small island on the Western edge of Europe. But in Ireland we see ourselves as an island at the centre of the world, with a global diaspora more than ten times the size of our population at home. We have learned that, in an inter-dependent world, the challenges of our time do not respect geographic boundaries. Finding solutions is a shared responsibility, whether you are a small Polynesian Island or a superpower - we breathe the same air.

This sense of shared responsibility guides Ireland's view of the world and the part we try to play in it.

Almost a century ago Ireland became an independent state, escaping a history of colonialism. Ours is not a unique story; but it is one which allows us to empathise with so many countries here at the UN.

Like the UN itself, we were born out of conflict. It has shaped how we view the world and our responsibilities as global citizens.

Our membership of the UN has played a major part in our development.

We not only support a fair rules-based order in international affairs - we exist, survive and prosper because of it. And we see no viable alternative.

In peacekeeping, disarmament, sustainable development, climate, nutrition, human rights and humanitarian assistance we have striven to match our words with actions and funding, supporting multilateral structures. While the system has flaws, Ireland is convinced that there is no other way to meaningfully address the common opportunities and threats that face each of us.

For Ireland, multilateralism strengthens our independence, self-confidence and security, rather than diminishes it. If you believe in multilateralism, now is the time to fight for it across the UN system, including with powerful countries which have traditionally played great leadership roles within this institution. We cannot defend a logic that views multinational engagement as an abdication of national leadership or a loss of influence on the international stage.

We urgently need global leadership which galvanises global support through strength of argument, which leads in finding solutions to our collective problems, to raise living standards for everyone, in particular those furthest behind.

We need positive outward-looking leadership by the great powers in the UN, particularly powers which traditionally have been indispensable, if imperfect, forces for good. Without this, I fear for the future of global stability. I fear for the future of the UN in the work it must do, a work that can never be replicated by transactional bilateral engagement; where the powerful dominate and decisions are no longer based on the strength of argument, compassion or generosity but instead based on states choosing sides, fearful of being “offside” with the strong and powerful or being put on a list for special treatment.

Ireland does not wish to see any diminution in the role played by the UN's leading actors. At the same time, we will always demand a place on the stage for everyone and an atmosphere that encourages free speech and new or sometimes controversial thinking. The UN's foundations will crumble without the inclusivity and generosity of thinking embedded though decades of experience. And sometimes it's the smallest states that have the answers to our biggest problems.

We cannot be complacent, however, about the institutional reforms needed to maximise the UN's legitimacy and relevance in a changing world. Ireland salutes the efforts of Secretary-General Guterres and welcomes the steps taken by the General Assembly on reform. Implementation of these reforms is now key.

Ireland particularly wants to see successful reform of the UN Development System to support the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. That is why my Government earlier this month pledged more than a million dollars in support of the reform of the UN Development System to complement the strong financial support Ireland already provides to UN Funds, Programmes and Agencies.

But reforms at the UN must go beyond the managerial and structural level. The UN's political bodies must also catch up to where the world is. This is particularly the case regarding the Security Council. Ireland is clear on the need to increase the size of the Council. Many areas of the world are either insufficiently represented in the Security Council or not at all represented.

The historic unjust under-representation from Africa in particular needs to be addressed so that there can be a fair African say in Council decisions affecting their own continent, where much of the UN's focus will be needed in the decades ahead. We also want to see consideration of a designated role for Small Island Developing States. The growing impact of climate change on international peace and security lends weight to this call.

It is not only the composition of the Security Council that should be under scrutiny. The use or threat of the veto remains a serious obstacle to the work of the Council.

Far too often, this results in the shocking abandonment of some of the most vulnerable people on earth. The failure of the Security Council to take action to prevent mass atrocity crimes betrays victims and undermines the UN's credibility.

I strongly believe that political reform of the Council would inevitably lead to a greater sense of participation, responsibility and ownership among the UN membership – this would surely only be positive for the functioning of the UN more widely. Many say we are wasting our time calling for reform of the Security Council. Maybe so, but if the power of evidence and argument is to mean anything then Ireland will keep trying to build a coalition for change.

President,

While recognising the need for new structures, we also need to make the best use of existing structures and always look for ways to improve them.

International criminal justice, where there has been an irreversible shift towards accountability, is one such example. It is particularly pertinent to recall this on the twentieth anniversary of the adoption of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Justice and accountability is always a better alternative to revenge, impunity or amnesty. And we have seen important developments in the area of gender-based and sexual violence, by enabling the prosecution of sexual violence as a war crime, a crime against humanity and genocide. We have witnessed universal justice strengthened beyond power politics and beyond geopolitical interests. And I am pleased to report that earlier this month Ireland ratified the Amendments to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court on the Crime of Aggression which were agreed in Kampala. Yesterday I lodged the instrument of ratification with the UN Secretary-General.

President,

Ireland welcomes the level of ambition at the heart of the Secretary-General's new Disarmament Agenda. We hope this will be a turning point in the current challenges facing disarmament and arms control processes.

Ireland is proud of the historic role we played in the development of the Non-Proliferation Treaty in the last Century. The NPT demonstrates what States can achieve together in the spirit of peace and cooperation. However, we also have a responsibility to remain ambitious

in the pursuit of the total elimination of nuclear weapons. Our efforts to promote the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons reflect this.

Ireland is deeply concerned by the persistent use of explosive weapons in populated areas in armed conflicts across the globe.

Civilian populations continue to bear the brunt of armed conflicts and we all must redouble our efforts to fulfil the Secretary-General's call to address this challenge.

We continue to call on the DPRK to abide by its obligations under relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and its international commitments, and to abandon all nuclear and other Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and ballistic missile programmes in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner.

President,

Ireland's multilateralism runs deep through our commitment to UN peacekeeping. Our contribution to UN peacekeeping operations enjoys a special place in the hearts of the Irish people.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of Ireland's participation in UN peacekeeping. For six decades, tens of thousands of Irish women and men have worn the blue helmets and berets on UN peacekeeping operations, particularly on missions in Africa and the Middle East. Our Prime Minister stated here at UN Headquarters in July: "We are as proud of the blue helmet as we are of the harp or the shamrock" – two emblems that are closely associated with Ireland.

Today, there are more than 500 Irish Defence Forces personnel deployed on UN peacekeeping missions, including more than 350 women and men on the UNIFIL mission in Lebanon, a mission that we have been contributing to for 40 years now. Ireland is the highest per capita European Union contributor of troops to UN peacekeeping with deployments to 6 UN missions across the Middle East and Africa.

The UN's humanitarian and development work is central to Ireland's commitment to the UN, but we know we need to do more.

We have reaffirmed our commitment to achieving the UN target of providing 0.7 per cent of Gross National Income for Official Development Assistance by 2030 - the same year the world has pledged to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals.

We are ambitious for Ireland's international development cooperation. We also need to be authentic to our own experiences. We have known hunger. We have known poverty. But we have also experienced transformation, a transformation based on education and innovation and a vibrant civil society.

Our values are not Ireland's alone, however. They are at the core of the 2030 Agenda and the future we seek. We know that to create a peaceful, fair and just world, we must respect the human rights of all. Economic progress cannot be delivered at the cost of equality and protecting the most vulnerable in our societies.

We must also go beyond rhetoric in our efforts to empower women and girls. Gender equality cannot be seen as a gift to be granted, but rather as a fundamental driver which can underpin real improvements in the lives of all of our people.

President,

The need for collective action to address Climate Change is more evident every month. As an island State, we learned centuries ago that the waters surrounding our island cannot deter forces beyond our control - isolation does not mean safety. Since I spoke here last year Ireland has experienced its first hurricane, generated in the east Atlantic, its most severe winter cold weather snap and the most sustained drought in living memory. The denial needs to end and the collective action on climate adaptation and abatement must intensify.

Today many more island nations face challenges not of their making, through climate change, pollution and rising seas. We must work together to face these challenges, nations united by a determination to protect ourselves.

More broadly, the scale of the humanitarian crises facing the international community cannot be overstated. Over 134 million people around the world are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection, with conflict the single greatest driver of this need. As a country committed to humanitarian principles, we will continue contributing to international efforts to

ease the plight of civilians suffering the impact of conflicts in South Sudan, the Central African Republic, Syria, Yemen, Palestine and elsewhere.

Over 68 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes worldwide, with over 25 million cross-border refugees. I am very conscious that a huge majority of displaced people are being sheltered in countries already experiencing high levels of vulnerability and poverty, and that this is placing a huge strain on already very limited resources. Ireland will continue to support refugees and vulnerable host communities.

I particularly want to acknowledge the generosity of many States and the extraordinary burden they are being asked to carry. States like Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Egypt, Jordan, Kenya, Lebanon, Pakistan, Turkey and Uganda, and many more - these countries are hosting enormous numbers of people displaced by conflicts in neighbouring regions.

Bangladesh is now host to the world's largest refugee camp, sheltering over a million refugees. In the year since I last addressed you, this camp has swelled with hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees fleeing appalling violence in neighbouring Rakhine State. The Rohingya must be assured of a safe, voluntary, dignified and sustainable return. And the international community must insist on an end to impunity for the appalling acts of violence that have come to light and ensure accountability for the crimes that have been committed.

President,

Because of Ireland's experience of prolonged, intractable conflict but also a successful peace settlement, the Israel Palestine conflict and lack of progress on a peace agreement is a big foreign policy priority for me and for the Irish Government. Ireland's own experience shows that even decades-long conflicts can have a turning point.

Peace is a process, not a moment. To bear fruit, that process requires untiring work and commitment. And we all surely realise that forced outcomes with winners and losers can never be the basis for lasting peace. From all my visits to the Middle East, I know that the current situation serves the interests of neither people. But I am also conscious that the burden of being under occupation is the heavier one.

Settlement construction underlines this, and is causing ever-greater damage to the prospects for peace. Ireland, like many, is very conscious of the threat to Khan al Ahmar and other strategically-located West Bank villages. What happens there will tell us much about whether we can count on a real commitment to negotiating a two-state solution. The situation in Gaza, also, is simply untenable, and the 1.9 million people living there desperately need the decade-long blockade to end, so that they can start to rebuild normal lives, reject the twisted promises of radicals, and look to the future with hope. They also need countries which fund terrorist activities, chaos and mismanagement in Gaza to halt this unwelcome interference without delay.

When I visited Gaza, I was struck by how much people there rely on the efforts of UNRWA, both to meet basic needs, and to know that they are not forgotten. I am proud that Ireland is such a long-standing supporter of UNRWA, not just in Gaza, but in the West Bank and across the region. Ireland will continue that assistance and has increased our contribution to €7m for this year, recognising the financial pressures. I greatly regret recent cuts to UNRWA's funding by the US and plead with those in power to reconsider the consequence of their decisions. Reform of UNRWA is needed, but in the context of a peace deal and a functioning Palestinian State. Shutting off funding now is simply adding to the turmoil of current pressures where UNRWA cuts are interpreted as a collective punishment, targeting women and children. How does increasing the misery of Palestinians not empower the radicals, who want to poison the minds of hopeless, angry, young Palestinians and destabilise the moderate political leadership who want peace?

A people who have been downtrodden for decades will not be pressured into negotiating through enforced hardship and humiliation - the human soul doesn't work that way. Without hope or dignity, minds close to the compromises we all know are necessary.

I believe there is a way forward for the Middle East Peace Process with American leadership and with the support of others that can help to broker a peace deal between an Israel that justifiably demands security and a Palestinian people who dream of their own country and state. Ireland is a small player in all of this, but we will continue to advocate honestly for progress and justice as a friend of both Israel and Palestine.

President, Member States know that Ireland is a proud and ambitious candidate for a seat on the Security Council at the elections to be held in 2020. We have been making our case better known with States over the past months.

We Irish are by nature bridge-builders. We listen to all sides and work to build collective solutions to our global challenges.

We are committed to hearing and heeding the voices of all, to forge consensus and common purpose.

We think independently. Our path is our own. We bring no partisan agenda to the table. We are here to serve the wider good and to support the UN and the multilateral system.

And we will be courageous when the UN, and all of you, need courage and leadership from the Security Council.

Empathy, partnership and independence will guide us.

With Ireland, you have a small country with a broad mind, a listening ear and a strong independent voice that promotes the values that should inspire this organisation in the future.

Thank you.