



IRELAND

Statement by

Mr Eamon Gilmore, T.D.
Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) and
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

at the

United Nations General Assembly General Debate
67th Session of the United Nations General Assembly

New York, 28 September 2012

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
ireland@un.int

Israel must stop expanding settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which only impede the prospect of achieving Israel's own stated desire of a Palestinian state. The peace and security of the people of Israel, to which they are entitled, gain nothing from denial of the basic rights of the people of Gaza, who are subjected to an unjust and counter-productive blockade.

There is no alternative to serious negotiations between the two sides aimed at a comprehensive settlement. I would like to see President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu committing themselves to achieving a comprehensive peace agreement within a specified timescale. This will not be easy and will require painful compromises on both sides. But, if both leaders are willing to embark on this path, they will have the unstinting support of the entire international community, including Ireland.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Peace and security are inextricably linked to development. And development is at the heart of Ireland's foreign policy. We have maintained our ODA above 0.5% of GNP – an important achievement in the face of major economic difficulties – and we remain committed to reaching the 0.7% UN target as soon as we possibly can.

Ireland's aid programme represents a genuine investment by the Irish people in the world we share with the people of developing countries. We focus in particular on the countries of sub-Saharan Africa. We have prioritised investments in education, in health, in good governance, in the lives and the rights of girls and women, and of those living with HIV and AIDS. We have seen remarkable economic progress made in African countries as a result of such investments. But great inequalities still persist.

It is in all our interests, as global citizens, that we stay the course in relation to the Millennium Development Goals. And that we continue to work together for a sustainable and just world, where states operate on the basis of the rights of all people to participate in and contribute to society and inclusive economies.

Against this background, the reality of hunger in our world persists. The scandal is that we have the tools to tackle this suffering and this terrible waste of human potential. How can people realise their rights and their potential if they cannot meet the most basic needs for existence?

SOMALIA

No country knows this better than Somalia. Once Somalia was at the centre of the world's attention. But the media spotlight moved on, and the people of Somalia have faced a long struggle to emerge from war, famine and instability.

Today, more than two million Somalis still need our help. On the last Sunday of July, I visited Mogadishu, and I saw, amidst the grinding poverty and the misery of insecurity, genuine signs of hope and opportunity. Schools, homes, shops, businesses are being rebuilt and reopened, and people are returning from exile.

Increased international engagement has been essential. Real progress is also being achieved in Somalia's transition to democracy, with impressive engagement by Somali traditional and political leaders. We must support them.

I pledge today that Ireland will not turn away from Somalia. Or from humanitarian emergencies elsewhere in the Horn of Africa, the Sahel and across the globe. We will work with partners to highlight forgotten crises and the needs of fragile states. And to forge a much more coherent and effective international approach towards humanitarian action and development policy.

Ireland has made the fight against hunger and undernutrition the key priority of its development policy. We have delivered on our commitment to direct 20% of our aid budget to this priority. With our partners, we have worked closely with the UN Secretary General to build and support the Scaling Up Nutrition, or SUN, movement. But we must do more. Collectively, we must act now to recognise the systemic linkages between recurring food price crises, humanitarian emergencies, chronic undernutrition and the effects of climate change.

There is nothing that connects us more, across borders, across oceans and across generations, than our mutual dependence on this planet which we share. Climate change is not something happening in a far off land or in a distant future. It is happening now, and it is happening fast. It is not for another generation to solve – it is for us to take responsibility, to strive to achieve climate justice, to act.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr President,

A deep attachment to the safeguarding of human rights has been at the heart of Ireland's foreign policy since the foundation of our State.

Ireland's commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights has been shaped by our own history. As a small island nation which has experienced the impact of colonialism, civil war and conflict, we learned the hard way that human rights can never be taken for granted.

From the earliest days of our UN membership, we pioneered the promotion of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation. We also paid close attention to decolonisation and the struggle against apartheid. Today, we make substantial contributions to UN development agencies and funds and are active participants in UN peacekeeping operations. Thousands of Irishmen and Irishwomen have served in UN peacekeeping forces, and our people are intensely proud of that contribution to the ideals of the United Nations.

Ireland also plays an active role in the work being done in the UN framework to protect and promote human rights. We are proud that our former President, Mary Robinson, served with distinction as UN High Commissioner for Human Rights from 1997 to 2002.

When the Human Rights Council was first established in 2006, Ireland declared that it would seek election in 2012. This is the first occasion on which we have sought election to the Council.

We are committed to a robust and effective Human Rights Council. We want to see a principled Council that provides real leadership in this critical area. We also value and support the full participation of small states in the work of the Council.

The Universal Periodic Review process has opened up an important space for national dialogue on human rights. Ireland engaged constructively and self-critically in its own review.

We are also firmly committed to a strengthened UN Treaty Monitoring Body system and have actively contributed to efforts to reinforce this system.

The threats to human rights worldwide are proliferating steadily: whether from widespread poverty and hunger, from repressive systems of governance, from religious intolerance, from gender-based violence or from other directions. If Ireland is elected to the Human Rights Council in November, we will serve the cause of international human rights protection as an active and committed member of the Council.

ATTACKS ON DIPLOMATIC MISSIONS

Mr President,

The United Nations is founded on the principle that diplomatic engagement and dialogue between nations are essential to peace and human development. Attacks on diplomatic missions, such as we saw recently in Benghazi, are attacks on that principle. They are never acceptable and must be condemned by the international community.

OSCE

Mr President,

Ireland is currently Chairing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. This has enabled us to make a contribution to the search for agreement across the full range of the OSCE's activities. We have drawn on our own experience of building peace in Northern Ireland to contribute to the work of the OSCE, which seeks to find peaceful settlements to protracted conflicts.

I am hopeful that, by the end of our term in office, we will have been able to make progress in some key areas, including in the so-called "Human Dimension" of the OSCE and on some conflict issues.

We have used our Chairmanship to prioritise internet freedom, reflecting the increasing importance of the Internet as a platform for the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms. A major conference in Dublin last June focused on how human rights and fundamental freedoms do not change with new technologies, but extend seamlessly into the digital age.

We look forward to assuming the Presidency of the European Union Council of Ministers in the first half of next year. We will bring to that role the same energy and commitment that we have devoted to discharging our OSCE responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Mr. President

A distinguished Irish politician and lawyer of the late eighteenth century, John Philpot Curran, once remarked that "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance".

If we are to live up to the aspirations of the UN Charter, we must also assume the burden of eternal vigilance. The daily challenges to human rights are painfully obvious. Our response must be clear and unrelenting.

In the words of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action, the promotion and protection of human rights is "the first responsibility" of Governments. We cannot and must not shirk that responsibility.

Thank you.