
National Statement of Ireland to the United Nations General Assembly by Taoiseach Micheál Martin

22 September 2022

**President of the General Assembly, Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Secretary-General, Excellencies, Friends,**

This year, Ireland marks the centenary of our independence.

The Irish Free State was established on the 6th of December, 1922 and we began our journey as an independent, sovereign nation.

From the start of this journey, we were a nation that looked outwards.

One of our first acts was to apply to join the League of Nations.

In his first address to the Assembly of the League of Nations the following year, then President of the Irish Government's Executive Council, W.T. Cosgrave, spoke of Ireland's commitment to 'avert the ancient evils of warfare and oppression; to encourage wholesome, and to discourage unwholesome relations between nation and nation; to enable even the weakest of nations to live their own lives and make their own proper contribution to the good of all, free even from the shadow and the fear of external violence, vicious penetration, or injurious pressure of any kind.'

These are the ideals that guide Ireland's foreign policy.

These same principles, articulated one hundred years ago, as the League's newest member, continue to inform our actions today.

The belief that all countries have an equal right to live in peace.

That all countries, no matter how small, have a contribution to make to international peace and security, and to economic and social development.

That all people have the right to live in dignity; to have their human rights and fundamental freedoms respected.

President, Excellencies

One hundred years on, we, as a global community, are very far from living up to these principles.

We convene here at a time of crisis.

A time when, yet again, we are facing the threat of widespread global hunger and food insecurity.

When we see daily the devastating impacts of climate change, with those who bear no responsibility for its causes being most affected.

When we have witnessed the most blatant disregard for international law and for the UN Charter on my own home continent of Europe.

When much of the progress that we were making towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals has stalled or gone into reverse, as we grapple with the continued effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It does not have to be this way.

We have the tools and the systems to address these issues.

We have – in this General Assembly, and in the other bodies, institutions and agencies that make up the United Nations – the spaces to discuss, to negotiate, to share experiences, to craft solutions.

We have an interlocking web of Charters, of Treaties, of norms, of resolutions, of international jurisprudence, of political declarations, of agreed conclusions.

Our global structures are not perfect – we know that.

No structures ever are.

There is much that needs reform.

But it is not our systems or our structures, nor our Treaties or Charters, that are fundamentally failing us.

It is the lack of political will to implement and uphold them.

President, Excellencies

I opened by quoting a former Irish Leader speaking to the League of Nations Assembly, almost 100 years ago.

Let me quote another Irish Leader and former President of Ireland, Eamon de Valera, also speaking to the League of Nations, exactly 90 years ago today.

De Valera believed in the League's potential to protect small nations through collective security.

But he recognized that, to be effective, the League Covenant had to be enforced; member states had to fulfil their obligations.

In his speech in September 1932, he warned that world opinion was losing faith in the capacity of the League to protect peace and stability.

"People are complaining that the League is devoting its activity to matters of secondary or very minor importance, while the vital international problems of the day... are being shelved or postponed or ignored".

90 years on, we cannot continue to shelve or postpone or ignore our existential global challenges.

President, Excellencies

As an elected member of the Security Council, Ireland has seen first-hand that political will, and a commitment to the principles of the UN Charter, can deliver results.

On Syria, Ireland has worked in partnership with Norway, and with all Council members, to ensure that humanitarian aid can continue to reach the millions who need it.

During our eighteen months on the Council, we have twice renewed the UN cross-border operation, which provides crucial aid to four million people in the North West of the country. Ireland will continue to work to keep that critical lifeline open. We urge other members of the Council to support a further renewal. To do otherwise would have devastating consequences for the people of Syria.

We have worked with our partners on the Council to extend, and renew, the mandates of the 14 UN peacekeeping operations, and the many UN Special Political Missions, that require the approval of the Council.

Day after day, across the globe, the military and civilian personnel in these missions protect civilians, monitor ceasefires, support peace building, facilitate negotiations and verify the implementation of peace agreements.

Amongst them are hundreds of Irish men and women, who carry on our proud tradition of peacekeeping and crisis management.

We are deeply proud of their service.

Echoing that tradition, last year, Ireland led work on Resolution 2594, the Council's first ever resolution on Peacekeeping Transitions.

Adopted with the support of all Council members, it will help to ensure that the hard-won gains of peace are maintained when a peacekeeping mission ends.

It puts the protection of civilians at the centre of the UN's planning, when transitioning from military peacekeeping operations into civilian-led political missions, in countries emerging from conflict.

We have also seen progress on the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

As co-chair along with Mexico of the Council's expert group, Ireland has ensured that the role of women as peacebuilders, and as agents of change, is at the heart of UN peacekeeping and political missions across the globe.

We have brought the voice of grassroots women peacebuilders to the Council table, with a record 16 women civil society briefers during our Presidency of the Council last September.

Our commitment to the protection of civilians has also informed our work in leading negotiations to agree a Political Declaration on the use of Explosive Weapons in Populated Areas earlier this year.

This Declaration is a significant milestone, which recognises the humanitarian consequences of the use of explosive weapons in populated areas, and includes a number of ambitious actions to address those impacts.

I look forward to its formal adoption at a high-level international conference in Dublin on 18 November.

President, Excellencies

We have been encouraged by these successes, incremental though some of them are.

But at times we have also been deeply frustrated by the Security Council's failure to act.

A year ago, I stood before you and spoke of our ambition for the Council to adopt a resolution on Climate and Security.

Along with Niger, we worked tirelessly to craft a resolution that reflected the reality that climate change is increasingly driving insecurity and acting as a threat multiplier.

We challenged the Council to take on its responsibilities to address the impact of climate change on international peace and security.

One hundred and thirteen countries – one hundred and thirteen of the Members of this Assembly – supported us in our efforts.

One country - Russia - vetoed these efforts.

It frankly beggars belief that, in 2022, the UN body charged with the maintenance of peace and security, has still not taken on its responsibilities in this area. It is a singular failure of political will and political responsibility.

A year ago, I also spoke to you of Ireland's deep concern at the situation in Tigray, in northern Ethiopia - at the looming humanitarian catastrophe, at the violations of human rights and international humanitarian law.

I spoke of the vital need for a negotiated ceasefire, unfettered humanitarian access and the restoration of basic services, and a political solution to the crisis.

Yet, a year later, we continue to raise the alarm. We continue to urge the Council to act decisively. We continue with our determination to support a political solution and seek accountability for gross human rights abuses.

President, Excellencies

Each month, the Council meets to discuss the situation in Palestine.

Each month, Ireland, along with many of our fellow members of the Council, has reiterated our firm commitment to a two-State solution, with a viable Palestinian state based on 1967 borders, living in peace and security alongside the State of Israel, with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.

But we are no nearer today to that aim than we were when we joined the Council 18 months ago; and, truth be told, long before that.

Israeli settlement building continues to undermine – it would seem knowingly and deliberately - the viability and territorial contiguity of a future Palestinian State, and to jeopardise the two-State solution. Settlements are a clear violation of international law and today stand in the way of a just, lasting and comprehensive peace.

Let us be clear. The situation in the occupied Palestinian territory is untenable. We cannot - and must not - become inured to it.

We cannot tolerate a situation where young Palestinian people have no confidence in political progress and no hope for the future. The risk – the very real risk- is that the space for the political middle-ground is being squeezed out, lessening further the prospects of a just and lasting solution.

The international community must renew its efforts. Progress will not be possible without addressing the root causes of the conflict. The Security Council must fulfil its responsibilities. Crucially, it must work for compliance with its own resolutions.

On Afghanistan, since the Taliban takeover of Kabul, Ireland has resolutely defended the human rights of the Afghan people, particularly women and girls, and we have increased our humanitarian aid.

We helped to ensure that the mandate for the UN mission in Afghanistan, adopted in March, was directly informed by the courageous activism of Afghan women. And we have pushed for accountability for the Taliban's actions.

But we continue to witness the ongoing erosion of the rights of Afghan citizens, particularly women and girls, but also those of ethnic and religious minorities and the LGBTQI+ community.

September is a month when many students around the world return to school. For girls in Afghanistan, there is no return. They have now been out of school for more than a

year. This is a clear violation of their fundamental rights and freedoms. Their potential will not be fulfilled and that of Afghanistan weakened if this situation continues to prevail.

President, Excellencies

At this time of heightened nuclear threat, it is deeply regrettable that one country alone, Russia, prevented agreement at the Tenth Review Conference of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty last month.

The heightened nuclear risks arising from Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the threats to nuclear safety and security resulting from military activity in and near civilian nuclear facilities in Ukraine, are unprecedented.

The Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty must remain an essential element of international peace and security. The urgency of its full implementation cannot be over stated.

President, Excellencies

In the past few days, many of my colleagues in this Hall have spoken of Russia's illegal and immoral invasion of Ukraine. For European Member States in particular, this carries dark echoes of our continent's past.

We face an expansionist power, brutally invading and occupying a peaceful neighbour.

We faced this many times in Europe in the 20th century. We did not think we would face it again in the 21st century.

But this is not just a European issue. Not just a concern for 'the West'.

All States, and particularly small countries such as my own, should fear a world where might equals right, where the strong can bully the weak; where sovereignty and territorial integrity can be blatantly violated; and where the UN Charter – the Charter that all of us in this Assembly have faithfully put our trust in – can be flouted with impunity.

In Ukraine in July, I heard first-hand accounts from civilians of the brutality and violence visited upon men, women and children by occupying Russian forces. And where Russia's forces have been pushed back, we have seen the wanton destruction, and the uncovering of mass civilian graves, such as in Bucha and more recently in Izium.

We have seen the targeting of nuclear facilities and of civilian infrastructure.

And now we see President Putin plan sham referenda in eastern Ukraine, aimed at forcibly changing Ukraine's borders, in clear violation of the UN Charter. We have to name what we are seeing. These actions, taken collectively, show Russia behaving as a rogue state.

We are also seeing how the impact of Russia's aggression reaches far beyond Ukrainian or European shores and borders.

From the Horn of Africa to the Sahel, and beyond, food insecurity has reached a critical tipping point.

Some of the countries which have been worst affected by the current food insecurity crisis are those most reliant on imports of wheat from Russia and Ukraine.

Combined with the impact of climate change, and of conflict, severe drought and other extreme weather events, we face a crisis that needs urgent action.

Like many others represented in this Hall, Ireland has responded by increasing our humanitarian aid. This has included direct humanitarian support of €78 million for the Horn of Africa, and sustained and early funding to other severely affected countries and regions, including Yemen, Afghanistan and the Sahel.

And yesterday, along with the US, UNICEF and others, Ireland led a pledging event, at which we committed an additional €50 million over 3 years specifically to tackle acute child malnutrition.

We have also increased our core funding to the UN Central Emergency Response Fund, in recognition of the critical importance of enabling UN agencies to respond rapidly as crises unfold.

We have prioritised gender-responsiveness in our humanitarian work, addressing the particular vulnerabilities faced by women, girls and boys in emergency settings.

And we have adapted our funding and our programming so that we respond to humanitarian emergencies in a way that underpins our climate, development and peacebuilding interventions; in a way that builds the resilience of individuals, families and communities.

President, Excellencies

The link between conflict and food insecurity is irrefutable. This is why we focused on Hunger and Conflict as a priority for our term on the Security Council. Conflict is now the main driver of hunger, reversing gains made over the last decades. We are failing in the challenge to reach zero hunger.

Ireland's longstanding commitment to food security will guide our international cooperation for many years to come. Ending world hunger and ensuring the right to food must be placed firmly at the top of the political agenda.

At major Summits over the past twelve months - on Food Systems, on Nutrition for Growth, and at the EU-AU Summit, Ireland has committed to helping partner countries on their journey towards sustainable, resilient and nutritious food systems.

This transformation is more urgent now than ever before.

And at COP27 later this year, we will be at the forefront of efforts to combat the existential threat of climate change.

Adaptation to climate change and its impacts will remain a key focus of our international engagement and support. We must make progress on averting, minimising and addressing losses and damages that are a direct result of our changing climate.

On global health, Ireland has strongly supported the work of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria since the Fund's inception 20 years ago. This week, we announced a significant new contribution of €65 million over 3 years, a 30% increase on our previous such contribution, to support their important work against these diseases, and the related strengthening of health systems.

President, Excellencies

The United Nations, and the rules-based international order, is central to who we are as a nation.

But multilateralism can only succeed if it is effective. And it can only be effective if we, the Member States, allow it to be so.

That takes courage. It takes political will. It takes commitment to collective solutions to global challenges. It takes a readiness to compromise.

It takes a genuine belief in the principles of the UN Charter.

When, in a hundred years' time, a future Irish leader marks the bicentenary of Ireland's independence and returns to this hall, I hope they will be making a very different speech.

One which celebrates substantive, sustained progress in ending conflict, tackling global inequality, poverty and hunger.

One in which they will not cite frustrations over the use of the veto at the Security Council to thwart the will of the majority of Member States, because the veto will be an anachronism that has long ceased to exist.

One which refers to a strengthened and reformed UN system, structured and equipped to tackle the challenges of its day.

One which remarks on the common will to uphold the principles of the UN Charter.

One which looks back with relief at the collective action which brought this planet back from the brink of catastrophic collapse.

Thank you.

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