SERVICE BY THE DEFENCE FORCES

WITH

THE UNITED NATIONS

REPORT TO DÁIL ÉIREANN

2019
Introduction

I wish to report to Dáil Éireann on Irish military participation in United Nations missions in 2019. I am pleased to take this opportunity to put before Dáil Éireann an account of the contribution made by members of the Defence Forces in the various United Nations missions in which they have participated in the year under review.

Ireland has a long and well-regarded history of participation in overseas missions mandated by the United Nations since 1958. In that period Defence Forces personnel have completed approximately 70,000 individual tours of duty in overseas missions. There is universal recognition for the fine work they undertake on the ground, helping to bring stability and peace, and improving the lives of vulnerable citizens.

Ireland’s first deployment of an armed peacekeeping contingent was to the Congo in 1960. Sixty years later, and as the UN peacekeeping footprint has expanded, so too has the Irish contribution to UN missions.

Defence Forces personnel continued to make a significant contribution to international peacekeeping throughout 2019 through their participation in UN-led and UN authorised missions. Ireland’s main commitments during the year under review were to the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and to the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) on the Golan Heights.
UN-led Missions

The UN-led Missions to which the Defence Forces contributed in 2019 were as follows: -

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)

The United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was established on 19 March 1978, under United Nations Security Council Resolutions 425 and 426, following the invasion of Lebanon by Israel. Its mandate was “to confirm the withdrawal of Israeli Forces, to restore international peace and security and to assist the Government of Lebanon in ensuring the return of its effective authority in the area”. Ireland participated in UNIFIL from 1978 until 2001 and again during the period October 2006 to October 2007. Following a request from the United Nations and Dáil Éireann approval on 21 April 2011, Irish troops returned to serve in Lebanon in May 2011.

Ireland served as part of a joint Irish/Finnish Battalion from June 2012 to November 2018. Following Finland’s withdrawal from the joint Irish/Finnish Battalion, in November 2018, Ireland increased the number of personnel deployed to UNIFIL and assumed the full duties and responsibilities of the Irish Battalion for a 12 month period. Additional force protection assets were deployed, consistent with the increased strength and the increased responsibilities of the Defence Forces contingent in UNIFIL.

Arrangements were put in place with the United Nations for Poland to partner Ireland in UNIFIL from November 2019. In November 2019, Ireland reduced its contribution of troops in UNIFIL to 340 personnel approximately and Poland deployed some 220 personnel. Hungarian personnel also deployed as part of the Polish contingent. Partnership with other States is an important element of peacekeeping operations.

There were two rotations of Irish personnel during 2019. The 114th Infantry Battalion deployed to UNIFIL in May 2019 and was replaced by the 115th Infantry Battalion in November 2019. As part of a bi-lateral arrangement between Ireland and Malta, nine Armed Forces Malta personnel deployed with the 115th Infantry Battalion to serve as part
of the Irish contingent in UNIFIL. On 31 December 2019 there were 357 Irish personnel serving with the mission.

The Irish Battalion, is based in Sector West of UNIFIL’s area of operations, in the vicinity of At Tiri, and with two posts on the ‘Blue Line’, which separates Lebanon and Israel. Personnel are tasked primarily with patrolling, reconnaissance, and occupying static posts while operating in close coordination and cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces in Sector West of UNIFIL’s area of operations.

During 2019, Mr Paul Kehoe, T.D., the Minister with Responsibility for Defence had the opportunity to visit troops deployed in Lebanon in March and also in October when he accompanied the President of Ireland, His Excellency Michael D. Higgins. The UNIFIL mission in Lebanon continues to represent Ireland's largest overseas deployment. Such visits are an opportunity to acknowledge the professionalism, bravery, and commitment to peace that lies at the core of the Defence Forces role as peacekeepers in overseas missions.

The presence of the UNIFIL mission is vital to maintaining peace and security, providing support to the Lebanese Government and stability in the wider region.

**United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF)**

The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) was established on 31 May 1974 by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 350 (1974), following the agreed disengagement of the Israeli and Syrian forces in the Golan Heights in May 1974. Since 1974, the mandate of UNDOF has been renewed every six months.

A contingent of the Permanent Defence Force has been deployed to UNDOF since 2013. UNDOF supervises the implementation of the disengagement agreement, maintaining an area of separation between the forces which is over 75 kilometres long. While the area of separation is governed and policed by the Syrian authorities, no military forces other than UNDOF are permitted within it.
There were two rotations of Irish personnel during 2019. The 59th Infantry Group deployed to UNDOF in April 2019 and was replaced by the 60th Infantry Group in October 2019. On 31 December 2019, a total of 137 Defence Forces personnel were serving with the mission.

The UNDOF mission redeployed back to Camp Faouar on the Syrian side of the area of separation with the Irish contingent completing their relocation to Camp Faouar in September 2018. Their role includes the provision of a Quick Reaction Force which is on standby to assist with the on-going operations within the UNDOF area of responsibility. The Irish Infantry Group is also tasked with carrying out patrols and convey escorts as necessary.

In September 2019, the United Nations appointed Brigadier General Maureen O’Brien to the post of Deputy Force Commander in UNDOF and in October 2019, she assumed the role of Acting Force Commander pending the UN appointment of a new Force Commander.

The presence of the UNDOF mission remains an important element in ensuring the continuing ceasefire between Israel and Syria and in the wider Middle East Region.

**United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)**

MINUSMA, the United Nations authorised operation in Mali, was established on 25 April 2013 by UN Security Council Resolution 2100 to stabilise the country after the Tuareg rebellion (2012). The role of the mission is to ensure security, stabilization and protection of civilians; supporting national political dialogue and reconciliation; and assisting the reestablishment of State authority, the rebuilding of the security sector, and the promotion and protection of human rights in Mali.

The mandate for this mission has been renewed annually by the UN Security Council. UN Security Council Resolution 2480 (2019), renewed the mandate for a further period of 12 months up to June 2020.
Government and Dáil approval was received in June 2019 for the deployment of a contingent of the Permanent Defence Forces to participate in MINUSMA. Two officers deployed on the 7th September to Bamako where the MINUSMA Force Headquarters is located. An additional 11 personnel drawn from the Army Ranger Wing deployed with the German Armed Forces to Camp Castor in GAO, Mali on 12th September 2019.

All deployed personnel are embedded with a larger Germany company and are carrying out assigned tasks in accordance with the mission mandate.

The Defence Forces deployment to MINUSMA has been approved for a period of 24 months from September 2019 to September 2021.

**United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO)**

The Defence Forces have participated in UNTSO since 1958. Working closely with UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) and UNDOF (the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force), UNTSO’s main objectives are to monitor ceasefires, supervising armistice agreements and assisting the UN peacekeeping operation in the area.

A total of twelve (12) members of the Permanent Defence Force served with UNTSO in 2019, with this number subject to minor fluctuations during the year to allow for rotations and handovers. In 2019 Irish Personnel served in HQ UNTSO in Jerusalem, Observer Group Lebanon (OGL), Observer Group Golan (OGG) in Syria, Observer Group Golan-Tiberias (OGG-T), Observer Group Golan – Damascus (OGG-D), Liaison Office Damascus (LOD), and Liaison Office Beirut (LOB).

**United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)**

The United Nations mission for the referendum in Western Sahara was established consequent on the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 690 on 29 April 1991. The mission was mandated to first put in place the necessary infrastructure, and
to then oversee a referendum to establish whether the electorate wished the territory to be incorporated into Morocco or to gain its independence. The Mission also monitors the ceasefire agreement between Morocco and the Polisario Front. The Polisario Front is a nationalist organisation which has consistently opposed terrorism, with the independence of Western Sahara as its main goal. It views itself as a “front” encompassing all political trends in people living in the western part of the Sahara desert.

Despite a UN backed peace plan since 1988 that foresees a referendum on self-determination, there has been no progress on the political question, as Morocco has refused to allow a referendum in the territory which would include independence as an option. MINURSO still performs a valuable role in policing the ceasefire agreement and preventing any major escalation or drift back to war as a result of the referendum impasse.

MINURSO’s mandate, 2494 (2019), was renewed by the UN Security Council for 1 year until 31 October 2020. Three (3) Defence Forces officers served with this mission in Western Sahara during 2019.

**United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO)**

The United Nations Organisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) was established on 30 November 1999, to monitor the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement of July 1999. UN Security Council Resolution 1925 of 2010, provided that the Mission would bear the title of United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO) with effect from 01 July 2010, with a renewed mandate to use all necessary means in the protection of civilians, humanitarian personnel and human rights defenders under imminent threat of physical violence and to support the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in its stabilisation and peace consolidation efforts.
On 29 March 2019, the UN Security Council renewed the mandate of its peacekeeping operation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, MONUSCO until 20 December 2019 by adopting Security Council Resolution 2463. Security Council resolution 2502 (2019) once again renewed the MONUSCO mandate until 20 December 2020, highlighting the strategic priorities of (i) protection of civilians and (ii) support to the stabilization and strengthening of State institutions in the DRC along with key governance and security reforms. The UN Security Council also noted the assessment of an independent strategic review which stated that an absolute minimum transition period of three years is required for any exit of MONUSCO, with flexibility required in consideration of the situation on the ground.

Defence Forces personnel have served with the mission as Military Staff Officers since June 2001. Three Defence Forces officers served with this mission in 2019.

**Appointment at Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations**

One officer of Colonel rank continued his appointment as Military Adviser to the Permanent Mission of Ireland to the United Nations (PMUN) in New York during 2019.

**UN Authorised Missions:**

**International Security Presence in Kosovo (KFOR)**

Over the course of the past two decades, the UN has come to increasingly rely on regional organisations including the African Union, the EU and NATO to provide forces to implement and support UN Security Council Resolutions. KFOR is a NATO-led force operating under a UN mandate in Kosovo.

KFOR was established on 10 June 1999, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1244, for an initial period of twelve (12) months, to continue thereafter unless the UN Security Council decides otherwise. The role of KFOR is to support the maintenance of civil law and order within Kosovo so as to develop a climate of safety and security.
Ireland has participated in KFOR since August 1999 following Government approval (29 June 1999) and Dáil approval (1 July 1999). The mission is authorised under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. In June 2019, the Government approved the continued provision of up to 12 members of the Permanent Defence Force for service with KFOR for a 12 month period up to June 2020.

KFOR, in close co-ordination with the Kosovo Police, continues to work towards maintaining a safe and secure environment. KFOR continues to monitor the security situation on the ground and maintain a deterrent posture to react quickly and decisively as required.

**EUFOR’s Operation Althea - Bosnia & Herzegovina**

The EU operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina - Operation “Althea” - was established in December 2004, under the authority of UN Security Council Resolution 1575 of 22 November 2004, to replace the NATO-led Stabilisation Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina (SFOR).

The mandate for this mission has been renewed annually by the UN Security Council. UN Security Council Resolution 2496 (2019), renewed EUFOR’s mandate for a further period of 12 months up to November 2020.

Ireland has participated in EUFOR since December 2004, having previously been a participant in SFOR since 1997. Following the downsizing of the Irish contingent in July 2011, a residual component of seven (7) personnel was retained in the Force Headquarters until April 2017. Since April 2017, following a review by the Defence organisation of Defence Forces mission commitments, Ireland’s contribution to the EUFOR mission was reduced to five (5) personnel. Irish personnel are based at EUFOR’s headquarters in Sarajevo where they provide support to the Mission Commander and the headquarters.
The primary focus of Operation ‘ALTHEA’ is on the maintenance and stability of a safe and secure environment in the country, especially supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina authorities.

**European Union Training Mission- EUTM Mali**


The objective of the mission is to provide training for the Malian Armed Forces so as to improve their capacity to maintain security in Mali and restore the authority of the Malian Government and the territorial integrity of the Malian State. Alongside standard infantry training, training is also being provided in international humanitarian law, the protection of civilians and human rights.

The current mission plan of EUTM Mali is orientated around the concept of Combined Mobile Advisory and Training Teams who travel to the various regions to provide training to Malian Soldiers. Irish personnel participate in these Combined Mobile Advisory Training Teams. The continued roll out of decentralised training is a key component of enhancing the utility of the Malian Armed Forces.

Twenty personnel were deployed to EUTM Mali during 2019. Nine (9) Irish personnel occupied staff appointments in the mission Headquarters in Bamako and eleven (11) personnel were based in Koulikoro Training Centre.

Ireland’s troop contribution to EUTM Mali is evidence of Ireland’s committed support for the EU’s Common Security and Defence Policy and for the EU and UN strategy in support of the government of Mali in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions.
Financial Implications

The UN reimburses some personnel and Contingent Owned Equipment costs in respect of contributions of personnel to UN led operations. Rates of reimbursement, fixed in accordance with UN categories of equipment and personnel, are agreed in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Ireland and the UN for each mission. Ireland was reimbursed in respect of some troop and equipment costs for the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) and the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) during 2019.

Reimbursements totalling approximately €14.9 million were paid by the UN to Ireland in 2019. €11.1 million was for UNIFIL personnel costs in respect of the period 01 November 2018 to 30 September 2019 and in respect of equipment costs for the period 01 October 2018 to 30 September 2019. In addition, €3.8 million was received in respect of UNDOF personnel costs for the period 01 November 2018 to 30 September 2019 and in respect of equipment costs for the period 01 October 2018 to 30 September 2019.

As of 31 December 2019, the total amount owed to the Department of Defence by the United Nations is estimated to be €3.8 million. The monies owed at year end 2019 in respect of reimbursement of troop and equipment costs for UNIFIL and UNDOF missions will be refunded during 2020.

Commitment of Defence Forces to United Nations Missions in 2019

On average per month, there were 646 personnel involved in UN-led and UN mandated missions throughout 2019.

Conclusion
UN Peacekeeping is a tradition that the women and men of Óglaigh na hÉireann have been proudly involved in for over sixty years. Permanent Defence Force personnel serve overseas in Africa, Europe and the Middle East. This commitment to international peacekeeping is a very practical expression of the values which we hold dear as a nation and of our commitment to the U.N and to multilateralism.

March 2020