



Christian Aid Ireland's Submission to the 'Review of Ireland's Foreign Policy and External Relations'

4 February 2014

Christian Aid Ireland welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the review of Irish foreign policy. The global and national context has changed dramatically since the White Paper of 1996, and the review represents a timely opportunity to bring Irish foreign policy up to date and fit for purpose. That is not to say that Irish foreign policy has not been successful or effective over the intervening years- on the contrary. Ireland's international reputation and stock has grown, as reflected by its election to the United Nations (UN) Security Council in 2001, and more recently its election to the Human Rights Council in 2012. Ireland has earned an enviable reputation as an honest broker, a defender of human rights, and as a leading authority on issues of international development. The review however comes at a time when Ireland faces into new challenges and new global dynamics, such as the changing power bases from northern and western hemisphere to southern and eastern and the increasing threat of man-made global challenges such as climate change and rising inequality. Each poses different challenges to Irish foreign policy and how we respond to a rapidly evolving context. This review provides the opportunity to take stock of where we are as a country, and what needs to be in place to help us to address these issues, while building on our positive international reputation.

As an international development agency working in almost 50 countries around the world, our submission is focussed on the issues that are relevant to international efforts to tackle poverty and injustice, and the role that Irish foreign policy can play in that regard. That Ireland has historically prioritised international aid and development issues, and viewed international solidarity as central to our foreign policy is another aspect of Irish foreign policy to be proud of.

In our understanding, poverty is not inevitable and that there is hope for a more equitable and just world. Created and perpetuated by human systems and structures, poverty can be ended by human action. To end poverty we need to empower those who live in poverty, while at the same time inspiring those with power to share their power accountably. It is the transformation of power relations that will rebalance an unjust world. Through its international engagement, drawing on sound analysis of the political economy of the country as well as a context specific power analysis Ireland can contribute to this by

promoting power structures that are genuinely representative and responsive to people's demands. This kind of analysis will provide external actors with a deeper understanding of where real power resides, how institutions function, and what the most strategic actions in pursuit of Irish foreign policy objectives may be.

Our foreign policy will also need to adapt to a world which has never been more unequal. Decades of economic growth have brought prosperity for millions but have left millions more behind, living in poverty and further away from the resources and services and decision making power they require to do anything about it. Countries like Brazil and India which have enjoyed some of the greatest prosperity in recent years are also home to some of the world's most marginalised people. As a country with a proud tradition of aid and development this is a scenario that our revised foreign policy must equip us to address.

While it was welcome that One World, One Future (2013) identified growing inequality as a barrier to development, it said little as to how Irish Aid might address it. A previous Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade publication – The Africa Strategy (2011) - was clear on the role that trade can play in promoting economic growth, but in our view economic growth is not of itself sufficient to address inequality and growing levels of poverty.

Christian Aid- as part of their submission to the public consultation on Irish Aid policy in 2012- made the suggestion that in order to start tackling inequality governments must pursue a consistent standard of data that will allow a clear analysis of the inequalities and dimensions of poverty facing each community and country. This will not only facilitate more effective policy making in a technical sense, but will also allow people to engage with the political response to inequality and make choices about prioritisation.

But there is also a national interest in developing a robust response to inequality. Unequal growth and inequality affects all of us. It destabilises local, national and global relationships and interdependencies; it exhausts our natural resources and limits the access of vulnerable and marginalised people to basic necessities. In the interconnected mutually dependent world in which we live in, the insecurity of countries on the other side of the world are the insecurities of us all. Eamon Gilmore, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, speaking about climate change, when speaking in Dublin Castle in 2013 stated -

“It is morally wrong that the poorest in the world pay in some cases with their lives for the centrally-heated and air-conditioned comfort of the better off. It is not sustainable in a world more interconnected than at any other time in history. It must be addressed – for reasons of morality and of self-interest. Because in our world today, the common interest is our self-interest”

Our submission consists of three parts:

- 1) Core values**
- 2) Essential components of a revised foreign policy**
- 3) Issues of immediate concern**

1. Core values

Perhaps the most important opportunity presented by the review of Irish foreign policy is the opportunity to make clear the values that will underpin our engagement internationally. Ireland's updated foreign policy should make clear from the outset what these values are – values that will shape our intent, practice and priorities.

- **Human rights at the heart of our foreign policy**

A foreign policy with human rights at its core should respect the indivisibility of human rights, recognising the equal status of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights and the need to promote and protect them in a manner that recognises their inter-dependence. Defending human rights is a stated high level goal of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Strategy Statement 2011 to 2014. This is very welcome and should be maintained and strengthened in the updated foreign policy document. Irish foreign policy should therefore explicitly state our values are underpinned by our commitment to the global implementation of human rights standards.

This review also presents an important opportunity to commit to strengthening our capacity in this area and to build upon our good reputation in the field of human rights. Specific ways to do this are outlined below in the section entitled 'The essential components of a revised foreign policy'.

In parallel to the clear articulation of a rights based approach to our foreign policy we would also like to see the development of clear indicators against which progress in this area can be measured and assessed. The absence of explicit values and indicators risks making our foreign policy less accountable, and more vulnerable to taking decisions that reflect political expediency rather than decisions that reflect our core values.

Key Recommendations

- ✓ **Irish foreign policy should place a commitment to human rights at its core**
- ✓ **Progress in this area should be evaluated by a set of measurable indicators**

Essential components of a revised foreign policy

- **Multilateralism**

Over decades Irish foreign policy has built up a positive international image. Various things have shaped this perception – our military neutrality, our support for the self determination of small states, a commitment to an international agenda as exemplified by Frank Aiken’s work on nuclear disarmament, the role Irish peacekeepers have played in UN missions around the world, and the Northern Ireland peace process, to name but a few. Since the birth of the state, arguably Irish foreign policy has made a significant impact at UN level where individual states have greater scope to pursue their respective foreign policy agenda, especially in comparison to the more unanimity orientated European foreign policy.

At European level, while the Lisbon Treaty has institutionalised a permanent search for consensus within member states, arguably it does this at the risk of watering down respective national policy principles. If Ireland’s foreign policy is to be characterised by the adoption of courageous positions in support of people’s fundamental rights this may mean, at least initially, investing time in trying to build support among other potentially like-minded member states.

However, since the establishment of the European External Action Service, the collective voice of the European Union (EU) is now a major foreign policy player in which Ireland still wields a degree of influence. There is also increasing evidence of the growing formation of a body of European foreign policy principles like referrals to the International Criminal Court to which an increasing number of member states, including Ireland, feel comfortable to adhere to and support.

While recognising that the EU is the more natural and immediate forum in which to pursue Irish foreign policy, and acknowledging the potential it has to grow in influence for the reasons mentioned above, Christian Aid also supports continued resourcing and support to Irish engagement at UN level.

The UN, for all its acknowledged weaknesses, remains a truly representative international body, enjoys the greater legitimacy in the eyes of developing countries, and is the only body at which developing countries operate on a somewhat more equal footing with other more affluent countries. Given the importance of our aid programme to our foreign policy generally, promoting the role of the UN is also a more strategic approach.

Christian Aid recommends that Irish foreign policy is best served through engaging at EU level in the most effective way, by establishing itself as a leader in the field of human rights, by promoting a right based approach with other member states, through developing alliances with like-minded states, while at the same time also actively pursuing national

foreign policy objectives at UN level. Part of that engagement should necessarily mean being active players in the drive to reform the UN system and structures, creating a UN that is more effective and dynamic while not compromising its unique standing as the preeminent multilateral body.

Key Recommendations

- ✓ **Continued investment in multilateralism at both EU and UN level.**
- ✓ **Within the EU, working to establish ourselves as leader on human rights issues, and building alliances around human rights issues with other EU member states.**
- ✓ **Working to increase the legitimacy and effectiveness of the UN through active engagement in the reform process.**

▪ **Respect for international law and human rights law**

We welcomed the reinvigorated approach to human rights articulated in the One World, One Future document, which provides an opportunity to place the realisation of human rights at the heart of our development programme. Together with Ireland's election to the UN Human Rights Council this should allow Ireland to have greater impact in achieving human rights globally.

Similarly, we would welcome reaffirmation of Irish commitment to international humanitarian and human rights law in Irish foreign policy. Since the White Paper of 1996 there have been several conflicts internationally where international law has been either ignored or relegated to something aspirational. This review is an important opportunity to recommit again to these laws.

Key Recommendations

- ✓ **Restate the importance of international law to Irish foreign policy.**
- ✓ **Ensure Ireland has ratified all relevant human rights instruments to which we are not yet signatories.**

In line with our values we should explicitly state how we will ensure implementation of these commitments both nationally and internationally. Specific and concrete measures could include for example:

- ✓ **a national strategy to implement the UN Business and Human Rights Principles,**
- ✓ **ratification of all international and European human rights instruments we are not yet party to,**
- ✓ **development of specific human rights indicators to measure impact in our foreign policy work,**
- ✓ **reporting and accountability measures to citizens on our global work on human rights,**
- ✓ **closer integration with bilateral aid countries and our work on the Human Rights Council for those countries, and**

- ✓ **dedicated human rights expertise within Irish Aid and human rights dialogues as part of trade missions.**
- ✓ **Ireland should ensure that all development plans, policies and interventions respect and promote the principles of: participation, non-discrimination, equality (including gender equality), empowerment of those made vulnerable and marginalised and human rights accountability of state and non-state actors.**
- ✓ **Ireland should also promote the right to development and the right to participate, as well as working for the full implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against women in particular.**
- ✓ **Current specific priorities such as the protection of civil society space, gender equality and the protection of human rights defenders should be maintained and an action plan with targets developed for each areas.**

- **Peaceful resolution of disputes**

Specifically, governments and multilateral agencies can influence the likelihood of peace or conflict in other countries through their security policies, their approaches to development co-operation, their economic and trade policies and their diplomatic efforts. The interconnected nature of the global economy and the influence of the international community can have a powerful effect on violence and peace at a country or regional level. Our foreign policy must strive to ensure that our actions do no harm, recognising that in complex situations; even well-meaning actions can aggravate long-term vulnerability.

The underlying causes of conflict must be addressed. Effective peace building cannot be imposed: it must grow in the hearts and minds of both oppressor and oppressed.

Where Ireland is involved in peacekeeping missions we must also take appropriate measures to prevent, investigate, prosecute and punish perpetrators of gender based violence and end impunity.

We also recognise that prevention of and response to gender based violence in emergencies is life-saving and should be prioritised from the outset of an emergency, alongside other life-saving interventions.

Key Recommendation

- ✓ **Peace building initiatives need to address the underlying causes of the conflict, hold perpetrators to account, and recognise the specific vulnerability of women to gender based violence in conflicts.**

3. Areas of concern

- **Policy Incoherence**

If Irish foreign policy is to be truly effective, it must be about more than just the policies of one government department. Policy coherence across government requires the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to harness the relevant strengths of all government departments in support of our international agenda, and at the very least ensure that the policies of one government department do not undermine our foreign policy objectives. If our foreign policy is to be guided by principles of justice, international law, and human rights law – and we believe it should be – then government policy in all departments needs also to reflect this.

However this has not always been the case, and there are examples where the policies of different government departments – either as articulated at EU level or in policies adopted domestically – have been seen to undermine the development objectives of Irish Aid.

For example, Christian Aid Ireland has previously highlighted the damage that Ireland’s role in the global taxation architecture is inadvertently causing developing countries. This and other cases of incoherence at worst undermine the development efforts of poor countries and damage our reputation, and at best undermine the overall effectiveness of our foreign policy.

Key Recommendations

- ✓ **For Irish foreign policy to be as effective as it can be, it requires policy coherence across all government departments.**
- ✓ **Policy coherence requires high level political commitment, which could be ensured by placing responsibility for it within the office of An Taoiseach.**

- **Striking the right balance between trade initiatives and protection of human rights**

While Christian Aid has long acknowledged the value of equitable and just trade practices as a means to promoting sustainable growth, we would also sound a note of caution at the apparent subordination of aid and human rights to Irish trade policy priorities. Indeed, the potential conflict that exists between trade objectives and aid objectives is one of the many areas that could threaten the government’s commitment to greater policy coherence for development. For example, while a ‘whole of government’ approach, as described in the One World, One Future document, could mean joint overseas missions including Department of Jobs Enterprise and Innovation, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Industrial Development Authority, how the priorities of any such mission would be established is critical from a development perspective. We would like to see a coherent government policy underpinned by human rights law being the driving force behind such a

mission, ensuring that any investment opportunities for Irish companies also deliver sustainable development outcomes and do not ignore human rights concerns.

The Irish trade mission to the Gulf region in January 2014 is a case in point. The visit was broadly criticised by a range of organisations, individuals and elected representatives. The general perception among critics was that trade opportunities in the Gulf for Irish companies were given clear precedence over human rights concerns in that region. While the government response was that these issues are more effectively raised in international fora such as at the EU or UN, it is our view that a foreign policy that places human rights at its core obliges us to raise our concerns in bilateral meetings with states with dubious human rights records – in addition to raising them at EU and UN level. It is also in the long term interests of Irish businesses to address these concerns. To make an artificial separation between our values as a country, and trade concerns relegates and delimits issues of human rights and international law to specific fora, instead of viewing them as what guides and influences all our international relations including trade negotiations.

Key Recommendations

- ✓ **Human rights concerns need to inform and guide all our international engagement, including our trade missions.**
- ✓ **Dedicated human rights expertise should form part of trade missions.**