



The Review of Ireland's Foreign Policy and External Relations Concern Worldwide Submission

Nature of Views: Submitted on behalf of Concern Worldwide

Organisation: Concern Worldwide is a non-governmental, international, humanitarian organisation dedicated to the reduction of suffering and working towards the ultimate elimination of extreme poverty in the world's poorest countries. Concern's mission is to help people living in extreme poverty achieve major improvements in their lives which last and spread without on-going support from Concern. To achieve this mission Concern engages in long term development work, responds to emergency situations, and seeks to address the root causes of poverty through our development education and advocacy work.

Role in Organisation: Submitted by Dominic MacSorley, CEO of Concern Worldwide

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Release of Submission: Yes - DFAT has permission to release all or part of Concern's Worldwide's submission, subject to data protection.

Freedom of information: No aspects of this submission should be withheld.

Publication on DFAT Website: Yes, DFAT may publish this submission on the DFAT website.

“Ireland affirms its devotion to the ideal of peace and friendly co-operation amongst nations founded on international justice and morality.”

Article 29, Constitution of Ireland

Introduction

Concern welcomes the Review of the Foreign Policy initiated by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the accompanying consultation process which affords civil society organisations the opportunity to engage with the Department on issues of mutual concern and consequence.

Concern Worldwide's perspective on this review derives from our experience of working in more than thirty countries across three continents over almost half a century. We have seen and felt first-hand the positive impact of Irish foreign policy from Sub-Saharan Africa to the Middle East; from Asia to Latin America. It could be argued that this nation's history and reputation as a country that has cared for the very poorest of our world has been achieved through the work of our missionaries, our aid agencies, our political leaders and through the generous support of the Irish public. Historically, publicly and politically, our partnership with the developing world runs deep.

As a small nation, Ireland has every right to be proud of its foreign policy historically, particularly our vital contribution to human rights, development and humanitarian assistance. Ireland's history of overcoming conflict, colonisation and famine have given us an empathy and understanding with other struggling nations that informs our focus on human rights, poverty eradication and the fight against hunger and enables us to act as an "honest broker" and a progressive voice in many areas of international diplomacy. Ireland's role in furthering the cause of disarmament and non-proliferation internationally and specifically the role we played in the adoption of the Cluster Munitions Treaty are to be commended. Likewise, our commitment to the United Nations and to neutrality, has served to contribute to Ireland's identity as a peaceful nation which supports international solidarity and the rule of law. Indeed, it is our ability to maintain a principled and independent voice, which has garnered a solid reputation on the world's stage, and resulted in our enjoyment of strong relations with other nations, including those with whom we have not had traditional bilateral relationships. This was evidenced in 2013 when Ireland used its membership of the UN Human Rights Council to lead a core group of diverse states - Chile, Japan, Sierra Leone and Tunisia - in developing and tabling a resolution on civil society space, which was passed by consensus.

Concern believes that it is this legacy, of a principled, independent voice, matched with a practical, informed delivery of assistance on the ground which should inform a new foreign policy, framed by our international human rights and humanitarian obligations. The updated foreign policy should reiterate Ireland's commitment to global peace and security and to a rules-based international system. We look forward to the formation of a policy which enshrines the following values outlined by An Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Eamon Gilmore:

"Freedom and equality. These are the values which underpin Ireland's response to key global and regional challenges. It is our deep commitment to freedom and equality which places Ireland in the vanguard of international efforts to resolve conflict; to create and maintain peace; to eradicate hunger and under-development; and to put an end to human rights abuses around the world."

Address by An Tánaiste to the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 26/9/2011

Context of the Foreign Policy Review

“This is a nation that met its responsibilities by choosing to apply the lessons of your own past to assume a heavier burden of responsibility on the world stage...”

Barack Obama

The timing of this foreign policy review is significant in our view for a number of reasons.

The current Statement of Strategy was a document born of an economic crisis and which was predominantly occupied with economic recovery. The foreign policy review must now take a longer term more strategic view, and articulate a coherent values-based foreign policy which builds on the past and respects and protects those principles which underpin our strong legacy.

We are all rightly concerned with the medium term objective of restoring "Irish credibility", but Concern's experience in the places where we work is that the credibility of Irish foreign policy remains as strong as ever. It is our past legacy coupled with this current credibility which should guide us in forging our existing priorities with new ones.

The review document seeks to take account of how the world is changing and the speed of that change. On a daily basis, Concern bears witness to the challenges of a changing world, and the impact of these changes on the poorest and marginalised. Increased economic vulnerability, climate change and a shift in conflict patterns have resulted in growing levels of inequality across the globe, and strong action is needed if we are to see this trend reversed and build the conditions for a just and peaceful world.

Concern welcomes the assertion in the foreign policy consultation document that the international community must respond to these challenges. Ireland's foreign policy should therefore articulate the kind of society we want to live in and the contribution we see Ireland making to that vision.

This vision should be anchored in international human rights norms, and set out a clear and coherent blueprint for ensuring that these principles are protected and promoted through broader policy dialogue in areas such as trade and economic development. Indeed, it is important for the Department to recognize that a stable world and a rules-based international system in which the interests of small states can be protected provide the environment in which our economy can operate most effectively. A coherent approach is needed which sees all strands of Government policy working in support of Ireland's development objectives, and which respects at all times the obligation to maintain humanitarian issues independent of political and security decisions.

Recommendations for the updated Foreign Policy

"We will not enjoy security without development, we will not enjoy development without security, and we will not enjoy either without respect for human rights."

Former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan.

The Foreign Policy should:

1. **Confirm** that human rights obligations are at the heart of Ireland's foreign policy, and that development and humanitarian action are a vital part of Ireland's overall engagement.
2. **Uphold** International Humanitarian Law and endorse the core humanitarian principles derived from it; this principled approach is essential in order that Ireland works and is seen to be working in an impartial, independent and neutral manner in complex political and security contexts.
3. **Demonstrate** that Ireland will strengthen efforts to eradicate hunger and poverty. Ireland's voice, impact and reputation in these areas are each considerable and should be strengthened further by an approach which sees all strands of Government policy working in support of these objectives. The commitments made in One World, One Future should likewise be supported by Ireland's foreign policy and all realms of government policy.
4. **State** that incorporation of civil society positions at the international and domestic level will be integral to Ireland's foreign policy engagement. The DFAT should continue to initiate formal, structured dialogues with civil society on matters relating to government policy and practice, in order to increase transparency and accountability.
5. **Commit** the Irish government to pursuing a leadership role on gender equality and non-discrimination, at both the domestic and international level. The DFAT should place specific emphasis on the situation of women and gender based violence, as well as to vulnerable and marginalised groups, including LGBT people, migrants and refugees.
6. **Demonstrate** its determination to implement the Policy Coherence for Development agenda adopted in the European Consensus on Development (2005), at an Irish and EU level. The foreign policy should state that this approach will be progressed across each of the core areas outlined in the 2009 PCD agenda (trade and finance, climate change, food security, migration and security.), respecting at all times the obligation to maintain humanitarian issues independent of political and security decisions.
7. **Announce** the Government's intention to initiate a reporting mechanism with measurable targets and indicators across government departments with a view to identifying any policy which undermines the government's human rights or development goals. Such policies should then be amended to prevent or reduce negative effects on the poor and marginalised.

8. **Enhance** the promotion and protection of human rights internationally by committing to the ratification and implementation of outstanding human rights instruments to which Ireland is not yet a party - including but not limited to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Optional Protocol on the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Migrant Workers Convention.
9. **Articulate** Ireland's commitment to, and support for, the mandate, institutions and mechanisms of the United Nations as the primary legitimate body for the promotion of global peace and security. The policy should reconfirm Ireland's long-standing support for the UN Peacekeeping arm, which provides a significant example of our policy on neutrality.
10. **Declare** that Ireland will be a courageous voice at EU level on issues that impact on developing countries. DFAT should evaluate Ireland's contribution to the EU and to the multilateral fora where common EU positions are applied, and consider how greater transparency and public ownership of inputs to these fora can be achieved.
11. **Commit** to effective engagement with the Irish public on foreign policy issues and development and humanitarian action in particular, in order to deepen citizens' understanding and appreciation of the positive role which Ireland plays on the world stage; translating our values into a determined voice which calls for principled policies, effective practices and an international system which works towards a fair, just and equal world for all.

Conclusion

Concern Worldwide agrees with the statement in the public consultation document that "our foreign policy promotes a clear image of Ireland abroad." Thus far in our long and varied experience, that image has been one of a small and principled nation, devoted to peace, poverty alleviation and international solidarity. From support for the anti-apartheid movement, to commitment to the rights of the Palestinian people and the protection of minorities, it is this image that lends us a moral standing in the world, and affords us the ability to promote our national values.

We now have the opportunity to reiterate that these values remain at the heart of our foreign policy. Despite our limited resources and recent economic challenges, our reputation remains untainted and this must be protected. We must ensure that our economic diplomacy supports growth that is pro-poor and sustainable, and which is at all times compatible with international human rights law. Only then can we seek to influence a world where, in the words of one of Ireland's greatest Ambassadors;

*The longed-for tidal wave
Of justice can rise up,
And hope and history rhyme.*

Seamus Heaney