



The following is the submission by the Volunteer Mission Movement (VMM), to the 2014 Review of Irish Foreign Policy being conducted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Introduction

VMM (*Volunteer Mission Movement*) is a lay Christian development organisation which recruits, trains, places and supports the work of skilled Irish personnel working to build the organisational capacities of selected local strategic partner organisations in developing countries of the world, but in particular Africa. VMM focuses on integral human development and supports the work of people and organisations of all faiths and politics, or none. Since its founding in 1969, VMM has recruited and trained over 2,800 professionally qualified lay mission development workers in support of its local partner organisations overseas, but primarily in Africa.

Given the importance which vocationalism and volunteerism has played and continues to play in Irish society, we also want to highlight the added value which such ethics can bring to Irish overseas development assistance. The VMM model complements and benefits the work of Irish Aid. With the decline of religious vocations in Ireland and the subsequent transitional impact upon the work of Irish overseas mission development, organisations like VMM will play an increasingly critical role in consolidating the excellent development work begun by Irish religious missionaries through the placement and support of professional Irish Lay volunteers in the service of mission development. They are instrumental in consolidating the strong ethical framework around Irish overseas policies which continues to be evident in Foreign Affairs today.

We welcome the consultation exercise as an opportunity to share with you our hopes and concerns in the development of strategic cohesive policies for Irelands Foreign Affairs and Trade department.

Promoting Irelands Values and Interests

As a small nation trading on the edge of Europe, Ireland's self-interests are interlinked with the global common good. However it is still perceived as a strong non-aligned nation, albeit within the European Union (EU). The EU was founded on Christian democratic principles and such principles continue to inform the thinking behind much of Irish development activities. Global issues such as climate change, trade and migration, as well as shifting international relations in an increasingly multi-polar world require urgent coherent policy from the Irish government. VMM believe that Ireland's programmes must continue to facilitate people being helped to have control over their own lives, and enable civil society groups to grow and to prosper. In support of such principles we propose:

- *Sign and ratify the core human rights Conventions to which the state is not a party, and expedite the ratification of conventions to which it is a signatory.*
- *Ireland should sign up to the national implementation plan on UN guiding principles for business and human rights which is currently in process of being implemented;*
- *Promote adherence to Ireland's international human rights standards and obligations across all Government Departments' strategies and programmes;*
- *Systematically apply core human rights principles of accountability, empowerment, participation and non-discrimination in all policy activities;*

European Union policy

Since the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union is a significant global player in its own right. Within that framework Ireland needs to assert its own values and traditions of equality, participation and accountability. Ireland's membership of the European Union significantly influences our international policy. There is now a public perception that the values of our traditional neutrality are slowly being eroded within Ireland's current Foreign policy and that our neutrality is now less visible or effective within the militarily driven agendas of many of our partners within the EU. In 2012 the global military budget was €1,700 billion. Since militarisation is a major obstacle to development in developing countries and is a significant

factor to creating and maintaining poverty in our world, Ireland needs to be proactive in combating and assisting this industry. Clearer and more ethical policy coherence is needed to prevent Irish foreign policy drift in that regard.

Among the strengths of Irish foreign policy are ***overseas development, human rights, peace building*** and ***dis-armament***. These themes continue to make a valuable contribution to global peace and Ireland's traditional non aligned status within Europe gives it opportunities to articulate a human rights based approach with greater moral authority at global levels.

- *Ireland should consolidate its UN based neutrality strategies and deepen and articulate its advocacy roles in the areas of ethical development and peace-building.*
- *Ireland should retain its strong voice in the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), consistent with its foreign policy traditions and interests.*
- *Ireland should strengthen its HR personnel resources in the European External Action Service (EEAS) towards improving the effectiveness of our representation at EU's external fora.*

Ireland and Building Bilateral Relationships

The primacy of the United Nations (UN) as the framework for Ireland's expression of its diplomatic values as a sovereign nation should be grounded in building and expanding its diplomatic representation abroad. There is a need for a re-visioning of the roles of our embassies and diplomatic missions which could utilise our global influence through our diasporas. Ireland, through its NGOs and missionaries has a long tradition of support for practical multilateralism, based on the UN; the promotion of human rights, advocacy for disarmament and arms control; the fight against hunger and poverty and our support for the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); our contribution to UN-mandated peace support operations and commitment to global conflict resolution efforts.

- *VMM supports proposals for the expansion of a network of Irish foreign and security policy experts. Irish scholars and professional experts in a variety of fields working overseas in universities, think tanks, research institutes, multilateral agencies.*

International Development Policies and Actions.

The current Policy for International Development – *One World, One Future* – adopted in May 2013 renews that commitment and sets out the vision, goals and priorities for our engagement on international development. The fight against poverty and hunger is a central priority of Ireland's foreign policy. As Ireland puts more emphasis on trade with Africa there is a danger of losing the balance in the current Africa Strategy document. It is essential that development aid does not become a tool to trade with. It is vital that trading arrangements retain ethical standards and are used for sustainable trade to uplift local enterprises and communities in developing countries.

In his introduction to the DFAT Statement of Strategy 2011-2014, An Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore stated that "the global economic crisis must not deflect us from our traditional values and role in the world". Based on evidence in areas such as inequality, social exclusion, and human rights we believe that Ireland should put greater focus in these areas, and should mainstream gender inequality to offer increased support to women and girls.

The major share of Irish development aid continues to go to its priority programme countries, primarily in sub-Saharan Africa, and to supporting the work of Irish development NGOs and Missionaries engaged in development work. Education of people is the key. Without education it is difficult to ensure improvement in the quality of lives of many people which in turn excludes them from being able to compete for their rights in our fast-changing world. Formal education programmes especially at secondary level need to have a strong advocacy bias. Education is a right for all.

Other areas which are important to maintain are the fight against **HIV-AIDS & Malaria:**

These two diseases are crippling as days are lost at work and are a massive drain on medical resources. They are the biggest causes of Infant Mortality and death among the work force in Sub-Sahara Africa.

Family Income-Generating (IGA) Projects: This type of project needs a greater investment into the future if the poor are to be encouraged to raise their standard of living. Vocational and Agricultural Training programmes need support so as to be more effective in the IGA tasks undertaken.

Advocacy Training is very necessary so that people know their rights and are equipped to address and confront corruption. Any responsible aid programme has to find local culturally appropriate ways to communicate the important human values which underline our commitment to human rights.

¹ An Tánaiste Eamon Gilmore TD's Address to the UN Special Event on the MDGs: <https://www.dfa.ie/news-and-media/speeches/speeches-archive/2013/september/millennium-development-goals/>

Policy Coherence for Development

The European Union and Ireland bilaterally have accepted that their policies, across a range of areas, can have detrimental effects on developing countries. Ireland should implement its commitment to Government policy coherence through a vigorous, systematic process of analysing, monitoring and correcting for incoherencies.

In practice, this means sustaining and deepening DFAT efforts, established in its 2011-2013 Statement of Strategy, to have all Departments (but especially Finance, Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, Jobs, Environment, Enterprise and Innovation)¹ ensure that Ireland's overseas development priorities are integrated within their own thinking and positions, as well as in their negotiations on EU positions regarding trade, climate change and food security.

This should involve working more closely on the European Union's five identified Policy Coherence Development (PCD) priorities for a continuing work programme across the EU include: trade and finance, climate change, food security, migration, and security.

The EU recognises that its economic interests and the legitimate interests of developing country partners sometimes collide. Systematically increasing its focus on policy coherence for development would bring focus to Ireland's policies and positions within and across policy areas, and therefore to its foreign policy and external relations, minimising the impact of such economic "collisions".

¹ Irish Government Department of Foreign Affairs Statement of Strategy 2011-2013

In the area of trade, for instance, this should mean Irish and state supported companies and individuals adhere to international law and human rights conventions and best practice international standards for business. The Foreign Policy review should result in Ireland establishing a timeline for the development of the National Action Plan to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

As a matter of policy coherence for development, the foreign policy review process should clarify the nature, duration and standing of important international development commitments by Ireland, including those to:

- *Achieve the UN target of spending 0.7% of Gross National Income on Official Development Assistance*
- *Channel 30% of development resources through multilateral organisations, with funding decisions guided by published performance assessments*
- *Spend €100m each year related to HIV, AIDS and communicable diseases*
- *Devote “more resources” to gender equality, disability and development education.*

Northern Ireland

Religious and lay Christians have played a unique role in building and sustaining peace on this island. Ireland’s missionaries represent a unique all island resource towards deepening the processes of peace and reconciliation at home and abroad. Missionaries in particular have significant understanding on inter-faith dialogue and such experience should be utilised when engaging in inter-faith. The British government have recognised the importance of faith based work and religion as a potential force for positive good in communities and a way of making politics work. Ireland’s policy review should assess these trends.

Diaspora Engagement

The global framework within which Irish lay and religious missionaries work represent an extraordinary network which is in daily contact with the Irish diasporas. Indeed a significant proportion of Irish development workers currently form part of that diaspora. Such resources need to be availed of through direct and virtual contact in a practical and cohesive manner. This valuable resource needs to be explored more fully to address the many social issues facing our people abroad.

Promoting a Positive Image of Ireland

VMM hold the view that Ireland's external relations should be founded on values and principles which in turn should guide its policies, negotiating positions and practical actions. VMM support the proposal for a human rights-based approach and the vigorous adoption of policy coherence development (PCD) analysis to guide Irish foreign policy in a way that cements Ireland's international profile.

We would welcome some regular and structured civil society engagement with the Minister and DFAT, within and outside the Oireachtas Committees regarding the impact of the Ireland's foreign policy and external relations. This will be especially important in relation to the new emphasis on promoting Ireland's trade, investment and commercial interests through DFAT. While the economy is a vital dynamic within Irish society it is also an integral part of our national image to insure that our cultural values are promoted and ethical behaviour maintained. As Ireland puts more emphasis on trade with Africa, it is essential that aid does not become tied to trade. It is also important in trading arrangements that ethical standards will be used for sustainable trade that helps to uplift local enterprises and communities in developing countries.

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