

ADDRESS TO THE ANNUAL DELGATE CONFERENCE PDFORRA

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CHIEF OF STAFF

INTRODUCTION

A Uachtaráin PDFORRA, a Aire Cosanta, Rúnaí Cúnta Ginearálta na Roinne, Rúnaí Ginearálta PDFORRA, baill den Fheidhmeanach Náisiúnta, deiligáidí, Omudsman Na Forsaí Cosanta agus a aíonna go léir. Tá mé fíor shásta bheith anseo inniú ar ócáid bhur séachtú (17th) comhdháil bliantúil déag. Mar is gnáh fáiltím an seans seo labhairt le h-ionadaithe tofa PDFORRA agus deiligídh go léir.

President of PDFORRA, Minister for Defence, Deputy Secretary General of the Department, General Secretary PDFORRA, members of the National Executive, Delegates, Ombudsman for the Defence Forces and fellow guests. I am delighted to be with you today in Westport on the occasion of your 17th Annual Delegate Conference and I welcome the opportunity to address the elected representatives and delegates of PDFORRA.

The Defence Forces has a proven capacity for change and flexibility as illustrated by the variety of services provided and the success of the organisational reform process set out in the White Paper and associated Strategy statements.

Last year was my first opportunity, as Chief of Staff, to address Conference. I used the theme of maintaining the momentum of change towards embracing our vision and achieving our mission. I am delighted to be able to say that we have maintained this momentum and even increased its tempo. This has been greatly facilitated by high levels of professionalism, resilience, loyalty and dedication across all ranks in the Defence Forces. The solid ongoing and positive relationship developed with PDFORRA as part of the partnership process and modernisation mechanisms has added to this progress.

The White Paper on Defence 2000 outlines defence policy, defines the roles of the Defence Forces and charts a course to develop defence capabilities over the period to 2010. The Strategy Statement

2008 to 2010 defines the vision, mission and high level goals for the defence organisation. I will structure my address around the four programme headings.

1. Contingent Capabilities
2. On-Island Security and Support to other Agencies
3. International Peace and Security
4. Defence Policy, Military Advice and Corporate Support Services

CONTINGENT CAPABILITIES

Maintaining and developing appropriate military capabilities are key elements in the implementation of our strategies. My Annual Plan for 2008 reflects the primacy of operations both at home and overseas and maps out a clear and achievable Capability Development Process. This programme entails, amongst others, training, support and maintenance of military capability, including major equipment procurement and infrastructure projects, in order to deliver effective On-island security support and make a meaningful contribution to International Security. Human resources, training and equipment are key enablers supporting capability development.

Human Resources

The success, with which the Defence Forces met its many challenges and commitments, both at home and overseas, reflects the high quality, professionalism and dedication of our personnel. Our ongoing need is to attract and enlist the highest quality personnel in order to meet our many challenges into the future. A Review Group was convened by Major General David Ashe, D COS (Sp), in March of this year, to conduct a strategic review of all aspects of the Defence Forces' approach to recruitment and selection. Under the chairmanship of Col Patrick Moran, with amongst others RSM Tony O'Neill of the DFTC, Coy Sgt Paul Kieran of 4 W Bde BTC and Sgt David Mooney of the 5 Inf Bn, the Review Group carried out a 'best practice' review of the recruitment and selection process with a view to implementing approved recommendations across the Defence Forces.

Defence Forces turnover, at 6.65%, is relatively low when compared with other military organisations and our organisation has been successful in meeting emerging demands and maintaining strength levels. Turnover is greatest in the first five (5) years of service, particularly in the Initial Induction phase. The changed nature of contracts will lead to increased turnover in the medium term, while the economic environment may impact on future trends.

There has always been significant interest in careers in the Defence Forces, which is strongly associated with established military tradition. But with our high profile of operations at home and overseas and our high ceremonial contribution the interest has widened considerably. The projected General Service application figure for 2008 is almost 4,000 compared with 2,221 in 2007. This represents a potential 75% increase in applications.

As of today the strength of the Defence Forces currently stands at 10,500 in total, with the Army at 8,600, the Air Corps at 830 and the Naval Service at 1,070.

Training

Like Human Resources, Training is a key enabler in capability development. Capability can be measured in terms of skills and competencies. When not engaged in operations the focus is on training and preparation. Training forms an essential part of the development of capabilities contingent on the security environment at home and abroad. The Director of Defence Forces Training is to prepare and will issue Annual Training Directives designed to develop the capabilities that will best meet the challenges facing the Defence Forces.

This last year has seen the Defence Forces involved with the European Battle Groups for the first time. The Defence Forces committed an IEDD (Improvised Explosive Device Disposal) unit with its own integrated protection and support as part of the European Union Nordic Battle Group (NBG) from 01 Jul 2007 to 30 Jun 2008. The IEDD Tactical Component was the first DEFENCE FORCES unit to participate in multinational training outside of Ireland – this was enabled by legislative change which is a clear demonstration of the strong political support for our participation.

To ensure that the training met the interoperability and operational capability requirements two evaluations were conducted. The first evaluation was conducted in Ireland to confirm that the unit met Full Operational Capability. Through the dedication and hard work of all the personnel involved, the unit declared Full Operational Capability on 31 July 2007, the first NBG Unit to achieve this status. The second evaluation was conducted off island in Sweden in order to achieve NBG certification. This latter evaluation, conducted in a severe weather environment, was assessed against the five essential pillars of military capability: operational viability, readiness, interoperability, deployability and sustainability.

As a testament to our continued capability development, and with great credit due to those involved, our participation with the Nordic Battle Group has attracted praise from our fellow participants. This has been a single theme in all the CHOD level meetings of the NBG and it was again emphasised to me during my latest contacts with the OpCdr (Maj Gen Bengt Andersson) and the FCdr (Brig Gen Karl Englebretson).

Our experience to-date in CHAD is that the preparation undertaken as part of routine annual training and as part of pre-deployment training has ensured that our personnel are trained, and capable of performing, to the highest standards in the most demanding situations. Following an After Action Review of the training undertaken by the initial troops deployed to CHAD a greater emphasis has now been placed on the drills and skills of the individual ranging from first aid, map reading and navigation, to driver skills and recovery of vehicles. This is to ensure that those deployed can self sustain and are capable of maintaining a high degree of operational readiness.

ON ISLAND SECURITY & SUPPORT

Our commitment and undertakings in relation to developing and deploying capabilities to aid the Civil Power (ATCP) and aid to the Civil Authority (ACA) continues. The support to the Garda Síochána (GS) including cash in transit escorts, explosive escorts, prisoner escorts and Bullion cash escorts continue. Portlaoise Prison Guard, Explosive Ordnance Disposal Teams and Ceremonial services also continue, all might I add to the very highest standards.

The Naval Service continue to meet the high standards they have set for themselves in recent years in terms of patrol days and the development of new capabilities.

The Air Corps continues to support An Garda Síochána and provide Ministerial Air Transport and Air Ambulance. Full Rotary Operational capability will be achieved with the delivery of the final AW 139 later this month thus ensuring all six AW 139 helicopters are brought into full operational service as quickly as possible.

The Defence Forces is a 'can do, will do' organisation. To date, the Defence Forces have delivered 100% of all approved Aid To Civil Power and Aid to Civil Authority requests.

I would like to avail of this opportunity to extend my sincere appreciation to those hundreds of enlisted personnel of the Army, Air Corps, Naval Service and Reserve who have participated so magnificently in Defence Forces' and State Ceremonial to date in 2008. The most prominent ceremonial event was the State Funeral of the late President Hillary. The compliments I received from the Hillery family and National Leaders were most gratifying. It is wonderful to see that the pride in uniform, turnout and drill on such occasions remains a priority for our personnel at a time when so many other demands are made upon them.

INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND SECURITY

The ability of the Defence Forces to deliver contingent capabilities on overseas deployments continues to be a challenging task. Our participation in overseas operations is a key element of Ireland's foreign policy and an important factor in meeting Ireland's international obligations as a member of the United Nations, the European Union and the Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe. It is fair to say that the demands on the Defence Forces in this regard have never been greater than to-day.

Currently the Defence Forces have 557 NCOs and privates serving overseas as follows:

6 serving with United Nations led peacekeeping operations, UNIFIL and UNMIK.

369 serving with European Union led crisis management operations, EUFOR Tchad/RCA, EUFOR Bosnia and Herzegovina .

182 serving with NATO/PfP led peace support operations, KFOR and ISAF.

EUFOR Tchad/RCA

Chad is a difficult mission that poses operational, environmental and logistical challenges. However, the Defence Forces are a very well equipped, interoperable, modern, motivated and capable force. These attributes, allied to our training and considerable experience in peace support operations enables us to mitigate the risk to troops in the mission area. This experience gained on over 70,000 tours of duty, in 50 years peacekeeping service stands us in very good stead.

Members of the Army Ranger Wing deployed to Chad in February 2008 as part of the Initial Entry Force. This group proved to be tremendous pathfinders for the follow-on deployments of the Advance Group and 97 Inf Bn itself. Starting from a brown field sandy site, the Advance Group, that deployed in April 2008, constructed a modern military camp, thus facilitating the deployment of 97 Inf Bn to Camp Ciara in Goz Beida.

In May 2008, 97 Inf Bn deployed to Chad, and from the outset began to establish a high operational profile, establishing conditions that would help create a safe and secure environment and facilitate freedom of movement for International Organisations, Non Governmental Organisations and others within the area of operations. Despite the effects of the wet season, 97 Inf Bn maintained a patrolling schedule throughout the Area Of Responsibility.

The majority of the Advance Group and the ARW personnel were recovered, all safely, to Ireland in June 2008. The 97 Inf Bn has just handed over to 98 Inf, who deployed on 21 September and 07 October 2008. Planning continues, subject to political approval, for a handover from the European Union to the United Nations and it appears likely that this will become a United Nations mission from the Spring of 2009 onwards.

KOSOVO KFOR

On 01 Aug 2008 Ireland successfully completed the role of Framework Nation for KFOR's Multinational Task Force Centre. This represented a significant development for the Defence Forces. For the first time an Irish Officer was in command and control of a Multinational Brigade sized force in a NATO/PfP led Peace Support Operation. In addition it provided opportunities for our NCOs and soldiers to participate in higher level staff positions in a multinational environment that demanded the highest levels of professionalism. This newly gained experience will contribute to the development of the Defence Forces and enhance our capabilities and our profile within the international peacekeeping community. The Defence Forces through the 38 Inf Gp continues to contribute to KFOR in providing stability and the necessary reassurance to the people of Kosovo. The 39 Inf Gp have just started their tour of duty.

In addition to the main deployments to Chad and Kosovo the Defence Forces continues to deploy to Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR), Afghanistan (ISAF), Kosovo (UNMIK) and Lebanon (UNIFIL). All these deployments continue to support Ireland's foreign policy and facilitate Ireland's international obligations.

BATTLE GROUPS

Our participation in the Nordic Battle Group (NBG) has been another new and significant experience for us. This participation has been a significant development for the Defence Forces across a number of fronts and I have already mentioned the training aspect of our involvement. This has been the first time that a unit of the Defence Forces was raised in order to be at high

readiness, as part of a certified multinational unit to respond to international crisis, with an ability to be able to deploy on a 5 days notice to move basis, to an area of operations anywhere within a 6,000 KM range of Brussels. The challenges posed, by the expeditionary nature of this task, and our ability to meet the operational capability requirements is another manifestation of the success of our capability development programme.

Looking to the future we are building on our experience in 2008 and staff at DFHQ are currently planning our contribution to the NBG 2011 which commences its standby period on 01 January 2011. Additionally we are discussing with other nations the possibility of joining other Battle Groups. Of course political approval must be obtained before any understandings are agreed.

DEFENCE POLICY, MILITARY ADVICE and CORPORATE SERVICES

In the development of capabilities ensuring on-island security and the promotion of international peace and security the Department of Defence and the Defence Forces work closely with other Government Departments who also carry responsibilities in these areas – the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform and the Department of Foreign Affairs. The provision of defence policy advice is an important contributor to the development of overall Government policy on defence and international peace and security.

CONCLUSION

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members of PDFORRA for their support and dedication throughout the year and pay tribute to those who have served abroad on our many overseas missions. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the support that our families give and the difficulties they accept, due to absence of loved ones, in facilitating mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers or sisters to serve away from home and overseas.

I want to thank your full-time officials and all of you who are actively participating as representatives at other levels for your positive and worthwhile contribution to the representative process in the Defence Forces.

Once again thank you for providing me with this opportunity to address you and I wish you well for the remainder of the Conference and for the coming year.

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