

## **Speech by the Taoiseach, Mr. Brian Cowen, T.D.**

### **Ceremony to mark the 50th Anniversary of the Defence Forces' Involvement in Peacekeeping**

**McKee Barracks, Dublin.**

**Thursday, 26 June, 2008 at 1.50pm**

A Ard Mheara, a Airí, a Iar Thaoisigh, a Ard-Rúnaithe, a Cheann Foirne, a Ath-laochra, baill d'Oglaigh na hÉireann agus a uaisle go léir. Is mór an onóir agus údar bród dom a bheith anseo inniu d'ócáid cuimhneachán caoga bliain Óglaigh na hÉireann mar choimeadaí síochána.

Ba mhaith liom buíochas a ghabhail leis an Aire Ó Deaghaidh, a thug cuireadh dom freastal ar an gceiliúradh agus an óráid seo a thabhairt.

Is ceart an cheiliúradh seo a dhéanamh mar aitheantas ar an tseirbhís a thug shaighdiúirí na Tíre seo, fir agus mná, ar mhaithe le síocháin domhanda. Tá rannpháirteachas Óglaigh na hÉireann mar choimeadaí síochána mar cheann do na comharthaí is feiceálaí dár mballraíocht do na Náisiúin Aontaithe agus ár dtacaíocht do phrionsabal na heagraíochta sin.

Is prionsabal tábhachtach iad seo i leith ár polasaí maidir lenar neodracht mhíleata.

Freisin, tá ár rannpháirteachas leis na Náisiúin Aontaithe mar buaic phointe do sheirbhísí in Óglaigh na hÉireann agus dár bpolasaí Eachtrannach.

Ó 1958 i leith tá baill d'Oglaigh na hÉireann ag freastal go leanúnach faoi scáth agus údarás na Náisiúin Aontaithe i limistéir éagsúla ar fud na Cruinne. Go deimhin, rinne shaighdiúirí na Tíre seo breis agus caoga sé míle turas dualgais ar caoga ceathair mísiúin éagsúla leis na Náisiúin Aontaithe.

Tá caill domhanda bainte amach ag Óglaigh na hÉireann de bharr a gairmiúilachta agus a gcuid díograis agus iad i mbun a gcuid oibre. Léiríonn siad, daonnacht, neamhspleách, nach mbíonn claonta agus iad ag cuir síocháin agus slándáil i bhfeidhm agus iad ag léiriú ómós do chultúir agus nósanna éagsúla.

Mar thoradh ar ár rannpháirteachas sna Náisiúin Aontaithe tá saol i bhfad níos fearr anois ag cuid do na daonra is bochta agus faoi brú ar fud na Cruinne.

D'óc Óglaigh na hÉireann go daor as an gcaill domhanda seo.

Chaill muid Ochtú Cúig baill dár bhForasí agus iad ar seirbhís síochána. Tá siad ar fad agus a muintir go mór inar smaointe againn inniu.

Is deacair teach ar aon rannóg sa Sheirbhís Poiblí thugann onóir chomh-mór dár Stát ná an seirbhís agus an íobairt atá thugann fir agus mná na hÉireann agus iad ag ar seirbhís faoi bhrat na Náisiúin Aontaithe.

Gur fada buan sibh!

It is fifty years since the first Irish Troops set out as part of the armed military observer mission known as United Nations Observer Group in Lebanon, where a total of 50 Irish officers served over four separate deployments.

Following on from that experience, Ireland's first major overseas UN deployment commenced in July 1960, when the Irish Government, in response to the UN Secretary General's request for assistance, agreed to send troops to the Congo as part of the UN force there.

Our participation in the UN mission to Congo has become etched in our Nation's consciousness. Tragically, 26 Irish soldiers lost their lives in the cause of peace in the Congo operation. These deaths were a sharp wake-up call for Ireland, as the Nation and the International Community more widely began to fully appreciate the cost that had to be borne in the cause of peace.

Between 1960 and 1964, a total of 6,000 Irish personnel served in the Congo. It marked the first opportunity for the Irish Defence Forces to serve alongside armies from other nations. The Congo experience highlighted our skills and training, while also informing and supporting the development of our approach to the planning and undertaking of future operations.

Since becoming a member of the UN in 1955, Ireland has been a strong defender of the primary role of the UN Security Council in the maintenance of international peace and security. Ireland's obligation under the United Nations Charter to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security is reflected in our continuous involvement in peacekeeping operations, mandated or authorised by the United Nations Security Council. The ongoing conflicts and tensions in the Middle East, Africa, Central America and elsewhere have ensured a continuing demand for United Nations peacekeepers.

We have, as a country that cherishes its tradition of military neutrality, been able to deploy Irish peacekeepers to these trouble-spots under our triple lock mechanism of Government decision, Dáil approval and UN authorisation. Our adherence to the triple-lock not only demonstrates our commitment to our military neutrality and the United Nations; it is a recognition that global security can only be achieved through collective action by the international community working together.

Over the past number of years, the nature of peacekeeping operations has changed extensively, from traditional UN led "Blue Hat" missions to multifaceted regionally-led peace operations. These see the onus being placed on regional states to organise and assemble peacekeeping troops for the purpose of discharging a UN Mandate.

Within the European Union, the evolution of the European Security and Defence Policy has placed greater responsibilities on individual Member States, both collectively and individually, to contribute personnel in support of UN Mandated crisis management operations. The development of these capabilities is particularly important as we seek together to support the Union in responding to the challenges of an increasingly globalised world and in supporting the United Nations.

Óglaigh na hÉireann has risen to the continuing challenges and developments in peacekeeping. They have shown the capacity and experience to respond to the changing nature of peace support operations by modernising and enhancing their capabilities. Ireland's Defence Forces have gained extensive experience in peacekeeping over the years and we are regularly approached as a source of peacekeeping personnel and expertise. Our investment, over the past 10 years in equipment, training and infrastructure means that we now have the internal capacity to undertake increasingly complex and difficult missions.

A key facet of Ireland's approach to international peace support operations is the engagement of Defence Forces personnel at all levels with the local communities they are called on to serve. Indeed, liaison with

the local population and the provision of support and humanitarian assistance is one of the hallmarks of the Irish Defence Forces approach to their involvement in peace support missions.

Relative to our size, available resources and capabilities, both financial and military, Ireland is proportionately a very large peacekeeping contributor within the international community.

We are currently contributing 811 Defence Forces personnel to 12 different missions throughout the world. This contribution has been made possible by the willingness of the Irish people, in particular, the Defence Force personnel and their families, to play their part by responding generously to calls from the United Nations down the years.

This important year also sees the Defence Forces maintaining Ireland's long and historic association with the African continent, with the deployment of a contingent of over 400 personnel to the EU-led UN-mandated operation in Chad and the Central African Republic. The EUFOR mission in Chad is undertaking a vital task in providing basic security for over 400,000 refugees - many fleeing the Darfur crisis - and facilitating the delivery and free movement of humanitarian aid and personnel to the victims of the Darfur atrocities.

As well as the extensive involvement of Irish military personnel in United Nations peacekeeping operations, a number of Irish officers have held the most senior appointments with several United Nations missions since Ireland's involvement first began. The appointment of an Irish officer, Lt. Gen. Pat Nash, as EU Operation Commander of the mission in Chad and the appointment of Brigadier General Gerry Hegarty to command the Multinational Task Force Centre of KFOR in Kosovo, indicate the high standing of the Irish Defence Forces in the field of peace support operations generally.

On this day, 26th June, 1963, President Kennedy commenced his historic visit to Ireland. In his eloquent address to the Dáil two days later, Kennedy paid a glowing tribute to the work of Irish peace-keepers. He said : "From Cork to the Congo, from Galway to the Gaza Strip, from this legislative assembly to the United Nations, Ireland is sending its most talented men to do the world's most important work - the work of peace."

Forty-five years on from John F. Kennedy uttering these famous words, and half a century on from our Defence Forces' first involvement in UN peacekeeping, our country remains resolutely committed to that important work - the work of peace. Today, we should all be proud of the many talented Irish men and women down through years who have served this country and the cause of peace with great distinction.

Mar fhocal scoir, ba mhaith liom ar mo shon féin agus ar son an Rialtais buíochas a ghlacadh leis na baill do Óglaigh na hÉireann atá ag freastal faoi láthair agus dár ath-laochra ar fud na tíre dé bharr a gcuid crógacht agus dílseacht ar feadh an caoga bliain atá thart.

Tá seirbhís iontach tugtha acu mar Ambasadóirí don Tír seo, iad ag tabhairt onóir ollmhór dár Náisiúin agus a cur lenár gclú trasna na cruinne.

Cuirim mo bhuíochas in iúl freisin dá dteaghlach agus dá daoine muintire. Gan a gcuid tacaíocht bá dheacair obair, fiú obair chomh fiúntach le síochána domhanda a dhéanamh.

Tá muid faoi chomaoin agaibh ar fad!

ENDS