

# IRELAND CELEBRATES 60 YEARS OF UN SERVICE

Celebrating the contribution made by Gardaí and Defence Forces personnel to the United Nations since Ireland first became a member in 1955, the 'UN60' exhibition at the National Museum of Ireland is part of a programme of events and special projects to mark the 60th anniversary of Ireland's membership of the UN. Report by Grace Heneghan.

Since Ireland first joined the United Nations on 14 December 1955, it has contributed substantially to the work of the organisation, in particular within the framework of UN peacekeeping. The UN also celebrating its 70th anniversary this year.

Entitled 'UN Peacekeeping – A Celebration of Ireland's Proud Engagement', the exhibition showcases Ireland's membership of the UN which started in 1955; 87 military and Garda personnel have lost their lives on UN peacekeeping missions since the first group of Defence Forces UN Observers were deployed to the Middle East in June 1958 and the first full unit to deploy to the Congo in July 1960.

Speaking at the exhibition's launch in the National Museum of Ireland in Collins Barracks, Minister for Defence Simon Coveney pointed to Ireland's proud tradition of participation in peacekeeping missions, both civilian and military.

"The UN charter is central to our peacekeeping policy. Since the first deployment of Irish peacekeepers to Lebanon in 1958, the dedication and service by men and women from the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána contributes to the excellent reputation that Ireland holds as a member of the international community. It's also a major contributor to international peace and security across the globe."

## FIRST GARDA INVOLVEMENT

An Garda Síochána's first UN involvement in 1956 saw the initial deployment of 25 Gardaí to the UN Troops Organisation as security officers, field officers and logistics personnel, but interestingly not as police officers.

In order to take up their UN duties, Garda personnel had to



resign from the Force and upon their return to Ireland they were reappointed. This all changed in 1989 with the passing of the Garda Síochána Act, which accordingly legislated for Garda members to participate with the UN Civilian Peace Component on overseas missions.

"Throughout our 59 years of involvement members of An Garda Síochána have served in locations as diverse as Namibia, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Cyprus and Angola," noted Deputy Commissioner John Twomey.

"I think it would be appropriate to remember those who didn't return from duty, in particular Sgt Paul Reid, and our thoughts are with his family on this day." Sgt Reid died in 1995 whilst serving with the UN Protection Force in Sarajevo, Bosnia & Herzegovina. "We remember his sacrifice along with the Irish soldiers who have lost their lives on duty with the UN," noted the Assistant Commissioner, adding that it was good to see Sgt Reid's colleague Garda Philip Carr at the launch.

Sgt Reid and his partner Garda Philip Carr, both from County Donegal, were travelling in a UN jeep when it struck a lamp post. They were the only Gardaí on UN duty in the former Yugoslavia



Ministers Simon Coveney and Aodhán O'Riordáin pictured with Irish UN Veterans (l-r): Jim McCormack, Martin O'Keeffe, Vice-Chairman of the Irish UN Veterans' Association, and Des Keegan, from Cork.

over the last 60 years with a sense of pride in the courage, commitment and professionalism of our peacekeepers.

"As we look forward to the next 60 years, the political complexity facing peacekeeping operations remains challenging, but An Garda Síochána and the Defence Forces will continue their proud tradition of distinguished service in the cause of world peace."

He added that since the first deployment of Irish peacekeepers to the Lebanon in 1958 they have gained recognition at home and internationally for their endeavours. "But perhaps what is less well known is that the men and women from An Garda Síochána have also served with distinction."

For many years they served in a personal capacity, and had to resign from An Garda Síochána for the duration of their UN service. That all changed in 1989 when new legislation was enacted to facilitate serving members to participate in peacekeeping missions.

"Since the first contingent of 35 members travelled to Namibia with a mandate to ensure free and fair elections, over 900 Gardaí have served on overseas missions in Africa, Asia and Europe. They have assisted in the restoration and maintenance of peace in



Deputy Garda Commissioner John Twomey (second left) pictured with Minister of State at the Dept of Justice & Equality Aodhán O'Riordáin, Minister for Defence Simon Coveney, (fourth and fifth left), Defence Forces Deputy Chief of Staff Kieran Brennan (third right) and Irish UN veterans and officials at the 'UN60' Exhibition in the National Museum of Ireland, Collins Barracks.

at the time. According to a UN report, the crash was probably caused by a sniper's bullet striking a front tyre. Garda Carr was seriously injured.

"It's clear that the work carried out in the UN throughout the last 60 years by the Irish Army and the last 59 years by members of An Garda Síochána has been instrumental in bringing not just hope but stability and solace to regions savaged by the fall out of conflict."

#### POLITICAL COMPLEXITY

Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality, Aodhán Ó Riordáin pointed out that Ireland can look back

countries affected by conflict.

"I understand that 12 members of the Force are currently serving in Cyprus, continuing the tradition of support in peacekeeping there since 1993. The peacekeeping missions under which Garda personnel are deployed have a community policing focus and benefits from An Garda Síochána's long tradition of successful engagement with local communities in this country. Their depth of experience and expertise serves them well in these overseas missions."

Both Ministers took the opportunity at the launch to pay tribute to serving and former members of the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána, for the important role they have played

in Ireland's contribution to peacekeeping missions abroad.

### FIRST CONGO MISSION

Just three years after Ireland gained UN membership, the peacekeeping story began in the Lebanon in 1958 when 50 members of the Permanent Defence Force were deployed as military observers with the UN Observer Group in Lebanon (UNOGIL).

Ireland's first troop contribution came shortly after in 1960 with its deployment to the UN mission in the Congo. Since then Irish Defence Forces personnel have served in peace support missions in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, the Far East and South America, completing over 64,000 tours of duty with UN missions.

"Ireland's participation in UN and UN-mandated peacekeeping missions is a tangible demonstration of our commitment to the pursuit of international peace and security," noted Defence Minister Simon Coveney.

Currently up to 500 men and women are serving overseas in peacekeeping missions in various parts of the world, and Minister Coveney added that Ireland's participation in UN and UN-mandated missions illustrate the very positive and practical difference that small countries, like Ireland, can make in the world's trouble spots.

"The Government's recent White Paper on Defence confirmed our continued support to the UN and to international peacekeeping generally. The White Paper, published in August 2015, sets out the policy framework for

### UN VETERAN SHARES MEMORIES OF SIX PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS

UN veteran Des Keegan from Fermoy, Co. Cork was a member of the 33rd Battalion deployed to the Congo in July 1960, where he served two further terms in 1961 and 1963. He also served in Cyprus in 1964 and 1967 and Lebanon in 1978.

He says that the second trip to Congo in 1961 with the 35th Battalion was the toughest of his six overseas missions, "We lost four armored cars in action." He also recalls that his tour with the 44th Battalion to Lebanon in 1978 was also a rough trip, "but due to the fact that we had much better equipment on board it was an easier mission than the Congo".

He had seen some major changes through his years on overseas peacekeeping missions. "During my second trip to Congo with the 35th Battalion in 1961, we had a refugee camp with a minimum of 55,000 refugees, wherein the Irish Defence Forces controlled one side of it whilst the Swedish forces controlled the other side. All the refugees had at their disposal were two water taps and no sanitation!"

He said he wouldn't change anything and would do it all again, but it would be nice to have better equipment all the same! I was talking to a chap who was with the 32nd Battalion and he went out a few weeks before our unit on the first trip to the Congo in 1960.

"He had volunteered one Monday and with only seven days of training he was in the Congo the following week. Nowadays training lasts for about three months before they go overseas, and they have top-class equipment at their disposal. We didn't have anything like that back in my time."

His advice to any new army recruits today looking at overseas peacekeeping missions is that it matures individuals. "My own son is in the army and he served in Kosovo, Liberia and Lebanon many times. He is based in Collins Barracks and he will end his career with the army after the 2016 celebrations.

"It's not a life for everyone, some take to it and some people find it very hard. It can affect you when you see such hardship and suffering of people in these war-torn countries."

After serving for 21 years, Des Keegan retired in 1980 at the age of 36, "because I felt like I was too old to soldier on any longer!"



Kieran Brennan, Defence Forces Deputy Chief of Staff (Operations), and Defence Forces Press Officer Comdt Seán Ó Fátharta.

the Defence Organisation for the next ten years and beyond."

### INSTITUTE FOR PEACH SUPPORT

One of the new proposals is the evaluation of a new concept involving the potential development of a new Institute for Peace Support and Leadership Training, at the Defence Forces Training Centre in the Curragh.

It is envisaged that the new Institute will have international standing and contribute to the overall development of knowledge and experience in the areas of peace support and conflict resolution.

"It is also proposed to explore further options for gender-focused measures in UN operations, particularly in relation

to the deployment of female personnel. This issue was discussed by the UN Secretary General during his recent visit to Ireland. My Department will engage with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána to explore opportunities in this area," added the Defence Minister.

In his concluding remarks, he paid particular tribute to the number of personnel who serve and have served in a multitude of other posts throughout the world, as advisers, observers, monitors and experts on missions.

"These often unheralded activities of the Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána are key enablers in supporting critical missions in often difficult and personally challenging operations. They also enable Ireland, despite limited resources, to contribute to a wider range of important missions than might otherwise be the case and contribute in turn to Ireland's standing on the international stage," noted Minister Coveney in conclusion.

**'A SEMINAL MOMENT'**

Kieran Brennan, Deputy Chief of Staff (Operations) of Defence Forces, described the Defence Forces first overseas deployment on 28 June 1958 to Lebanon as "a seminal moment".

Recalling the deployment of the first unit to the Congo in 1960, he said "it was complex environment; it had just won its independence and 'actors' both internally and externally were competing for autonomy in the ensuing uncertainty. This first deployment was to be an indicator of both the dangers and the successes that Irish personnel would experience over the next 55 years."

Over 64,000 tours of duty have been completed in hostile regions of the world by members of the Defence Forces.

Peace support operations have evolved over the last 60 years and "the Defence Forces have adapted to match the ever-more complex security challenges we now face on overseas deployments," he added.

"The advances in our techniques and procedures are directly linked with the experiences of those who have served, and we can be rightly proud of the legacy left by UN veterans.

"The greatest privilege I have had in my military career was in commanding



The range of UN armoured vehicles on display on the grounds of the National Museum of Ireland in Collins Barracks.



Garda Museum's Sgt Martin Drew pictured with guests at the UN exhibition.



Garda Supt Martin J. McGonnell, Kilrush, Co. Clare, pictured with Chief Supt Michael O'Sullivan, Garda HQ.

Irish troops in Kosovo in 2004 and Chad in 2008 and 2009 in very challenging and difficult security environments."

**SPIRIT OF SOLIDARITY**

For a small country on the periphery of Western Europe, the importance of UN membership for Ireland is two-fold, according to the Deputy Chief of Staff. "It affords us the opportunity to develop and grow with our neighbours in a spirit of consensus and understanding. Ireland can deliver security and infrastructural assistance in that spirit of solidarity and comradery to societies which need our assistance.

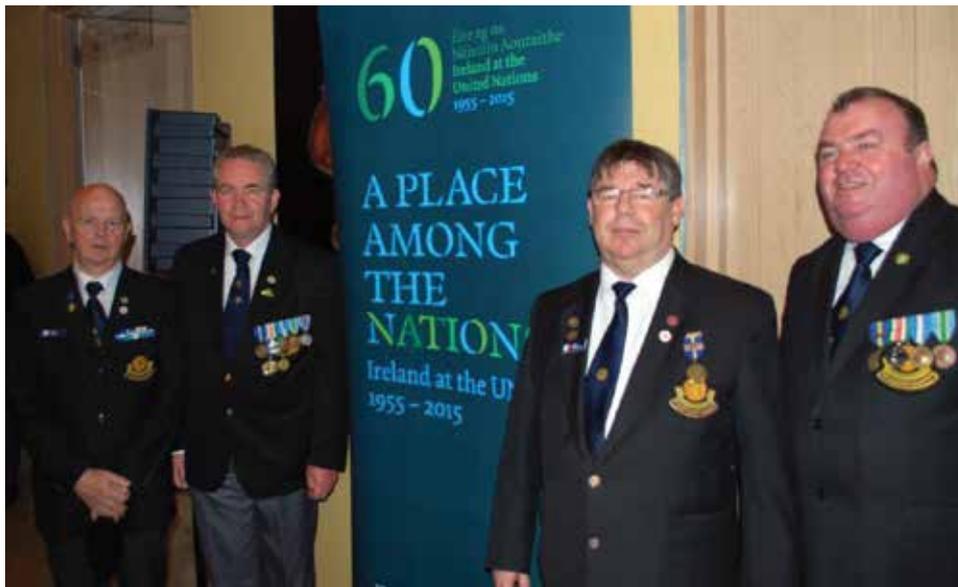
"It is a source of pride that the Defence Forces has a record of unbroken service to the UN throughout the world since our first deployment in 1958.

"Currently there are 492 Defence Forces personnel serving in 16 missions in 15 countries; over 200 of these personnel are currently serving in the Middle East in both Lebanon and the Golan Heights, in addition to 60 sailors on board the LE Samuel Beckett doing great work on the Mediterranean.

"This record is not lost on the world. US President Barack Obama stated in 2011: *'Ireland punches above its weight internationally when it comes to humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping'*. Irish troops are in many different places in the world and provides the kind of stabilisation and humanitarian effort that make all the difference and save lives," he noted in conclusion.



In 1989 new legislation was enacted, which enabled Gardáí to participate in peacekeeping missions without having to first resign from the Force as had previously been the case.



Representing the Organisation of National Ex-Servicemen and Women (O.N.E) were (l-r): Paul Cooley, Peter Orrigan, Ollie O'Connor (CEO) and Philip Coy.



Minister of State Aodhán O'Riordáin in talks with army officers at the exhibition.

