

DRAFT Proposed Government Special Envoy on Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Discussion Paper (Elements for expansion)

Why focus on Freedom of Opinion and Expression (FOE)?

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 19

Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), Article 19

Freedom of opinion and expression are human rights enshrined both in the UDHR and the ICCPR. They are widely recognised as key enabling rights that support the vindication of other human rights and are a cornerstone of democracy. Now more than ever, threats to these rights in online and offline spaces are growing¹.

Establishing a Government Envoy focussing on FOE, would provide enhanced capacity for high-level engagement on a small number of established Irish human rights priorities, across regional and multilateral architecture. These are priority areas that have been outlined in “The Global Island: Ireland’s Foreign Policy for a Changing World”, specifically

- Civil society space
- Human rights of LGBTIQ+ persons
- Freedom of expression and opinion incl freedom of the media and freedom of association

Potential activities

1. Represent Ireland at relevant high level events (including Irish-organised side-events) in multilateral fora including:
 - Human Rights Council
 - UN General Assembly 3rd Committee
 - Commission on the Status of Women
 - OSCE Human Dimension
 - Council of Europe
 - Freedom Online Coalition (and other related coalitions in the future)
 - Media Freedom Coalition

¹ Article 19 Annual Report 2019: https://www.article19.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/A19_AnnualReport_2019_Final_22June2020-min.pdf “Global Freedom of Expression at 10-year low”;

2. Lead Ireland's advocacy initiatives around key annual events: World Press Freedom Day, International Women's Day; IDAHOT day; PRIDE month;
3. Undertake 2-3 country visits p.a. to promote in-country advocacy work.
4. Collaborate with UN/regional/bilateral partners such as:
 - The EU's Special Representative for Human Rights, Eamon Gilmore and FRA Director Michael O'Flaherty
 - Existing networks of bilateral Human Rights Envoys and Ambassadors, specifically the EU network of Human Rights Envoys/Ambassadors at Large
 - The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and her Office
 - Relevant UN Special Procedure mandate holders e.g. on Freedom of Opinion and Expression, Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity
5. Specifically on the LGBTIQ+ elements of the role - and in the context of the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy – the role could include engagement with LGBTI+ diaspora communities and exploring the scope to work with LGBTI+ organisations in Northern Ireland to identify how their experience of cross-community organisation might be shared in other contexts.

[Further consideration would need to be given to how the Envoy role fits into DFA architecture, resourcing, reporting, coordination, statements etc]

Political Division

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