

Briefing note for the Foreign Affairs Committee

The appointment of a Special Envoy for Freedom of Opinion and Expression and on the deployment of envoys by Ireland and Internationally.

Appointment of Special Envoy for Freedom of Opinion and Expression

In March 2021 the Minister for Foreign Affairs asked the Department to give consideration to the appointment of Katherine Zappone to an envoy role related to LGBTI+ rights.

Initial consideration took place against the background of implementation of the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy where the Department has responsibility for the international dimension and where the breadth of engagement in support of this strategy currently extends from the provision of citizen services to work at the United Nations and other multilateral organisations and across the mission network. This initial work identified a number of areas where it was believed the appointment of an LGBTI+ envoy could support or build on existing commitments and areas of activity and identified some options for consideration in developing a mandate.

Further considered was undertaken in the context of the Department's wider engagement on human rights. In light of this, a broader mandate was recommended, focussing on freedom of expression. The Department believed this would provide enhanced capacity for high-level engagement on established Irish human rights priorities including civil society space, the human rights of LGBTIQ+ persons, freedom of opinion and expression, freedom of the media and freedom of association. Potential activities included engagement at high-level events, advocacy around annual events including Pride Month, collaboration with other envoys and office holders, especially in the UN framework and country visits to support the work of the mission network as well as assistance with implementation of the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy.

Given the breadth of the mandate, it was proposed that the envoy would be supported by a cross departmental group and activities targeted on a limited number of engagements at the United Nations 3rd Committee, the Human Rights Council, the Commission on the Status of Women, the Freedom Online Coalition and in support of the National Strategy of LGBTI+ Inclusion.

The time required was estimated at up to 30 days during the initial six months with a per diem payable based on Principal Officer scale. It was proposed that the Envoy would report to the Minister for Foreign Affairs on activities undertaken and progress in fulfilling the mandate at six-monthly intervals with a full report and assessment at the conclusion of the two-year mandate.

The proposed mandate, recommended to Minister Coveney and approved ahead of submission of the appointment to Government, is attached to this document.

The Use of Special Envoy Roles by Ireland

Special Envoys have been deployed in a specific and time-limited manner over several years to advance specific government priorities. The duration, tasking and support provided has varied in accordance with the nature of the role and the circumstances of the mandate-holder.

There are currently two Special Envoys, each serving with a mandate to the end of 2022.

Mr. Tom Arnold is serving as **Government Special Envoy on Food Systems**. His role is to assist in preparation for the UN Food Systems Summit in September and the Nutrition 4 Growth Summit in December 2021 and, arising from this, to assist in the development of a food systems pillar in Ireland's international engagement.

Mr. Kenneth Thompson is serving as **Special Envoy for francophone Africa and the Sahel**. His role, for the duration of Ireland's term on the UN Security Council, is to assist in the development of well-informed and robust policy positions on relevant UN Security Council agenda items in a region where Ireland does not have an established Embassy network.

During Ireland's campaign for membership of the UN Security Council, Minister Katherine Zappone was appointed as **Government Special Envoy** for the campaign, promoting Ireland's candidacy and agenda both in bilateral engagements with other member states and through events at the UN in New York.

As part of Ireland's campaign for election to the UN Security Council for the term 2021-2022, twelve Special Envoys were deployed to enhance Ireland's regional and bilateral engagement, particularly with UN Member States where Ireland has no diplomatic representation. These roles were filled by 6 retired and 5 serving diplomats, each identified for their networking knowledge, diplomatic experience, thematic and regional knowledge, and language skills. All these Special Envoy appointments expired on Ireland's election to the UN Security Council in June 2020.

Prior to the Security Council campaign, Mr. John Deasy, then T.D., was appointed as Government Special Envoy to the United States Congress in June 2017. His role was to assist the Government on issues relating to the undocumented Irish in the US as well as the E3 visa bill to secure future pathways for Irish to travel to the US. This mandate concluded in February 2020.

Where an envoy role has been occupied by a serving Minister, member of the Oireachtas or public servant, the responsibility has been taken on in addition to their existing responsibilities and without extra payment. Travel and subsistence expenses are provided by the Department of Foreign Affairs in line with regulations for the civil service as set out in the relevant circulars issued by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Otherwise it has been customary to offer recompense for the time and expertise invested. Depending on the role and timescale of the mandate, this has ranged in value from €3,000 to €25,000.

International Practice in relation to Special Envoys

Special Envoys are frequently deployed by other governments to highlight priority concerns. The use of this mechanism can augment existing government engagement and help to sharpen the focus and build networks of influence on these issues. Having regard to the increased prioritisation attached to human rights by many states on the one hand, and the push back against the very definition of human rights by some states on the other, many states have appointed Special Envoys with mandates in this area. There is a marked trend in this direction by like-minded EU member states but also by the US and Canada

At EU level, Eamon Gilmore serves as Special Representative for Human Rights. He is one of nine EU Special Representatives focused on geographic or thematic priorities and has also served as the EU HR/VP's Special Envoy for the Colombian Peace Process.

EU Member States with Ambassadors or Envoys for human rights include:

- Ambassador Minna-Liina Lind is the first Estonian Ambassador at Large for Human Rights and Migration, appointed in 2020 to demonstrate *“Estonia’s determination to participate actively in various human rights associations”* such as the Media Freedom Coalition and the International Religious Freedom Alliance.
- In Finland, the post of Ambassador for Human Rights and Democracy was created in 2008. The current incumbent is Rauno Merisaari. His mandate includes promoting Finnish foreign policy on human rights and democracy and his identified priorities are democracy cooperation, Roma rights and the Freedom Online Coalition (currently chaired by Finland).
- Delphine Borione is the French Ambassador at Large for Human Rights. The post was created in 2000. The Ambassador represents France on diplomatic human rights missions and in multilateral fora, including the presentation of France’s Universal Periodic Review and in chairing sessions at the UN Security Council, e.g. on child soldiers. The Ambassador is also responsible for issues related to the Holocaust for the French government and has launched initiatives to raise awareness about contemporary antisemitism.
- In Germany, the post of Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and Humanitarian Assistance was created in 1998 to ensure the protection of human rights and to mainstream human rights into all areas of foreign policy. Dr Bärbel Kofler has held the position since 2016. The Commissioner is the “contact point” for all issues relating to human rights policy and humanitarian aid. They follow political developments and submit proposals to the Federal Foreign Minister in order to help

shape foreign policy. The Commissioner liaises with other institutions such as other ministries, the German Bundestag, and non-governmental organisations. She engages regularly with the EU, OSCE, Council of Europe and the UN and she heads the German delegation to the Human Rights Council.

- Italy's President of the Inter-ministerial Committee for Human Rights (CIDU) is Fabrizio Petri. He is particularly active on LGBTI rights, as well business and human rights.
- Lithuania appointed its first Ambassador at Large for Human Rights, Laima Jurevičienė in 2020. She has used her position as Ambassador to highlight Lithuania's commitment to the topics of inclusion, women's participation in public life and gender equality. She has also promoted Lithuania's initiatives to support democracy movements in countries such as Belarus.
- Luxembourg's current Ambassador at Large for Human Rights is Marc Bichler (appointed in 2016). The role promotes Luxembourg's commitment to an ambitious human rights agenda and strengthens its voice in multilateral fora. The Ambassador has prioritised the protection of human rights defenders and business and human rights, as well as the link between human rights and sustainable development.
- The Netherlands has had a Human Rights Ambassador since 1999. The position allows The Netherlands to have a visible and distinct profile in human rights fora as well as creating greater coherence in between human rights and other policy fields. Ambassador Bahia Tahzib-Lie has stated that she uses her mandate to foster an inclusive and diverse media landscape as well as championing gender equality. The Ambassador also engages with NGOs, civil society and business in The Netherlands and abroad. Since 2019, the Netherlands has also had a Special Envoy for Religion and Belief, Ambassador Jos Douma.
- Denmark also has an Office and Special Representative for Freedom of Religion or Belief, Ambassador Michael Suhr, a position established in January 2018.

Spain is awaiting a new appointee to the role of Ambassador at Large for Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law (the previous incumbent was Pablo Ruiz Jarabo). The Ambassador represents Spain in multilateral fora and has led the Support group of the International Commission against the Death Penalty.

- The Swedish government created the position of Ambassador for Human Rights in 1980, to stress the centrality of human rights in their foreign policy. Current Ambassador Annika Ben David described the role as consisting of communicating Sweden's role in the protection and promotion of human rights and ensuring that it is mainstreamed throughout their foreign service. The Ambassador represents Swedish policy in multilateral fora and in relations with other countries and maintains a close dialogue with civil society. Ambassador Annika Ben

David also acts as the Swedish Head of Delegation to The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA)

- Recent appointments of Envoys in the area of human rights by the US administration include the nomination of the Executive Director of NGO OutRight Action International, Jessica Stern, as U.S. Special Envoy to Advance the Human Rights of LGBTQI+ Persons. The following month, Emory Prof. Deborah Lipstadt was nominated Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Antisemitism, with the rank of Ambassador. The US also has a range of Special Envoys for geographical areas of priority for US foreign policy.
- In March 2020, Bob Rae (former Premier of Ontario and former interim Leader of the Liberal Party of Canada) was appointed Canadian Special Envoy on Humanitarian and Refugee Issues by Prime Minister Trudeau. Mr Rae had previously served as Special Envoy to Myanmar (appointed 2017).
- In the UK, Fiona Bruce MP was appointed as the Prime Minister's Special Envoy for Freedom of Religion or Belief in December 2020 while Helen Grant MP was appointed the Prime Minister's Special Envoy on Girls' Education in January 2021. (Lord) Nick Herbert was appointed UK Special Envoy on LGBT rights in May 2021. His role is to "lead efforts to champion LGBT equality at home and abroad and will chair the 'Safe to be Me: A Global Equality Conference' in June 2022."

Department of Foreign Affairs

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