



An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha
Department of Foreign Affairs

**REVIEW OF WORKPLACE ARRANGEMENTS
IN IVEAGH HOUSE
ON 17 JUNE 2020**

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An Roinn Gnóthaí Eachtracha Department of Foreign Affairs

Statement by the Secretary General, Joe Hackett

I am grateful to colleagues in Human Resources Division for their report and to the staff concerned for their full cooperation. I believe that the Review's account and conclusions are accurate and fair based on the extensive series of meetings conducted and documentary evidence reviewed. My response to the material provided is outlined below.

As Secretary General, I would first like to clearly acknowledge the genuine concerns that have been expressed surrounding the incident that took place in the workplace on 17 June 2020. It was a mistake. It should not have happened and, on behalf the Department, I would like to say sorry. The image of staff celebrating Ireland's election to the United Nations Security Council has caused offence to the public who were unable to come together at significant moments in their professional and personal lives. At that time, many of our fellow citizens were dealing with the devastating impact of the pandemic and grieving the loss of loved ones.

On 17 June, staff were working in Iveagh House on matters related to our UN Security Council campaign. Their presence on site on the day of the vote was essential and appropriate given the nature of the campaign, the need for extensive final day lobbying and the likelihood that a second round of voting would be necessary. This would have required intense further campaigning directed by staff at HQ through the night.

The records examined, which have already been released under Freedom of Information legislation and included as an annex to this review, provide comprehensive documentary evidence of these preparations. The records also confirm that staff within the United Nations Policy Unit were mindful of the importance of respecting social distance measures and had made appropriate provision in their planning for adherence to the measures in place at that time.

The documentary and oral material received by the Review Team indicates that no organised or pre-planned social event took place in Iveagh House on the evening of 17 June.

Staff watched the announcement of the vote from the large open plan UN Policy Unit office space within Iveagh House. The positive election outcome represented a significant achievement for the Department and the country and was the result of several years work by successive Governments and by those present in Iveagh House.

Following the announcement of the result of the vote at 9.10 pm, a breach of social distance guidance occurred when staff came together physically to celebrate Ireland's successful election. This breach was captured in a photograph taken by the then Secretary General. Staff were not observing social distancing requirements at the time of the photo. Many had glasses of alcohol in their hands to toast the outcome. While staff in the photo did not wear facemasks, there was no public health requirement to wear masks in such a setting at that time.

The then Secretary General posted the photograph on his twitter account and subsequently removed it acknowledging at the time that it should not have happened. The breach of social distancing guidance lasted approximately a minute.

Most staff at that point either returned to their desks, stood discussing the outcome or prepared to depart the building. The then Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Simon Coveney, T.D., watched the election from Government Buildings and participated in a press conference which concluded at approximately 9.55pm. He subsequently returned to the UN Policy Unit in Iveagh House and spoke to staff to thank them for their work. He stayed approximately 15 minutes. The Review Team is satisfied that no social event in breach of guidance took place during his presence.

The remarkable level of compliance with public health measures across Irish society throughout the pandemic protected not only the health of individuals but saved the lives of thousands of our fellow citizens. The public have a right to expect Government Departments, and their staff, to be equally compliant.

The nature of the response to the outcome of the vote was wrong. It has caused offence, inflicted reputational damage on the Department and undermined internal morale.

The then Secretary General was motivated by an understandable wish to acknowledge and thank staff for their huge efforts over many years. More broadly, he had spent much of the period since March 2020, leading the Department's response to COVID. This included directing the largest repatriation of Irish citizens abroad in the history of the state and ensuring that the safety and welfare of our staff at home and abroad was prioritised.

However, by providing alcohol and organising a group photograph, the then Secretary General was largely responsible for facilitating the breach of social distance guidance that occurred. He also placed colleagues, particularly more junior ones, in a difficult position. His actions were uncharacteristic errors of judgement. He sincerely regrets this. He has provided outstanding public service throughout his career, including a leading role in supporting peace and reconciliation on this island.

Three other officers at Management Board level were present in the photograph- all three had played key roles in our UN Security Council campaign and were working intensely throughout that day and evening. During their careers, they have given outstanding service to the country. They did not actively facilitate the breach of public health measures.

However, they accept that, as senior officials, they could have done more to try to prevent this breach.

While the Review found no evidence that statutory rules were breached, the public health guidance that then applied was not followed. This may have been a brief lapse, but has understandably raised public concern. It has also damaged the reputation of the Department. Accordingly, I have asked the former Secretary General to make a donation to a charity providing assistance to people affected by Covid in the amount of €2,000 and the three other senior officials to make a similar donation in the amount of €1,000. Each of the officials concerned has agreed to do so. I do not intend to take any further action.

Although not directly related to this Review, the Department will enhance transparency around official events. We will publish on a six monthly basis a list of official hospitality events hosted in Iveagh House along with related costs. The guidelines on the hosting of official events will be updated and made available publicly. The Department will also reform its policy and guidance on the use of social media for official purposes to include enhanced clearance and oversight arrangements.

The staff of the Department of Foreign Affairs are fully committed to delivering the best possible public service to this country and its people. They have a strong track record of doing so and serve their country with distinction and pride at home and abroad, including at times under challenging and dangerous circumstances. The controversy caused by this incident does not devalue or undermine that service or the remarkable achievement of our election to the Security Council. Our staff will continue to focus on advancing Irish interests and values in the EU and globally, managing the consequences of Brexit, maintaining peace and reconciliation on this island, providing a first class passport, consular and diaspora service and creating a more equal world through our development programme.



Joe Hackett

Secretary General

31 January 2022

2. Introduction

The terms of reference for this Review were as follows:

“On 13 January 2022, the Secretary General of the Department of Foreign Affairs commenced a review of and adherence to the public health advice, relevant workplace protocols and arrangements in place in Iveagh House on 17 June 2020 for the vote on Ireland’s candidature for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

The Review will include meetings conducted by Human Resources Division with relevant staff members who were present on site in Iveagh House on 17 June 2020.

Purpose and conduct of the Review

The Review will examine: the workplace arrangements and public health advice in the Department on 17 June 2020; the circumstances under which staff were present in Iveagh House on that day; the nature of the work that required on-site presence; the circumstances whereby staff gathered in the UN Unit of Iveagh House following the result of the vote; and relevant timelines.

Human Resources Division will meet with the relevant staff present in Iveagh House on 17 June 2020, with a view to assessing what occurred on the day, having regard to the public health protocols.

The Review team may request access to documentation or records from across the Department that it considers necessary for the purposes of carrying out the review.

Staff will be obliged to co-operate with the Review and attend for meeting with Human Resources Division when requested to do so. They may be questioned on any matter relevant to that day. A note-taker will attend and record key elements of the meeting. A copy of the record will be sent to the individual.

Outcome of the Review process

The Review will result in a report to include conclusions based on the meetings conducted with staff and an examination of any relevant documentation and public health advice at that time. It is the intention of the Department to publish the key outcomes and conclusions contained in the report.

Timescale

The Review will be completed no later than 31 January 2022.”

The Review Team appointed by the Secretary General on 13 January 2022 consisted of the Acting Director General of Human Resources Division and a Principal Officer in the Human Resources Division. It is the role of the Human Resources Division to ensure that the principles which govern the behaviour of civil servants are upheld.

In accordance with the terms of reference, the Review Team examined adherence to the public health advice and relevant workplace protocols and arrangements in place in Iveagh House, and specifically in the open plan space where the UN Policy Unit was located in the Department of Foreign Affairs (“the Department”) on 17 June 2020 in relation to the vote on Ireland’s candidature for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

The Review Team met with 25 members of the Department’s staff (“officers”) over a number of days to gain an understanding of the circumstances surrounding their presence in Iveagh House and to review relevant information relating to their movements and other developments occurring during the day.

In advance of their meetings with the Review Team, officers were provided with copies of the Terms of Reference and the following documents (included at **Annex A**):

- An overview of Reopening Phases commencing 18 May 2022;
- A message to all staff from the Director General of Corporate Services dated 02 June 2020;
- Guidance and FAQs for Public Service Employers during COVID19 dated 15 June 2020;
- DFA COVID Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) dated 9 June 2020.

The Review Team compiled information through the examination of relevant records and meetings with staff in the Department who were working in the UN Policy Unit on 17 June 2020, as well as those who had a relevant role in the UN Security Council campaign. The Review Team initially held meetings with 20 officers, followed by a further five.

The Review Team is aware that then Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Simon Coveney T.D. and then Minister of State at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade with special responsibility for the Diaspora and International Development, Ciaran Cannon T.D. were present in Iveagh House on 17 June at various stages. The Review Team did not hold meetings with these individuals as this was considered to be outside the Terms of Reference of the Review.

3. Statutory Regulations and Public Health Guidance in Place

The Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (Covid-19) (No. 2) Regulations 2020 (SI 206/2020, the “No. 2 Regulations”) came into operation on 8 June 2020 (revoking and replacing SI 121/2020 - Health Act 1947 (Section 31A - Temporary Restrictions) (Covid-19) Regulations 2020) and applied until 29 June 2020. The No. 2 Regulations therefore applied on 17 June 2020.

The No. 2 Regulations provided (at Regulation 5) that, subject to a number of exceptions, a person 'shall not engage in activities solely for social or recreational purposes outside his or her place of residence'. Accordingly, the No. 2 Regulations did not place any restrictions on leaving a place of residence for the purposes of work, although the advice provided in official public health guidance at the time (Guidance for Phase 2 Reopening) was to “work from home where possible”.

Regulation 6 of the No. 2 Regulations provided that “a person shall not organise, or cause to be organised, an event for cultural, entertainment, recreational, sporting, social, community or educational reasons” except where not more than 15 people are to attend or where all reasonable measures are taken to ensure that no more than that number attend.

In addition to statutory regulations, the public health guidance which applied at the time (Guidance for Phase 2 Reopening) advised two metre social distancing and recommended that “face coverings be worn in public places, such as shops, and on public transport.” It was, therefore, not mandatory for masks to be worn in office spaces.

The Government also introduced the Return to Work Safely Protocol in May 2020 (**Annex B**) to support all employers and workers by providing guidance on putting measures in place that would prevent the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.

Steps taken by the Department

In order to satisfy the different requirements and guidance set out above, the Department introduced a number of measures to protect staff, in accordance with the Return to Work Safely Protocol.

From an attendance perspective, a COVID-19 Pre-Return to Work Form was introduced in the Department from 3 June 2020. All officers entering the workplace from that date were required to complete this form prior to their return.

Officers were also required to complete an online COVID-19 Return to the Workplace Safely Induction course. This was designed to raise awareness on the importance of protective measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 in the working environment.

Health and Safety signage and signposting was installed across all Departmental buildings in Ireland. In addition, the office cleaning regime was upgraded, with a focus on common touch points, static hand-sanitiser dispensers were replenished, extra liquid soap was provided in bathrooms, arrangements were made with a contract cleaning company for any necessary deep cleaning and the use of lifts was curtailed.

Management Response to COVID-19

At the request of the then Secretary General, the Department's Management Board met by video conference on a weekly basis to monitor and respond to the public health situation at home and abroad. In addition, Departmental coordination meetings occurred twice weekly by video conference and remained largely focussed on Covid-19 issues, including staff welfare and safety at headquarters and throughout the network of over 90 Missions abroad. Following the publication of the Government's Five Phase Plan for Reopening Society and Business, a cross-Departmental Covid-19 Safe Working Group was established to plan for the return to the workplace on a phased basis.

4. Background to UN Security Council Vote

On 17 June 2020, in the first round of voting at the General Assembly of the United Nations (UN), Ireland was elected to one of five non-permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council for the two-year period of 2021-2022. The result of the vote was announced by the President of the 74th session of the General Assembly, Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, at UN headquarters in New York at approximately 16:10 local time / 21:10 Irish time. Four of the five new members of the Security Council for this period (India, Ireland, Mexico and Norway) were elected in the first round and Kenya was elected following a second round vote on 18 June 2020. This success marked Ireland's fourth election to the Security Council, following non-permanent tenures in 1962, 1981-82 and 2001-2002.

Ireland announced its candidature in 2005 and the campaign was officially launched by the then Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar T.D., in July 2018 in New York. Ireland was competing for election against two strong and credible candidates, Canada and Norway, as part of the Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG), from which only two states could be elected. The campaign was considered to be highly competitive with no assurance of success. It was, therefore, necessary for the Department to coordinate a robust and intensive campaign to secure votes.

The campaign was coordinated primarily between the UN Policy Unit situated in the Political Division at the Department's headquarters and Ireland's Permanent Mission to the United Nations in New York. A prominent feature of the campaign was high-level interactions between the Government Ministers in Ireland and their counterparts internationally. Over the final months of the campaign, more than 100 in-person bilateral meetings at political level had been arranged.

Following the onset of a global pandemic in early 2020, the Department had to review and redesign its campaign strategy to take account of travel restrictions and the requirement for online meetings only. The campaign regularly involved long hours by team members, particularly due to time differences between Ireland and New York. The intensity of the campaign increased over the final months, with notable increased staffing commitments in the weeks leading up to the vote. This involved coordination and logistical challenges across all time zones globally. To illustrate the scale of increased efforts, the then Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Simon Coveney T.D. alone made 80 calls to foreign counterparts over the final weeks leading up to the vote.

In advance of 17 June, the analysis by the campaign team was that Norway was likely to win a seat in the first round. The probability of success for Ireland at this stage,

based on information compiled regarding voting intentions of other states, was not assured and it was expected that either Ireland or Canada would be elected in the second round of voting scheduled to begin on the morning of 18 June in New York. As a result, it was necessary for those working on the campaign to develop comprehensive plans, coordinated between Ireland and New York, for re-engagement (at political and official level) with as many states as possible in the 17 hour period following the announcement of the result. This re-engagement would begin late in the evening in Dublin and would have necessitated an intensive overnight campaign.

5. Account of Developments on 17 June 2020

Preparations in advance of 17 June

Officers working in the UN Policy Unit, together with other relevant colleagues involved in the campaign, had made prior arrangements to be physically present in the office, primarily to coordinate the second round of voting for Ireland's candidature for a non-permanent seat. A number of other officers attended the office to provide support to Ministers and the then Secretary General on the day. As success in the first round was uncertain, plans had been devised for a new and refocused campaign to target votes in a second round of voting which would have required an intensive coordinated approach globally.

As outlined in an email on 10 June from the then Secretary General to all Heads of Mission in Ireland's diplomatic network, the potential for a second round vote meant that it would be "essential to mount a fast, responsive and effective mini-campaign". This would have involved making contact with national capitals across the world to lobby for votes in line with time zones, which would have involved an all-night effort. In addition, the assessment was that votes promised in the first round would not automatically translate into second round votes. Records examined (and included in documents released under Freedom of Information legislation at **Annex C**) and information provided by officers, detail the level of advance planning that had been put in place (during meetings with the Review Team some individuals recalled bringing food and overnight bags with them in preparation for working through the night).

The decision to attend Iveagh House was discussed and agreed in video conferences with senior managers as part of advance planning arrangements. The Review Team also established that there is no evidence of, nor were invitations issued to, a pre-planned celebration in the event of a successful outcome.

Given the COVID-related guidance in place, a number of individuals mentioned that consideration had been given to using the Department's crisis centre in Lower Mount Street, a space used as a call centre during overseas crisis situations affecting Irish citizens. It was, however, established that the open plan space of the Political Division in Iveagh House, which the UN Policy Unit ordinarily shared with a number of other Units within Political Division, was larger in size and would help facilitate social distancing given the fact that officers assigned to those other Units would not be attending the workplace.

The open plan space has six banks of four desks running from one end of the open plan office floor to the other. Surrounding this space on one side are six single occupancy offices and a conference room.

There is no record that the Safe Working Group had been contacted in advance in accordance with the office notice of 02 June. However, the Review Team considers that this was a minor administrative error, based on the thorough and detailed evidence of extensive preparations to comply with relevant guidance.

Events on 17 June

On the morning of 17 June, a number of those working in the UN Policy Unit arrived in the office, with the first recalling their arrival at 07:00. Some of the team members worked from home that morning and arrived in the office that afternoon as work began in New York. All those present confirmed that they adhered to social distancing guidance in advance of the vote in the open plan space. Specific details of the location of socially distanced work stations was provided by the relevant officers and a number of them recalled receiving regular verbal reminders about social distancing by management during the day.

Officers also recall that two additional large TV screens were installed in the open plan area in order to ensure that the announcements could be viewed by colleagues in a socially distanced arrangement.

Over the course of the day, all officers present in the UN Policy Unit and in other locations were working on scenario planning, contacting colleagues at Ireland's Permanent Mission in New York for updates on voting, preparing briefing for a possible Press Conference in Government Buildings, compiling other material for use in media briefings depending on differing outcomes, and finalising call schedules for second round voting. A number of briefings were also provided to the media on the morning of 17 June.

In their meetings with the Review Team, some officers recall that the then Tánaiste and the then Minister of State briefly passed through the UN Policy Unit on their way to Government Buildings to watch the vote.

Following the Result

The Review Team has established that at the time of the announcement of the result of first round voting, 21 officers were located in the open plan space or adjacent offices.

15 of the 21 officers present were either assigned to the UN Policy Unit or reported to it as part of the campaign. Four (including the then Secretary General), were Management Board level officers involved in the strategic planning of different aspects of the campaign, and two officers were support staff.

Two of the 21 officers present were on maternity leave at the time and attended the building to join colleagues for the announcement of the results and to offer advice and support as necessary. Both individuals had worked on the campaign and were considered to be key members of the team. One of the officers concerned attended

with her nursing infant. Both individuals confirmed that they attended the building on their own initiative and were not requested by management to do so. In their meetings with the Review Team, both officers emphasised their adherence to social distancing apart from the time spent congregated for the photograph.

Following the announcement of the result of the vote, the then Secretary General provided three bottles of sparkling wine from personal items he kept in his office for use as gifts and which he purchased at his own expense. The alcohol was subsequently offered to those present. One other officer confirmed that they provided one bottle of sparkling wine which they had retrieved from their office. The glasses used came from a kitchen adjacent to the open plan area. The Review Team is satisfied on the basis of accounts provided by officers that no other alcohol was supplied on that evening. The Review Team has also confirmed that no alcohol was taken from official Departmental stocks.

Following a toast, the then Secretary General took two photographs ('selfies') of the group with his phone in quick succession. The time stamps on these photographs establish that they were taken at 21.18. The majority of officers in the photographs recalled that the then Secretary General requested the group to gather in close proximity for the purposes of capturing the team in the photograph. All accounts provided to the Review Team establish that the taking of the photograph lasted approximately one minute.

After the photograph was taken, the group dispersed, with some officers returning to their desks to continue work (which included media coordination and standing-down arrangements for the second round of voting), some watched the Press Conference that was beginning at that time, and others left the open plan space to make phone calls. Others recall standing in groups in what was described as a more relaxed atmosphere talking about the outcome.

Following the press conference in Government Buildings (which concluded at 21.55), the then Tánaiste returned to Iveagh House and visited the UN Policy Unit. He made remarks congratulating the team on the outcome and thanked them for their contribution to the successful result. On the basis of accounts provided, the Review Team estimates that the then Tánaiste was present in the open plan space for approximately 15 minutes. The Review Team received no evidence that public health advice was breached at that time.

Officers began to depart shortly thereafter at different stages depending on their remaining work commitments, with some officers involved in compiling briefing and promotional materials for the meeting of the Cabinet the following day. Others were required to contact various missions regarding next steps and some worked on press statements. Most recall departing between 22:00 and 23:00.

6. Conclusions

The Review Team recognises that owing to the nineteen month period that has elapsed since 17 June 2020, it was not possible to establish the precise times of all developments during that day. On the basis of its assessment of the records examined and the information provided by staff, it has reached the following conclusions:

The officers working in Iveagh House on 17 June 2020 were conducting essential business on behalf of the Department.

There were 25 officers present at various stages in Iveagh House dealing with matters relating to the UN Security Council campaign and the outcome of the vote. The Review Team is satisfied that the vast majority of those present attended the workplace in order to perform essential work-related tasks. The Review Team has established that presence on site on the day of the vote was both essential and appropriate given the nature of the campaign and the likelihood that a second round of voting would be necessary. This would have required a tightly coordinated approach as part of intense further campaigning directed and managed by officers at HQ through the night.

No event had been planned in advance to celebrate the success of Ireland's election to the United Nations Security Council.

This is confirmed by the records examined by the Review Team and the Team is satisfied that no record of any invitations to a social or celebratory event issued at any point. The material examined also indicates that no organised or pre-planned social event took place in Iveagh House that day. This is confirmed by information provided by officers in their meetings with the Review Team. Furthermore, the Review Team is satisfied that no organised event (within the meaning of Regulation 6 of the No. 2 Regulations then applying) occurred.

Extensive measures were taken to facilitate compliance with COVID guidance in advance of 17 June.

The Review Team is satisfied that prior to 17 June, extensive advance planning had taken place among the members of the UN Policy Unit regarding attendance in Iveagh House on that day to ensure that social distancing would be maintained and adhered to. Following an assessment, the open plan space in Political Division in Iveagh House was identified as the optimum location due to the large size of the area, the number of desks that could be utilised while respecting social distance, the number of adjacent offices that could also be used and the power point accessibility for the installation of several screens to watch the vote.

On 17 June, in the hours leading up to the announcement of the vote result, public health guidance was observed.

Officers who attended Iveagh House that day confirmed awareness of the arrangements in place to implement the Return to Work Safely Protocol and other relevant guidance documents. The Review Team received confirmation of adherence to the social distancing guidance prior to the announcement of results.

The relevant records examined by the Review Team and the oral information provided confirm extensive advance planning put in place by the UN Policy Unit and full awareness of the need for all those present in the office that day to ensure social distancing in line with the guidance in place.

The Review Team is satisfied that officers viewed the announcement of the vote from the large open plan UN Policy Unit or in adjacent offices in a socially distant manner. Additional TV screens had been set up in the room to enable the maintenance of social distance and to reduce risk.

A serious breach of social distancing guidance occurred in the period immediately following the outcome of the vote.

Following the announcement of the results, a breach of guidance on social distancing occurred. The then Secretary General wanted to acknowledge the achievement of Ireland's election. However, by providing alcohol and requesting a group of 20 officers to congregate for the purposes of a photo, he facilitated a breach of the guidance. Although brief, this was a serious breach. In the opinion of the Review Team the actions taken were not representative of the dedication and compliance shown by colleagues across the Department in response to the pandemic, nor are they a reflection of the overall conduct of the officers concerned during their presence in Iveagh House that day.

According to accounts provided by officers, this breach lasted approximately one minute.

Furthermore, the Review team received no evidence that public health guidance was breached when the then Tánaiste returned to the UN Policy Unit to thank the officers.

In the period following the photograph, those present dispersed into a range of activities, during which some minor breaches of guidance may have occurred.

Following the taking of the photograph, some of those present watched the press conference taking place at Government Buildings, some returned to desks and sent emails and made phone calls, including to stand down arrangements for a second round of voting, some prepared material for a Cabinet meeting and some began to pack up their belongings. As some officers also stood in small groups discussing the outcome, the Review Team cannot exclude the possibility that minor breaches of the social distance guidance may have occurred.

