

Government Special Envoy on Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Supporting Rationale

The role of government special envoy will form part of the greater foreign policy objectives enshrined in “The Global Island: Ireland’s Foreign Policy Objectives in a Changing World.” In addition, it will exemplify the self-confidence and ambition in increasing Ireland’s presence on the international stage, called for by Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar in his introduction to “Global Ireland: Ireland’s Global Footprint to 2025.”

This role has some unique advantages in serving both these objectives.

Firstly, it is focused on an area of human rights which is not only becoming more highly contested on the global stage, but which is also in considerable flux. New players - governmental, NGO and private sector - are bidding not simply for advantage, but for the ability to define the very meaning of many of the terms associated with freedom of opinion and expression, as well as their very association with the notion of “human rights” in the modern world. In this contested space, with such importance to the future of civil society, human progress, and world peace, it is essential that Ireland’s voice be both loud and clear.

Secondly, the trajectory of Ireland’s own history over the past ten years and its traditionally outsized role in human rights on the international stage, means it has permission to punch well above its weight in framing the global future of freedom of opinion and expression. This is the time for Ireland to make the most of this heard-earned legitimacy and unique soft power. Not only to fulfill its own human rights priorities, but to help establish its authority and prominence alongside far more conventionally dominant players (friendly and adversarial) in this space - and beyond.

The establishment of the role of the Government Special Envoy on Freedom of Opinion and Expression is extremely timely. Not only in terms of the growing prominence and import of the issues involved, but in terms of the opportunity to enhance Ireland’s global standing in general, and its capacity to exercise its foreign affairs objectives, in particular.

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