

DRAFT (Version 2)

Special Envoy on Freedom of Opinion and Expression

Rationale: Freedom of opinion and expression are human rights enshrined 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.

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 impact on the international stage, called for by the Taoiseach in “Global Ireland: Ireland’s Global Footprint to 2025.”

The establishment of the role of the Government Special Envoy on Freedom of Opinion and Expression would be extremely timely in terms of the growing prominence and import of the issues involved and in terms of the opportunity to enhance Ireland’s influence and reputation.

The mandate would focus 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.

The trajectory of Ireland’s own history over the past ten years and its traditionally outsized role in human rights on the international stage support an ambitious role in framing the global discourse on freedom of opinion and expression alongside conventionally dominant players (friendly and adversarial) in this space - and beyond.

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 including freedom of the media and freedom of association

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”;

Tasking:

1. To support the Government's objectives on these issues at relevant high level events (including Irish-organised side-events) in multilateral fora with a particular focus on the UN framework including:
 - UN General Assembly 3rd Committee (October – December 2021)
 - Freedom Online Coalition (December 2021)
 - Commission on the Status of Women (March 2022)
 - Human Rights Council (June – July 2022)
2. Support the implementation of LGBTI+ at international level (Action 25 of the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy, led by DFA)
3. Support Ireland's international advocacy initiatives around key annual events (World Press Freedom Day, International Women's Day; IDAHOT day; PRIDE month).
4. Support the in-country advocacy work of Ireland's mission network through country visits (2-3 in year 1).

Timeframe

A two-year mandate. Meeting with Minister after 6, 12 and 18 months to review progress and priorities. A report will be prepared at the conclusion of the mandate.

Support:

The Special Envoy will be supported by an informal DFA taskforce comprising the Human Rights, Emigrant Support, Communications and Corporate Support Directorates and a representative of the GEDI Network, meeting monthly.

Next steps:

- Government decision on 28th July
- Task Force convened and initial 6-month work programme developed
- Launch of mandate with Minister at UNGA in September
- Ongoing development of programme and preparation of events through monthly meetings of the Task Force
- Initial Review Meeting with Minister scheduled for c February 2022

DFA, 22nd July 2021