



Building Consensus in Times of Crisis: Ireland's Presidency of the UN Security Council

by Ross Fitzpatrick

On 1 January 2021, Ireland took up its seat on the UN Security Council for the 2021-2022 term.¹ This represents a once in a generation opportunity to engage the Council membership and wider international community on critical aspects of international peace and security.

On 1 September 2021, Ireland assumed the Presidency of the UN Security Council,² which it will hold for one month until 30 September 2021. This is only the fifth time Ireland has assumed the role of Security Council President in the history of the state. The Presidency is held by each of the members in turn for one month. Once Ireland finishes its Presidency at the end of September, Kenya will take up the mantle. As Ireland's sole opportunity to lead the UN's top table during its two-year Security Council term, the Presidency marks an important milestone and a key opportunity to make an impact at the UN's top body for international peace and security.

Ireland last held the Presidency of the Security Council in October 2001 during its 2001-2002 Council membership. The 2001 Presidency was

led by former Irish Permanent Representative to the UN, Richard Ryan, when Ireland was called upon to lead the Security Council response to the developing international conflict in Afghanistan.

Ireland assumes the role of President as the Security Council once again finds itself faced with an emerging international crisis in Afghanistan, as well as ongoing political, humanitarian, and human rights crises in Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Israel-Palestine and Haiti, to name but a few.

The Irish Presidency will be spearheaded by Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence Simon Coveney and his team in New York, which is led by Permanent Representative to the UN, H.E. Geraldine Byrne Nason. In its role as President, Ireland will oversee the regular business of the Council, which involves managing the reporting cycles and mandate renewals of thematic and geographic items of the Security Council's agenda. Ireland will also use the opportunity to bring some of its core priorities at the UN to the fore through a number of high-level signature events.

¹ <https://www.dfa.ie/news-and-media/press-releases/press-release-archive/2021/january/ireland-takes-up-seat-on-un-security-council-for-2021-2022-term.php>

² <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/content/presidency>



It is expected that Ireland will be able to hold most Security Council meetings in person throughout the course of the month, with the possibility that certain high-level signature events could be held via videoconference to facilitate greater participation at political level.

Actively supporting the UN is a cornerstone of Irish foreign policy. As such, Ireland's efforts to make an impact on the work of Security Council for the month of September will be underpinned by its commitment to balancing its national foreign policy priorities with effectively managing the regular business of the Security Council, existing and emerging international crises, and internal Security Council dynamics in an independent manner.

Security Council Agenda for September 2021

The month of September at the United Nations is traditionally one of the busiest in the calendar year, with the opening of the new session of the UN General Assembly taking place and heads of state and government converging in New York for high level week. Moreover, in light of the many ongoing crises around the globe which pose a threat to international peace and security, the Security Council can expect to receive an additional media spotlight throughout the month.

Beyond dealing with the emerging and ongoing political, humanitarian, and human rights crises in Afghanistan, the Tigray region of Ethiopia, Myanmar and Haiti, the Security Council has the

responsibility for managing the regular business on its agenda, which mainly involves monitoring the reporting cycles and mandate renewals of UN peacekeeping missions, sanctions committees, special political missions and special representatives.

Most UN mission mandates are renewed on an annual basis through a Security Council resolution. Throughout the month of September, there are a number of key mandates up for renewal, which will be facilitated by Ireland in its capacity as President. These are: the Special Political Mission in Libya (UNSMIL); the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA); and the UN Investigative Team to Promote Accountability for Crimes Committed by Da'esh/ISIL (UNITAD).³

Furthermore, Ireland will oversee the reporting cycles of a wide range of both thematic and geographic Security Council agenda items. This generally requires the Secretary-General (SG) to report to the Security Council every few months on the particular situation in question and provides an opportunity for Council members to engage directly in a discussion with the Secretary-General.

Security Council members will also meet throughout the month to discuss the following issues: the SG report on the drawdown of the peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO); the report of the Libya sanctions committee (UNSCR 1970); the SG report on the peacekeeping mission in Mali (MINUSMA); the SG report on the Somalia sanctions committee (UNSCR 2551); the SG report on the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) and Sudan (UNITAMS); the SG report on the UN Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and updates on the evacuation of UN staff; the SG report on political, humanitarian and chemical weapons issues in Syria (UNSCR 2268, 2254, 2118, 2533); the SG report on developments related to the political process in Yemen (UNSCR 2201, 2586, 2451); and the SG report on the Palestinian question (UNSCR 2334).⁴

Finally, the Secretary-General will present his annual report to the Security-Council on the reform of UN peacekeeping operations, which will be followed by an open debate.

³ https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil/files/reporting_and_mandate_cycles.pdf

⁴ Ibid.

Ireland's Presidency Priorities

Ireland's Presidency will have two core dimensions. First, a key focus for Ireland will be ensuring that it acts in an effective and impactful manner as President in relation to conducting the regular business of the Security Council's agenda, as outlined above. Second, Ireland will seek to take advantage of its position as President to highlight issues that it has identified as top priorities at the UN by holding a number of high-level signature events at political level.⁵

High-level signature events, which are often chaired at political level, are the cornerstone of the Presidency. They offer Member States the chance to underscore the core priorities for their Presidency and can sometimes result in the adoption of Security Council resolutions or Presidential Statements. Ireland will convene four high-level signature events during its Presidency.

Maintenance of International Peace and Security

The first of these will be on the maintenance of international peace and security. Supporting the Security Council's work on the maintenance of international peace and security has been central to Ireland's membership at the UN. Ireland has chosen to organise a briefing on this core dimension of the Council's mandate, which will be chaired by Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and Chair of the Elders, and Lakhdar Brahimi, former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Algeria and former UN Special Envoy to Syria.

Peacekeeping Reform

The second signature event will be a ministerial level debate on UN peacekeeping transitions. Ireland has the longest unbroken record of participating in UN peacekeeping operations of any country in the world and placed this at the heart of its campaign for a Security Council seat.⁶ Moreover, the SG is due to present his annual report on peacekeeping reform at the end of September and Ireland is keen to use this opportunity to drive the momentum for further reform. Ireland will seek to safeguard language

on the 'Protection of Civilians' in the context of UN peacekeeping mission mandates, which has often been sacrificed in the transition from chapter VI to chapter VII missions, and intends to pursue a resolution as a possible outcome.⁷ Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence, Simon Coveney, will chair the meeting.

Climate and Security

The third signature event will focus on climate change and security. While this has been a divisive topic among Security Council members, in so far as to whether it should be on the Security Council agenda at all, Ireland is determined to build on the growing recognition among Council members that climate change is having increasingly serious implications for international peace and security.⁸ Moreover, as co-chair of the Security Council's Informal Expert Group (IEG) on climate and security with Niger, which was established in July 2020 to assist the Council to achieve a more comprehensive and systematic approach on climate-security risks, Ireland is keen to use its leadership position in its capacity as President. A core focus for Ireland will be on deepening awareness of how links between climate and security are evident in specific countries and using the debate to progress thinking on this issue at the Council by highlighting the peace dividends of climate action. Taoiseach Micheál Martin will chair the meeting and Secretary-General António Guterres is expected to brief.

Non-proliferation

The last signature event will focus on the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Ireland has a long history of commitment to nuclear disarmament at the Security Council, from being the first country at the UN to sign the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), to playing a key role in the process that led to the adoption of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which entered into force on 22 January 2021.⁹ In light of the upcoming 25th anniversary of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), Ireland will use this opportunity to reflect on the current multilateral disarmament architecture and to highlight the need for continuing the progress towards a world free of nuclear weapons.

⁵ <https://www.iiea.com/publications/ireland-as-membership-of-the-un-security-council-explainer>

⁶ <https://www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/ourrolepolicies/unitednations/Campaign-Brochure-July-2018.pdf>

⁷ Most traditional peacekeeping missions fall under **Chapter VI** of the U.N. charter, which provides for the settlement of conflicts by peaceful means – including negotiation, mediation and confidence-building measures. **Chapter VII** missions, however, authorise the deployment of forces by land, sea or air for the purpose of conflict resolution, which has been referred to as peace enforcement.

⁸ <https://www.iiea.com/publications/climate-and-security-at-the-un-security-council-explainer>

⁹ <https://www.dfa.ie/news-and-media/speeches/speeches-archive/2021/january/irelands-priorities-for-the-un-security-council-2021-2022.php>

Women, Peace and Security and Civil Society

Finally, Ireland will seek to approach all its work at the Security Council during its Presidency with an overarching Women, Peace and Security (WPS) lens. As a common thread which ran through Ireland's Security Council campaign and a key priority during its membership as co-chair of the IEG on WPS with Mexico, Ireland will continue to push for the mainstreaming of WPS language across Security Council resolutions, statements, and the mandates of peacekeeping and political missions. Along with Kenya and Mexico, who will take up their Presidencies in October and November respectively, Ireland plans to make Women, Peace and Security a priority for their trio of Presidencies. Ireland is also keen to use its Presidency to build on its longstanding commitment to civil society by ensuring that there is a civil society briefer for each of the scheduled meetings that take place in September. Moreover, in line with its commitment to the WPS agenda, Ireland will seek to prioritise women briefers.

Conclusion

Above all, Ireland's Presidency of the Security Council will be underpinned by its strong commitment to multilateralism. It will seek to use the unique opportunity of the Presidency, which only comes around every 20 years, to build on existing alliances and establish new ones in order to achieve progress on important issues, such as climate and security and the human rights of women and girls in Afghanistan.

Overcoming divisions between the P5 on particularly sensitive files and dealing with the often unpredictable nature of world affairs poses major challenges to effectively managing threats to international peace and security at the Security Council. However, Ireland will seek to take advantage of its reputation as a peacemaker and honest broker to achieve effective and practical solutions to existing and emerging threats to international peace and security.

Beyond this, measuring Ireland's success as President of the Security Council will be determined to a large extent by how it navigates and effectively responds to what the former US Secretary of

Defence, Donald Rumsfeld, once referred to as the *known knowns*, *known unknowns*, and *unknown unknowns* of international relations.

At the launch of Ireland's Security Council Presidency on 1 September 2021, Taoiseach Micheál Martin underscored the importance of Ireland's principled, constructive, and open approach to the Security Council's vital work. Building on this will be all the more crucial in efforts to drive the Security Council's promotion of international peace and security at critical and challenging times such as these.

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