

# Ireland at the Helm:

## *Assessing Ireland's Presidency of the UN Security Council*



By Ross Fitzpatrick

[Ireland's month-long Presidency of the UN Security Council](#) officially came to an end on [30 September 2021](#) as it handed over the reins to Kenya for the month of October. This was Ireland's sole opportunity to chair the Security Council during its two-year tenure. Moreover, it afforded Ireland the opportunity to highlight some of its core priorities at the UN through a number of high-level signature events while managing the thematic and geographic items of the Security Council's agenda.

During the month-long Presidency, Ireland was responsible for leading the Security Council's response to international humanitarian and human rights crises in Syria, Yemen, Ethiopia, Israel-Palestine, Haiti, and Afghanistan, to name but a few. Despite internal Security Council dynamics which continued to impact the ability of the Council to reach consensus across a range of important issues, Ireland managed to make considerable progress on some key files, including UN Peacekeeping and Afghanistan, through the adoption of Security Council documents.

### Security Council Documents

Security Council resolutions are the most authoritative expression of the Council's will in this regard. However, they require the consensus of the P5 in order to be adopted and can therefore prove the most difficult to achieve. Presidential Statements are made by the President of the Council on behalf of all the members and are issued as an official document of the Council. Finally, Press Statements are declarations to the media made by the President of the Council on behalf of all the members and are issued as a United Nations press release in English and French.

### Security Council Resolutions

During the month of September, Ireland facilitated the adoption of five Security Council resolutions in its capacity as President. The majority of these extended the mandates of UN Missions around the world while

a thematic resolution on Peacekeeping Transitions marked a major achievement of Ireland's Presidency.

In early September, [Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence, Simon Coveney, chaired a Security Council briefing on the situation in Afghanistan](#). The Special Representative for Afghanistan, Deborah Lyons, Afghan Peacebuilder, Wazhma Frogh, and Pakistani peacebuilder, Malala Yousafzai, were invited by Ireland to brief Security Council members. Following this briefing, [the Security Council adopted a resolution extending the mandate of the UN Mission in Afghanistan](#) until March 2022. Despite the short extension, the adoption of this resolution offers a lifeline to the millions of Afghans facing a deteriorating humanitarian and human rights crisis in Afghanistan by ensuring the UN presence in the country for at least another six months.



**Malala Yousafzai, Pakistani peacebuilder**

Furthermore, at one of its high-level signature events on UN Peacekeeping Transitions on 8 September 2021, Ireland led the negotiations of a [landmark Security Council resolution on Peacekeeping Transitions](#). This resolution – Ireland's second ever at the Security Council – was reached by consensus of all Council members. It builds on the [vision statement of the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres](#), for his second term in relation to sustaining the protection of civilians in the context of transitions from UN peacekeeping to peacebuilding missions.

Ireland also oversaw the adoption of Security Council resolutions extending the mandates of the [UN Mission in Libya](#), the [UN Investigative team to promote accountability for crimes committed by Da'esh](#) in Iraq,

and [on migrant smuggling and human trafficking off the coast of Libya](#).

### Presidential Statements, Press Statements and Press Elements

In addition to ensuring the efficient negotiation and adoption of Security Council resolutions, Ireland delivered presidential statements, press statements, and press elements on a wide range of issues throughout its Presidency. While these statements carry less weight than Security Council resolutions, they are nonetheless made by the President on behalf of all 15 members to express the opinion of the Council on a particular issue.



**Ambassador Geraldine Byrne Nason, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the UN**

During its Presidency, Ireland oversaw the adoption of one presidential statement, four press statements, and one press elements. [On 15 September, the Security Council adopted a Presidential Statement on the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam](#), which called upon Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan to resume negotiations under the auspices of the African Union in relation to the filling of the dam in a timely fashion.

Furthermore, the Security Council adopted press statements on the anniversary of the [9/11 terror attacks](#), the [situation in Somalia](#), the [transition from military to civilian rule in Sudan](#), and the [formation of a new government in Lebanon](#). Lastly, the Security Council agreed press elements – which are sometimes issued after private Council meetings – on [the situation in Yemen](#).

### High Level Signature Events

A cornerstone of Ireland's Presidency was the organisation of four high-level events which focused on core priorities of Ireland's foreign policy at the UN, including peacekeeping, climate and security, and disarmament.

The first of these was an [open briefing with 'the Elders' on the maintenance of international peace and security](#) on 7 September 2021. Elders Chair and former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, and former UN Special Envoy, Lakhdar Brahimi, briefed Council members on a range of issues including, climate and security, the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan, and conflict resolution.



**Mary Robinson, Chair of the Elders and former President of Ireland**

The second event was an open debate on [UN Peacekeeping Transitions](#) on 8 September 2021. UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, former Liberian President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, and Sudanese civil society representative, Safaa Elagib Adam briefed Council members. As noted above, the major outcome of this meeting was a Security Council resolution which was adopted by consensus and co-sponsored



**Taoiseach Micheál Martin**

by 97 UN member states.

The third high-level event was an open debate on climate and security on 23 September 2021, which was chaired by [Taoiseach Micheál Martin](#). UN Secretary-General António Guterres briefed Council members along with Somali-Canadian civil society representative, Ilwad Elman.



**Ilwad Elman, Somali peacebuilder, Elman Peace and Human Rights Center**

While the Taoiseach stated that it was Ireland's intention to convene discussions on a thematic resolution, strong opposition from Russia, China, and India have left prospects for a first ever climate and security resolution uncertain at this point.

The final high-level event of Ireland's Presidency focused on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The meeting, which took place on 27 September 2021, marked the 25th anniversary of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty. [Minister of State Thomas Byrne chaired the meeting and delivered Ireland's National Statement](#), in which he called on all states to ratify the Treaty so that it could enter into force.

### Conclusion

It is tempting to focus solely on the number of resolutions and presidential statements adopted, and high-level signature events held, as a means of measuring the success of Ireland's Presidency of the Security Council.

However, it is arguably Ireland's constructive approach to diplomacy and ability to navigate

geopolitical divisions within the Council to achieve concrete results which deserves most recognition. For example, bringing [16 women civil society briefers](#) to a male dominated Council is an unprecedented achievement which could influence future Security Council Presidents to strive for greater gender balance.

As Ireland looks ahead to the next 15 months of its Security Council term, it is essential that it builds on the positive momentum generated by its Presidency to continue using its voice at the Council to speak out against injustices in Haiti, Ethiopia, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and Israel-Palestine.

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