

Visit of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to Ireland 6-8 July 2009

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon paid his first official visit to Ireland from 6-8 July 2009. During his visit, the Secretary-General met with leading Irish public and political figures, including President Mary McAleese, An Taoiseach Brian Cowen, T.D, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Micheál Martin, T.D, Minister of Defence, Willie O'Dea, T.D, Minister for the Environment, John Gormley, T.D, and the Oireachtas (Parliamentary) Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs.

In his discussions with An Taoiseach and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Ban welcomed Ireland's contributions to UN peacekeeping efforts, as well as development aid, the fight against hunger and public health. At his joint press conference with An Taoiseach, the Secretary-General expressed his gratitude to the Government of Ireland for rehatting EUFOR soldiers to United Nations MINURCAT Peacekeeping force in Chad and commended the leadership roles played by Irish Defence Force Generals. He also expressed his appreciation for Ireland's support for the UN's mediation and peacebuilding efforts, and Ireland's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals and in particular eradicating hunger by 2015.

One of the main highlights of Secretary-General Ban's visit was his key-note address on UN Peacekeeping at the Institute of International and European Affairs at Dublin Castle. Mr. Ban spoke of a new effort currently underway to strengthen United Nations peacekeeping at a time when the demand for the Organization's services is at an all-time high and the global economic crisis threatens to further limit its ability to respond effectively. He discussed UN's 'New Horizon' process for peacekeeping, which focuses on critical peacekeeping tasks and functions that require a renewed consensus, and highlighted Ireland's contributions to UN peacekeeping. He also praised Ireland's engagement with EU peace operations under the European Security and Defence Policy, and emphasised their compatibility with goals and objectives of UN peacekeeping.

The Secretary-General also had the opportunity to meet with the Chief of Staff of the Irish Defence Forces, Lt. Gen. Dermot Earley, and with Irish veterans of UN Peacekeeping Operations when he reviewed the Irish Guard of Honour and participated in a wreath-laying ceremony in honour of Irish fallen soldiers.

In meeting with the Oireachtas Joint Foreign Affairs Committee, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spoke of the role parliamentarians play in addressing the global challenges facing the international community. He highlighted the urgent need for concerted efforts to address climate change and the international economic crisis and underlined the need to further strengthen the UN to enable it to play its full part in these efforts. The Secretary-General welcomed Ireland's commitment to the UN, where he stated that Ireland "punches above its weight" across the UN agenda.