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Friday, 30 November 2007

## **ADDRESS BY WILLIE O' DEA, T.D., MINISTER FOR DEFENCE TO RACO'S BIENNIAL DELEGATE CONFERENCE**

27th NOVEMBER 2007  
Lyrath Estate Hotel, Kilkenny

President, General Secretary, Secretary General Department of Defence, Chief of Staff, distinguished guests and assembled delegates, I am most pleased to be with you here today. The fact that I would forego attending today's Cabinet meeting in order to address your Biennial Conference is an indication of the importance I attach to this event.

I believe we have developed a positive and productive working relationship over the past three years. Together, we have made significant progress in Defence Forces modernisation. Defence Forces modernisation has been my priority since my appointment. I remain committed to ensuring that we have a modern Defence Force capable of meeting the needs of Government and the public, while delivering value for money.

The development of the Defence Forces one of the big success stories of public sector modernisation. Each of you should be proud of the part you have played in that success. Our improved ability to meet our international security commitments is evidence of that success.

I have witnessed the tremendous work our troops do at home and overseas. I want to again record my own appreciation - and that of the Government - for the work you do in many troubled areas of the world and for the sacrifices that your members make in the cause of international peace. The support your family and friends provide is also a crucial component in the success of overseas missions

Our commitment to international peacekeeping will be maintained by our continuing participation in UN mandated missions. The EU, through the European Security and Defence Policy is taking on increasing peacekeeping responsibility. The proposed EU military operation in Chad and the Central African Republic represents a big challenge for the EU in helping the international community to restore normality in the Darfur region. This mission is specifically mandated to provide security and protection in the camps in eastern Chad accommodating the 170,000 displaced Chadians and 236,000 Sudanese refugees fleeing the Darfur conflict.

Lt. Gen Pat Nash has taken up the post of Operation Commander at the EU Operational Headquarters in Paris. This prestigious appointment reflects positively on both General Nash's experience and our reputation in peace support over the last 50 years.

Lt. General Nash has assumed the leadership role in the planning and launch of the operation, assisted by additional personnel deployed to both the Operation Headquarters and the Force Headquarters. This is the type of challenge for which we have been preparing. I have no doubt that the Defence Forces will meet this challenge in the professional manner we have come to expect.

As I have stated publicly, there are still gaps in the force structure. These gaps are in vital areas associated with the launch of this operation, such as helicopters, tactical aircraft and in medical

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support. Last week I strongly urged my EU Ministerial colleagues to take another look at the shortfalls and to actively support the force structure and mission. It is critical that it is adequately resourced and capable of fulfilling its mandate. The shortfalls are also being actively examined and addressed by EU Military Staff in consultation with the Operation Commander.

The success of this operation is crucial to the credibility of European Security and Defence Policy and the EU's engagement in crisis management. Ireland's position as the second largest contributor, and the provider of the Operation Commander in Lt Gen Pat Nash, is clear evidence of our determination to play a meaningful and constructive role in this mission,

Another major achievement for the Defence Forces in the international arena was the assumption of command of KFOR's Multinational Task Force (Centre). This is a new development for the Defence Forces. We have never before commanded a brigade size force in a multinational peace support operation. Undertaking this responsibility is an indication of our troops' experience in crisis management operations and the regard in which they are held by our international partners.

As you are now aware Ireland is committed to participate in the Nordic Battlegroup. This will be on standby from the 1st January – 30th June 2008. Ireland's contribution to the Battlegroup will amount to approx 100 personnel involving an Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Improvised Explosive Device Disposal team with its own security detail, together with staff posts at the Operational and Force headquarters.

While most of the training by the Defence Forces Battlegroup troops was conducted here at home, they have also trained with other Battlegroup elements. The final military exercise in Sweden by the Nordic Battlegroup was conducted in October and November. I attended this final ground exercise and was delighted to meet with many of the 93 Irish Defence Force personnel who participated.

Following on from the excellent working relationship we have developed with the Nordic countries, the possibility of participation in a future Nordic Battlegroup has been agreed in principle for 2011. The option of joining an Austrian/German Battlegroup for 2012 is currently being looked at and informal discussions are ongoing.

Central to our ability to perform in an international setting is our continued investment in the Defence Forces. In recent years in excess of one third of a billion euro has been spent on providing the Defence Forces with modern operational equipment, training facilities and accommodation.

Since the beginning of 2006 we have made several major equipment purchases including the first four medium-lift AW139 helicopters for the Air Corps. A further two will be delivered in 2008 (bringing the total to 6).

At the end of August I launched a tender competition for a Naval Service Vessel Replacement Programme. This Programme represents the single biggest investment in Defence Forces equipment in the history of the State. We will be purchasing two Offshore Patrol Vessels and one Extended Patrol Vessel with options for one additional vessel in each category. It is expected that the vessels will be delivered on a phased basis between 2010 and 2012. Since 2001 we have purchased 80 Mowag APCS at a cost of some €120M.

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I am pleased to have been able to secure continuing investment in equipment and infrastructure for the Defence Forces. Indeed, in 2007 the total Defence budget exceeded €1 billion for the first time. This shows the commitment of the Government to the Defence Forces. The agreed Programme for Government is a further statement of this commitment. It includes:

Ensuring that investment in the Defence Forces continues.

A continuation of the ongoing policy of annual recruitment enabling the Permanent Defence Force to maintain a strength of 10,500 fully trained personnel with an additional provision for up to 350 troops to in training at any time.

Ensuring that our troops have the most modern and effective range of protective equipment, weaponry and training available.

The preparation of a second White Paper on Defence for the period 2011- 2020

Over the past two years I introduced two major legislative initiatives. The first was the legislative changes necessary to enable participation by the Defence Forces in EU Battlegroups.

The second was the comprehensive amendment of the Defence Act (Part V) which brings military law into line with the European Convention on Human Rights. It provides for new structures, procedures, punishments and appeal processes governing both summary investigations and courts-martial. I believe it will serve us well in the years ahead.

The appointment, for the first time, of an independent military judge, with a judicial role similar to that of a civilian judge, is one of a number of its key provisions. I wish Col Tony McCourt every success in his new role. Drafting of revised court-martial rules of procedure and new regulations governing summary investigations is also underway.

The ongoing implementation of the recommendations of the Doyle report *"The Challenge of a Workplace"* is one of the highest priorities for the Defence Forces and the Department. I am satisfied that the military authorities are alert and vigilant to this issue and are committed to tackling it with a continuing and positive approach. Your Association will shortly be invited to participate in a review of the progress made in this area, which is planned for early in 2008.

I would like to turn now to the day to day interaction between your Association, the Defence Force management and the Department. As well as the developments mentioned above; the day-to-day work of the Association continues through the formal Conciliation and Arbitration machinery. Your Association has a vital role to play in the implementation of change. I am pleased to see that the process continues to work successfully.

18 significant reports have been signed since the last ADC, the majority recording agreement. The most important was probably the implementation of the *Towards 2016* pay agreement. That has resulted in increases in pay on 1 December 2006 and 1 June 2007.

I am aware that discussions have been ongoing for some time between your representatives and my officials regarding the new pension scheme applying to officers appointed since April 2004 and some improvements in existing pension terms. These discussions are close to concluding - subject to the resolution of a few outstanding issues. My officials are considering the remaining issues and they expect, shortly, to be in a position to convene a meeting of the Pensions Sub-Committee with a view to concluding matters.

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The development of the capacity of the Medical Corps is another issue that has been under review and discussion for some time. Concrete steps are now needed and this is reflected in the *Agreed Programme for Government*. I am committed to the changes necessary to provide a medical service to meet the needs of the Defence Forces both at home and abroad. I am currently reviewing progress on this issue to ensure that our commitments under the both the *Programme for Government* and the *Towards 2016* modernisation agenda are met.

I am sure you will agree that the last few years have been extremely busy for the Defence Forces. We have made significant progress and there is more to be done.

You, the officer Corps, are central to successfully continuing the modernisation programme that is so essential for our future. You are the leaders of change in the Defence Forces.

Leadership has many aspects. Leadership is about more than simply mobilising others to get things done. It is about having a vision and turning it into reality. It is about searching for opportunities to innovate, grow and improve. It is about imparting the highest standards and values by observing them at all times and in all situations.

Our success to date shows that there has been excellent leadership at all levels in the Defence Forces. We must not be complacent, however, the change process is never completed. We must ensure that the leadership and values that have long been the hallmark of the Officer Corps continue to be in evidence to enable us to achieve our goals and maintain the hard won reputation of the Defence Forces both at home and abroad.

Again I want to thank you - and all members of the Defence Forces - for the successes over the past few years and I look forward with optimism to the future.

I thank you for your kind invitation to address you. Unfortunately, due to pressing business I will have to leave shortly and will not be able to attend your banquet this evening. However I wish you the best for the remainder of the Conference and I hope you have an enjoyable evening.

Ends