

Chief of Staff's Address to the PDFORRA ADC 2018

Castlebar, 2nd October 2018

A Aire Cosanta, a Árd Rúnaí na Roinne Cosanta, A Árd Rúnaí agus a Úachtaráin PDFORRA, a dheiligáidí, a aíonna agus a cháirde.

Ba mhaith liom mo bhuíochas a ghabháil libh as ucht an cuireadh a thug sibh dom arís i mbliana labhairt libh anseo inniú.

INTRODUCTION

We are all members of Óglaigh na hÉireann. We understand that our organisation is unique and as military professionals we too are unique in that a fundamental of our democracy is being faithful to Ireland, loyal to the constitution and the oath we all took. There can be no other way and with that comes constraints, obligations and duties. We can be ordered, at short or no notice, into the *Bearna Baol*, to the point of greatest risk, running towards danger when others turn away. This is more than a notional commitment. We have frequently done so, and will do so again. That is what makes us different.

COURAGE

Before I give you my perspectives on the challenges facing the Defence Forces, I want to make my position absolutely clear. It takes physical courage to confront the hardships and risks of service at home and overseas. It takes physical courage to put to sea, week after week in

what are statistically some of the roughest seas in the world. It takes physical courage to fly in aircraft on demanding missions. It takes physical courage to stand up to violent extremists. This physical courage, often unseen by those in whose service we display it, is linked to our moral courage. Our moral courage in turn stems from our organisational culture, our history, the example of our peers and the legacy of our veterans.

Moral courage is a defining feature of our organisation and it finds one of its most important platforms in the work done by you, the leadership of PDFORRA. So I wish to open by acknowledging here, today, the moral courage that PDFORRA has shown over many years and in particular, in the recent years of economic difficulty. At a time which is increasingly characterised by populism it takes moral courage to stand for office and provide the consistent leadership that functioning representation requires. There are so many who have a view on what to do or how to do it but who abdicate when it comes to standing for office or providing the leadership while remaining within set down parameters. I commend each one of you here for having the courage to go for office and provide the necessary leadership.

CURRENT CHALLENGES

The national economic difficulties which characterised the past decade are thankfully, gradually, being addressed. I am nevertheless

fully aware that the burden of the necessary decisions that were made, has fallen heavily on the Defence Forces, and on our troops. I have visited our installations at home and abroad in the year since I last addressed this Conference. I am in no doubt about the validity of the concerns weighing on so many across the ranks. I am also quite clear that the question of remuneration is the major - though NOT the only - driver of those concerns. You in turn, are aware that rates of pay are not within the remit of the Chief of Staff.

That being said, it has been put to me that the challenges facing the Defence Forces are more about leadership rather than pay. Let me deal in the first instance with leadership. Someone once said that leadership is not so much about the exercise of power but rather the capacity to create that sense of power in those who are led. The real role of the leader is to create more leaders and that is a responsibility for each and every one of us irrespective of rank. I will not be found wanting and I need your help.

I do want people to have the autonomy to grow in the organisation. I want people to have a voice and to be heard and most of all I want people to feel valued. That however can be a challenge. In healthy organisations pay as an issue is normally number three or number four. In the Defence Forces right now, it is my view that pay is number one. It is my responsibility therefore to give advice and advocate on the matter.

Because there is an inextricable link between pay and being valued. So what I and the General Staff can do and what I and the General Staff actually do is to advocate on behalf of the forces. And, I wish to assure you that no opportunity to advocate on pay and conditions has been missed.

I have made the point that DF personnel on average are the lowest paid members of the Public Sector according to CSO historic data on average annual public sector earnings. These data also show that other uniformed bodies have achieved pay gains, beyond those received by the DF. I have made the point that DF personnel are different in that we do not have a union, we do not withdraw labour, we are subject to military law and we accept an unlimited liability in the conduct of our service.

I have been consistent in my advice that the DF cannot recruit its way out of the current retention challenges meaning that both recruitment and retention issues will need to be addressed in tandem. Finally it has been my view that a narrow focus on small groups within the DF will be to the detriment of the remaining larger proportion of personnel. This was reinforced to me following my visit to the Naval Base last Friday where I could see how an acceleration in junior line enlisted rank premature voluntary retirement can have a significant impact in a lean organisation.

I have a responsibility to provide advice and the data I use to inform my advice are drawn from the numerous internal surveys, focus groups and open source national body statistics. While these data are authoritative, the most compelling material that informs my advocacy comes from the stories that soldiers, sailors and aircrew convey to me personally wherever and whenever we meet, whether it be in the course of town halls or individual encounters.

But it also is the courage, loyalty and discipline that the membership of the Defence Forces displays, often in difficult circumstances, in remaining at their posts, in delivering defence, security and government services to the State and to international organisations such as the United Nations, that empowers me to advocate for a fair deal on your behalf. I have done so, and I will continue to do so while remaining within the limits of my office.

PUBLIC SECTOR PAY COMMISSION

On the matter of the Public Service Pay Commission as part of its public service pay policy, the Government established the Commission as an independent body with its own ToR's and its own process. I have a responsibility to respect the PSPC independence and process as established by Government. Suffice to say however that over the past number of months military management has worked with civilian management in finalising an agreed submission to the Commission.

The submission is comprehensive, detailing the unique roles required of the Defence Forces explaining how we recruit and develop our personnel. A significant amount of contextual material was also included to assist the Commission in understanding how we operate. With a view to servicing the work of the Commission, the military and civil management team have also sought a meeting with the Commission. We hope that this will provide a further opportunity for us to advocate for all personnel and to again provide evidence-based facts to the PSPC to consider in advance of the publication of their report to Government.

It should be noted that when the Commission does complete its report, its recommendations will be submitted to the Government for its consideration and approval. I wish to acknowledge that overall Government policy on public sector pay is for restoration taking place. I have also noted the fact that the DF is a prioritised sector within the PSPC.

Overall, none of us joined the Defence Forces to make loads of money, and we know from past experience that DF personnel are unlikely to 'win the lotto' at the end of this process. That said, I have always maintained that every member of the DF should have a fair day's wage for a fair day's work.

POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS

While we do have significant challenges, it would be remiss of me and inaccurate not to acknowledge the positives. Where matters have been within our power to directly influence, we have done so in a positive manner that is both in the national interest and in the interest of our personnel. The General Staff advocated for restoration of new entrant pay to 2013 levels and more appointments for those same junior personnel overseas, especially in UNIFIL and in the Mediterranean. These appointments will not only give them vital operational experience but will allow them to temporarily earn higher pay, which I know is always welcome.

PROMOTION

Another factor that affects retention rates is **Promotion**, and we have also made progress there. In the last year up to last week we have promoted 584 NCOs. While these promotions are starting to ease the pressure at local level and open the way for consequential promotions, we know that the current promotion system is not perfect, for example the points system, which is impacting on unit loyalty. Every promotion gap that exists is bad for us. It is a gap in our management structure and it is a missed opportunity to remunerate better. We are already working on the lessons learned for a more effective promotions system. We will need your assistance in this as PDFORRA will have important inputs in this work.

VALUES

We are also working on improving the wellbeing of our personnel, so that everyone feels valued by the organisation, by Government and by the Irish citizen. And this is where we all have a key role to play. Together we must turn our **DF values** into behaviours. That is why later in the year we will be rolling out a 'Values in Action' initiative, following on from our 'Values Champions Awards' in 2017. I was very heartened by the stories of these outstanding individuals, especially as they were nominated NOT by the chain of command but by their peers. Linked to our values is the need to continue with our diversity and inclusion strategies while striving for improved gender balance. These are important, NOT because they're politically correct, but because these are capability drivers for the future.

C&A MODEL

Another good news story has been the Minister's appointment of an Independent Chair (Mr Gerard Barry) to review the **Conciliation & Arbitration process**. I have frequently stated in the past that our organisation is not perfect. Where those imperfections, be they failures of leadership, of strategy, of systems or simply misunderstandings, come to our attention, we must have a robust and frank way of airing and resolving these issues in a timely manner. It takes moral courage to stand up and bring such matters to notice, and often, you have shown this moral courage. I desire our approach to be

modern, timely and responsive, placing the basic dignity of our people at the heart of our efforts. I understand that the Minister recently shared this report with PDFORRA and therefore I think it best to allow time to understand Mr Barry's findings and the optimal way forward.

WORKING TIME DIRECTIVE

Another issue that is currently engaging our energies in DFHQ is the EU Working Time Directive. Although the Defence Forces retains exemptions in certain operational areas, there is much in the conduct of our daily business that will need to be adjusted in order to comply with the legislation as things progress. It is my intention that such changes should be to the benefit of all Defence Forces personnel, but you will appreciate that this will also bring organisational challenges. Above all, successful implementation of the coming changes will require a collaborative approach and I call on all elements in this area, both civil and military, within the DF and without, to approach this matter in that collaborative, constructive spirit, sharing information and objectives openly and- in every case- that implementation be managed in a way that protects both the organisation and the national interest. The DFHQ working group has been working on this for some time and it is clear that some of the issues of most concern could be addressed very quickly.

In short however the WTD is implemented,

- it must be implemented in a manner that optimises military capability
- it must deliver value to the taxpayer.
- it must be implemented in a manner that is fair

We must not underestimate the challenge but, with the shared objective of a modern, progressive workplace which values its people, I look forward to success in this area.

SERVICE SPECIFIC ISSUES

Over the past number of weeks I have visited each Brigade, the DFTC, the Air Corps and the Naval Service. There have been many service specific issues that have been raised. In the Army the matter of people commuting long distances or being tasked with duties out of area were frequent themes. In the Air Corps greater autonomy for career courses was raised. I visited the Navy last Friday and I am very aware the difficulties that the Service is currently experiencing. I know the Navy is suffering from challenges arising from its strength, its retention problems and the stress being felt by the personnel committed to a demanding operational and training cycle. I consider the Naval Service, with its relentless operational focus and on-going challenges, as a microcosm of the broader Defence Forces. I can see the parallels between the operational stretch and elsewhere in the organisation, and the associated effects on morale. I can assure you

that the General Staff is engaged on these issues on a weekly and sometimes daily basis.

FINALE

Despite all these challenges, there is much to be positive about, and I know that as leaders we must follow the old maxim – we must reflect reality while at the same time inspiring hope. By working together, I know that we will prevail through these difficulties, as Óglaigh na hÉireann has done many times over the last ten decades. This is a unique organisation and one of which we should be rightly proud. This period of consolidation is part of our overall strategy, with the emphasis now on the well-being of our men and women. Representation is a central pillar of that strategy.

The activities of this Association are force-multipliers for those common objectives. I call on all of you to summon your courage in the face of continuing and undeniable adversity. Advance the matters you believe to be in accordance with our values, for the benefit of our personnel and in the national interest, without fear or favour. Don't be afraid to innovate in everything you do. Maybe we'll make mistakes, but mistakes are the portals of learning, and so we will learn, and do better the next time. Despite our differing perspectives and roles, I will continue to do all in my power to ensure that our collaboration is the best that it can be. Through all of our efforts, we should not let others set the agenda. Each of us here has a mandate,

we conform with appropriate norms and principles and we will continue to strengthen the nation by inspiring pride and leading excellence. Go raibh maith agaibh agus beirigí bua.