



ARCO's Observations on the IRG-DF REPORT - findings and actions taken

On 28th March '23 the Tánaiste and Minister for Defence Micheál Martin published the report of the Independent Review Group (IRG) on dignity and equality issues in the Defence Forces.

The report acknowledged that the Defence Forces have a proud and rich legacy that is recognised and highly respected at home and abroad.

However, it severely criticised how instances of unacceptable behaviour were dealt with and found the Defence Forces to be resistant to change, with out-of-date HR policies and procedures and simply not fit-for-purpose in tackling unacceptable behaviour, bullying, discrimination, harassment, and sexual harassment.

Publication followed a Cabinet meeting, where Government agreed to progress, as a priority, the report's thirteen recommendations, including:

- › establishment of a statutory inquiry to investigate whether there have been serious systemic failures in dealing with individual complaints, including sexual misconduct
- › setting up an External Oversight Body, on a non-statutory basis initially, to increase transparency and accountability; and to drive necessary culture change throughout the Defence Forces
- › urgently reforming the existing mechanisms for making a complaint to restore faith and trust in the complaints process

Since the publication of the Report, ARCO has been in regular contact (both written and face to face meetings) with the Minister and the Sec Gen of the Department of Defence as part of a consultative process with stakeholders on the development of Terms of Reference for the proposed Statutory Inquiry including the supporting provisions governing the attendance of witnesses in such matters as individual legal representation, funding of such by the State and making documents available to witnesses on matters to be addressed by the Inquiry.

ARCO wrote to the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Defence on 24 Apr 2023 and requested a meeting to outline our members' serious concerns about the Contents and Findings in the IRG-DF Report. This meeting, though not formally refused, never took place and accordingly ARCO made a written submission on 14 June 2023. The following sets out the matters addressed in our submission.

At the outset, ARCO stated that our members were not in denial of wrongdoing in the Defence Forces either in the past, nor at the present.

ARCO also stated that as a "scoping exercise" it was important for the IRG-DF to seek out personnel who have had negative experiences in their service. Such experiences need to be heard, authenticated, and be fairly, adequately, and timely addressed. However, in our opinion their subsequent approach to assessing the environment within the Defence Forces is flawed.

METHODOLOGY

ARCO informed the Minister that ARCO members, with considerable expertise and experience in the areas of organisational culture and statistics, have identified serious flaws in the Report, especially in the methodology used leading to its Findings.

Also, ARCO reported that informal reference with professionals in these competencies, who have no military connections, have indicated to ARCO that any report into an institution or an organisation, such as the Defence Forces, containing such sweeping negative characterisations and criticisms, with little or no positive features, culminating in Findings, was at least problematic and most likely flawed.

ENVIRONMENT

ARCO highlighted that:

- › The Defence Forces reflects the society it serves – it is not perfect – and things unfortunately do go wrong.



- › The military workplace is necessarily robust, tough, and energetic, and must constantly find the correct balance between what behaviour is appropriate or inappropriate.
- › Failure to find the correct balance can lead on the one hand to unacceptable wrongdoing, resentment, and low morale, whilst on the other hand; it can lead to carelessness, lack of diligence, inattention to detail, and consequently casualties in routine work, in training and on national and international operations. An imbalance either way results in a non-effective military force, unable to implement its roles assigned by Government.

ALLEGATIONS

ARCO informed the Minister that:

- › Palpable anger now dominates the discourse within the broader Veteran Community and their families. This derives and is focused on the elements of the Report that are offensive both in the contents and in the conclusions of the Report, and apparently based on unchallenged and untested allegations from a small number of personnel who served in the Defence Forces.
- › The IRG baldly state that the organization 'barely tolerates women' but without examining the copious documentation available such as Performance Appraisal Reports and Course Reports that demonstrate the high regard Commanding Officers viewed the women with whom they served.

POLITICAL RESPONSE

ARCO also highlighted that - Political commentary, including Press Releases, and Government responses to the Report has angered our members. The knee jerk and populist reactions have not gone unnoticed. The reputational damage to all veterans is unjustified, and in ARCO's opinion, will likely prejudice the deliberations of the proposed Statutory Inquiry from the outset. It was also pointed out that:

- › Most Veterans and their families recall their service and association with the Defence Forces with great pride and affection, and value the hugely positive and formative influence it had on them, irrespective of the duration of that service.

IRG-DF'S SOURCES

The submission highlighted that it was very clear to the ARCO delegation that met with the IRG-DF, that they were struggling in their trawl for those who served and were disaffected and in their Findings clearly succumbing to the errors of cognitive dissonance and conformation bias.

The IRG-DF mentions three sources in their Findings.

1. Fifteen interviewees and a further thirty individuals agreed that their detailed submissions could be examined. The submissions from this self-selected group were unchallenged and untested. The IRG-DF reported that no findings of fact were made, but in fact they clearly were. The IRG-DF Report and Appendix 11 makes clear that it was the experiences, opinions and views of this group of forty-five individuals alone, which informed what they called an "assessment of culture within the Defence Forces."
2. A separate Perceptions and Experiences Survey of 527 current serving members of the Defence Forces was benchmarked to a similar survey in 2002. The timeframe of the experiences is not clear. In this survey, up to 60% of most experiences are shown to be over five or ten years old. The erroneous impression given in the report is that they are recent in nature. The IRG-DF report selectively uses some data from this survey where it supports their own analysis while ignoring the data, which shows that incidents of bullying, sexual harassment, etc have been consistently falling over the five years to 2022. The broad Findings are at variance with this Survey. In fact, the IRG-DF, regrettably did not conduct a formal Culture Survey as recognised by any contemporary HR Professionals. The international culture survey company, Human Synergistics'1 guidelines indicate that, for a Culture Survey to be valid, participants should include all levels of seniority, appointments, and job descriptions within the organisation. To get an accurate picture of the current culture within the Defence Forces, a survey in the region of 3,000 serving members (30%) across all ranks and appointments would be appropriate. For a historic Culture Survey, a pro rata survey group would be required.

ARCO contends that the evidence -albeit limited- of the IRG-DF survey indicates surprisingly high rates of satisfaction, commitment to service to the State and self-worth within the forces, contrary to the interpretation and tone given to it in IRG-DF Findings, This is despite a vibrant economy together with policies of neglect by successive Governments and little regard for the needs of the Defence Forces, and of serving personnel and their families, at official level.

3. 'Different sources available' to the IRG – DF. These are not identified in the Report, yet many aspects of the findings in the Report's Findings would seem to be based on these anonymous sources.

To cite some examples:

- a. The criticism of the officer induction and leader development programs of the Defence Forces is an old chestnut, which elements within the Department of Defence have been pushing over the last few decades.
- b. Cadetships for officer ranks in the Defence Forces are selected by an open public competitive process. It is a system that is used in most militaries across the globe.



- c. Induction at enlisted personnel level focuses on the soldier as an integral part of a team. Enlisted personnel have two options to progress to commissioned ranks. One is through the Cadetship public competition, and secondly through Potential Officer Courses, which are reserved for serving enlisted personnel only.
 - d. Induction at Cadet level is the initial leader development programme designed for those who have demonstrated considerable aptitude and motivation for leadership during the selection process. From day one, Cadets find themselves in positions of leadership, and more importantly of taking responsibility and accountability inherent in leadership.
 - e. The success of serving officers in the international defence and peacekeeping environments, and former officers in leadership roles in areas such as business, public service, sport, education, and charities, bear eloquent testament to the strength of Cadet School and Military College education and training outputs.
 - f. The references to the officer 'class system' (P43), again has no basis in evidence. The Minister would be aware from attendance at recent Commissioning ceremonies that the backgrounds of those being commissioned reflects Irish society in general and include the sons, daughters, nieces and nephews of NCO's and Privates. This does not reflect a Defence Forces leadership rooted in 'snobbery, condescension and denigrating attitude of a closed class system' as found by the IRG-DF and accepted by the Government.
 - g. Page 37 of the Report, referencing the loyalty of members, presents a Finding that the officers' first loyalty is to their cadet class and colleagues, and thereafter to the Organisation. No evidence is produced to support this finding, which has no basis in fact. The oath taken by all personnel of the Defence Forces, binds them legally to be loyal first to Ireland and thereafter to the Constitution. Readily placing life and limb at risk, on behalf of the State, the Government, and citizens, is the ultimate expression of loyalty. The IRG-DF authors have confused the bonds and friendships between comrades who have shared a formative experience, with disloyalty.
 - h. For officers, their prescribed Commission places special trust in this loyalty, and implicit in this, is a profound responsibility, which recognises that they have proven themselves worthy to serve as commissioned officers, through their robust education and training in the Cadet School.
 - i. On pages 13-14 of Appendix 11, the IRG-DF finds that leaders are frequently dishonest. No evidence is produced for this defamatory statement. Its acceptance by Government calls into question the integrity of the Defence Forces and whether the organisation is trusted by the Minister for Defence.
 - j. Reference to an organisation resistant to change has no basis in fact. The Defence Forces has been in a continuous cycle of reorganisation, downsizing and reform since the 1990s, as well as adapting and responding to the myriad of government taskings from high intensity operations overseas, domestic land sea air operations, and a whole range of diverse non-military supports to civil authorities. These are verifiable accomplishments and a previous Taoiseach in the Dáil attested the Defence Forces as an exemplar of Public Service reform. No other State Institution has demonstrated the adaptability, organisational flexibility, and willingness to undertake such significant change and transformation.
- It is distressing to our members that the Government has accepted all the Findings in the Report. One wonders where these Findings derive from, if not evidence-based. The unchallenged opinion of forty-five "complainants," as the IRG-DF describes them, plus some unidentified "different sources" is hardly solid evidence.
- ### OVERSIGHT BODY
- Further points in relation to ARCO's views on the composition of the Oversight Body covered in the submission to the Minister were that:
- a. Command of the Defence Forces is vested in the President, and thereafter, through the Government and the Minister for Defence to the General Officers Commanding Brigades, the Air Corps, and the Flag Officer Commanding Naval Service. Arising from the recommendations of the Commission on the Defence Forces, the Chief of Staff will exercise the function of command.
 - b. The composition of the proposed Oversight Body must reflect and respect the statutory requirements for the command function, especially those exercising command within the Defence Forces. Excluding the Chief of Staff from the Oversight Body can only be interpreted as undermining the integrity and authority of the holder of the Office of the Chief of Staff. Including the Secretary General of the Department of Defence, exacerbates this slight.
 - c. The Commission on the Defence Forces correctly recognised the need to empower the Office of the COS, as heretofore the Office had limited power to influence the future and strategic direction of the Defence Forces. This power was held within the Department. The demise of the Defence Forces in its current state bears clear testament to this.
 - d. The membership of the Oversight Body gives the impression that the COS is answerable to inter alia- the Secretary General in respect of aspects of his/her command function.
 - e. The COS [CHOD] must be accountable to the Government only, through the Minister, for the Force he/she is responsible for.



- f. The Independent Monitoring Group (IMG) fulfilled the function of the Oversight Body in the past, and this worked effectively, resulting in considerable change within the Defence Forces. Its composition ensured confidence, respect, and acceptance at all levels of the Defence Forces. The disbandment of the IMG was a serious policy error, and the decision to do so should be investigated.
- g. The Oversight Body as proposed would be flawed from the outset as it exacerbates the historically dysfunctional relationship that has existed between the military and civilian components of the Defence Organisation.
- h. This would not be a good start and must be corrected.

CONCLUSION

The submission concluded by stating that ARCO recognised that like Irish society in general, regrettably criminal, unacceptable and inappropriate behaviours occur in the Defence Forces, and like society, unfortunately will never be fully excised. Nevertheless, in the Defence Forces in particular, discipline must demand zero tolerance of such incidences with appropriate and timely sanctions acting as realistic deterrents.

Combat, referred to as warfighting in military doctrine, is the ultimate expression of the military workplace. Preparation for combat is necessarily robust and demanding. To achieve dignity in the workplace, acceptance, by all quarters, of the actual nature of the combat side of service life, is needed.

The training methods used must always seek to find the appropriate balance when preparing soldiers for what they may have to undertake in conventional and non-conventional military operations. A failure to do so will have profound consequences for the soldier, for those in leadership and command roles, and, for the State. A strict, fair and consistent disciplinary regime is key to moderating behaviours and controlling the necessary aggressive nature of soldiering.

As a "scoping exercise" it was important for the IRG-DF to seek out personnel who have experiences of a wide range of inappropriate behaviour, and who feel that they have not been fairly treated. Their experiences must be fairly and adequately addressed, and lessons learned and then acted on.

ARCO commends the work of the IRG-DF in identifying the requirement for continuous vigilance and monitoring of the workplace. These requirements are key to supporting a safe and respectful working environment in the Defence Forces, as are the provision of the appropriate means and resources to do so.

The IMG was such a mechanism, and worked well, due to its composition, which ensured confidence and acceptance at all levels of the Defence Forces. Therefore, the creation of an External Oversight Body is welcomed. Its composition is not.

By publishing as "Findings," the IRG-DF gives unjustified credibility to what are, in fact, still untested allegations, and indeed could be seen as pre-judging the findings of the Statutory Inquiry it recommends setting up. The proposed Statutory Inquiry must be directed to take full account of this and adjudicate on the Findings of the IRG-DF in their Report.

Palpable distress and hurt now dominate the discourse within the broader Veteran community on this issue and is focussed on the outrageous elements in the Findings of the Report.

The predominant belief within the Defence Forces Veteran community is that these findings and the governments acceptance of them without question, demonstrates once again that little has changed in the attitude of Governments towards the Defence Forces, since the foundation of the state.

CURRENT SITUATION

The Minister had hoped to determine the nature of the Inquiry and formulate the Terms of Reference and bring them before the Dail for approval prior to the summer recess. For reasons unknown, approval has been deferred to Autumn 2023. Nevertheless, The Minister has decided to convene a Tribunal of Inquiry which is a far weightier forum of investigation than the alternative Commission of Inquiry.

By virtue of appointments held, many of our members can expect to be individually subpoenaed to appear before the Tribunal to address matters that came before them during their service. ARCO advises that witnesses, called to appear would be remiss not to have legal representation available to them.

In ARCO's view, it is unfortunate that the character, and reputation of a whole cohort of serving and retired personnel, many of whom ARCO represents, was de-facto impugned in the Findings of the IRG-DF Report and it is against this background that they may be required to give evidence to the Tribunal.

Constitutionally, our members are entitled to their good name and to be protected, where their personal or property rights are at risk of being jeopardized as a result of any evidence received by the Tribunal. Members of our Association, who are compelled to appear before the Tribunal, cannot be confident these rights will be protected, without the benefit of a legal advisor of their own choosing and in whom they can have full confidence.

Accordingly, ARCO has written to the Minister on 21 Aug 2023 demanding that:

- › Legal representation for witnesses should be of their own choosing and fully funded by the State.

- › ARCO members appearing before the Tribunal should be provided in advance with a comprehensive summary of all matters the Tribunal of Inquiry requires them to address, and copies of all relevant documents, including any specific allegations made by individuals.

- › ARCO also advised that this list may be added to on foot of the advice of independent legal representation.



Dates For Your Calendar Defence Forces Events 2023.



The following Ceremonial events are open to the public. Timings will be confirmed.

15 Sept '23	68th Inf Gp UNDOF, Ministerial Review. Custume Bks. Athlone, at 10.30hrs.
01 Oct '23	Veterans' Day. McKee Bks., Dublin at 14.00hrs
06 Oct '23	ARCO AGM, Cathal Brugha Bks., Dublin at 11.30hes
15 Oct '23	Annual Gala Concert, National Concert Hall, Dublin, at 17.00hrs. (Note; Day and time change from previous years)
31 Oct – 03 Nov '23	123 Inf Bn UNIFIL, Ministerial Review. Stephens Bks., Kilkenny. Time and Date TBC with Minister.
05 Nov '23	Niamba Ambush Anniversary Mass, Cathal Brugha Bks., Dublin, at 11.00hrs
01-05 Nov '23	Defence Forces Deceased Members Mass, Various Locations
26 Nov '23	DFTC Gala Concert
?? Nov '23	DF Remembrance Ceremony, Merion Square, Dublin. TBC with Minister.
13 Dec '23	DF Carol Service. Arbour Hill. At 20.00 hrs

41 Year Reunion of 58th Army Cadet Class & 25th Naval Cadet Class



The 41 year reunion of the 58th Army and 25th Naval Cadet Class was held in Collins Bks., Cork on Fri 11th Nov 2022.

Members of both Classes travelled from all over the world to celebrate what was a most memorable evening of memories, reminiscences and the usual banter. The Class also remembered their deceased colleagues, Col Frank Lawless and Capt Mary Jo O'Sullivan.

Front Row (seated L-R): Col B. Delaney, M. Rutherford, A. Whelan, C. Jones, Brig Gen B. Cleary, Maj Gen A. McKenna, G. Fagan, G. Brennan, Maj Gen M. O'Brien, J. Farrell

Centre (L-R): Col D. Harrington, J. Keena, S. O'Dwyer, J. Kirwan, M. O'Connor, Brig Gen T. Cudmore, J. Corcoran, Capt (NS) W. Roberts, Brig Gen G. Buckley, P. Mitchell, Comdr (NS) M. Malone, E. Kelly, Col T.O'Callaghan

Back Row (L-R): D. Hogan, A. Jones, T. McNamara, T. Boyce, B. McCabe, N. Connors, D. Moloney, M. O'Chulachain, J. O'Callaghan, S. Fahy, M. Byrne, N. Duffy

Unable to attend: 58th (A) CC: Col J. McCrann, Col D. Cowhig, T. O'Donoghue, M. O'Duffy, N. O'Mahoney, S. O'Malley, N. Donohoe, E. Douris (RIP, 09 June 2023), D. O'Brien, D. Campion, S.O'Se, M. Dowling, C. Dwyer, J. Ryan, T. Whelan, 25th (NS) CC: D. McLoughlin, C. O'Shea, J. Shaloo, A. Heery, B. McCarthy.

49th Cadet Class Reunion



The 49th Cadet Class (1973 – 1975) held their Golden Anniversary Reunion recently in Hodson Bay Hotel, Athlone.

Pictured above are (Left to Right): Tom Murray, Richie Ryan, Mick O'Brien, Jim Long, Seamus Rouine, John White, Paul Rossiter, Ray McNicholas, Mick Moore, Ollie Barbour, Tom Griffith, Macdara Delargy, Con Ryan, Michael Moore, Michael McCarthy, Joe Callan, Gerry Harney, Brendan Dooley, Kieran McDaid, Pat Costello, Peter Burns, Paul Rafter, Noel O Grady, Gerry O Flynn, Jim Hunt, Jim Sayers, Michael Hession, Eddie Sheehan, Brendan Healy, Colm Campbell, John Picard, Mick Delaney.

6th Infantry Battalion Association



Lt Col John Durnin (Retd) organised a talk by Comdt Cathal Berry (Retd) TD on 12 April last. Cathal's talk was based on his article "Keeping Defence at the Forefront of Irish Politics", which appeared in the last ARCO Newsletter (Issue No. 43). The talk was held in St Ciaran's Hall Athlone and the attached photo shows the attendance at the event. The talk was followed by a meal in a local restaurant.



3rd Inf Bn Retired Officers Association



The 3rd Inf Bn Retired Officers Association recently presented new Colours to the Battalion at a ceremony in Stephens Barracks, Kilkenny. Pictured, above (Left), is the President of the Association, Col Tom Aherne (Retd) presenting the Colours to BSM, John Kelleher, who, in turn, presented the Colours to the Battalion Commander, Lt Col Gareth Prendergast.

Commissioning Ceremony 98th Cadet Class An Cliaomh Gaisíochta



During the Commissioning Ceremony, held in Collins Barracks, Dublin on 29th March '23, Brig Gen Seamus Ó Giolláin, President ARCO, presented Lt Ben Breen, 27 Inf Bn, with An Cliaomh Gaisíochta (ARCO Sword).
Lt Breen was the best student of the 98th Cadet Class.



ÓGLAIGH NA HÉIREANN
THE DEFENCE FORCES

Bands of the Defence Forces & Pipes & Drums

Annual Gala Concert

in the National Concert Hall, Dublin.
Sunday 15 October, 2023
at 17.00 hrs

In aid of
Defence Forces
Benevolent Fund
& Soldiers Aid Fund

Tickets: €25

BOOKINGS: Available directly from the
National Concert Hall: T. 01 417 0000 or
Website: www.info@nch.ie or from
Capt Ciaran Finn. Ph 01 804 6568 or
ciaran.finn@defenceforces.ie or
garry.mckenzie@defenceforces.ie

ARCO AGM 2023

The 2023 AGM will be held on
Friday 06 October 2023
at 11.30hrs. in **Cathal Brugha Bks., Dublin.**

NOTE: Change of location for AGM 2023.

Welcome to ARCO's New Members

Vice Adm Mark Mellett	Comdt Gregory O'Keeffe
Comdt Pádraig McCarthy	Capt Brian Leahy
Capt Michael (Mick) Browne	Comdt Gerry Moore
Capt Félim Gibbons	Col John McCrann
Comdt Philip Carey	Lt Cdr Patrick Allen
Lt Col William Donagh	Comdt Alan Fennell
Lt Col Wayne Tyrrell	Capt Vinny Lanigan
Capt Danny O'Sullivan	Capt Graeme Towell
Capt Mick Mullagh	Lt Col Barry Ryan
Comdt Ciaran McKeown	

Important Notice: Texting Service Mobile Phone Number

ARCO's Texting Service is part of our aim at improving communications with our members. Thanks to all members who responded to this notice in previous Newsletters. Your details have been updated on our database, so you should now be receiving messages through the Texting Service. Any Members of ARCO who are still **NOT** receiving messages through the ARCO Texting Service should ensure that their **current mobile phone number** is recorded on our database. Please forward your mobile number to your Regional Representative or to declancarbery@hotmail.com

Deceased Officers

Ar dheis De go raibh A n-Anamacha

Our condolences to the families and friends of those comrades who passed away since our last newsletter.

Col Peter Daly	16 Dec '22
Comdt Ciaran Spollen	22 Dec '22
Lt Col Peter (Peadar) Hayes	07 Jan '23
Brig Gen Jeremiah (Jerry) Enright	18 Jan '23
Fr Mícheál Mac Gréil SJ	21 Jan '23
Lt Col Peter Archbold	24 Jan '23
Capt John Bourke	24 Jan '23
Comdt Joseph (Joe) Campbell	12 Feb '23
Cannon Michael Murphy	11 Mar '23
Cdr Martin Counihan	14 Mar '23
Rev Fr Patrick Daly	15 Mar '23
Col Tom Murphy	30 Apr '23
Comdt Gus McMenamin	02 May '23
Col Joe Young	06 May '23
Col Seamus (Jim) Condon	14 May '23
Capt Edel Douris-O'Halloran	09 June '23
Capt Shane Ashe	12 June '23
Capt Michael Desmond (Des) Ringrose	26 June '23
Capt Laurence (Larry) Hayes	03 July '23
Comdt Frank Kelly	12 July '23
Lt Col Ultan Lyons	18 July '23
Capt Hugh O'Neill	30 July '23
Lt Col Fergus Marshall	31 July '23

EDITOR'S NOTE

This Newsletter is issued in Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter. The editor welcomes articles or items of interest, or suggestions as to what should be included. If you have any contribution or suggestion please send them to the Editor, Declan Carbery at declancarbery@hotmail.com

For further information, please visit ARCO's Website: <https://iarco.info/> and follow us on LinkedIn under Association of Retired Commissioned Officers, or on Facebook and Twitter, via @ARCOIreland