

**Social  
Democrats**

# Foreign Affairs

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Ireland's Place in Today's World

**Hope** for better.  
**Vote** for better.  
**Vote** Social Democrats.

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## Introduction

Since the foundation of the state Ireland has always engaged in a positive and committed manner in global affairs while remaining proudly militarily neutral.

Our interaction with the nations of the world in an era of increasing globalisation is a critical element in sustaining Ireland's security, and in contributing to our economic growth and the safety and prosperity for our people.

Many of the domestic issues we currently face have their roots abroad, and therefore must be addressed through our foreign policy, including by **promoting and upholding the values of an inclusive, fair, and just society with dignity, respect, and equality for all**; values which define who we are as both a nation and a people.

Issues like migration, cultural conflicts, climate events, and financial pressure on housing (and indeed other public services) are often symptoms of larger global trends and we should use our high international standing to push for positive change around the world.

A culture that promotes human rights and respect for international law is strongly embedded in Ireland. Through our participation in European Union (EU) and United Nations (UN) institutions the Social Democrats are committed to supporting diplomatic efforts **towards peaceful and durable solutions to conflict** in accordance with international law, as well as advocating and participating in **the global struggle against hunger, famine and extreme poverty**.

**The Social Democrats will also support UN and EU peacekeeping operations** to help mitigate the worst effects of conflict on local civilian populations and will seek to provide aid to alleviate hunger, famine, and extreme poverty. As a country, we need to "wage peace" by working with the UN, EU and other international institutions to resolve conflicts that incur incalculable human cost and drive people to flee their homes.

Much of the instability in today's world is propelled by the rapid onset of climate change, widespread hunger, food and water security, poverty, disease and emerging international security and hybrid threats emanating from state and non-state actors. Combatting climate change globally is the only way to prevent extreme weather events that already impact us locally.

**Ireland must work with the international community to ensure preparedness and resilience to respond to the challenges and opportunities** presented today

and to those over the horizon and not yet visible in a rapidly changing and evolving world order.

We must strike the correct balance in our national and international policies, and in the context of our international engagement work, to safeguard Ireland's national security, economic interests, and social and cultural values.

By addressing these issues collaboratively and at their source, we can create a more stable and prosperous society for everyone.

## The European Union

Ireland's road to Europe began in May 1972 when 83 per cent of the Irish electorate voted in favor of joining the European Communities, or what we know today as the European Union (EU). European Union membership still enjoys the overwhelming support of the Irish population.

EU membership has helped transform Ireland into a modern and progressive society, and the areas of Irish life – whether economic, social, cultural or political – that have been advanced by EU membership are many. They include how we work, our ability to travel easily for work or education opportunities, issues of social and economic equality, and environmental protection.

**The Social Democrats are fully committed to keeping Ireland in its rightful place at the center of the European family.**

- We believe EU membership and shared European values are central to our national interests and provide Ireland with a platform to actively promote our foreign policy objectives within a European bloc of friendly nations.
- We will strive to ensure that the European Union promotes Ireland's cultural and social values, national interests, as far as is possible.
- We will endeavour, through the processes and institutions of the EU, to deepen cooperation among member states in the pursuit of peace, prosperity, social justice, and well-being for all EU citizens.
- We will work within the EU framework to promote fundamental human rights, democratic values and institutions, and the rule of law.
- Transparency and accountability are fundamental values to the Social Democrats and we will work to enhance these values where necessary across EU institutions, agencies and bodies.
- Support the creation of EU strategic partnerships outside Europe for the management of common objectives, including food security, energy security, and migration, but only where human rights are being upheld.
- We want to see an EU-funded Search & Rescue Missions in the Mediterranean, and a strengthened humanitarian mandate for Frontex. The EU should have an explicit goal to save lives in the Mediterranean.

## The United Nations

Since joining the United Nations (UN) in 1955, Ireland's diplomats, humanitarian workers, police and military personnel have brought stability and peace to unstable areas of the world and have been among the world leaders in maintaining peace in some of the most insecure regions around the globe.

Ireland is justly proud of our tradition of participation in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, and membership for Ireland continues to be a key component of Irish foreign policy.

The Social Democrats believe Ireland should continue to play its key role as a member of UN in the context of promoting peace, human rights, rule of law, social justice, hunger reduction, dignity and the primacy of diplomacy to resolve conflict.

- We will commit to support the vital work of the United Nations around war and conflict, gender-based violence, human equality, minority rights, clean water, global health, shelter, and food and energy security.
- We will leverage our position to promote partnership and proficiency in mitigating the causes of climate change.
- We will promote and actively support UN initiatives to grow the social democracy and justice ethos for equality of opportunity, human rights, dignity and a peaceful existence for all people.
- Actively support the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs 2030 agenda for sustainable development.
- Advocate for the reform of the UN Security Council to feature a more diverse representation, including amongst permanent members.

## Palestine

The Social Democrats will work closely with international institutions including the EU, UN and others to enhance humanitarian assistance to the people of Palestine and help accelerate a peaceful and enduring resolution to the conflict between Israeli and the Palestinian people.

The Social Democrats utterly repudiate all violence from state and non-state actors directed against the civilian populations of both Israel and Palestine.

We unequivocally condemn Hamas as a terrorist organisation.

In government the Social Democrats will:

- Sustain efforts to ensure accountability for war crimes and human rights abuses, including those committed in the conflict in the Middle East.
- Promote efforts to achieve a two-state solution on the basis of 1967 borders. We believe the two-state solution offers the only prospect of an enduring peace, and we support the creation of a shared capital for the two states in Jerusalem, and the ending of the illegal occupation of Palestinian lands.
- Seek the further recognition of a Palestinian state among our international allies.
- Seek to enact the Control of Economic Activity (Occupied Territories) Bill 2018 and the Illegal Israeli Settlements Divestment Bill 2023.
- Call out publicly the State of Israel's apartheid being exacted on the Palestinian population on a daily basis.
- Join South Africa and pursue a case of genocide at the International Court of Justice, and consider a case against Israel at the International Criminal Court
- Advocate for the suspension of the EU trade deal with Israel.
- Continue to advocate internationally for sanctions against Israel and introduce diplomatic and travel sanctions at a domestic level wherever possible.
- Ensure that weapons of war did not travel through Irish airports or Irish airspace and ban the export of dual use goods to Israel.

## Ukraine

The illegal invasion of Ukraine is the largest attack on a sovereign state in Europe since the end of World War II. The Russian Federation, by its actions, has unhinged the geopolitical and security landscape, potentially for decades, and presaged a new world order where the crime of state aggression replaces a generally accepted rules-based order, underpinned by international law.

The Social Democrats unreservedly condemn the illegal invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation and are committed to:

- Sustaining efforts to ensure accountability for war crimes committed against the people of Ukraine.
- Supporting the supply of non-lethal aid to Ukraine and providing humanitarian assistance to its citizens relocated to Ireland.
- Recognising the territorial integrity of Ukraine as being within the borders identified by international law.
- Supporting the principles of the United Nations Charter to help find a diplomatic solution and enable a lasting peace for the region.

## Global Conflict

The Social Democrats are acutely aware of the spread of global conflict.

Conflict in Syria, Yemen, Libya, Western Sahara, Sahel, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan among many other places brings the usual litany of human rights violations, internal displacement and the movement of vast numbers of the affected populations across international borders, seeking safety and humanitarian assistance.

The Social Democrats will seek to leverage Ireland's history of non-colonialism, our international reputation in peace keeping, and military neutrality, in exhorting the primacy of diplomacy to prevent conflict, and will work to promote the UN Charter as the catalyst for the settlement of international disputes, tackling the root causes of the conflict.



## Irish Neutrality

While Ireland's definition of neutrality is not formally described in Irish law, it has been well-established through precedent and is recognised in EU Treaties, while public support for the continuation of this policy remains strong.

**The Social Democrats believe Ireland should maintain our current form of neutrality**, which can be described as non-membership of military alliances or mutual defence arrangements, while allowing for political alignment and the provisions of non-lethal aid and humanitarian assistance. Ireland's neutrality is a positive position and does not represent international political indifference. It allows us to play a role as neutral arbitrators where appropriate.

Our neutrality informs our active approach to peace-support operations and crisis management, to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, and more. It enables more effective engagement to promote peace, including via the UN.

Crucially, military neutrality means being able to defend and monitor one's own territory. This needs to be reflected in national defence and security policy, and an increased investment in the Defence Forces is necessary so it can do its job.

The Social Democrats are committed to:

- Retaining Ireland's long established policy of military neutrality (non-alignment) as a key element in our Foreign Policy and in line with the current wishes of the majority of the Irish people.
- Ensuring that any major change to our current form of neutrality be tested first via a Citizens' Assembly and possibly by referendum.
- Vocal political opposition to the crime of military aggression, violations of Human Rights, or International Human Rights Law from whatever source.
- Ensuring Ireland is not used as a hub by State or Non-State actors for the passage of military equipment such as weapons, explosive equipment, ammunition etc. into war zones or regions of conflict. A pro-active inspection system to avoid abuse of landing rights at Irish airports is required.
- Requiring all military aircraft requesting overflight of Irish airspace to be compatible with our policy of military neutrality.
- Opposing Irish membership of NATO.
- Increasing funding the Irish Defence forces to allow it to defend and monitor our national territory commensurate with our international obligations.

## The Diaspora

The Social Democrats recognise the importance of the Irish Diaspora and concur with President Michael D Higgins when he said:

‘Our diaspora is one of Ireland’s greatest resources: through the contribution our people make to the nations they migrate to; through the bonds they forge with the peoples of those countries, our migrants have allowed Ireland to have global connections far beyond our size’.

Supporting and consolidating our relationship with the Irish Diaspora spread across the world is something close to the hearts of the Social Democrats. We are committed to growing that relationship and enhancing supports for Irish people living abroad who desire to return home.

## Our Neighbour, Britain

Britain is our closest neighbour and one with which we enjoy a strong connection across a broad range of areas including culture, trade, tourism, a common travel area, the supply of services, and investment opportunities. There is also a significant Irish diaspora permanently residing and working there.

The Social Democrats are committed to maintaining, and where opportunity presents enhancing, our strong bond with the people of Britain. A close political relationship built on mutual respect and collaboration will facilitate the continued growth of prosperity and reciprocal friendship for both our people and our countries.

## Climate Change

Climate Change is a fundamental issue facing Ireland and the rest of the world and one of the greatest challenges of our time. The actions we take, or fail to take, now will affect our country and our planet for generations.

The Social Democrats **appreciate the global dimension to mitigating the effects of climate change** and preventing further environmental damage. We will promote our environmental principles and concerns, as set out in our Environmental, Climate, Nature and Biodiversity policies, outside Ireland through diplomatic channels and via other available avenues of approach as opportunity allows.

The Social Democrats are committed to:

- Promoting adherence to the Paris Climate Agreement and other environmental protections within European institutions.
- Supporting the work of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).
- Reaching the European Commission's current proposals, to more than halve our CO2 emissions by 2030.
- Collaborating with international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on climate change issues compatible with our national objectives.
- Promoting the development of both new and emerging technologies that can help mitigate the effects of climate change and act as enablers in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Supporting Ireland's Embassies and Consulates to act as role models for our environmental principles.

## Irish Aid

**The Social Democrats believe fighting global poverty and hunger should be an integral component to Ireland's foreign policy.** Through implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and a pledge to reach 'the furthest behind first' we can help provide the leadership to reduce global hunger and poverty.

The Social Democrats are committed to:

- Reaching the UN target of allocating 0.7 per cent of national income to official development assistance (ODA) not later than 2030.
- Acknowledging that Ireland's commitment under Agenda 2030 to reach 0.7 per cent of national income by 2030 is separate and distinct from the Climate Finance commitments made in the Paris Agreement in 2015.
- Ensuring that Ireland's domestic response to the Ukraine crisis is additional to current (and future) ODA spending and not diverted from funding for ongoing humanitarian crises.
- Maintaining the poverty-focused, untied, and fully grant-based nature of Irish development aid.
- Continuing Ireland tradition of targeting humanitarian aid in all its formats towards the worlds most deprived and poorest regions.
- Scaling-up humanitarian funding to conflict-affected and fragile states, directing funding that contributes to removing the root causes of crises.
- Supporting the pledge of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to reach 'the furthest behind first' as part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
- Ensuring that Ireland's international development policy and foreign policy more generally has a focus on women's rights.
- Women's Rights programmes are often poorly funded within Aid Programmes and resourcing feminist movements and women's rights organisations is essential to delivering for women and girls' rights.
- Support the development of a new UN-based (as opposed to IMF-based) debt workout mechanism. Excessive debt burdens impede the pursuit of more sustainable economic and environmental models in poorer and developing countries.

## International Tax Justice

Tax policy is crucial for international development. It shapes the capacity of states to raise revenue, fund essential public services, and fulfil their human rights obligations. Without fair and functioning taxation systems, efforts to deliver adequate housing, decent healthcare and quality education, and to tackle poverty and inequality, are badly undermined.

Corporate tax avoidance is a major barrier to tackling poverty in the developing world, with harmful tax practices and 'aggressive tax planning' by companies and wealthy individuals depriving poorer countries of hundreds of billions of dollars per year. It has been estimated that such practices deprive these countries of more than twice the amount they are granted in development aid by the rich world each year.

Ireland's oversized role in the international tax avoidance landscape is well-documented, despite efforts of government to close loopholes. The closure of the infamous 'Double Irish' in 2014 was followed four years later by a move to shut down the so-called 'Single Malt'. However, reports emerged in 2021 suggesting that the Single Malt is very much still alive, and is in fact being used by one of the world's biggest pharma companies to pay an effective corporate tax rate as low as 4 per cent. More needs to be done to ensure that Ireland's role in facilitating tax avoidance for large corporations is reduced and eliminated.

In Government, the Social Democrats will:

- Conduct a new, comprehensive and independent 'Spillover Analysis' of Ireland's tax policies, examining existing anti-avoidance measures, and any potential negative impacts on the economies of developing countries.
- Support the development of a new UN Tax Convention, to design a fairer international tax system and tackle international tax avoidance, to the benefit of both Western and developing countries.
- Take real and tangible action to tackle tax avoidance and profit-shifting by large multinational companies, including the use of the 'Single Malt' scheme and similar structures.
- Support improved transparency rules for all large multinational companies, including registers of beneficial ownership and mandatory public 'country-by-country' reporting, to allow citizens see where multinational companies have business activity and where they pay their taxes

## Business and Human Rights

Corporations wield considerable economic and political influence, and frequently avoid genuine accountability for human rights violations.

Often, intricate corporate structures impede efforts to hold those responsible to account, or hinder efforts to seek justice. Numerous European companies are implicated in human rights violations and environmental damage across the world.

All companies should have a responsibility to respect human rights, workers' rights, and environmental standards wherever they operate. The State should safeguard against human rights violations by businesses and facilitate access to redress through robust policies, laws, and regulations.

In Government, we will support a global treaty on Business and Human Rights, and lobby at EU level to deliver a rigorous Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive on Business and Human Rights.

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