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Elements for a possible LGBTI+ Envoy Role

You requested thoughts on a possible role for an envoy in the area of LGBTI+ issues.

The promotion of LGBTI+ rights and engagement on a wide range of LGBTI+ issues is an established priority in Ireland's foreign policy, with commitments in *The Global Island* (2015) and *A Better World* (2019), as well as other texts such as the Diaspora Strategy (2020). The National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy (2019) identifies five actions for DFA: three relate to the integration of LGBTI+ rights across Ireland's foreign policy and the work of the embassy network (25.1, 25.2 and 25.3); two are in the area of service delivery: engagement with LGBTI+ diaspora communities (25.4) and consular service provision to LGBTI+ persons (26.1). The Department's Equality and Diversity Action Plan (2018) also contains a number of provisions relevant to LGBTI+ issues, and there is a PPU prepared paper on LGBTI+ issues in Irish foreign policy (2019).

Preparation of returns under the National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy reveal that large areas of the Department are engaged in support of these commitments: Political Division, EU Division, Development Cooperation and Africa Division, Irish Abroad Unit, Consular Division and the Passport Office. Regional units and sections and the mission network is also engaged in this work. Corporate Services and Human Resources Divisions are engaged in respect of DFA as an inclusive employer.

While a number of states are active at international level in support of LGBTI+ rights, the journey Ireland has travelled and the extent of change in public attitudes, over a relatively short period while maintaining social coherence and support, provide an entry point for Ireland to make an identifiable contribution to the promotion of LGBTI+ rights and issues.

There are a number of areas where the appointment of an LGBTI+ envoy could support or build on existing commitments and areas of activity. I have set out some options for consideration below. Other issues that require reflection include how a role of this kind might relate to the promotion of Ireland's wider human rights objectives, issues of coherence including in bilateral relations with certain states, and previous experience of appointing envoys to take forward work in specific policy areas. The views of Political Division would be important in this regard, while the views of DCAD would be important in respect of aspects related to international development policy.

Possible elements for consideration for an LGBTI+ envoy role:

- Represent Ireland at international meetings on issues relevant to the promotion of LGBTI+ rights and issues, to raise the profile of Ireland's commitment and engagement;
- Support Ireland's engagement with the UN human rights and development architecture, the Council of Europe, the EU Strategy on LGBTIQ Equality and other multilateral frameworks relevant to the promotion of LGBTI+ rights and issues;

- Engage with similar office-holders from likeminded states on issues relevant to the promotion of LGBTI+ rights and the further advancement of a normative framework;
- Work towards a meeting of LGBTI+ envoys or equivalents from other states to identify areas for collaboration or joint commitment, ideally on a cross-regional basis; such a meeting could include a civil society component.
- Act as a focal point within DFA and maintain an overview of LGBTI+ issues in Ireland's foreign and development policies, and the work of the Department and mission network (the Department's Equality and Diversity Action Plan (2018) suggested establishing a lead unit for LGBTI+ issues in foreign policy and public diplomacy);
- Develop a toolkit and set of guidelines for mission engagement on LGBTI+ issues, building on DCAD work in this area and the Policy Planning Unit paper (2019), tailored to (i) contexts where LGBTI+ persons experience discrimination and/or persecution, and (ii) more supportive contexts;
- Undertake a programme of travel in support of mission network engagement on LGBTI+ issues;
- Engage with Irish LGBTI+ civil society organisations on an all-island basis, on international aspects of LGBTI+ issues; facilitate, via the mission network, knowledge- and experience sharing with LGBTI+ organisations in select locations.
- When sharing Ireland's experience, it would be important to differentiate between a story we tell about ourselves in likeminded contexts, and a narrative we draw from in appropriate ways to support the promotion of LGBTI+ rights in contexts where they are under pressure or absent. When sharing this experience we should acknowledge both progress achieved and steps that remain to be taken, as well as the diversity of lived experience within the LGBTI+ community in Ireland.
- In contexts where LGBTI+ persons are at-risk group engagement by an envoy would necessarily be low-key or private, conducted online or in the safe space of an embassy or consulate.
- If targeted engagement with government authorities is considered, this would be conducted in private in some contexts, while in other contexts public engagement might be considered, depending on the situation. Such interventions would need to be carefully calibrated taking a range of factors into account, in particular the safety and security of the local LGBTI+ individuals and organisations concerned.
- Engage with LGBTI+ diaspora communities, including on issues related to welfare and the specific needs of young and aging LGBTI+ emigrants as subsets of wider diaspora communities;

- Consider the establishment of an informal network of LGBTI+ diaspora figures from a diversity of backgrounds (sport, culture, business, public life) to act as champions within their communities.
- Explore scope to work with LGBTI+ organisations in Northern Ireland to identify how their experience of cross-community organisation might be shared in other contexts;
- Produce an annual report on the work of DFA in the field of LGBTI+ issues.

The following points also arise for consideration:

- How the work of an envoy would relate to the profile and engagement of Ministers in this area.
- How the role of an envoy would relate to Ireland's broader work on human rights, in particular issues of intersectionality (eg LGBTI+ women experience discrimination both as LGBTI+ persons and as women), and coherence with other aspects of our human rights work. The views of Political Division might be sought on this and other human rights aspects.
- The potential that an appointment in this area may give rise to calls for the appointment of an envoy with responsibility for other aspects of human rights, or in other policy areas. There might be value in examining previous experience of appointing envoys to take forward work in specific policy areas.
- The need to take account of contested issues, for example conflicting understandings of the rights of Trans women in some quarters in the context of discussion on women's rights.
- How an envoy would engage with the existing interdepartmental human rights architecture, and whether and how an envoy would interface with domestic policy areas and commitments.
- An increased level of attention to the LGBTI+ record of certain countries may become a factor in broader bilateral relations, within the EU and more broadly.
- Would the envoy have a role to support the Department's work as an inclusive employer, including the Department's Equality and Diversity Action Plan and Human Resources Strategy? (The Equality and Diversity Action Plan envisages appointing diversity champions across DFAT.)

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