



ASSOCIATION OF RETIRED COMMISSIONED OFFICERS

STATEMENT – 10 JULY 2019

REQUIREMENT FOR A STATUTORY DEFENCE FORCES COMMISSION

This statement from the Association of Retired Commissioned Officers (ARCO) is issued in solidarity with Óglaigh na hÉireann, its serving personnel and their families.

In light of the prevailing remuneration, the service conditions, well-being and work-life balance experienced by serving personnel and their families, coupled with the status of the Defence Forces as an unique institution of State, ARCO now urges the Minister for Defence to present formal proposals to Government, establishing without delay a statutory based, permanent and independent Defence Forces Commission to address remuneration (including pensions), service and retention conditions, and the conciliation and arbitration architecture.

ARCO salutes all personnel of the Defence Forces, together with their families, who by applying values of Respect, Loyalty, Selflessness, Courage and Integrity, while serving the citizens of Ireland, continue to successfully execute the defence and security roles assigned by the Government, both at home and overseas.

ARCO, whose membership reflects a significant reservoir of experience and expertise within the realm of defence, contends that the prevailing inability to retain serving personnel, even in the context of a buoyant economy, is destabilising leadership at unit level, is purging corporate military knowledge, is increasing operational and training risks, is impacting negatively on morale, esprit de corps and well-being, is reducing manning levels, resulting in the unprecedented decline of deployable land, air, maritime and cyber capabilities, thus leaving the State, its institutions and citizens, vulnerable in maintaining a stable environment for economic development, and in addressing the threat landscape.

Notwithstanding the Government's endorsement of the recommendations of the Public Service Pay Commission and the associated High Level Implementation Plan, ARCO's previous statements on the grave deterioration of service conditions for personnel of the Defence Forces and their families, and the deployability of strategic and specialised defence capabilities, remain pertinent.

The Government's decision arising from the Public Sector Pay Commission's Report, coupled with the public service pay restoration process, fail to adequately address the adverse effects of the inadequate remuneration and poor service conditions accruing to our colleagues in Óglaigh na hÉireann.

In reality, the Government's limited financial package focuses on the restoration of allowances reduced consequent to the Haddington Road Agreement of 2013 and the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest Acts 2009 - 2015. ARCO notes that the Public Service Pay and Pensions Act 2017 already provides for the restoration of the majority of these allowances on 1st October 2020. The disappointing increase in the Military Service Allowance will have only a marginal effect, if any, on the declining living standards, work-life balance and welfare values endured by serving personnel and their families.



Notwithstanding the reintroduction of the Service Commitment Scheme for Air Corps Flying Officers, ARCO remains deeply concerned with the retention challenges across all ranks in the Army, Air Corps and Naval Service.

82% of the 3,400 personnel exiting the Defence Forces during the period 2014 to 2018 were of a voluntary nature, this trend continues. Of particular concern to ARCO, is that the unacceptable turnover rate for the Army moved from 4.92% in 2014 to 7.27% in 2018, the Air Corps turnover rate moved from 4.24% in 2013 to 8.14% in 2018, and the Naval Service turnover rate moved from 7.23% in 2013 to 14.81% in 2018. This alarming trend continues in 2019. The critical turnover rate identified by the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom is 5%.

ARCO notes the release of the Government's High Level Implementation Plan. Phase 1 must bring closure to the recommendations contained in the Public Sector Pay Commission's report. ARCO asserts that the timely conclusion of Phase 2, which examines core pay, is key to resolving the recruitment and retention challenges in the Defence Forces.

In summary, in order to address the serious retention and remuneration issues that are undermining the Defence Forces capability development and operational readiness, coupled with the weakening morale, well-being and work-life balance of its personnel and their families, ARCO now calls on the Minister for Defence to present formal proposals to Government establishing without delay, a statutory based, permanent and independent Defence Forces Commission.

ARCO's Previous Statements

On 16 September 2018, ARCO released a *Statement of Concern* on the serious deterioration of the service conditions, and the depletion of strategic defence capabilities in the Defence Forces.

On 29 April, 2019, ARCO released another statement in the context of the Respect and Loyalty Parade, which took place on 04 May, in Cork.

Both statements are posted on the Association's website: www.iarco.info

Executive Committee

10 July 2019