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## Oifig an Taoisigh Office of the Taoiseach

5 February, 2014.

Mr. David Begg General Secretary Irish Congress of Trades Unions

Dear David,

Thank you for your letter of 10 January regarding human rights in the Gulf States.

I am aware of the issues which you have raised in your letter and I can assure you that the Government and, in particular, the Tánaiste and his officials are aware of the valuable reports of international civil society organisations who do important work in monitoring the human rights situation around the world.

The promotion and protection of human rights throughout the world is a priority for the Government and this has not changed. However, in order to be effective in addressing human rights concerns, we need to pursue them in the most appropriate way, using the best opportunity to make our case.

Our primary, but not exclusive, focus is on using the international human rights machinery which has been established to monitor implementation of universal human rights standards. Ireland avails of all appropriate opportunities to raise human rights issues in the relevant multilateral fora and this happens in a number of ways.

Ireland engages actively in the United Nations human rights mechanisms and currently holds a seat on the UN Human Rights Council for the period 2013-2015. This provides us with an opportunity to enhance our contribution to the universal protection of human rights. For progress to be made, it is necessary to engage with other Council members, many with different perspectives, and with all UN Member States, to try and build support for what we value.

The Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is the principal UN mechanism whereby the human rights record of each individual member state is publicly examined by



## Oifig an Taoisigh Office of the Taoiseach

(2)

the other members of the Human Rights Council. Ireland actively engages with other countries on specific issues and makes clear and strong practical recommendations to countries wherever we consider them warranted. We do this as a support to the UPR process as a means of improving the human rights situation on the ground and addressing human rights violations wherever they occur.

Cooperation with our European Union partners also provides an important and effective channel through which to promote and protect human rights worldwide. The EU's approach on international human rights issues is informed by the comprehensive EU Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy adopted in 2012. As the Minister with responsibility for these matters, the Tánaiste regularly addresses human rights issues at Ministerial meetings at EU level with Foreign Ministers of third countries.

To be effective in raising human rights issues with other states, it must be in an appropriate way and at the right juncture, so that our concerns are taken seriously. This is necessary so that it remains possible to raise these concerns over the longer term. The principal focus of a trade mission is to encourage business-to-business links and encourage investment and employment opportunities. Meetings during trade missions are primarily to establish relationships and to build trust between parties to enable business to progress. The raising of other issues needs to be carefully considered and judged on a case-by-case basis taking the various factors into consideration.

During the visit to the Gulf, I discussed regional and political issues with the leaders whom I met, including matters pertaining to human rights. During my meeting with Crown Prince Salman in Riyadh, I expressed Ireland's desire, as a fellow member of the UN Human Rights Council, to work more closely with Saudi Arabia on human rights issues. For progress to be made, Ireland will and should work with any country which is willing to engage on human rights issues, regardless of their specific positions and interests.

No country is perfect when it comes to human rights, and each Government has to take responsibility for the promotion and protection of the human rights of its



## Oifig an Taoisigh Office of the Taoiseach

(3)

citizens. Our position on the responsibilities of Governments in relation to the human rights of their citizens is quite clear, and none of the countries that we deal with are in any doubt about our views in this regard.

With kind regards,

Yours sincerely

Enda Kenny, TD

Taoiseach

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