

**PDFORRA Statement to the PAC Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> of October at 11.00**

Good morning Mr Chairman, members of the Committee. I would like to thank you for extending the opportunity to PDFORRA to come here this morning and outline our position in relation to the allowances paid to members of our Association.

PDFORRA represents the 8,000 soldiers, sailors and aircrew of the Permanent Defence Force on all matters concerning pay and conditions. PDFORRA is established under the Defence (Amendment) Act 1990 and specifically DFR S6. PDFORRA negotiates and consults, in the main, through an agreed conciliation and arbitration scheme. Unlike fully fledged trade unions PDFORRA or its members have no right to engage in any form of industrial action whatsoever. Moreover, PDFORRA is prevented from joining the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

PDFORRA members receive very modest levels of pay. In the case of the most common rank that of Private the basic annual rate rises to €34,910 at the top of the scale. In recent years PDFORRA members have been subject to a reduction in the rates of pay and allowances of approximately 6%; a pension related deduction of a similar level and increased tax payments which cumulatively will see some members pay cut by 20%. Many of our members are struggling to balance family budgets, cope with mortgage debts and payments – and now need Family Income Supplement to survive.

The Defence Forces and its members have been delivering significant reform since the mid-1990s and this process is continuing through the Croke Park Agreement. The numbers have dropped from 12,750 in 1996 to an authorised strength of 9,500 today; the number of barracks has reduced from 29 to 14, representing a 50% decrease, and the organisation has re-structured by reducing its administrative and support functions – and dropping to a two brigade structure.

As a proportion of GDP Ireland's defence spending is one of the lowest among the 27 European Union member states at just over 0.5%. The EU average spend as a percentage of GDP is 1.69%.

PDFORRA and its members have delivered everything that has been asked of them under the Croke Park Agreement. This has had significant impact on sections of the membership of the same order as the pay cuts and pension related deductions. For example, the closure of certain barracks and the re-deployment of the soldiers concerned to other posts will see them bear additional travel costs of up €4,000 per annum. This burden will be repeated in the context of the current re-organisation process.

At the heart of the Croke Park Agreement is the deal that pay will not be cut in exchange for co-operation with a modernisation and change agenda. The modernisation and change agenda is being delivered and therefore pay should not be cut – and this should include allowances. No distinction should be made regarding allowances as they are simply part of basic or core pay. This is especially the case given the particular circumstances that apply in the Defence Forces.



The particular circumstances that I refer to are the fact that members of the Defence Forces do not receive overtime or unsocial hour's payments for working additional or unsocial hours. Ordinary members of the Defence Forces who work long and/or unsocial hours are rewarded on many occasions, but not all, by way of allowances.

There are a large number of allowances paid to members of the Defence Forces and this has attracted a lot of media comment. However, many of the allowances are intended to cover the same thing in different circumstances. For example, in most of the Country additional attendance and unsocial hours are rewarded by the payment of Security Duty Allowance; but in the original border units it was rewarded by Border Allowance. When additional attendance or unsocial hours are worked in the context of the States prisons Prison Duty Allowance is paid and when it is worked in the context of the explosive ordnance threat Explosive Ordnance Disposal Allowance is paid. Of course in the Naval Service Patrol Duty Allowance fulfils this function while in the Air Corps Flying Pay is the relevant allowance. When called on to provide aid to the civil authority then Aid to the Civil Authority Allowance may be paid and, similarly, when that aid to the civil authority arises from industrial action Maintenance of Essential Services Allowance may be paid. Other allowances are also paid to compensate for long and/or additional hours of attendance. The allowance bill for all members of the Defence Forces amounts to approximately 8.5% of the total pay bill.

Historically these allowances emerged in circumstances where soldiers, sailors and aircrew were required to work alongside Gardai, Prison Officers, Customs Officials and Local Authority workers who received overtime and unsocial hour's payments. At that time the existing pay system did not provide compensation for additional hours of attendance and the allowances that evolved were an effort to do this without conceding overtime.

There are of course occasions where no additional payments are made for extra attendance or working unsocial hours and those concerned receive no additional payments but may get compensatory time off in lieu. Other allowances paid in the Defence Forces are equally as justified as those already mentioned. Typically they are paid to individuals who carry out the duties of a higher rank or have a specific skill which is not rewarded through the existing pay structure.

It is worth noting that internationally many Armed Forces pay out a substantial number of allowances and that much of this can be attributed to compensation for long and unsocial hours.

In summation, I wish to say that the allowance system in the Defence Force is largely driven by a necessity to reward members of the Defence Forces for working long and or unsocial hours – without conceding the payment of overtime. The allowances are basic pay and something that our members cannot do without given the difficult financial circumstances that they now find themselves in.

Finally, I would like to thank the committee for giving PDFORRA the opportunity to put forward the position of our members in respect of their pay and allowances. Thank you, Mr Chairman and members of the Committee.