

Ireland's Parliament: "If We Really Care about Refugees, We'll Stop Allowing Shannon to Be Used to Bomb Their Homes..."

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Here's my ten minute piece on the current Refugee Crisis, in the Dáil yesterday -

"I too welcome the motion and, even though I speak only for myself, because I am an Independent Deputy, I will be supporting it. Unfortunately, our approach last winter was not quite so positive. We argued about the cancellation of the Mare Nostrum programme and protested to the Europeans that it was not a good idea. When programme was brought to an end, the refugees were never going to stop trying to come across the sea, they were just going to drown and that is what happened to many of them. People were also drowning when the Mare Nostrum programme was working but it was, at least, a big help at the time.

There is no doubt that this is an incredible crisis. On the issue of the refugees coming in, I support Deputy Mac Lochlainn's point about the importance of getting these people into a work situation as quickly as possible. Surely, it would be rational to do this. The manner in which we have dealt with that issue in the past has left too much to be desired.

I still worry about this situation. If we consider what has happened in the past 20 years, the statistics are frightening.

The militarisation of the planet has continued to increase, especially since 2001. In the past five years, there has been a 16% increase in the proliferation of arms in comparison to the previous five years, a frightening development. Of the 60 million people currently displaced, it is estimated 33 million of them are displaced because of war.

What will we do about this? Ireland is a small country but I believe we can play a positive role in this regard. Several weeks ago, Annette Groth, a member of the German Parliament who had been in Hungary watching the plight of the refugees there, told the German Parliament:

Germany is the third biggest weapons exporter in Europe and has good relations with, for instance, Saudi Arabia and Qatar ... Our government is still delivering arms to Saudi Arabia which happens to be supporting ISIS, the jihadists.

We all realise the whole Middle East region has gone crazy but we cannot stay silent on the reason for it. The number of refugees will actually increase, not decrease, unless there is a serious examination of the root causes of it all. For example, Deputy Mac Lochlainn made the point some countries are prepared to help more than others. Two countries not prepared to take in refugees are Saudi Arabia and America, yet the part they are playing in the

destruction of this region is unbelievable. Yemen is being destroyed, with refugees being created every hour there, but no one has said a word about it.

Shannonwatch, through freedom of information requests, got the statistics on the planes coming through Shannon Airport last year. There are planes going through the airport from America to Saudi Arabia with all kinds of arms and most likely cluster bombs, which are being used in Yemen. We are allowing Shannon Airport to be used by the American Government and the arms industry to bring arms to the Middle East region to cause havoc. Bombs are falling on innocent people's homes and they are being driven out of them but we are not stopping it. It is great we sent two boats to the Mediterranean and it is to be commended that we are prepared to take in refugees but how can we continue to allow Shannon to be used for as a US military base? If the Minister for Justice and Equality did nothing else for the rest of her time in government before the election, it would be wonderful if she took a positive decision on this issue, as it would mean so much. We cannot possibly defend our facilitation with what is happening.

Those fleeing to Europe now are fleeing to countries which sold the arms that caused the havoc and displacement in the first place. The Russians have now started to bomb Syria, making them as culpable as the Americans. Bombs do not solve problems; they create them. The French and British cannot wait to get in there more. The region is a minefield now. They have been training rebel groups to fight Bashar al-Assad. While I would not defend Assad for one minute, the alternative is worse. The ISIS crowd are flourishing because of what is happening. It is crazy what they are like. Bad as Assad is, his is one of the last multicultural governments in the region. His biggest crime is that he is independent of America and Israel. I accept he is guilty of many crimes against his own people over the past five years. He should be tried for war crimes, the same as the likes of Blair, Bush and Obama for what they have been involved in.

I make no excuses for Assad or the Russians but Ireland has an opportunity to play a positive role. We are an island, a small country, but it does not stop us from having a real and strong neutral voice for peace. We cannot start talking about peace, however, while we continue to allow Shannon Airport to be used as a US military base. That is the height of hypocrisy. Up to 2.5 million US troops have gone through Shannon since 2001. The amount of arms that we allow through with permits on civilian planes is astronomical. We refuse to search military planes that land at the airport. When people are in opposition, they say we should search the military planes in Shannon. When they get into government, however, they say they have assurances from America that all is well. All is not well.

Deputy Clare Daly and I had three days in court in Ennis recently. Witnesses came forward who were working in Shannon to testify they saw arms on military planes which is illegal. Still our Government does not want to look into this. The judge accepted the bona fides of the testimonies of these individuals. He ended up fining us in the end, which was irrational given his own arguments but that is a different issue.

Will we look at the Shannon issue and stop helping one country bomb another? It would mean so much. Can one imagine visiting people in the Middle East region and watching bombs falling on the houses beside them, looking to kill someone involved military activity but wiping out women and children? Can one imagine sitting there knowing the bombs could have come through Shannon before they were dropped? What does it say about us that we can tolerate this?

The manner in which the world operates has never been as disappointing. The arms industry, along with the pharmaceutical industry, is one of the two largest industries in the world. One cannot get elected President of America without the support of the arms industry. It will cost Hillary Clinton \$2 billion just to run for president, which is a lot of money. One needs the arms industry's support to run for President of America in a serious manner. The end result is payback. Bombs have to be dropped on people to support the arms industry and keep it thriving. We are complicit because we choose to turn a blind eye to Shannon Airport being used as a US military base. We should be ashamed of ourselves."

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