

Celebrating 100 years of Ireland-Uganda friendship

In a world as fast-moving and unpredictable as the one we are in, it is nice to know there are a few certainties and celebrations upon which we can depend.

One of those is St Patrick's Day. Every March 17 is an occasion that Irish people, and people of Irish heritage, will celebrate all over the world, including here in Uganda. For over 100 years, Ireland and Uganda have shared a continuous friendship.

In that time, Irish people and institutions have contributed significantly to Uganda in many fields, including education, healthcare, culture and business. Ugandan people have played an integral role in Ireland's development, including through vibrant civil society networks and multilateral partners. It is through these partnerships that Ireland has transformed from a poor, agrarian state to a high-value knowledge-based economy.

For our small island, from which so many people emigrated throughout our history, St Patrick's Day is a global celebration of history, culture, connections, shared values and an opportunity to share our story.

We understand the challenges Uganda and many countries

face around inclusive development, hunger and poverty because these experiences were part of our history too. Though Ireland's story of sovereignty is now more than 100 years old, it is only in the last half a century – and in the 53 years since we joined the European Union, to be more precise – that our economy has grown and our society has become more tolerant, more equal and more inclusive.

This July, we will assume the presidency of the Council of the European Union, and for six months, we will lead in steering the European agenda. Ireland has always played

an active role in shaping the European Union (EU), just as Europe has so profoundly shaped Ireland. We will prioritise strengthening the European Union's competitiveness and relations with Africa and deepening our EU single market during our presidency this year. This, after all, is a union in which Ireland feels very much at home. Eighty-two per cent of the Irish people support our EU membership, one of the highest figures for any EU member state.

Ireland will take on the mantle of the presidency at a juncture when global challenges have rarely looked so formidable.

Our European neighbourhood is under threat, and some continue to undermine international law, placing us all at risk. Yet, these are challenges that Uganda and Ireland

MAGS GAYNOR



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know well. Our people, for many years, fought for their essential rights and the freedom of every country to choose its own destiny.

Our regions have experienced the brutal legacy of war and the destructive impact of narratives intended to divide our communities.

Our people understand, perhaps more than most, that peace is not a destination but an active and enduring journey.

None of this is easy work. Conflict resolution is never straightforward, or without difficult compromises – as the Irish poet WB Yeats said: "Peace comes dropping slow." We also know that even countries which want peace must ensure they are ready to face threats from those who don't. For Ireland, a militarily neutral country, this is why we have increased defence spending by 43% since 2020 and announced the most significant programme of capital investment in our defence forces in the history of our state. Our ambition is a safe and prosperous Ireland, helping to shape a competitive and innovative Europe.

In our 30 years of diplomatic relations, it is these values and experiences that we have shared with Uganda. Nowhere is this collaboration clearer than in Karamoja, where, for over 20 years, Irish investment has had a transformative impact. Ireland has consistently sought to address the low levels of access, retention and competition in primary and secondary schools, and even in universities.

Nowadays, across the

country, educational trends have seen remarkable progress. Education, alongside open and inclusive civic spaces have an invaluable role to play in Uganda's future.

The deep friendship between our countries is built on people-to-people links, with our populations standing side-by-side as we walk towards our shared future. In an increasingly complex world and in the face of humanitarian crises and challenges to the multilateral system, Ireland remains fully committed to our obligations. While others may step back, Ireland remains dedicated to our values, our objectives and our friends.

At a time of so much turbulence, there is strength in Irish stability and friendship. Predictability rarely makes for dramatic breaking news – but it can produce a great location to invest, visit, study and do business. This is Ireland in 2026 – a country with lots of challenges, domestically and internationally, but also one well-placed to lead a strong national and European response, learning from our past and working with our friends. An ambition worth toasting this St Patrick's Day!

The writer is the Irish Ambassador to Uganda

