

Uganda, Ireland share

The world stops on March 17 to celebrate St. Patrick's Day. He is Ireland's patron saint and created such an impact through his ministry in Ireland that the day is now synonymous with Irish culture. This year, the Irish Ambassador to Uganda, **Dónal Cronin** shares his thoughts on the day and other issues of bilateral concern between both countries with Umaru Kashaka and Miria Sidney

What are some of the enduring values which St Patrick espoused, which you think Ugandans would do well to emulate?

In my view, Uganda is already emulating Patrick. St Patrick was an immigrant originally from Wales who found himself forced to work in Ireland. And he overcame those difficult conditions to become a leader and now our national saint with our national day named after him.

Uganda has done a good job in receiving many refugees over the last number of years. And I think there are lessons for us all, including in the European Union, in terms of Uganda's generosity in the way it has managed the refugee inflow.

St Patrick also taught peace and co-existence and the role that Uganda plays in regional peace and security is critical. The mediation in Burundi, engagement in South Sudan and the peace-keeping force in Somalia are positive and necessary engagements by this Government which we wish to encourage to be sustained.

How have you found Uganda as a country?

Well, this is my second time in Uganda. I was here for almost seven years working in the Irish Embassy from 2003 to 2009.

Then I was fortunate enough to come back to Uganda in 2013 as Chargé d'Affaires and then ambassador, so Uganda for me and my family is more like our home. We have enjoyed being in Uganda, working in Uganda and for me representing my country in Uganda.

And the partnerships that we have in Uganda with the Government, with other actors, our contacts, our people-to-people links between our two countries has made this an interesting and dynamic posting.

How would you then describe the relationship between Uganda and Ireland?

The relationship between Uganda and Ireland is strong and vibrant. We have had an embassy in Uganda since 1994. Ireland and Uganda are strong allies on issues that we are mutually concerned about. On the international stage, we co-operate on issues, for

example, to do with nuclear disarmament, the sustainable development goals which the foreign affairs minister, Sam Kutesa, was responsible for negotiating as the President of the UN General Assembly.

Kutesa had to pick two countries to co-facilitate that process of negotiation and he picked Kenya next door, and Ireland. That is another indication of the strong co-operation we have with Uganda. We also share views on issues such as the United Nations Security Council reform; and peace-keeping is a strong element of both of our foreign policies.

We also have many elements in our history which are shared with Uganda. Ireland too was colonised, we too had famine in our recent history, and we too suffered from a great degree of conflict and instability, which we have emerged out of, just like Uganda.

What is important now, when peace is achieved, is dealing with the past, building on reconciliation, and planning for the future ahead.

Where do you see the relationship between Uganda and Ireland going?

We have great plans for developing our relationship with Uganda. That is why in July last year, our two governments signed a memorandum of understanding. The memorandum of understanding sets out the basis for our partnership for the coming five years.

We want to boost trade and investment between our two countries. We want to continue to partner on poverty reduction programmes that we are supporting in Uganda where we are contributing about 17m Euros per annum, with a strong focus on Karamoja, where poverty is most deeply entrenched.

We want to build on the links between our two countries. We provide visa and consular services here. We want to engage politically with Uganda on important issues of regional peace and security and domestically with regard to the follow up, for instance, from the European Union (EU) Election Observation Mission report relating to the February 2016 elections.

What does Ireland derive from its partnership with Uganda?

In our view, our partnership here is mutually beneficial. It is a two-way street and what Ireland gains from that is as important as what Uganda is gaining. One of the areas, for example,

is that of trade. At the moment, trade between our two countries is quite modest, at around 16m Euros per annum — so we want to grow that. We see there are great opportunities for attracting more investment from Ireland, more trade links as well as more export markets for Uganda's produce in Ireland.

So you are working hard to try and promote that. How?

We are partnering with the Uganda Investment Authority, looking at the investment climate. We have an Irish business network, which is active and trying to encourage investors, share information and co-ordinate.

And of course, we are also an active member of the European Union (EU), one of Uganda's biggest trading partners, where our trade relations are equitable.

The EU is Uganda's main export market, with a share of 26% of total exports. If you look at the Irish economy, we are a small, open economy on the edge of Europe surrounded by water. We have focused on some critical niche areas, which are now forming the bedrock of our economic growth — tourism, agro-processing, the pharmaceutical industry, aviation and information technology.

This has enabled us to be among the fastest growing economies in the EU. We believe there are many lessons from this that we can share with Uganda.

How do you see Uganda's investment climate?

Uganda has a favourable investment climate, with an abundance of many opportunities. There are, however, areas that need to be worked on. We do have surveys such as those on 'Doing Business'. We see from those that there are improvements that can and have been made: having

good accountability, strong institutions and strong emphasis on the rule of law. One area for example that we are working with the Uganda Investment Authority on is the issue of investor aftercare.

How would you convince Ugandans who may not be aware that there are many investment opportunities in Ireland?

Well, there are many. We are as I say an open economy, dynamic and vibrant. We

have in Ireland a number of areas that we do try to raise awareness on including here in East Africa, for example, in the sphere of education. If somebody is looking for the country to study their masters and PhDs, then Ireland is one of the best places to go in terms of quality of life, affordability, use of the English language and in terms of a strong reputation that Irish qualifications have anywhere in the world.

But also Ireland is a market. It is part of the EU and we have a common market. It is our hope that the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the East African Community (EAC), which I know has been delayed for some time eventually comes to fruition.

What in your view has caused delays in signing the EPA?

Well, the Economic Partnership Agreement has been a long time in gestation now and we are aware that one or two countries in this region have concerns about the final signature of the agreement. We hope this can be resolved soon.

The EPA will provide a predictable and uniform trade scheme for all EAC members that respects their customs union and preserves duty-free and quota-free access to the EU market for all of them, including Uganda. The evidence is clear that the EPA is going to be good for Uganda and its people and it is going to be good for Europe.

What has been the impact of your support in the various sectors?

Well, the impact is there and if the impact was not there, we would not be investing in Uganda. I calculate that between 1994 when we first opened our embassy and today, we have invested about 500m Euros in Uganda through

our development co-operation programme. The results are quite evident.

For example, in terms of our current priority, Ireland is supporting the provision of the senior citizens' grant to over 165,000 people in Uganda over the age of 65 and in Karamoja over the age of 60.

This has proven to have a direct benefit on poverty in those villages in terms of healthcare and support for school-going children.

SAGE, as it is known, is a programme that is working and that we are proud to be associated with along with DfID and our partners in the Government.

We also see that new HIV infections have reduced in Uganda from 163,000 in 2011 to 83,000 in 2015. However, we need to work hard to bring it down to zero. This requires renewed vigour, and more financing from the Government to sustain the response, for example through the HIV/AIDS Trust Fund that is now enabled by law.

Another example is the Democratic Governance Facility, which Ireland is currently chairing. This is a basket of eight donors and through that programme, we are providing legal aid services to over 130,000 people in 74 districts of Uganda.

Karamoja for us is a key focus. We have built and rehabilitated 11 secondary and 21 primary schools. We have constructed dormitories for girls and boys to support their access to education. We have provided bursaries for over 1,500 girls and boys — and the impact of that is very clear to be seen.

Many of those supported over the years are now working in the area. Those are the types of results that drive our partnerships forward, but there is still work to be done.

How can Uganda's social protection system be improved?

The social protection system is the one that provides the essential safety net for those who are disadvantaged or marginalised to be able to meet their needs. The senior citizens' grant is a fantastic programme and the government of Uganda has seen clearly the economic impact it is having on the ground.

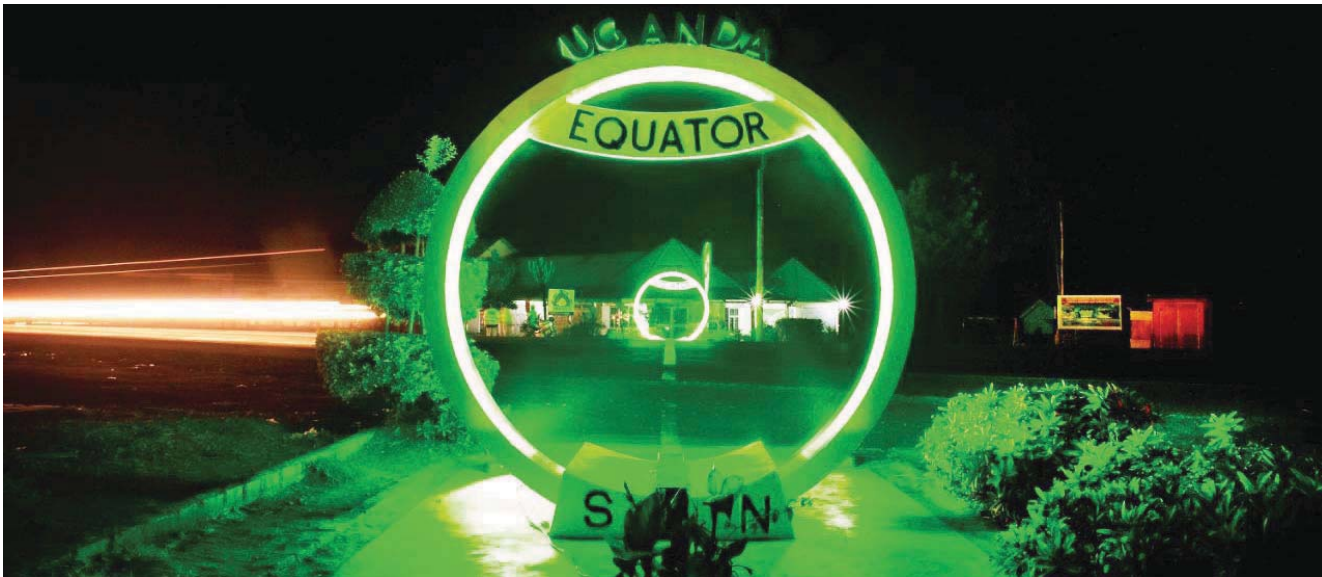
Where I would say there is room for improvement is for the Government to allocate more and better domestic financing of the programme to sustain it, and to ensure it has a lasting impact on the ground.

Of all areas that need intervention in Uganda,

FOR OVER 20 YEARS, WE HAVE BEEN ENGAGING AND INVESTING IN HIV PREVENTION, EDUCATION, SOCIAL PROTECTION AND GOOD GOVERNANCE



similarities in history – Cronin



The equator monument in Uganda has been made green as part of Ireland's global campaign

why did you choose the ones you have talked about?

We went for those areas because we concentrated on what we know best as Ireland. For over 20 years, we have been engaging and investing in HIV prevention, education, social protection and good governance. We also invest in those areas because we strongly believe that investment in those areas is necessary for economic growth to be equitable and to be sustainable.

Uganda needs roads, railways, dams and infrastructure. You have a target of achieving middle-income country status which is laudable, but we know from our own history in Ireland that unless you invest in education, health and wellbeing of the population, then economic growth will not follow.

You need to have people healthy enough to use the railways, trade and invest. And so we strongly believe education and health are key areas of Uganda's economy not to be seen as mere service delivery, but key areas of the economy that require investing. If you invest in those, the rate of return will be manifold.

Do you think if Uganda focused on those areas, it could achieve a middle-income status by 2020?

I think investment in health and education is a key part of achieving middle-income country status, but it is not the only ingredient. There are many things which need to happen for that level of growth to occur. I mentioned the infrastructure and the overall macroeconomic environment. Uganda, like any country, is exposed to global economic

conditions.

Prices of commodities can go up or down. In Ireland, we are faced with the challenge of Brexit and now that has a potential to impact on our economy. So there are many things which need to be put in place for Uganda to be able to achieve its target of middle-income country status.

Talking of Brexit, how is it going to change relations with Ireland and what is the future going to look like?

Brexit is top of the agenda of the Government of Ireland. We are using every opportunity to highlight Ireland's unique concerns. The UK and Ireland have a strong shared history and great cordial relations, after a sometimes troubled history.

In terms of trade, friendship, family ties and our common travel areas, our relations with the UK are strong. One of our priorities in the forthcoming Brexit process is to minimise the impact on trade and our economy in Ireland.

We also would like to maintain a common travel area between the UK and Ireland, and to ensure that the border between Ireland and Northern Ireland remains seamless. It is important for us to protect the Northern Ireland

peace process.

And we want to influence the future of EU and remain a steadfast member. The EU membership remains central to the success of our open, competitive economy and has been the foundation for much of the social progress we have made over the last four decades. So it is an important period for us and it is probably our top most foreign policy priority for the coming number of years.

We are living in difficult times, especially in regard to climate change and its effects globally. How is Ireland addressing itself to that challenge and how is it working in partnership with Uganda to mitigate effects of the challenge?

Climate change is a huge global and shared challenge. We also see from the evidence that the countries that least contributed to climate change are the ones that are mostly impacted by its harmful effects. That includes Uganda.

Our work in Karamoja is very much fitting within the climate change response to ensure that we can support resilience, preparedness and mitigation measures. Ireland is an important member of EU. We have a shared and strong commitment to implement the Paris Agreement of 2015.

Uganda has been at the forefront and we have supported its efforts in so doing and in providing leadership. For example, Ireland co-funded the National Climate Change Resource Centre in Uganda, which opened in 2015.

As you mark St. Patrick's Day, what message do you have for the Irish

living in Uganda and to Ugandans?

I would like to wish everyone a very happy Saint Patrick's Day. This is a day for celebrating being Irish, for reaching out to our friends, including those in Uganda. It

is a day when the world goes green with our national colour, and we have even greened the equator monument in Uganda again this year as part of our global campaign.

I want to thank everyone in Uganda for the great

collaboration that we have had and I am looking forward to another successful year in building on the strong ties that exist between our two countries, strong ties that will deliver much of mutual benefit to all of us.

Congratulations to the Irish Community in Uganda



A community worker plants a tree during a Tullow Sponsored Tree Planting initiative in Hoima

On the occasion to mark **St. Patrick's Day**, Tullow Oil congratulates the Irish Community, for their support to Agriculture and Skills Development initiatives in the Lake Albert Region through Irish Aid. Supporting communities to improve their livelihoods in a sustainable manner is a key objective of Tullow's philosophy of Shared Prosperity.

UGANDA HAS A FAVOURABLE INVESTMENT CLIMATE, WITH AN ABUNDANCE OF MANY OPPORTUNITIES