



Ireland

Defence Forces chief welcomes response to sexual harassment revelations

No place for 'failure to act on any form of inappropriate behaviour' – Lt General Seán Clancy

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Defence Forces Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Seán Clancy said he was conscious that he was taking up his appointment at a time of emerging from the pandemic and awaiting the report of the commission for the Defence Forces. Photograph: Defence Forces

Anne Lucey Killarney

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Newly appointed Defence Forces Chief of Staff Lt General Seán Clancy has welcomed the independent review and the interim measures including the confidential contact person announced by Minister for Foreign Affairs Simon

Coveney in the light of the recent revelations on sexual harassment of women in the defence forces.

Lt General Clancy knew he spoke for the vast majority of men and women in the defence forces in saying “there is no place for any type of abuse or failure to act on any form of inappropriate behaviour, towards any individual, within the defence forces.”

Many instances brought to light in the recent Women of Honour documentary were historic, “but many are not”, the chief of staff said, adding he had listened to some distressing and unacceptable service experiences in the three weeks since that documentary on RTÉ.

Speaking in Killarney on his first official engagement he said he was conscious that he was taking up his appointment at a time of emerging from the pandemic and awaiting the report of the commission for the Defence Forces which would set out “a new pathway for the Defence Forces out to 2030 and beyond.”

Mark Keane, president of PDFORRA, said the shocking and harrowing revelations in the recent programme on the Women of Honour Programme on RTÉ had been made by women no longer with the Defence Forces

“They feel empowered now because they are no longer serving in the Defence Forces,” the president said.

“Nobody who has or is serving within the Defence Forces has any confidence in the reporting mechanisms available to them to address this behaviour,” Mr Keane said.

These failings were highlighted “continually” by PDFORRA but nothing meaningful had changed.

“PDFORRA as their representatives, would continue to advise serving members to go outside the organisation to get the help they need, until there is a robust system operating within the Defence Forces to investigate and sanction those involved.

“Whenever PDFORRA had provided assistance to members who feel that have experienced situations as outlined in the Women of Honour programme, our

immediate response is to advise them to contact the proper authorities.

However the system is broken, he said.

“We have asked the Military and the Department to fix it but nothing has changed.

Until there is a robust system operating within the Defence Forces to investigate and importantly, sanction those involved, those remaining in service will not engage and we, as their representatives, will continue to advise them to go outside the organisation to get the help they need,” the president said.

Later on Wednesday, the president and supreme commander of the Defence Forces, Michael D Higgins is also expected to address the issue, and call for an end to all bullying and all harassment on gender, race; ethnicity and sexuality in the defence forces.

On Tuesday, the opening day of the conference, PDFORRA general secretary Gerard Guiney said the issue of harassment had to be addressed by the review to retain numbers of women in the defence forces.

Just 7 per cent of the entire personnel across army, navy and air force are female according to figures from the Defence Forces Press Office.

Issues of sexual harassment and bullying of women in the Defence Forces will have to be addressed if the organisation is to retain and attract female members, the general secretary of the Permanent Defence Forces Other Ranks Representative Association said.



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