

Discurso del Embajador de España en Dublín

“Good evening. I am very pleased to welcome you all today to the residence of the Spanish Embassy to celebrate a very special occasion, which marks yet another important step in the context of the increasingly close and deep relationship between Ireland and Spain.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Conor O’Boyle, for his company here today, together with Brigadier General Colm Campbell, Brig. General Michael Beary and Officers from the Irish Defence Forces. Families and friends are also very welcome. I would also like to acknowledge the presence here this evening of Captain Víctor Díaz del Río, Defence Attaché to this Embassy, who has travelled from London to mark the importance of this event.

I have the special honour to host this simple ceremony and to present the Cross of Military Merit with White Distinction to two Irish Officers, Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Ryan and Company Sergeant Mitchel Bohan, whose model behaviour and extraordinary courage make them worthy of the Award and should be a matter of pride for the Army they serve.

The Cross of Military Merit is intended to reward and recognise members of the Armed Forces individually for outstanding actions and service. It can also be awarded to civilians who have performed in a meritorious way in relation to National Defence. It is awarded by the Spanish Department of Defence.

The Cross of Military Merit, with White Distinction, is awarded for outstanding acts or services performed during missions, ordinary or extraordinary, commissioned to the Armed Forces.

On 24th June 2007, having finished their patrol in the UNIFIL Eastern Sector, a Spanish patrol formed by two armoured vehicles was on its way to its Base in the Lebanese town of Marjayoun when they were struck by a huge explosion set off by a device. The high temperature reached made the ammunition in the vehicle explode as well, causing six casualties and two injured among the paratroopers; in these circumstances, putting out the fire was an almost impossible task.

An Irish patrol formed by Lieutenant Colonel Stephen Ryan and Company Sergeant Mitchel Bohan, who happened to be travelling on the same road about

700 meters from the incident, decided to set to out to investigate when they saw the smoke. They quickly assessed the situation and, risking their own lives, they approached the armoured vehicle with their extinguishers to try and put out the fire. There were constant explosions from the ammunition carried by the armoured vehicle, but the Irish officers continued their efforts to put out the fire and helped to evacuate the injured to the Spanish Base using their own vehicle.

We are presenting these awards to honour and reward these officers who so truly deserve them. We are doing so as a testimony of gratitude and admiration from the Spanish Army to Lieutenant Colonel Ryan and Company Sergeant Bohan who carried out this heroic action. We also wish to recognise the altruistic work that military personnel do in Peace Missions deployed throughout the five continents.

In this context, I should like to stress that Ireland and Spain are strongly committed to the UN and are actively engaged in its peace keeping operations around the world. Allow me to mention that Spain has recently been elected by the UN General Assembly to the Security Council where she will be occupying a non-permanent seat in 2015-16. From this position Spain will look forward to cooperating with Ireland in all matters of mutual interest and in peace keeping in particular. We are very grateful to Ireland for her support to the Spanish candidacy for this election to the Security Council.

This is not the first time that the Irish Defence Forces have been honoured by Spain for heroic acts safeguarding Spanish lives. In 1990, Michael Quinn and Paul Kellett, members of the Irish Naval Service, were decorated for their heroic rescue of a Spanish trawler crew. Michael Quinn sadly lost his life in the attempt and Paul Kellett was badly injured.

So let's celebrate today not only the admirable courage and generosity shown by Lt. Colonel Ryan and Company Sergeant Bohan, but also the special relationship that both our countries have enjoyed throughout the centuries.

I will now proceed to bestow the Cross of Military Merit to Lt. Colonel Stephen Ryan and Company Sergeant Mitchel Bohan."