

Press release: NI0 Ministers mark 102nd anniversary of the battle of the Somme

The Rt Hon Karen Bradley MP will represent the UK Government in France, whilst her Ministerial colleague, Shailesh Vara MP will attend the commemorative service at Belfast City Hall.

The Secretary of State will lead tributes at the Royal British Legion service at Thiepval and the Somme Association services at the Ulster Tower and Guillemont. She will pay tribute to those soldiers from the volunteer Divisions raised in Ireland who made the supreme sacrifice on the battlefields of the Somme in 1916.

Ahead of travelling to today's ceremonies in France, Karen Bradley said:

I am truly honoured to be in this most beautiful part of France to represent Her Majesty's Government at today's ceremonies to commemorate the Battle of the Somme. It is important that we remember all those from across the island of Ireland who gave their lives for our freedom during the First World War. The Battle of the Somme in particular has an indelible link with Northern Ireland given the remarkable bravery shown, and the scale of the sacrifice made, by the 36th (Ulster) Division and the 16th (Irish) Division.

We are indebted to organisations such as the Royal British Legion and the Somme Association and Somme Heritage Centre who work tirelessly to ensure that their heroic contribution is always remembered.

Across the UK and Ireland we continue to commemorate the wider decade of centenaries, in which we have learned about our shared history, in a spirit of mutual respect and inclusivity. This year in November we will mark the centenary of Armistice and the ending of the Great War, and we will take a further step on our path towards a shared future.

It is difficult for us to comprehend the horror that these men faced as they went forward into battle, but their contribution and sacrifice was immense and we should never, ever forget it.