

**Irish Girl Guides press release**

9 February 2017

**Former Irish Girl Guides Chief Commissioner awarded  
second highest merit by French President**

**- Jillian van Turnhout receives Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite –**

Irish Girl Guides congratulates its former Chief Commissioner, Jillian van Turnhout, on being awarded the prestigious *Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite* by the President of the French Republic.

The *Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite* - the second highest national order of France - was presented to Ms van Turnhout by the Ambassador of France to Ireland, H.E. Jean-Pierre Thébault, last night at an event in his Dublin residence.

The award was made in recognition of van Turnhout's work in strengthening children's rights and for her engagement with civil society organisations across Europe.

Van Turnhout, who is a former senator, was Chief Commissioner of the Irish Girl Guides (IGG) from 2001 to 2007. She continues her involvement in the organisation in her role as District Commissioner and a Trainer on Code of Ethics. She chaired its Programme Review Steering Group, which resulted in the introduction of a brand new programme across all age ranges in 2015.

The current IGG Chief Commissioner, Helen Concannon, who attended the event, said: "We are delighted to congratulate Jillian on the acknowledgement by another country of her tireless work for young people. She epitomises what the Baden Powells, the founders of Guiding and Scouting, meant when they said, 'Girls should be brought up to be comrades and helpers, not to be dolls. They should take a real and not a visionary share in the welfare of the nation.'

"We are proud of all Jillian has achieved and all she continues to achieve through her involvement with Girl Guides," she added.

Ms van Turnhout said she was immensely honoured to be recognised by the President of the French Republic. "I strongly believe we must equip girls and young women, across the world, to achieve their full potential. This is why I continue to be a proud and active member of the Irish Girl Guides," she said.

"As a global movement, Guiding has given me life skills and instilled a value system that keeps me striving for a better, fairer and more inclusive society. Thank you to everyone who has supported me, and continues to support me, on my journey."

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**Contact:**

Fiona Murdoch, Communications Officer, Irish Girl Guides. Tel: 085 8570565.

**Photo caption:**

Jillian van Turnhout (centre) pictured at last night's award ceremony in the French ambassador's residence with from left: Irish Girl Guides Chief Commissioner Helen Concannon, Guide Leader Aisling O'Boyle, Irish Girl Guides' Chief Executive Officer Linda Peters and Irish Girl Guides' Eastern Region Regional Commissioner Fiona Walsh. Ms van Turnhout was awarded the prestigious *Chevalier de l'Ordre National du Mérite* – the second highest national order of France.



**Notes for editors:**

Irish Girl Guides has approximately 12,000 members. Ladybirds are age 5-7, Brownies age 7-10, Guides age 10-14 and Senior Branch members age 14-30. Guiding started in Ireland in 1911 and operates throughout the 26 counties with 1,800 volunteer leaders providing an informal educational programme of fun and challenging activities that foster confidence and leadership skills in girls and young women, enabling them to develop to their full potential and to become responsible citizens of the world. Girls can choose to earn a wide range of badges, including Arts and Crafts, Community Action, Cultural Diversity, Disability Awareness, Drug Awareness, Online Surfer, Science Investigator and Global Traveller.