

**MINUTES OF THE 29TH MEETING OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE TWO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS
ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND
(THE JOINT COMMITTEE)**

**Held on Thursday 8th October 2009 in Dublin at the offices of the
Irish Human Rights Commission**

Present

IHRC

Commissioners

Maurice Manning, President (Chair)

Suzanne Egan

Michael Farrell

Alice Leahy

Helen O'Neill

Lia O'Hegarty

Staff

Eamonn MacAodha, Chief Executive

NIHRC

Commissioners

Monica McWilliams, Chief Commissioner

Ann Hope

Tom Duncan

Colm Larkin

Colin Harvey

Staff

Peter O'Neill, Chief Executive

In attendance

Brian Gormally, Joint Contractor

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Olive Braiden, Tom O'Higgins, Rosemary Byrne, Gerard Quinn, Robert Daly, Katherine Zappone, Roger Sweetman, William Binchy, Conleth Bradley, Alan Henry, Geraldine Rice, and Daphne Trimble.

2. Minutes of the 28th Meeting

These were agreed and signed as a true record.

3. Matters Arising

Alice Leahy updated the Committee on the situation regarding confidential information on homeless people. It was noted that vacant property might be used for homeless people and that tenders would be going out for companies to take on the provision of suitable housing who might receive personal information on individuals. The situation was being monitored. In Northern Ireland it was noted that a Homeless Bill was going through the Northern Ireland Assembly but there was no similar provision proposed.

4. Seminar on a Charter of Rights

The draft programme for the seminar to be held on 6 November was discussed and approved. There were 200 invitees drawn from lists provided by the two Commissions and UCD. It was noted that the seminar consisted of academic papers in the morning followed by input from civil society in the afternoon. The seminar was to be regarded as part of a phased approach with more intensive discussions with policy makers and politicians to come later. The seminar would be discussed with Northern Irish political parties at an upcoming round table hosted by the NIHRC.

It was noted that the intention was to publish the proceedings which would be part of a continuing consultation. In the light of the discussion it was felt that it would be inappropriate to circulate the pre-seminar consultation paper that had been discussed at previous meetings. It would be re-examined after the seminar. It was noted that the President and Chief Commissioner would be attending the British-Irish Parliamentary Assembly in Swansea the following week which would provide an opportunity for general discussion on the subject.

5. Report of Racism Sub-Committee

Michael Farrell reported on the meeting of the Sub-Committee that had just taken place. The establishment of the Roundtable on Trafficking by the Irish Government, the participation of the IHRC and the interest in the model of the NIHRC were noted.

It was noted that the IHRC made a detailed examination of the draft Consultation Paper on the Migrant Workers Convention and had proposed a number of changes in the paper before the Sub-Committee. These changes were all regarded as helpful and strengthened the paper. The Joint Committee approved the consultation going ahead on the reported basis.

It was noted that the sub-committee had discussed a speech given by José Barroso to the European Parliament when seeking re-appointment as President of the European Commission. In this he had pledged to appoint two new Commissioners, one for Justice, Fundamental Rights and Civil Liberties and one for Internal Affairs and Migration. It was noted that these appointments could provide an opportunity for the two Commissions to voice relevant concerns, leading up to the ratification of their appointments by the Parliament. In discussion it was further proposed that the two Commissions could put forward proposals on the structure and programme of the two new Directorates and the remit of the Commissioners. It was agreed that Eamonn MacAodha and Colm Larkin would cooperate in drafting such a paper. This could be put to the two Governments and to MEPs from the two jurisdictions. It was further agreed to write to Sr. Barroso and congratulate him on his initiative. It was further noted that the speech also made reference to a Women's Charter.

6. Activity reports

NIHRC Chief Executive, Peter O'Neill, spoke to a report on the activities of the Commission since the previous meeting. Amongst items arising out of discussion, it was noted that the consultation on the Government response to the Bill of Rights advice had not yet started but that the Chief Commissioner was anxious to engage with Southern opinion on the matter. It was noted that the issue of liaison with the Northern Ireland

Assembly on bills and other legislation, mentioned at the previous meeting, was being pursued. It was further noted that the NI Departments had been unable to contribute to the UK report to the Comex of the Convention on Regional and Minority Languages in respect of Irish and Ulster Scots. The Chief Commissioner also reported that she had just returned from Uganda where the Irish and British ambassadors were keen that the two Commissions engage with the Ugandan Human Rights Commission which had significant powers but faced huge challenges.

The IHRC Chief Executive, Eamonn MacAodha, spoke to a report on the activities of the IHRC since the previous meeting. There was a welcome for the philanthropic support the IHRC had received in relation to a human rights education project. It was noted that the annual Human Rights Lecture would be delivered on 9 December by Seamus Heaney. It was agreed to develop liaison on significant events that could contribute to the development of a culture of human rights on the island. It was also noted that the two Commissions might use different methodologies in their enquiries or investigations into particular issues or institutions. It would be useful for staff to meet and share their experiences. It was noted that there was as yet no sign of the Irish Government appointing an organisation or consortium as a National Monitoring Mechanism for the new Disability Convention.

7. International developments

It was noted that the Bureau of the ICC was meeting in Rabat during 1 and 2 November 2009. Its biennial conference would be hosted by the Scottish Human Rights Commission in October 2010. The second conference of the European Fundamental Rights Agency would be held in December.

8. Other Business

There was discussion of an individual case relating to Civil Partnerships and the lack of recognition in the Republic. Both Commissions had engaged with this case, would continue to actively pursue it and would collaborate on the relevant issues as appropriate.

There was discussion of another individual case where it appeared an Article 2 ECHR investigation was required. It was noted that the two Commissions would maintain a watching brief on this case and assist the family as appropriate.

9. Date of next meeting

This was agreed as Tuesday 1 December 2009 in Belfast.

There being no further business the meeting ended.