

**Minutes of the Second Ordinary Meeting of the Joint Committee of
Representatives of
the two Human Rights Commissions on the island of Ireland (the Joint
Committee) ¹**

Thursday 31 January 2002, 10.30am - 1pm

Hilton Hotel, Belfast

Present: Brice Dickson, Chief Commissioner, NJHRC
Christine Bell (via conference call)
Tom Donnelly
Christine Eames
Tom Hadden
Inez McCormack
Patrick Yu
Judge Donal Barrington, President, IHRC
William Binchy
Olive Braiden
Martin Collins
Robert Daly
Michael Farrell
Nuala Kelly
Jane Liddy
Clodach McGrory
Mervyn Taylor
Staff: Paddy Sloan, Chief Executive, NIHRC
Sophie Magennis, Administrator, IHRC
Gráinne Blessing, Assistant to the President of the IHRC
Apologies: Margaret Ann-Dinsmore
Paddy Kelly
Frank McGuinness
Kevin McLoughlin
Harold Good
Christopher McGimpsey
Suzanne Egan
Fionnuala NI Aoláin
Tom O'Higgins
Gerard Quinn
Katherine Zappone

¹ The Joint Committee was established at the first official meeting of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the Irish Human Rights Commission held on 8 November 2001.

1 Minutes of the First Ordinary Meeting of the Joint Committee of 13 December 2001

The minutes were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

2 Matters arising from the minutes

No comments.

3 A Charter of Rights for the island of Ireland

3.1 Discussions concerning the possible content, status, aims and parties to a Charter of

Rights for the island of Ireland were continued. The discussions were based on a composite

paper prepared by Judge Barrington - which summarised ideas set out in papers by several

Commissioners submitted to the previous meeting of the Joint Committee - and on a paper by

Christine Bell. The following issues were considered:

NIHRC Bill of Rights

3.2 Consultations on the Bill of Rights were nearing completion but the NIHRC may seek to extend the deadline of May 2002 for the submission of its advice to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. The NIHRC will hold a residential meeting on 22 February 2002 on the Bill of Rights.

European Convention on Human Rights Bill, 2001

3.3 There was no clear indication as to whether the Bill may be enacted before the general election in the Republic.

Parties to the Charter and status of the Charter

3.4 It was noted that both governments have undertaken a commitment to the protection of human rights in Northern Ireland by the sovereign government with jurisdiction there (as per Article 1(5) of the Agreement between the British and Irish Government of April 1998). It was also noted that no further responses from political parties to the Commissions' letters of November 2001 had been received. Discussions on the possible status of the Charter were continued based on the views set out in the papers submitted to the Joint Committee.

Process for the development of the Charter of Rights

3.5 There was general agreement that - although developments in respect of the NIHRC Bill of Rights and the ECHR Bill were of central importance to the Charter - the process for the development of the Charter should not be postponed until the completion of the processes related to these documents.

3.6 In this connection, it was agreed that that the development of a Charter of Rights should not impact adversely on the NIHRC's Bill of Rights.

3.7 It was agreed that both Commissions should give separate consideration to the process for the development of the Charter of Rights - the NIHRC would feedback on its

residential meeting and the IHRC would consider undertaking a consultation process in the Republic on the Charter similar to that undertaken by the NIHRC on the Bill of Rights (any such consultation would be undertaken in close collaboration with the Joint Committee). Consideration of this item would resume at the next meeting of the Joint Committee.

4 The work of the Joint Committee Sub-Committee on Racism

4.1 The convenor of the Sub-Committee, Michael Farrell, reported that the Sub-Committee had met on 13 December 2001 and 23 January 2002. It had met with the Equality Authority and the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism in the Republic and would meet with the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland later today. The aim of these meetings was to identify the ‘added value’ the Sub-Committee could bring to this field and the role it should play. It was noted that the minutes of the Sub-Committee meetings are available.

4.2 It was noted that the IHRC will participate at a public meeting to be held in Dublin on

7 February to re-launch the documents from the World Conference on Racism (held in

Durban in August/September 2001). The meeting will include an information session on the

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racism (CERD).

5 Audit of human rights commitments and compliance with international human rights standards on the island of Ireland

5.1 It was noted that Queen’s University had given its consent to the use by the Commissions of its database of ratification of international instruments. Under this agreement the database would be posted on the websites of both Commissions and QUB and both Commissions would undertake the updating of the database in respect of their own jurisdictions.

5.2 Christine Bell and Mr Martin of QUB would discuss the practicalities of the transfer of the database to the websites of both Commissions.

5.3 The costs of updating the database and any related cost would be borne by both Commissions.

6 The Sixth International Conference of National Human Rights Institutions and the Second European Roundtable

6.1 The NIHRC and IHRC will be represented at the Sixth International Conference.

6.2 Arrangements for the hosting of the Second Roundtable on the island of Ireland were

discussed (discussions were based on a report prepared by Nuala Kelly on the preparatory

meeting of the Steering Committee of the European Co-ordinating Group for National Human

Rights Institutions held in Copenhagen on 17 January 2002). The meeting will be held from

13-16 November 2002 with delegates arriving in Belfast and travelling on to Dublin later.

150 participants were expected. The NIHRC and IHRC would attend a planning meeting to

be held in Strasbourg shortly.

7 Update on each Commission's activities

Reports on activities were submitted by both Commissions (attached).

8 Any other business

Danish Centre for Human Rights

8.1 In response to the news that the Danish Centre for Human Rights was to be reorganised by the Danish Government (in a manner which might infringe upon its independence and curtail its activities), it was noted that a letter had been sent by the participants at the meeting of the Steering Committee of the European Co-ordinating Group for National Human Rights Institutions, Copenhagen, 17 January 2002 to the Danish Government. The President of the IHRC has written to the Danish Prime Minister, An

_Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Danish Centre for Human Rights and Mary Robinson UNHCHR in this connection. It was agreed that the NIHRC and IHRC would send a joint letter to Pat Cox MEP, President of the European Parliament in this regard.

8.2 The IHRC had written to Mary Robinson UNHCHR requesting that she seek a further term as High Commissioner. The NIHRC will also write to her in this connection.

Upcoming events

8.3 The NIHRC and IHRC will attend (part of) the UN Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, April 2002.

8.4 The British Council will hold a conference on economic, social and cultural rights in May 2002. The NIHRC and possibly the IHRC will attend.

8.5 The CEO of the New Zealand Human Rights Commission will be in Northern Ireland shortly. The NIHRC will try and set up a meeting between the CEO and the IHRC.

JHRC Research on the elderly

8.6 It was suggested that the IHRC contact the researchers who worked on the NIHRC's report on the elderly regarding its research project.

9 Next meeting of the Joint Committee

Dublin, 22 March 2002 from 10.45 am to 1pm. Lunch will be provided.