

**MINUTES OF THE 30TH MEETING OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE TWO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS
ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND
(THE JOINT COMMITTEE)**

**Held on Wednesday 3 February 2010 in Belfast at the offices of
the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission**

Present:

NIHRC

Commissioners

Monica McWilliams (Chair)

Tom Duncan

Ann Hope

Alan Henry

Staff

Peter O'Neill, Chief Executive

IHRC

Commissioners

Maurice Manning

Michael Farrell

Alice Leahy

Helen O'Neill

Olive Braiden

Tom O'Higgins

Staff

Eamonn MacAodha, Chief Executive

Roisin Hennessy

In Attendance

Brian Gormally

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Daphne Trimble, Eamonn O'Neill, Colin Harvey, Colm Larkin, Geraldine Rice, Roger Sweetman, Rosemary Byrne, Suzanne Egan, Lia O' Hegarty, Conleth Bradley, Robert Daly, Gerard Quinn, William Binchy, Katherine Zappone.

The Chief Commissioner reported that Jonathon Bell had been appointed an MLA to replace Iris Robinson and had therefore resigned as a Commissioner. The Joint Committee recorded its congratulations and thanks for his past contribution.

2. Minutes of the meeting held 8 October 2009

These were agreed as a true record and there were no matters arising not on the agenda.

3. Updates on the work of the two Commissions

The Chief Executive spoke to a report on the activities of the IHRC since the previous meeting. Amongst items arising in discussion it was noted that two of the important cases in which the IHRC had been involved had been taken *pro bono* by lawyers working on behalf of the Commission. It was noted that this practice was not so prevalent in Northern Ireland. On prison conditions, the IHRC one year follow-up submission to the ICCPR would be forwarded to the NIHRC for consideration by its Detention, Policing and Justice Sub-Committee.

The NIHRC Chief Executive spoke to a report on the activities of the Commission since the previous meeting. Amongst items arising in discussion, it was agreed that Counsel's Opinion on Travellers housing issues would be shared with the IHRC. On the investigation into nursing homes, it was noted that private homes providing a public service have been designated as public authorities and therefore amenable to investigation by the Commission. The call for public evidence was regarded as innovative method of collecting evidence for the investigation. The issue of any responses to this from residents in the Republic was raised and it was conceded that this would raise a difficulty and the matter would be further considered. It was noted that the NIHRC had the power of conducting unannounced visits albeit with caveats. It

was also noted that the NIO consultation document on the Bill of Rights Advice was very disappointing.

4. Report of the conference on a Charter of Rights

The draft Conference Report had been prepared by Brian Gormally and was circulated to staff for comments in mid-January. This text had been copied to NIHRC Commissioners but not to IHRC Commissioners who had therefore not had an opportunity to read it. In the light of this it was agreed that the Report would be discussed and finalised at the next meeting.

The President of the IHRC conveyed a message from Suzanne Egan concerning her future involvement on the Charter issue.

5. Report from Racism Sub-Committee

It was noted that the consultation document on the Migrant Workers Convention had been sent out in early December. The return date had been set for 26 February and there had been little response so far. It was noted that the ICTU was to hold a briefing session with NGOs at which Michael Farrell would speak. It was also noted that Proinsias De Rossa had received a reply to a written question in the European Parliament which was of interest.

The launch of the NIHRC/ECNI report on human trafficking was reported and it was noted that a number of its formal recommendations had a cross-border dimension e.g. on the disappearance of children from care. The IHRC has not carried out a comprehensive study on human trafficking. However, the NGO Immigrant Council of Ireland has carried out comprehensive research on this issue. The Racism sub-committee recommended that, subject to capacity, both Commissions should study these recommendations and consider how they might be brought forward. The sub-committee suggested that the Joint Committee should discuss the results of these considerations at its next meeting. This was agreed.

6. International Developments

Amongst particular items noted, it was reported that the next meeting of the ICC would be in March in Geneva; its Strategic Plan had been

circulated for comment. The Fundamental Rights Agency would hold another consultation with national commissions in Vienna, date to be finalised. It was also holding a roundtable discussion in March in Dublin on LGBT rights. It was noted that the NIHRC had had useful contact with the Bangladesh human rights commission. It was also noted that the European Group had established working groups and the NIHRC was considering participating in the Disability Group.

7. Other Business

It was noted that the NIHRC Chief Commissioner had addressed an ICTU event on the Bill of Rights process. One of the issues raised in discussion was collective bargaining rights in the Republic of Ireland.

It was noted that Brian Gormally's contract was due to end in March so this was the last meeting he would be attending. He was thanked for his helpful contributions over the past period. It was generally agreed that the Joint Committee's work would benefit from a dedicated resource.

8. Next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Wednesday 14 April in Dublin.

The meeting concluded.