

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

Friday 22 March 2002, 10.45am - 1pm

Mansion House, Dublin

Present:

NIHRC

Brice Dickson, Chief Commissioner,
Tom Donnelly
Christine Eames
Harold Good
Tom Hadden
Paddy Kelly
Inez McCormack
Christopher McGimpsey
Frank McGuinness

IHRC

Judge Donal Barrington, President, IHRC
Olive Braiden
Martin Collins
Michael Farrell
Nuala Kelly
Jane Liddy
Fionnuala NI Aoláin
Tom O'Higgins
Katherine Zappone

In Attendance:

Paddy Sloan, Chief Executive, NIHRC
Sophie Magennis, Administrator, IHRC
Gráinne Blessing, Assistant to the President of the IHRC

Apologies:

Christine Bell
Margaret Ann-Dinsmore
Kevin McLaughlin
Patrick Yu

William Binchy
Robert Daly
Suzanne Egan
Clodach McGrory
Gerard Quinn
Mervyn Taylor

1 Minutes of the Second Ordinary Meeting of the Joint Committee of 31 January 2002

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 It was noted that no additional communications had been received from political parties in reply to the Commissions' letters concerning the proposed Charter of Rights, sent to all parties in both jurisdictions in November 2001.

3.2 There was a lengthy discussion on the possible content of a Charter of Rights, its legal status and the process for the elaboration of the Charter. It was decided to focus on the process for the elaboration of the Charter and a Sub-Committee on the Charter was established for this purpose. The members of the Sub-Committee are: Paddy Kelly (convenor), Olive Braiden, Martin Collins, Michael Farrell, Tom Hadden, Nuala Kelly (alternate member) and Inez McCormack. Donal Barrington and Brice Dickson will be entitled to attend ex officio.

3.3 The terms of reference of the Sub-Committee are:

To make suggestions regarding a process for the development of the Charter:

To advise the Joint Committee on means to engage with the public on the concept of the Charter.

3.4 It was agreed that the Sub-Committee should work primarily via correspondence rather than meetings (given the logistical difficulties with organising meetings).

3.5 The need to promote recognition of international human rights law and standards within the judiciary was noted and it was agreed that Donal Barrington and Brice Dickson would liaise on the issue of engaging with judges in both jurisdictions.

4 NIHRC Bill of Rights

The target for the submission of the NIHRC's advice to the Secretary of State on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland has been extended from May 2002 to early next year in order to allow for further deliberations on the document produced by the NIHRC. The NIHRC has requested the observations of political parties on the Bill of Rights and intends to hold further public meetings involving NGOs, political parties and other interested contributors.

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

5.1 Michael Farrell, Convenor of the Joint Committee Sub-Committee on Racism, reported on the 4th meeting of the Sub-Committee of 31 January 2002, attended by representatives of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI). The ECNI has been very active in the field of combating racism and the need to ensure complementarity of action with the ECNI and other statutory bodies was stressed. At the meeting, expertise regarding international human rights instruments was identified

as an area where action by the Sub-Committee could bring 'added value' and it was suggested that the SubCommittee consider developing a user's manual on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD). Minutes of the meetings of the SubCommittee are available.

5.2 It was noted that the IHRC had participated in a public meeting to re-launch the documents from the World Conference Against Racism held in Dublin on 7 February. In addition, the IHRC had met with the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, the Equality Authority and the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) concerning the development of a National Plan of Action against Racism. A consultative conference on the action plan will be held in Dublin on 28 March 2002.

5.3 The Sub-Committee would meet with representatives of the Irish Refugee Council and the Law Centre of Northern Ireland later today.

5.4 The role of the Sub-Committee and the status of its minutes was clarified. The Sub-Committee minutes record proposals for action. All recommendations / conclusions are to be submitted to the Joint Committee for approval.

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

A memo from Paddy Sloan on this issue was circulated. She will follow up this matter with a view to reaching a common understanding regarding the use of the web-based database on international instruments, located on the Queen's University Website, by both Commissions.

7 Planning meeting in Strasbourg for the preparation of the Second European Roundtable to be held on the island of Ireland in November 2002

7.1 A report on the planning meeting was circulated and it was noted that the venues, agenda and outline of the Conference programme had been agreed.

7.2 An additional theme of post September 11 developments and measures was suggested. It was agreed that the IHRC and NIIIRC would work jointly on this issue and that Tom Hadden and Fionnuala Ni Aoláin will prepare a paper. Brice Dickson and Donal Barrington will raise the issue of highlighting this theme at the Roundtable with the Danish Centre for Human Rights (as chair of the European Group of National Human Rights Institutions) at the forthcoming conference in Copenhagen in April 2002.

8 Update on each Commission's activities

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

9 Any other business

It was agreed in principle that the IHRC would participate on the North South Steering Committee on Education. The NIHRC is already represented on the Committee.

10 Next meeting of the Joint Committee

Belfast April 23, 2002 10.45 am to 1pm.