

**Minutes of the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Joint Committee of Representatives of the two Human Rights Commissions on the island of Ireland (The Joint Committee)**

**Held at 10.30 am – 1.00 pm on Tuesday 3 September 2002**

**At the offices of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Belfast**

**Present:**      NIHRC:      Brice Dickson, Chief Commissioner, (Chair)  
Margaret Ann Dinsmore  
Christine Eames  
Harold Good  
Tom Hadden  
Inez McCormack  
Kevin McLaughlin  
Frank McGuinness  
Patrick Yu

                  IHRC:      Maurice Manning  
Fionnuala Ní Aoláin  
William Binchy  
Olive Braiden  
Martin Collins  
Suzanne Egan  
Michael Farrell  
Tom Higgins  
Nuala Kelly  
Jane Liddy  
Clodach McGrory  
Katherine Zappone

**In Attendance**                      Alpha Connelly, Chief Executive, IHRC  
Paddy Sloan, Chief Executive, NIHRC

**Apologies:**      NIHRC:      Christine Bell  
Tom Donnelly  
Paddy Kelly  
Chris McGimpsey

                  IHRC:      Robert Daly  
Gerard Quinn  
Mervyn Taylor

*The Chief Commissioner of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission extended a warm welcome to the newly appointed President of the Irish Human Rights Commission, Dr Maurice Manning, and welcomed him to Belfast and to his first meeting of the Joint Committee. The President thanked the Chief Commissioner and all present look forward to a successful term of office.*

## **1.0 Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Joint Committee**

- 1.1 At point 4.4 the minute is to be amended to read, “regional consultation seminars on the National Action Plan Against Racism are being held in major cities in the Republic of Ireland”.
- 1.2 At point 4.7 regarding the detention of asylum seekers in both jurisdictions, the minute should be amended to note that “the NIHRC and the ICPO made separate visits to Maghaberry Prison”.

## **2.0 Matters Arising**

### **2.1 Audit of Human Rights Commitments and Compliance with International Human Rights Standards on the island of Ireland**

The current database, which requires updating, does not at present have a researcher identified to undertake the work. The Chief Executives of both Commissions are to take this forward in conjunction with Christine Bell and the relevant IT specialist.

### **2.2 Irish Travellers Accommodation Bill**

The Committee was advised that this is now being used against small groups of Travellers and further monitoring is required. There has been no response from the Irish Government to correspondence from the IHRC and the Chairs of the Joint Committee complaining about this legislation. The Irish Human Rights Commission will produce a document setting out the current legislation in the Republic of Ireland and the NIHRC will clarify the legal position regarding trespass in Northern Ireland and advise William Binchy. It was suggested that the NIHRC would associate with the IHRC’s publication on this issue, when launched.

## **3.0 Sub Committee Reports**

### **3.1 Charter Sub Committee**

- 3.1.1 A Charter of Rights paper had been prepared by Michael Farrell, Brice Dickson and Tom Hadden which had not as yet been discussed by the Sub Committee. Brice Dickson presented the paper outlining various options for proceeding with the Charter and concluding with a series of questions to be addressed.
- 3.1.2 After discussion of the paper it was agreed that, following further consideration by the Charter Sub Committee, the paper should be developed to identify other options and eventually to recommend a position advocated by the Joint Committee.

- 3.1.3 This involves widening the Sub Committee's brief beyond an examination of potential process to include a consideration of the content of a Charter of Rights. The role of the Joint Committee in the implementation of the Charter is also to be considered.
- 3.1.4 Whilst not necessary to defer this process until the completion of the Bill of Rights debate in the north and the incorporation debate in the south, it was agreed that there is considerable work to be undertaken on this project before going to public consultation.
- 3.1.5 Ultimately, the Joint Committee agreed to produce a consultation document.
- 3.1.6 All Joint Committee members are to be notified of future dates of Sub Committee meetings to allow the attendance or contribution of any interested Commissioner.

### 3.2 Racism Sub Committee

- 3.2.1 It was reported that the Sub Committee has met with a range of relevant groups to scope the issues north and south and to develop co-operative relationships. As yet meetings with ethnic minority groups have not been arranged, in the main due to the logistics of arranging meetings.
- 3.2.2 There was some discussion regarding the establishment of two separate working groups on racism, one in the north and one in the south, which would facilitate more regular meetings. This proposal will be discussed at the Racism Sub Committee meeting later in the day.
- 3.2.3 Michael Farrell has held a watching brief on behalf of the Joint Committee at the Republic of Ireland National Action Plan Against Racism Steering Group meetings. A north, south, west, east meeting is planned on the UK and Irish National Action Plans; it will be organised by the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.
- 3.2.4 The Northern Ireland NGO conference on the UK National Action Plan Against Racism will be held at the NIHRC on 25 September 2002. The Republic of Ireland is well ahead of the United Kingdom in the preparation of its National Action Plan and the north, south, east, west meeting should provide a valuable forum for sharing common issues.
- 3.2.5 No reservations were expressed by the Joint Committee regarding the proposal to establish two separate Sub Committees on Racism, north and south.

### 3.3 Accreditation of National Human Rights Institutions

- 3.3.1 A paper prepared by Brice Dickson was tabled outlining the issues for consideration. Further input is required from other Sub Committee members.

- 3.3.2 The purpose of the Sub Committee is to prepare a submission to the United Nations and others regarding the role of NHRIs with international monitoring bodies.
- 3.3.3 It was noted that the NIHRC is not fully compliant with the International Coordinating Committee's definition of a National Human Rights Institution as NIHRC is in fact a sub national human rights institution. The purpose of the paper should be to increase access, not increase barriers to participation.
- 3.3.4 It was agreed that the Joint Committee would write to Mary Robinson and to her successor, Vieira de Mello encouraging the previous attention given to NHRIs by Mary Robinson to continue to be the focus of the High Commissioner's office. A joint letter will be prepared and forwarded from the President and the Chief Commissioner.

#### 3.4 Emergency Legislation

- 3.4.1 The establishment of a Sub Committee on Emergency Legislation was discussed. A copy of the Hederman report is to be made available to all Commissioners.
- 3.4.2 At a minimum an exchange of information would be valuable between the two Commissions, as a significant body of work has been undertaken in both jurisdictions.
- 3.4.3 It was agreed that any Sub Committee's work should be broader than a commentary on the Hederman report, in particular in light of post September 11<sup>th</sup> legislation and the UN High Commissioner on Human Rights' reaction to that through the Security Council and the UN Sub Committee on Terrorism.
- 3.4.4 It was agreed that the establishment of a Sub Committee on Emergency Legislation is premature. However the issue is to be kept under consideration by the Joint Committee.
- 3.4.5 A paper will be prepared for discussion at the next Joint Committee meeting in October. Brice Dickson will prepare an overview of the situation in the north and Fionnuala Ní Aoláin will prepare a similar paper reflecting the situation in the south. Tom Hadden will liaise with both.

#### **4.0 Conference of European Human Rights Institutions, 14 – 16 November 2002**

- 4.1 Clarification of the criteria for the invitation of NGOs to the conference is to be sought from the Council of Europe.
- 4.2 It was agreed that the local National Human Rights Institutions to be invited would be the Equality Authority and NCCRI in the south and the Equality Commission in the north. The working group established to organise the conference will take this forward.

## **5.0 Update on each Commissions' Activities**

- 5.1 A paper was tabled outlining the current activities of the NIHRC to which the Chief Commissioner spoke. The paper was accepted as a matter of report.
- 5.2 The Chief Executive of the IHRC spoke to a paper outlining the current activities of the Irish Commission.
- 5.3 It was noted that there is a need to revisit the Standing Orders for the Joint Committee.
- 5.4 It was noted that the Irish Commission will host a seminar on Incorporation of the European Convention on 19 October in Dublin.

## **6.0 Any Other Business**

### **6.1 Minutes of the Joint Committee**

It was agreed that, subsequent to approval, the minutes of the Joint Committee meetings would be posted on each Commission's website.

### **6.2 British Irish Secretariat**

It was agreed to arrange a meeting of the Joint Committee with the British Irish Secretariat.

- 6.3 On behalf of the NIHRC, Margaret Ann Dinsmore thanked the Irish Commission for the invitation to attend the recent lunch to mark the retirement of the former President of the Irish Commission, Judge Donal Barrington.

## **7.0 Dates of Future Meetings**

- 7.1 It was agreed that a Joint Committee meeting every three months was appropriate timing.
- 7.2 The next meeting of the Joint Committee will be held on 30 October 2002 in Dublin.
- 7.3 The subsequent meeting of the Joint Committee will be held on 21 January 2003 in Belfast.

- 8.0 There being no other business the meeting closed at 1.00 pm.