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6 March 2000

## **NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

### **Minutes of the 14th Commission Meeting**

**Monday 14 February 2000**

**2.00 pm**

**Present:** Brice Dickson (Chief Commissioner)  
Christine Bell  
Tom Donnelly  
Tom Hadden  
Angela Hegarty  
Harold Good  
Paddy Kelly  
Frank McGuinness  
Inez McCormack

**Apologies:** Margaret-Ann Dinsmore will arrive late.

**In Attendance:** Paddy Sloan (Chief Executive)

#### **1. MINUTES**

- 1.1 Amendments were noted to the minutes of 13<sup>th</sup> Commission Meeting.
- 1.2 In Section 2.2 of the minutes the Chair of the Investigations Committee has withdrawn her objection as a result of the clarification.
- 1.3 Under Section 6.3 Christine Bell will advise on contacts regarding access for deaf people.

#### **2. MATTERS ARISING**

##### **2.1 Meeting with the First and Deputy First Minister**

Brice Dickson reported on the recent meeting between the Commission and the First and Deputy First Minister and their officers. A copy of the Guidance on the implementation of the Human Rights Act to Northern Ireland Departments has been given to the Commission for comment within two weeks. Brice Dickson will liaise

with Tony McCusker regarding the development of a protocol between the Department of the First and Deputy First Ministers and the NICHR. The protocol will clarify how the two organisations will interact and will cover issues such as confidentiality and the timing and level of consultation. The Commissioners noted the press release that was issued by the office of the First and Deputy First Ministers following the meeting.

**2.2 Stevens, Port, DPP Meetings**

There will be a joint meeting of the Investigations and Casework Committees at 11.00 am on 13<sup>th</sup> March to discuss how best to take forward the outcome of these meetings.

**2.3 The Anniversary of Rosemary Nelson's Death**

The Commission should release a press statement on the anniversary of Rosemary Nelson's death (15<sup>th</sup> March 2000). The statement should reflect any proposed action by the Commission and Brice Dickson will talk to Angela Hegarty regarding details of its content.

**3. CHIEF COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

**3.1 Confidentiality**

It was reaffirmed that a protocol needs to be developed on confidentiality within the Commission. Such a policy will be devised with counsel's opinion and presented to the Commission for ratification. It was agreed that the Casework Committee together with the Chief Commissioner will appoint counsel and advise the Commission.

**3.2 Stevens Investigation**

The terms of reference provided to the Commission by Mr Orde of the Stevens Inquiry are different from those available from British Irish Rights Watch. Brice Dickson will forward a copy of the terms of reference sent to us by British Irish Rights Watch to Mr Orde seeking some clarification.

**3.3 Juvenile Detention Centres**

A collective report on the visits to detention centres by Commissioners will be produced.

**3.4 Diplock Review**

Brice Dickson will expand on the report of the Round Table discussion with practising lawyers and the paper will be circulated to all those who attended that meeting.

3.5 **Irish Human Rights Commission**

Brice Dickson will write to Mr John O'Donoghue, Minister for Justice, seeking information on the progress of the establishment of Irish Human Rights Commission.

3.6 **British Council Conference 10<sup>th</sup> May 2000**

The Commission should have a role at the Conference which will involve senior lawyers and policy-makers from all over the world. In order to take advantage of their presence in Belfast, it is proposed that the Commission run a session on the Bill of Rights and, if necessary, sponsor a reception. Brice Dickson will take this forward.

3.7 **Human Rights and the Media**

The Education Committee is keen to promote interest in human rights among media students by offering a bursary or a prize. UNESCO may be keen to contribute to a seminar for the media and Brice Dickson will contact UNESCO to explore this further.

3.8 **Relatives for Justice**

Correspondence from the group was tabled. Individual copies were hand-delivered to Commissioners but the office had not received a copy. Commissioners agreed to discuss this correspondence at their next meeting.

3.9 **Victims' Committee**

Brice Dickson and Tom Hadden will draft terms of reference for the Victims' Project that will seek to examine the issue under Article 2 of the European Convention, and Comparative Human Rights Law and best practice. Funding may be sought from, for example, the Aspen Institute to undertake the work proposed.

3.10 **Parades**

Following information from a range of sources, the Commission contacted the NIO for clarification on whether or not it was intended to introduce the Human Rights Act before October 2000 to apply to the Public Processions Act. At an information-gathering meeting with Stephen Webb from the NIO the Commission was informed that, as a result of the review of the Parades Commission, government is considering introducing the Human Rights Act to apply only to parades legislation at a date earlier than the planned October 2000 commencement.

After extensive discussion, Commissioners concluded that whilst the Commission welcomes the introduction of the Human Rights Act in October 2000, any change in its proposed implementation strategy should have been discussed with the Commission. In effect, the Commission had not been consulted on this matter and as such Commissioners felt it important to issue a press release regretting the lack of consultation to date.

Tom Hadden's paper was not considered and will be discussed at the next Commission meeting.

**4.00 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

**4.1 Accommodation**

The Commission agreed that the Chief Executive could pursue accommodation in Capital House. The rest of the Chief Executive's report was noted.

5. Due to limitation on time, the various committee reports were noted by Commissioners.
6. Following consideration of the forthcoming conference in Strasbourg of European Human Rights Institutions, it was decided that the Chief Commissioner could represent the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and that it was not necessary to send an additional Commissioner.
7. There being no other business, the meeting closed at 6.00 pm.

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**Brice Dickson**  
**Chief Commissioner**

**Dated:** \_\_\_\_\_

