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8 May 2000

NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

Minutes of the 16th Commission Meeting

Monday 10 April 2000

2.00 pm at NIHRC Offices, Temple Court, North Street Belfast.

Present: Brice Dickson (Chief Commissioner)
Christine Bell
Tom Donnelly
Inez McCormack
Paddy Kelly
Frank McGuinness
Tom Hadden
Harold Good
Margaret-Ann Dinsmore (arrived late)

In Attendance: Paddy Sloan (Chief Executive)

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were noted from Angela Hegarty.

2. MINUTES

- 1.1 The minutes of the 15th Commission Meeting of 13 March 2000 were agreed for accuracy.

3. MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Human Rights Commission in the Republic of Ireland

A letter has been forwarded to the Minister of Justice in the Republic of Ireland

regarding the establishment of their Human Rights Commission and both that letter and the subsequent reply were circulated to all Commissioners.

3.2 Confidentiality

There is an urgent requirement for a confidentiality policy for the Investigations Committee. It was agreed that staff at HRC would prepare a draft policy prior to seeking legal advice. The policies of other relevant organisations such as the Equality Commission, Law Centre, Children's Law Centre and Save The Children Fund would be reviewed to inform the Commission's position.

3.3 Fatima Ismail

Fatima Ismail's Internship with the British Council at the Human Rights Commission comes to an end on 21 April 2000. Staff are taking Fatima out for dinner on 20 April to which all Commissioners are cordially invited.

3.4 Victims' Project

The Chief Executive and Chief Commissioner are to prepare a detailed costing of this project for submission to the next Commission meeting.

3.5 Parades

The government has not made any further announcement regarding the early introduction of the Human Rights Act to regulate the parades legislation. It was agreed that the Commission will find out further information on the investigation by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee into the Parades Commission. In particular, it will be important to clarify their timescale and to keep the committee informed of the forthcoming investigation into the policing of parades, the first stage of which should be completed by the end of June 2000.

3.6. Murder of Patrick Finucane

A meeting has been arranged with Mrs Finucane on Friday 5 May 2000 at 2.00 pm. All Commissioners are invited to attend.

3.7 St Patrick's Day reception in Washington

Inez McCormack attended the White House Reception on St. Patrick's Day and represented the NIHRC.

4.00 CHIEF COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

4.1 Paul Sieghart Memorial Lecture 2000.

A copy of the presentation given by Brice at the British Institute of Human Rights in London on 6 April 2000 was tabled. The paper is entitled "The Protection of Human Rights : Lessons from Northern Ireland" and was given in Brice's individual capacity, not under the auspices of the NIHRC. Radio Ulster carried an interview but there was no other coverage.

4.2 Press Releases

4.2.1 Press releases will issue shortly to announce the two pending investigations into Juvenile Justice and into the human rights issues that arise from parades, including the policing of parades. The Victims' Rights Project will be launched at the same time.

4.2.2 Staff will seek to ensure that all relevant parties are informed of the investigations before going to press. Press releases will also issue to cover Brice's presentations at Geneva and Morocco.

4.2.3 A press statement will be issued indicating the Commission's support for the call for an independent inquiry into Pat Finucane's murder but it will not issue until after Commissioners meet with the Finucane family.

4.2.4 Copies of any reference in the press to the Commission are normally forwarded to Commissioners for interest, in particular anything of substance or controversy is copied.

4.3 **Responses to consultation documents**

A revised paper on amendments to divorce legislation will be circulated to all Commissioners and submitted. The response to *Ends and Means; Human Rights Approaches to Armed Groups* was tabled.

4.4 **Council of Europe Round Table**

The Chief Executive and Chief Commissioner attended the conference for Human Rights Institutions held in Strasbourg 16-17 March 2000, a report of which was circulated on 21 March. Commissioners supported the Chief Commissioner's offer that Northern Ireland host the next Round Table in 2002 with Council of Europe funding.

4.5 **British Council/NIHRC Conference in Belfast 7-11 May 2000**

Commissioners were asked to note that the Commission is sponsoring a reception at lunchtime on Wednesday 10 May at the Hilton hotel. Any Commissioners interested in attending this or any other part of the programme should let the office know as soon as possible.

4.6 **Commonwealth Lawyers' Association Conference 19 June 2000**

Commissioners are asked to note this conference and the amendment that Colm Campbell, not Karen Quinliven, will present a paper with John Larkin on the local situation.

4.7 **Bloody Sunday Inquiry**

In discussion regarding the most useful role for NIHRC in monitoring the inquiry, it was agreed that the Chief Commissioner will write to Lord Saville registering our interest and seeking access to attend on occasions. In addition the Commission will contact the families individually seeking informal feedback as to the most useful support that the Commission can provide.

4.8 **Criminal Justice Review**

There is a six-month consultation period for this extensive report. Commissioners interested in commenting on particular elements of the review were asked to contact the office before the next meeting at which Brice will allocate particular sections for initial comment.

4.9 **Forthcoming Meetings**

Tom Donnelly agreed to meet the Australian High Commissioner on behalf of the NIHRC.

Harold Good will travel to London for the May meeting of the Human Rights Act Task Force.

Brice will attend Hillsborough for lunch with the Secretary of State and the Queen.

5.00 **COMMITTEE STRUCTURE**

5.1 **Research Committee**

Commissioners were reluctant to create another committee and it was agreed that research would be covered by the relevant committee according to the subject area.

5.2 **Legislation Committee**

This Committee should continue to meet monthly at least until the summer and will pick up policy issues also.

5.3 **Casework Committee**

Needs five Commissioners and will be chaired by Brice, as will the Bill of Rights Committee.

5.4 The Chief Executive is to examine staff roles and prepare an overview for Commissioners. Each area of work needs to identify strategic objectives and key performance indicators for staff.

5.5 Frank McGuinness and Tom Donnelly will join the Victim's Committee and full membership of that Committee will be reviewed.

6.00 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT

6.1 The Chief Executive's Report was noted by Commissioners

6.2 Paddy is to contact John Bailey at the Law Society for advice on solicitors' firms to approach regarding property law and conveyancing. Estimates will be sought from at least five firms to act on behalf of the Commission in agreeing a lease for new accommodation.

7.00 BILL OF RIGHTS

7.1 Working Groups

A proposed core membership of the working groups will be circulated to Commissioners for comment. The membership will be drafted bearing in mind Section 75 representation.

7.2 Miriam Titterton will speak to Paddy Kelly regarding the development of a process to ensure effective consultation with children and young people.

8.00 STRATEGIC PLAN

8.1 A paper was tabled prepared by Tim Cunningham analysing the response to the NIHRC draft strategic plan in light of our Section 75 obligations. In addition Tim

looked at the draft equality scheme prepared by Brice for the Commission.

8.2 It was agreed that Brice will re-draft the strategic plan in the light of comments for approval at the next Commission meeting.

8.3 The draft Equality Scheme will be widely circulated with a summary sheet.

Comments are required from Commissioners by 21 April and the Equality Scheme will be widely circulated by the end of the month.

9.00 BUSINESS PLAN

9.1 A separate Bill of Rights budget should be prepared including all associated costs to isolate this important and costly element of the Commission's work programme.

9.2 It was agreed to submit the business plan to the NIO and to continue negotiations around budget.

10.00 COMMITTEE REPORTS

10.1 The reports of the various committees were noted and Commissioners approved the proposals from the Investigations Committee to commence investigations into Juvenile Justice and the Policing of Parades.

11.00 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

11.1 The Commission will not be represented at the Friends of Ireland Conference on 14 and 15 April.

11.2 Alex Borraine may be coming to Northern Ireland for two months to undertake a piece of work on victims' support. Commissioners agreed in principle to support the project but would like to see more details of the proposal.

11.3 There being no other business the meeting ended at 6.10pm

Brice Dickson
Chief Commissioner

Dated: _____