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## **NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION**

### **Minutes of the 17th Commission Meeting**

**Monday 15 May 2000**

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

**Present:** Brice Dickson (Chief Commissioner)  
Margaret Ann Dinsmore  
Tom Donnelly  
Harold Good  
Tom Hadden  
Angela Hegarty  
Paddy Kelly  
Frank McGuinness

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

**Apologies:** Inez McCormack and Christine Bell

#### **1. MINUTES**

The previous Commission minutes were reviewed for accuracy.

- 1.1. In Section 5.5 on Committee Structure it was agreed that Frank McGuinness and Tom Donnelly would join the Victims' Committee and that full membership of that committee would be reviewed.
- 1.2 In Section 4.2.1 on Investigations the pending investigation on parades is an "investigation into the human rights issues that arise from parades including the policing of parades."
- 1.3 The Victims' Project will not be "linked" with the launch of the other investigations but will simply be launched at the same time as the announcement of the other two investigations.

## 2. MATTERS ARISING

### 2.1 **Human Rights Commission, Republic of Ireland.**

The Irish Commission is to be operational in July 2000 and it is planned that the NIHRC will meet with that new Commission also in July. It was agreed that Brice would write to the Taoiseach on behalf of the Commission supporting this time frame and emphasising the importance of complying with the Paris Principles in establishing the new Commission. A copy of this letter would also be circulated to the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Justice and to the Secretary of State.

### 2.2 **Confidentiality**

The joint Committee of Investigations and Casework will draft a confidentiality policy with the help of Maggs O'Connor and Linda Moore. This policy should allow the current proposed investigations to proceed and will feed into a wider confidentiality policy for the Commission on which counsel's advice will be sought.

### 2.3 **Victims' Project**

A post of project worker for six months will be advertised soon and a detailed budget and proposal presented to the next Commission meeting.

### 2.4 **Human Rights Act and Parades**

2.4.1 Brice Dickson wrote to Susan Scholefield at the Northern Ireland Office regarding the proposed premature introduction of the Human Rights Act with respect to parades. Susan telephoned to say that no announcement has yet been made on this issue.

2.4.2 Brice also wrote to the Clerk of Northern Ireland Affairs Committee regarding its investigation into the Parades Commission. There is no deadline for responses and it was agreed that the NIHRC would make a contribution. The first phase of the investigation into the human rights aspects of parades will be the publication of international standards that apply to parades and to the policing of parades. That piece of work will constitute the NIHRC's response to the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee investigation.

2.5 **Press Releases**

The press releases announcing the investigations into parades and juvenile justice and the victims' project will be released this week.

2.6. **Bloody Sunday Inquiry**

The response to Brice's enquiry from Lord Saville has been circulated to all Commissioners. The enquiry is due to close on the last Thursday in June and to reopen on 29 August. Commissioners wishing to attend should let the Inquiry know directly. The screens have now been improved as indicated in the response to Brice's letter. Brice also wrote to the Bloody Sunday Trust regarding direct contact between the Commission and the families. The Trust will consult with the families and come back to Brice with advice.

2.7 **Criminal Justice Review**

It is intended to host a conference on the Criminal Justice Review that will focus in the main on how best to submit comments to this wide-ranging consultation. The provisional date is 14 June with a proposed structure of two speakers from the Criminal Justice Review Group, probably Joanna Shapland and John Jackson together with others such as a practising solicitor and a CAJ representative who can discuss the practical aspects of the proposals. The target audience will be the voluntary/community/NGO sector with the purpose of highlighting and discussing issues and exploring how effective submissions might be made. It was agreed that staff would liaise with Angela Hegarty on the structure of the day.

2.8. **Research**

There will be an element of research in each of the committee's work. Some concern was expressed that research as a whole needed management by a single committee. This position was acknowledged but it was agreed that for now individual committees would manage their own areas of research.

2.9 **Human Rights Act Task Force**

Harold Good attended the Task Force meeting in London on behalf of Brice and met with David Lavery and Claire McGivern from the Human Rights Directorate of the OFM/DFM. The main issues covered at the Task Force included:

- 2.9.1 Dealing with a critical press – it was agreed that good press comes from good practice
- 2.9.2 There was a report from two public bodies on training for the introduction of the Human Rights Act, the Immigration and Nationality Directorate and the Armed Forces. Both of these organisations have very large numbers of staff and therefore have different intensities of training for different levels of staff. It was agreed that whilst the NIHRC cannot provide training to all public bodies we should monitor and advise on preparations for the implementation of the Human Rights Act.
- 2.9.3 The future of the Task Force post October 2000 is under review.
- 2.9.4 There was a very positive report of the recent British Council conference held in Belfast and Brice in particular was warmly mentioned.
- 2.9.5 Harold was thanked for taking time to attend the Task Force meeting and he reciprocated, having enjoyed the experience.
- 2.9.6 The Commission was advised that a Northern Ireland website is being established by the Human Rights Directorate that will have a particular focus on training.
- 2.9.7 It was suggested that the Commission might produce a template of issues that every public authority should cover in preparation of the introduction of the Act. Brice agreed to take that forward.
- 2.9.8 Observing RUC human rights training can be arranged and it was agreed that Brice and Linda Moore would attend.

**2.10 Solicitor for accommodation**

It was noted that it is no longer necessary to approach the Law Society to seek a solicitor to represent the Commission in securing premises. With the proposal to remain at Temple Court Valuation and Lands Agency and the Crown Solicitors will act for the Commission.

**3. CHIEF COMMISSIONER'S REPORT**

**3.1 Equality Schemes**

A list of Equality Schemes sent to the Commission was circulated. Some 13 responses have been received to the NIHRC scheme that went out to consultation.

- 3.1 It was agreed that the Commission should respond to all government departments rather than select.
- 3.1.2 It was agreed that Brice would contact the Equality Commission advising them to provide some support in terms of the process of responding to the large number of schemes being received by everyone at the present time.
- 3.2 **Guide to the Human Rights Act**  
A summary guide to the Human Rights Act for Northern Ireland has been prepared by Brice. Any comments on this guide should be received by the office by the morning of Wednesday 17 May 2000. It was agreed that this was a very useful piece of work.
- 3.3. **British Council Conference**
- 3.3.1 There were 80 participants from 50 nationalities and thanks were given to Commissioners who attended various elements of the conference.
- 3.3.2 Commissioners noted that the Secretary of State in his speech referred to Northern Ireland as “a world leader in human rights”.
- 3.3.3 Representatives from the Sri Lankan and Canadian Rights Commissions came to visit the NIHRC.
- 3.3.4 Dermot Nesbitt and Denis Haughey spoke at the conference.
- 3.3.5 There will be an on-line discussion group for participants and others for six months following the conference.
- 3.3.6 Congratulations were tendered to Brice for his role in directing the conference and his input to it. The British Council want to do it again in two years’ time.
- 3.4 **The Commonwealth Lawyers’ Conference**  
Lord Justice MacDermott will chair part of the conference and there will be speeches on Zimbabwe, Pakistan and Malaysia. In the afternoon John Larkin and Colm Campbell will be giving papers to which the Chief Constable will respond.
- 3.5 **The Commonwealth Conference for Human Rights Institutions at Cambridge 3-6 July .**  
It is proposed that Paddy will attend the first two days of this conference and Brice the second two days as it is an important opportunity both to contribute to and learn from the experiences of other human rights institutions around the world.

3.6 **July Commission Meeting**

The proposed date is 10 July which is considered impractical. This was rearranged to 18 July with the possibility of a full day's agenda. This would incorporate a half day follow up to the residential, looking at committee structure and staffing issues in the light of the agreed strategic plan. The next Commission meeting will be on Monday 14 August.

3.8 **Children's Law Centre Conference**

Commissioners were advised that the conference will take place on 24 May 2000. Anyone interested in attending should contact the office.

**4. CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S REPORT**

4.1 **Staffing**

4.1.1 It was agreed that given the indefinite nature of Denise Magill's sick leave a replacement should be sought, either on a fulltime basis or to cover particular areas of work.

4.1.2 Internships should be advertised as soon as possible given the imminent end of university terms.

4.1.3 **Confidentiality**

This is an important issue with regard to using volunteers, all of whom need to sign a confidentiality clause.

4.2 **Human Rights Day**

There was some discussion about the Commission acknowledging Human Rights Day on 10 December 2000.

4.2.1 The Commission is involved in the North-South conference being organised by ICTU on Equality and Human Rights. This conference involves the Equality Authority in the South and the Equality Commission in the North and the two Human Rights Commissions as well as OFM/DFM Human Rights Directorate and the Department of Foreign Affairs.

4.2.2 However Commissioners felt that NIHRC should also organise an event in its own right. Ideas for such an event should be given to Brice in the next few days. Brice will also write to both Nelson Mandela and the Head of the Constitutional Court in South Africa Mr Chaskelson to speak at a conference/seminar during the week beginning Monday 11 December.

4.3 **Accommodation**

It was agreed that the Commission would stay in Temple Court and expand to the ground floor premises. The Chief Executive agreed to take into account work space for Commissioners and a meeting room. In addition security and parking in the area are to be given due consideration particularly for staff.

5. **Meeting with Pat Finucane's family and legal advisors**

- 5.1 Angela Hegarty's apologies for that meeting were recorded.
- 5.2 Following the press statement Brice was interviewed both on Radio Ulster and Ulster Television where he stressed the word "public" in describing the investigation (which had not been included in the press statement).
- 5.3 It was agreed that the Chief Commissioner would write to the Secretary of State twice; firstly seeking a meeting on a range of issues e.g. our budget, and secondly focusing on the Pat Finucane case and the British-Irish Rights Watch Report as a precursor to a meeting on that issue. At that meeting the Commission should ask for a copy of the third Stevens' Report when published and should explore the sequence of events with respect to the police investigation.
- 5.4 It was agreed that subsequent to meeting the Secretary of State on the issue the Commission would meet with the Chief Constable and then seek a meeting with the Commissioner on Intelligence Services.
- 5.5 All Commissioners who have not already done so are urged to come into the office to read the British-Irish Rights Watch Report on the Finucane case.
- 5.6 The Chief Commissioner will write to Geraldine Finucane to advise her of our proposed course of action.

6. **STRATEGIC PLAN**

- 6.1 No comments were received from Commissioners and the Plan needs to be issued in the next few weeks.
- 6.2 It was agreed that a summary of activities would be introduced at the end of Section 8.

- 6.3 The Plan will not wait until the corporate identity and logo is produced but will go to the printers as soon as possible.
- 6.4 More information is now available on the joint committee with the Republic of Ireland which will be introduced into the text.

**7. POLICING**

- 7.1 A paper from Angela Hegarty had been circulated to all Commissioners for discussion. The purpose of this paper was to focus the Human Rights Commission's approach to ensure a strategic response to the RUC's handling of the Patten Report.
- 7.2 A working group was established to take forward a response to the policing bill. This involves Angela Hegarty, Tom Hadden and Brice Dickson and will be serviced by Paddy Sloan until someone is appointed to work specifically on this issue.
- 7.3 A press statement will be issued post publication of the Bill which will be circulated to all Commissioners in advance of publication.
- 7.4 A letter will go to the Secretary of State regarding the lack of consultation with the Commission and querying the human rights role of the Oversight Commissioner.
- 7.5 Someone will be selected from the register of researchers to work with the Commission in compiling a response to the Bill.

**8. BILL OF RIGHTS**

- 8.1 There will be a meeting of the chairs of the working groups on 23 May and of the Bill of Rights Committee on 31 May. There was concern that the working groups should not have a Belfast focus and that trade unions, churches and NGOs need to be represented.
- 8.2 Most of the pamphlets have been completed and are currently being edited into a common form for publication by PCC when the corporate identity is agreed.
- 8.3 The video and education materials will be ready for publication in early June.
- 8.4 The Chief Commissioner and Chief Executive will discuss with Paddy Kelly how best to take forward the consultation of children and young people



8.5 Commissioners have asked for a time line on the Bill of Rights consultation and strongly urge that an increased focus be given to the Bill of Rights process by the secretariat.

**9. Reports of the Subcommittees were noted.**

10.1 The Legislation and Policy Committee will meet again on 15 June not 18 May as previously arranged.

10.2 Commissioners asked specifically that a report and update on the casework be provided.

10.3 Attendance notes on the challenge to the Parades Commission appointments will be made available to Commissioners as requested.

**10.** There being no other business, the meeting closed at 6.00pm.

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

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

