

**MINUTES OF THE 9TH MEETING OF THE
NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION**

2 SEPTEMBER 1999, TEMPLE COURT, 2.00 PM

PRESENT: Brice Dickson (Chief Commissioner)
Angela Hegarty
Margaret-Ann Dinsmore
Christine Bell
Tom Donnelly
Tom Hadden
Paddy Kelly
Frank McGuinness

IN ATTENDANCE: Denise Magill (Research Worker)

1 APOLOGIES: Harold Good
Tom Donnelly had indicated that he would be late. He joined the meeting at 2.35pm

2 MINUTES:

The minutes of the 8th meeting were agreed subject to two amendments:

Item 2: Minutes of the 7th meeting. The first sentence should read: ‘...subject to two amendments’ rather than one amendment. After ‘... intimidation of defence lawyers’ at the end of the existing paragraph should be inserted an additional sentence: ‘The Commission also agreed to ask for a meeting with John Stevens and Colin Port’.

Item 5: Premises

After 5 (ii) insert:

‘Ms Hegarty asked that her dissent be noted to the expenditure by the NIHRC of a substantial capital sum for the internal fit-out of rented office accommodation’.

3 MATTERS ARISING:

3.1 Insurance

A Commissioner requested that when arranging insurance cover, additional cover be obtained for Commissioners in relation to any recruitment/selection discrimination claims which may arise in the future.

3.2 Minutes of Meetings

A Commissioner asked if minutes had yet been prepared of the meeting between the NIHRC and the RUC and the NIHRC and the CAJ. It was confirmed that these minutes had not yet been prepared. The Commissioner requested a copy of the minutes of these two meetings together with outstanding minutes of all other meetings held to date.

3.3 Paper on Plastic Bullets

It was decided that the paper of the post-graduate summer intern, Naomi Doherty, should be placed on the agenda for discussion at the next Commission meeting. (It was later agreed that a copy of the preliminary draft of that paper should be made available to each to each Commissioner).

3.4 Logo

It was decided that Brice Dickson, Paddy Kelly and Frank McGuinness should make a determined effort to meet to discuss how to progress this matter in advance of the next Commission meeting.

3.5 Premises

It was agreed that Brice Dickson should contact the NIO to pursue the possibility of securing additional monies in respect of start up costs.

4 DRAFT STRATEGIC PLAN

There was a lengthy and detailed discussion of paper 9.8, the Chief Commissioner's re-draft of the draft strategic plan, based upon the discussion at the 8th Commission meeting on 9 August 1999. The discussion included paper 9.12 (the re-drafts prepared by Ms McCormack and Ms Hegarty) and an un-numbered paper tabled on the day by the Chief Commissioner which provided a re-draft of pp.11-13.

A large number of drafting changes were proposed and noted by the Chief Commissioner for inclusion in the final draft strategic plan.

Following discussion, it was decided that the draft strategic plan should be translated into Irish; Ulster Scots; Chinese and Urdu. The translated versions should not be printed in order to save costs and instead bound copies should be made available. The best possible price should be sought, for example, pursuing possibilities of a lump sum charge for translation of more than 1 language. When it comes to printing multiple language versions of the final plan, the possibility of a joint publication should be pursued with the four relevant language/cultural organisations in order to share costs.

When considering p.29 of the draft strategic plan, one Commissioner suggested that the Commission needs to make a decision as to how it is to carry out its initial screening of approaches/complaints etc.

When considering p.36 of the draft strategic plan, it was agreed that the Legislation Committee should be known as both the Legislation and Policy Committee rather than just the Legislation Committee. When considering p.47 of the draft strategic plan, there was a discussion as to whether or not the Commission should establish a Finance and Personnel Committee in addition to these Committees already established. It was decided not to establish such a Committee at this stage.

It was decided not to include an appendix setting out a categorised list of all those with whom the Commission has met to date but that considerable thought should be given to ensure that the circulation list for the draft Strategic Plan includes the relevant individuals and groups across all of the constituencies of the NIHRC.

5 WEBSITE

The Research Worker reported on progress in the building of the website and it was agreed that this should be launched on Thursday 30 September 1999 at 10.30am with the draft strategic plan. Maximum press coverage should be sought for the launch. The Chief Commissioner was asked to check that our launch would not coincide with the publication of the Mitchell Review.

6 PREMISES

An update was provided as to the slow progress in respect of negotiating a lease for New Cathedral Buildings. It was agreed, given the objections of certain Commissioners to each of two other options regarding premises, that the Commission would rule out both the possibility of Windsor House and of increasing its floor space within Temple Court by taking a lease on the ground floor.

7 STAFFING UPDATE

The Chief Commissioner spoke to HRC 9.10. which was tabled. It was agreed to delay a decision on additional staffing needs until the current recruitment round was fully completed.

8 CHIEF COMMISSIONER'S REPORT

8.1 Register of Interests

The Chief Commissioner reminded Commissioners that 3 Register of Interest forms had yet to be received. As a request to view the forms had now been received, the outstanding forms should be returned as a matter of urgency.

8.2 Committees of the Commission

No minutes of these committees were available for discussion today.

8.3 Bill of Rights

The Chief Commissioner considered there was a need to establish a working group to start to plan the consultation process for the Bill of Rights. It was decided that the Chief Commissioner, Professor Bell and Professor Hadden should meet before the next Commission meeting in order to begin the planning of the consultation process.

8.4 Submission/Response to the Independent Commission on Policing

The Chief Commissioner reported that the deadline for submissions had passed. The NIHRC had not made a submission. The Chief Commissioner sought guidance as to whether or not a press statement should be issued upon the publication of the Patten Report. It was decided that any statement should say merely that the Commission would be measuring the proposals against international human rights standards. Any proposed statement should be e-mailed to members prior to issue.

8.5 Integrated Education

A meeting should be sought with the Northern Ireland Council on Integrated Education. It was agreed that thereafter, this issue should be referred to the Education and Research Committee for any further work. Professor Hadden expressed an interest in attending the meeting with NICIE.

8.6 Murder of Rosemary Nelson and Pat Finucane

The Chief Commissioner reported that he had not yet arranged the meeting with Mr Port and Mr Stevens but that he would do so.

8.7 Case of David Adams

Paper 9.11 contained an exchange of correspondence between the Chief Commissioner and the DDP's office. A further reply from the DPP was awaited. It was agreed that this was a matter which the Commission should pursue.

8.8 Human Rights Act Training

The Chief Commissioner reported that requests for training on the Human Rights Act had been received from the University of Ulster; the Occupational Health Service and from the RUC. Following discussion of the costs, resources and educational impact of providing such training it was decided that the NIHRC should recruit a member of staff on a short term contract to provide training on the Human Rights Act. The cost of this person's salary could be met, at least in part, from any fees generated from charging for training.

8.9 ADACS Council of Europe Finding

It was decided that a series of events should be organised considering how young people could become involved in the Bill of Rights project. The Chief Commissioner would discuss with Ms Kelly (who had left the meeting at this stage) the possibility of such events being organised jointly with the Children's Law Centre.

8.10 Industrial Relations Services Conference – 19 November

It was decided that, in the first instance, a staff member should speak on the Commission's behalf at this conference. Professor Hadden offered to speak if there was any difficulty.

8.11 Amnesty International Proposal regarding a schools competition in connection with the Bill of Rights.

It was decided to postpone discussion of this funding application to the October meeting.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

9.1 Future Ways

The Research Worker reported on the establishment of a group to look at potential common goals and shared working practices between community development, community relations and human rights practitioners. The group, convened jointly by Karen Eyben of University of Ulster and Barbara McCabe of Ulster Peoples College, had met twice. The Research Worker had attended on behalf of the Chief Commissioner. The group had decided to prepare a paper for the NIHRC with ideas as to how the Commission might carry out the consultation exercise in respect of the Bill of Rights. It was decided that the Research Worker should attend the meetings of this group and that once the Development Worker takes up post he or she should attend in place of the Research Worker.

9.2 Visits to Juvenile Justice Centres etc

A Commissioner referred to the earlier meeting with the Childrens Criminal Justice Lobby Group. He considered that the Commission should develop a rota in order to systematically visit a range of detention centres, prisons etc in Northern Ireland. It was agreed that the Chief Commissioner should draw up an action plan for places to be visited together with a rota of 3 Commissioners to carry out each of the visits.

9.3 Research to be commissioned

The Chair of the Legislation and Policy Committee requested approval to commission a piece of research at a cost of up to £1,000 into the extent to which law, policy and practice in Northern Ireland for the treatment of gays, lesbians and transsexuals complies with international human rights. In order to expedite this piece of research it was agreed that relevant individuals should be identified, for this initial piece of work, from the old SACHR Register of Researchers. These individuals would be invited to tender for the research paper. It was also agreed that the NIHRC should establish its own Register of Researchers.

9.4 Public Statements

A Commissioner raised concerns that the Chief Commissioner may be inhibited as regards the making of public statements by the need to seek agreement of all Commissioners to proposed statements. The Chief Commissioner indicated that he felt curtailed more by the lack of policies than by any need to seek prior approval. It was agreed that there was a need for the Commission to give priority to raising its profile.

9.5 Correspondence from Councillor Mary Nelis

Following discussion, it was decided that the issues raised in Ms Nelis's correspondence should be referred to one of the Commission Committees for consideration, namely the Investigations Committee. It was also agreed that the Chief Commissioner's letter to Ms Nelis should refute her criticisms of the work of the NIHRC to date.

The meeting ended at 6.50pm.