

**MINUTES OF THE 21<sup>st</sup> MEETING OF THE JOINT  
COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE TWO  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS ON THE ISLAND OF  
IRELAND  
(THE JOINT COMMITTEE)**

**Held at 10.30am on 22nd May 2007 in the premises of the  
Irish Human Rights Commission, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Jervis House,  
Jervis St, Dublin 1**

**Present: IHRC:** Maurice Manning, President (Chair)  
Olive Braiden  
Rosemary Byrne  
Robert Daly  
Suzanne Egan  
Michael Farrell  
Alice Leahy  
Lia O'Hegarty  
Tom O'Higgins  
Helen O'Neill  
Roger Sweetman  
Katherine Zappone

**NIHRC:** Monica McWilliams, Chief Commissioner  
Jonathan Bell  
Colin Harvey  
Alan Henry  
Ann Hope  
Eamonn O'Neill

**Apologies: IHRC:** William Binchy  
Gerard Quinn  
Mervyn Taylor  
Alpha Connelly, Chief Executive Officer

**NIHRC:** Thomas Duncan  
Christine Eames  
Kevin McLaughlin  
Geraldine Rice

**In attendance: IHRC:** Liam Herrick, Senior Legislation &  
Policy Review Officer  
Clair Wallace, General Administrator

**NIHRC:** Paddy Sloan, Chief Executive Officer

## **1. APOLOGIES**

**2. MINUTES OF THE 20<sup>TH</sup> MEETING** were amended at 4.7 to read thus: "This paper would form the basis of a consultation event on models and options for a Charter of Rights, possibly in 2008, when the Bill of Rights Forum in Northern Ireland has concluded its work. The Joint Committee noted that 2008 will also be the tenth anniversary of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, which indicated that consideration should be given to a Charter of Rights and an appropriate time to promote serious debate on such a charter". The Minutes were then agreed as an accurate record.

## **3. MATTERS ARISING**

There were none.

## **4. REQUEST OF THE OMAGH SUPPORT AND SELF-HELP GROUP - UPDATE**

The Chief Commissioner of the NIHRC reported that she has written to the Prime Minister wishing him well on his retirement from political life and reminding him that the NIHRC continued to call for the appointment of a judicial figure to advise on whether there should be an independent cross-border public inquiry. She received a letter from the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland saying that he cannot comment until the court proceedings are concluded. It was noted that once the outcome of the proceedings are known that NIHRC will continue to raise the issue with the Secretary of State.

## **5. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES**

Commissioner Michael Farrell reported on the Joint Racism Committee, which met earlier today and at which a booklet on immigrants was discussed.

The IHRC Senior Legislation & Policy Review Officer reported that the Observations on the Scheme of the Criminal Justice (Trafficking in Persons and Sexual Offences) Bill 2007 are about to be published. The President of the IHRC said that the IHRC Strategic Plan for 2007-2011 will emphasise measures to combat Trafficking. He suggested a round-table discussion on the matter. Commissioner Michael Farrell noted that the NIHRC Racism

Committee is commissioning a study on Trafficking and he thanked the NIHRC Investigations Worker for her contribution to the Committee meeting. He also thanked the IHRC Senior Legislation & Policy Review Officer for his input.

The Chief Commissioner stated that NIHRC is considering the best way of dealing with the issue of Trafficking. President Maurice Manning suggested that proposals in this area should be presented by both Commissions to a future meeting of the Joint Committee. The Chief Commissioner will present a paper on this at the next Joint Meeting and preliminary work to be done in advance.

Charter of Rights: It was agreed that if respective government funding was granted, then the Joint Committee would prioritise the Charter as a joint work project.

## **6. FUTURE PLANS**

A register of researchers of experts, who could carry out work on behalf of the Commissions, was discussed. This would also involve much-needed funding, which will be discussed further at the next meeting.

The President and the Chief Commissioner will attend the Human Rights Lawyers Association meeting in London on 15 June, along with Trevor Philips of the new Human Rights and Equality Commission of England and Wales.

## **7. INTERNATIONAL REPORT:**

Commissioner Helen O'Neill reported on her and the IHRC President's visit to Lesotho where a Human Rights Commission may be set up in the near future and IHRC would help them with advice on legislation.

The Chief Commissioner said that the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights was asking the NIHRC to contribute support to countries coming out of conflict and that the NIHRC would be keen to take this forward.

## **8. UPDATE ON ACTIVITIES OF THE TWO COMMISSIONS:**

The Chief Commissioner spoke to her written report.

The NIHRC Chief Executive Officer, Paddy Sloan, leaves office tomorrow, 23 May 2007.

The IHRC will be advertising for a new chief executive officer within the next weeks. Funding has been approved for two new senior staff and four new research fellows by October of this year.

Bill of Rights: There was discussion on the Bill of Rights Forum which had recently been established in Northern Ireland. The Forum is to complete its work by March 2008 and its outcome would help to inform the advice subsequently given by the NIHRC to the Secretary of State.

The President expressed gratitude to the two chief executives, Paddy Sloan and Alpha Connelly for their commitment to the work of the Joint Committee. This was unanimously agreed.

Convention on Disabilities: It was reported that the IHRC will work closely with the National Disability Authority and the Equality Authority regarding the Convention and Gerard Quinn will also be attending a meeting in June with the German Human Rights Commission.

The launch of the IHRC Public Inquiry report, 'Old Age and the Self-Employed', took place on 11 April.

*Amicus Curiae*: It was noted that the High Court and Supreme Court recognise the IHRC statutory right to act as *amicus curiae*.

IHRC Strategic Plan 2007-2011: The launch will take place on Monday 25 June in Dublin Castle and invitations will be sent out next week.

**9. DATE OF NEXT MEETING:**

Wednesday 12 September 2007 in Belfast.

**10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS:**

Paddy Sloan thanked the Commission for their generous support, both professionally and personally, that she received during her tenure as Chief Executive of the NIHRC.

