

**MINUTES OF THE 27th MEETING OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE TWO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS ON THE
ISLAND OF IRELAND
(THE JOINT COMMITTEE)**

**Held on Tuesday, 21st April 2009 in the premises of the Irish Human
Rights Commission**

Present:

IHRC

Commissioners

Maurice Manning, President (Chair)

Tom O'Higgins

Michael Farrell

Roger Sweetman

Lia O'Hegarty

Olive Braiden

Suzanne Egan

Robert Daly

Helen O'Neill

Staff

Eamonn MacAodha, Chief Executive

Kirsten Roberts, Director of Research, Policy and Promotion

NIHRC

Commissioners

Monica McWilliams, Chief Commissioner

Eamonn O'Neill

Tom Duncan

Colm Larkin

Colin Harvey

Staff

Peter O'Neill, Chief Executive

Daniel Holder, Policy Worker

In attendance

Brian Gormally, Joint Contractor

1. Apologies

IHRC: Rosemary Byrne, Alice Leahy, Gerard Quinn, Katherine Zappone, Conleth Bradley

NIHRC: Ann Hope, Alan Henry, Geraldine Rice, Daphne Trimble, Jonathan Bell

2. Minutes of the 26th Meeting of the Joint Committee

It was noted that Helen O'Neill had provided an apology for the previous meeting. With that addition the minutes were agreed as accurate and were signed by the President and the Chief Commissioner.

3. Matters Arising

In respect of item six of the minutes, it was noted that the concern of the Joint Committee over the cut in budget of the IHRC had been communicated to the Departments of Justice and Foreign Affairs. The NIHRC would take the opportunity to stress its support for the IHRC at the upcoming meeting with the Oireachtas Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement.

4. Activity Reports

The Chief Executives of both Commissions tabled and spoke to detailed papers on their respective activities.

In addition, it was reported that difficulties had been encountered in the funding of the Joint Committee Contractor for this current year. This meant that the work programme would have to be reviewed.

It was also noted that the Education Minister in Northern Ireland had refused to support a UK government reservation on special needs education under the Disability Convention.

5. Racism Sub-Committee Report

The Chair reported on the meeting of the Racism Sub-Committee which had been held immediately before the Joint Committee meeting. The actions to progress work relating to the Migrant Workers Convention were approved.

6. Charter of Rights

Brian Gormally tabled and spoke to a draft pre-conference paper and Peter O'Neill tabled and spoke to a draft Conference Agenda. The latter was approved but it was felt the former would need to be carefully re-drafted. A detailed discussion of the possibilities for the Charter took place. It was decided to set up a sub-committee to work through the details of conference preparations. This would be co-chaired by Colin Harvey and Suzanne Egan and would include the two Chief Executives. It would meet before the next Joint Committee meeting and report back to the July meeting.

7. Progressing the Bill of Rights

A detailed report was contained in the Activity Report from the NIHRC Chief Executive. The Chief Commissioner noted that her visit to Washington had been useful and the task now was to keep up pressure on the UK Government for a substantive response to the Advice. It was hoped there would be a reference to legislation in the November Queen's Speech.

8. IHRC Policy Statement on An Garda Síochána and Human Rights

The IHRC Chief Executive provided details on a policy statement recently issued by the IHRC making 36 recommendations in relation to human rights compliance of the police service. The statement had been publicly launched and copies of the press release were circulated. The policy statement was informed by the research commissioned from Professor Dermot Walsh which had been recently published under the title, "Policing in Ireland: Law, Policy and Practice." The Commission had a positive meeting with the Garda on taking forward the recommendations.

9. Common Travel Area

Daniel Holder, NIHRC Policy Worker tabled and spoke to a detailed paper on the proposals contained in the current Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Bill which threatens the Common Travel Area. The paper had been prepared for the House of Lords Committee Stage of the Bill. There was extensive discussion on this important matter and it was agreed that it should be kept on the agenda for the next meeting. Daniel was commended for the high quality of the paper.

10. International developments

Kirsten Roberts, IHRC Director of Research and Policy briefed on current developments. She noted that the European Group of National Institutions had adopted a 2 year Strategic Plan at its last meeting and that Luxembourg and Croatia had been appointed to the ECC. It was also noted that the EU Fundamental Rights Agency would be holding its second meeting with national institutions was scheduled for 18-19 May in Vienna. She also informed the Committee of recent developments at the ICC, including the adoption of the Statute and that the 2010 ICC Biennial would be held in Europe on the theme of Business and Human Rights. She also noted that the '4 jurisdictions' would meet on 24-25 June in Edinburgh.

The meeting noted that the British Equality and Human Rights Commission has been accredited by the International Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions and congratulated the President on becoming chair of the finance committee of the ICC and on his election as Chancellor of the National University of Ireland.

11. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting was set for Tuesday, 7 July 2009 in Belfast.

There being no further business, the meeting ended.