

**MINUTES OF THE 35TH MEETING OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE OF  
REPRESENTATIVES OF THE TWO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS  
ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND  
(THE JOINT COMMITTEE)**

**Held on 6 April 2011 at the offices of the Irish Human Rights  
Commission in Dublin**

**Present:**

**NIHRC**

Commissioners

Monica McWilliams (Chair)

Ann Hope

Staff

Virginia McVea, Director

David Russell, Head of Communications and Education

Rhyannon Blythe (Professional Placement)

Hannah Russell (Professional Placement)

**IHRC**

Commissioners

Maurice Manning

Roger Sweetman

Tom O'Higgins

Helen O'Neill

Staff

Eamonn MacAodha, Chief Executive

Des Hogan, Deputy CEO

## **1. Minutes of the previous meeting held**

These were agreed as accurate.

## **2. Matters arising from the meeting**

Commissioners expressed their congratulations to Ms McVea on her recent appointment as Director.

The Chief Commissioner of the NIHRC briefed on Article 2 ECHR compliant inquests that have cross-jurisdictional impact and in particular the watching brief in the case of Denis Donaldson. The Chief Commissioner tabled a short paper and statement on the inquest in question. It was agreed that the statement would represent a jointly agreed position of the Commissions.

## **3. Activity reports from the two Commissions**

The Chief Executive of the IHRC spoke to the report on activities undertaken since the previous meeting, in particular, recent developments in relation to the IHRC's consultation on religion and education and on the issue of whistleblowing. The Chief Commissioner of the NIHRC drew attention to the fact that the NIHRC is now listed as a body to whom complaints can be made in Northern Ireland.

The Chief Executive of the IHRC further briefed on recent corporate services developments including administrative re-linking to the Department of Justice, Equality and Defence, ongoing budgetary difficulties and a recent funding initiative from Irish Aid.

In relation to the IHRC's Human Rights Education and Training project for the Civil & Public Service funded by the Atlantic Philanthropies, the Chief Executive updated the meeting on recent training initiatives with the Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs and An Garda Síochána.

He further briefed on recent IHRC Shadow reports to the Committee Against Torture and to the UN Human Rights Council as part of the State's UPR reporting process.

Recent press attention was also noted including the President's work on housing rights in the Dolphin House complex.

The Director of the NIHRC spoke to the report on activities undertaken since the previous meeting including work undertaken on the Bill of Rights, training on CERD undertaken in Dungannon, human rights and conflict resolution, in addition to recent social media developments.

It was reported that the NIHRC would issue an Annual Statement on 10 December. Policy and legislative work on DNA data retention, the Caravans Act 2010, work on prisons, migrant eligibility for medical care and meaningful independent living for those with disabilities in residential centres within the meaning of Article 19 of the CRPD. Work on the Framework Convention on National Minorities was also raised.

The Director briefed on recent initiatives in legal services including possible litigation on adoption law disparities and on Traveller accommodation.

The Director also briefed on NIHRC funding cuts.

The Chief Commissioner briefed on recent meetings in Washington and in London (Westminster Parliament) on the Bill of Rights. She also raised an upcoming Public Inquiry into Child Abuse to be announced in Northern Ireland and possible connection with the issue of Magdalene laundries.

The President of the IHRC briefed on the yet unpublished report on review of the IHRC and other bodies.

#### **4. Update on Racism activities**

The Chief Executive of the IHRC gave Commissioner Farrell's apologies and updated the meeting on IHRC Racism Committee work, including on the IHRC appearance before the CERD Committee and its subsequent Conclusions; the visit of the President, CEO and Commissioner to a Direct Provision Centre in Galway and IHRC work on the issue subsequently, the work of the Racism Committee ahead of the country visit in January to Ireland by the UN Independent Expert on human rights and extreme poverty and the work of Commissioner Byrne on Trafficking. The Chief Commissioner raised cross-border concerns in relation to Trafficking.

The Chief Commissioner also drew attention to the work of the NIHRC on racism as set out in the Director's report.

## **5. Work on the Charter of Rights for the island of Ireland**

The Chief Commissioner introduced a draft report on the Charter and invited Rhyannon Blythe and Hannah Russell to speak to their paper. Following the presentation and discussion, Commissioners joined in recognising the work of Ms Blythe and Ms Russell. It was agreed that the paper was an excellent contribution and focused the work of the Joint Committee.

It was further agreed that the IHRC would discuss same at its upcoming meeting, that small technical adjustments may be made to the paper and a short introduction set out its context.

## **6. Equivalence**

It was agreed that the NIHRC would revert on the legal aid paper circulated at the previous meeting with a view to adopting a common position on same.

## **7. International Developments**

The President of the IHRC briefed on the Chair of the European Group of NHRIs which the IHRC would shortly relinquish and the progress made on a Secretariat.

## **8. Any Other Business**

There was none.

## **9. Next meeting**

The next meeting will take place in June in Belfast at a date to be decided.