

**Minutes of the 36TH Meeting of the Joint Committee of the two  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND  
(THE JOINT COMMITTEE)**

Held on 27 June 2011 at the offices of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in Belfast

**Present:**

NIHRC

Commissioners

Monica McWilliams (Chair)

Ann Hope

Colin Harvey

Alan Henry

Staff

Virginia McVea, Director

David Russell, Head of Communications and Education

Rhyannon Blythe (Professional Placement)

Hannah Russell (Professional Placement)

IHRC

Commissioners

Maurice Manning (President)

Tom O'Higgins

Staff

Eamonn Mac Aodha, Chief Executive

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

These were agreed as accurate subject to amendments.

**2. Matters arising from the meeting**

Commissioners expressed their condolences on the death of Kader Asmal.

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

The Chief Executive of the IHRC spoke to the report on activities undertaken since the previous meeting. The Committee's attention was drawn to meetings that have taken place with the CAT committee and work ongoing in respect of the Universal periodic Review.

The Chief Executive of the IHRC explained that the Government of Ireland was conducting a consultation exercise on the Universal Periodic Review and the IHRC has been asked to attend and make presentations at the events being held.

Commissioners were informed that on 4 July the Minister for Education & Skills would launch the IHRC report on Human Rights Education in Ireland - An Overview.

Training is continuing on the AP funded project with Irish Defence Forces, Department of Education and local government employees. The Chief Executive announced that additional funding has been secured for the next two years.

An overview was provided on the FRA-funded conference on human rights education and training for the civil service which was hosted by the IHRC.

The Chief Executive noted that Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, had visited IHRC on 1 June and that Eamon Gilmore TD Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade would deliver the IHRC's 5th Annual Human Rights Lecture on Tuesday 28 June 2011.

An update was provided on current legal cases supported by IHRC and ongoing administrative support difficulties.

The Chief Executive explained that external project funding was also being sought from Irish Aid for a project to assist with developing capacity of some NHRIs in Africa.

The Director of the NIHRC spoke to the report on activities undertaken since the previous meeting including work undertaken in respect of legal service in relation to adoption, prosecution threshold, Article 2 and the use of stop and search powers. Commissioners were also updated on the ongoing dispute concerning legal aid rates in Northern Ireland.

On legislation and policy, the Director explained work undertaken on DNA and fingerprint retention, university tuition fees, Corporation tax proposals, immigration and the common travel area and concerns over the withdrawal of PSNI service orders in relation to domestic violence.

Commissioners were briefed on the NIHRC investigation into the rights of older people in residential nursing care homes. An update was provided on education and development activities, including initial engagements with the Health and Social Care Board and a report being finalised on human rights and conflict transformation in partnership with the Northern Ireland Community Relations Council.

International engagements were overviewed with attention drawn to the ICERD parallel report, CRPD and attendance at the ICC Geneva in April.

#### **4. Charter of Rights**

The Joint Committee were updated on publication and distribution plans for the advice document and discussed arrangements for future meetings with political parties and the United Kingdom and Irish Governments.

Commissioners expressed their thanks to Rhyannon Blythe and Hannah Russell, both of whom had worked on the project. The Committee also noted the substantive work completed on the issue of equivalency of rights protections. The IHRC requested that the Professional Placements attend the IHRC Justice Committee at a future date to present their work.

#### **5. Update on Racism Issues**

An update will be provided to the next Joint Committee meeting.

#### **6. International developments**

NIHRC Commissioners noted that Dr Manning's term of office as Euro Chair was complete and thanked him and the IHRC for the important role played in developing this post. The Joint Committee noted that the Scottish Human Rights Commission had now been elected to the position and expressed their congratulations to Professor Alan Millar. The Chief Executive of the IHRC reported on progress made to access funding to support the Euro-group.

The Committee noted that a conference on NHRIs will be hosted by the OSCE on 13-14 July in Lithuania.

### **Any Other Business**

Commissioners noted that this was the last meeting of the Joint Committee with current Commissioners. It was agreed that the IHRC President and the outgoing NIHRC Chief Commissioner would discuss the role and function of the Joint Committee with the newly appointed NIHRC Chief Commissioner.

### **Next meeting**

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