

**Minutes of the 37TH Meeting of the Joint Committee of the two  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND  
(THE JOINT COMMITTEE)**

Held on 28 September 2011 at the offices of the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission in Belfast

**Present:**

NIHRC

Commissioners

Professor Michael O'Flaherty (Chair)

Alan McBride

Christine Collins

John Corey

Milton Kerr

Marion Reynolds

Staff

Virginia McVea, Director

David Russell, Deputy Director

IHRC

Commissioners

Maurice Manning (President)

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**

There were no matters arising

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

The President of IHRC provided an update on the merger due to take place with the Equality Authority.

The Chief Executive of the IHRC introduced new NIHRC Commissioners to the functions and operations of the IHRC.

An update was provided on policy work relating to the vetting Bill, the Universal Periodic Review and parallel reporting on the CoE Framework Convention on National Minorities. Detail was also provided on the proposed Constitutional Convention due to begin in 2012.

The Chief Executive provided an overview of education work undertaken to design and deliver training for the Public Sector and Civil Service and work in schools. A conversation followed on the NIHRC proposal to develop a similar project, subject to awaited support from the Atlantic Philanthropies.

An update was also provided on the use of Inquiry powers by IHRC and legal intervention through use of amicus curiae.

The Chief Commissioner of NIHRC introduced the work of the new Commission and outlined the strategic interest to consider impact of the NI Executive Programme for Government, the impact of the economic crisis, dealing with the past and building a culture of human rights. Media and community engagement undertaken were also discussed.

An update was provided on the recent visit of the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Human Rights and the upcoming visit of the CoE High Commissioner for Human Rights in December. The Chief Commissioner also provided an update on the reduction of the NIHRC budget.

The Director of the NIHRC also reported on a number of activities undertaken since the previous meeting including engagement on the Universal Periodic Review, the Programme for Government and the NI Prison Review.

An update was provided on the investigation into nursing care homes and existing legal cases.

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

The Joint Committee were updated on the Charter of Rights and related constitutional debates taking place in the UK and Ireland. **Action:** It was

agreed the Chief Commissioner and President would write to the chair of the British Irish Parliamentary Assembly requesting an opportunity to address the Assembly.

## **5. Future work of the Joint Committee**

A discussion took place on possible future work of the Committee. It was agreed that this would remain an agenda item to take account of the merger between IHRC and the Equality Authority.

### **Any Other Business**

NIHRC expressed its gratitude to the IHRC for successfully chairing the European group of NHRIs and both expressed their best wishes to the Scottish Human Rights Commission as it assumes the role.

The Chief Commissioner congratulated the Chief Executive of the IHRC, Eamonn Mac Aodha, on his recent appointment as Irish Ambassador to Belgium. The Joint Committee expressed its gratitude to Eamonn for his service and wished him future success.

### **Next meeting**

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