

**MINUTES OF THE 14TH MEETING OF THE
JOINT COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE
TWO HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS ON THE
ISLAND OF IRELAND
(THE JOINT COMMITTEE)**

**Held on 2 December 2004 at the Northern Ireland Human Rights
Commission, Temple Court, 39 North St, Belfast**

- Present:**
- NIHRC:** Brice Dickson (Chief Commissioner) – Chair
Tom Donnelly
Tom Hadden
- IHRC:** Maurice Manning (President)
Suzanne Egan (absented from agenda item 4)
Maureen Harding Clark
Nuala Kelly
Clodach McGrory
Tom O’Higgins
- In attendance:**
- Alpha Connelly (Chief Executive, IHRC)
Paddy Sloan (Chief Executive, NIHRC)
Don Leeson (Head of Corporate Services,
NIHRC)
Ciarán Ó Maoláin (Head of Legal Services,
Research and Policy, NIHRC)
Peter O’Neill (Head of Information, Education
and Development, NIHRC)
- Apologies:**
- NIHRC:** Margaret–Ann Dinsmore
Christine Eames
Kevin McLaughlin
- IHRC:** William Binchy
Olive Braiden
Martin Collins
Robert Daly
Michael Farrell
Fionnuala Ní Aoláin
Gerard Quinn
Mervyn Taylor
Katherine Zappone

1. Welcome and introductions

- 1.1 The Chief Commissioner, NIHRC, welcomed colleagues from the IHRC to the 14th meeting of the Joint Committee and introduced Don Leeson, Ciarán Ó Maoláin and Peter O'Neill who had all recently been appointed to newly created management posts within NIHRC.
- 1.2 The Chief Commissioner and three NIHRC Commissioners' terms of office are due to end in February 2005. Christine Eames and Kevin McLaughlin have been re-appointed for a further term, and a new Chief Commissioner and Commissioners are expected to be appointed in due course.
- 1.3 In light of the forthcoming change in Commissioners, it was agreed that the NIHRC and IHRC Chief Executives should review the operation of the Joint Committee, reflecting on the experience of the past three years, and draw-up draft Standing Orders. These will be considered at the next Joint Committee, which would be the first meeting for the new NIHRC Chief Commissioner and Commissioners.
- 1.4 It was noted that the three sub-committees of the Joint Committee would need new NIHRC Commissioner representation, which would be agreed at the next meeting.

2. Minutes of the 13th meeting (9 September 2004)

- 2.1 Subject to some minor amendments, the minutes of the last meeting of the Joint Committee were agreed as an accurate record and will be published on the Commissions' respective websites.

3. Matters arising

- 3.1 Both Commissions are developing Codes of Conduct for their respective Commissioners and staff and would share drafts as they are produced (paragraph 5.2 of the minutes of the last meeting referred). A copy of the NIHRC's Casework Manual would be given to the IHRC for information following the meeting.

- 3.2 Both Commissions had been approached by the Omagh Support and Self-Help Group seeking support for a cross-border public inquiry into the Omagh bombing (paragraph 7.3 of the minutes of the last meeting referred). IHRC Commissioners will be discussing the matter later in December 2004. Once they have done this, the Chief Commissioner and the President will share the views of respective Commissions and consider whether a common position for the two could be adopted and what action might be taken.

Suzanne Egan left the meeting

4. Report from the sub-committee on a Charter of Rights

- 4.1 Suzanne Egan is involved in a research project with links to a Charter of Rights and therefore left the meeting so as to avoid any conflict of interest. It was hoped that she would be able to present the key findings from the research, which is near completion, at a sub-committee meeting during the early part of 2005.
- 4.2 A range of responses has been received from stakeholders who had been sent the pre-consultation document on a Charter of Rights for people on the island of Ireland. Further work is needed in the light of those responses. It was agreed that the Chief Commissioner and the President should write to all stakeholders who had been sent the pre-consultation document to let them know that work was progressing, but that there would be a delay in completing this pending the appointment of the new NIHRC Chief Commissioner and Commissioners.
- 4.3 In the meantime, it was decided that the sub-committee, with its current membership, should meet in January or February 2005 to develop and agree an overview document on work to date on a Charter of Rights, outstanding issues and what needed to be done to progress the project as a handover briefing to the new membership of the sub-committee.

Suzanne Egan rejoined the meeting

5. Report from the sub-committee on racism

- 5.1 It had not been possible to convene a meeting of the sub-committee since the last Joint Committee meeting. However, race issues continue to feature prominently in the work of both Commissions, and updates were given on the work they are undertaking.
- 5.2 NIHRC is in the process of developing a Migrant Workers' Handbook, in partnership with NGOs from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. IHRC were keen to be consulted as part of the project, particularly in respect of cross-border issues. It was agreed that NIHRC would consult IHRC on the draft Handbook, which might then highlight other areas for collaborative working on race issues.

6. Report from the sub-committee on emergency laws

- 6.1 Given that emergency legislation was markedly different in the two countries, there was a lack of clarity on the objectives of the sub-committee. This uncertainty had not yet been resolved because it had proven difficult to find a convenient date for a meeting of the sub-committee that every member could attend. It was agreed that the sub-committee should meet, by telephone conference if necessary, to review its purpose and report back to the Joint Committee.

7. International work

- 7.1 The IHRC is co-ordinating the European human rights institutions' input to the development of the United Nations Convention on disabled people. Katherine Zappone will be attending a seminar, to be facilitated by the Swedish Ombudsman, to discuss the proposed convention in Stockholm on 4/5 December 2004 and will report back to both Commissions on developments.
- 7.2 It was noted that the Council of Europe has recently published draft guidelines for member states on the protection of victims of terrorism.

- 7.3 Paddy Sloan gave an update on proposals for the reform of the European Court of Human Rights. It was noted that the closing date for comments on the proposals for reform is 15 December 2004.
- 7.4 Proposals to establish a Fundamental Rights Agency for the European Union were noted. The closing date for comments on the proposals was 17 December 2004. A meeting to discuss the proposals and the responses is scheduled to take place in Brussels on 25 January 2005.
- 7.5 A copy of the declaration agreed at the Third Roundtable of National Human Rights Institutions in Berlin on 25–26 November 2004 was circulated. The declaration covers development of the system of human rights protection within the area of the Council of Europe, human rights protection in the context of the fight against terrorism and protection of victims of trafficking in human beings.
- 7.6 At the Fifth Meeting of the European National Human Rights Institutions following the Roundtable in Berlin, the IHRC was elected to the four-country European Co-ordinating Committee in place of Sweden (the other countries being Denmark, France and Greece).

8. Joint database on UK and Irish human rights obligations

- 8.1 Rather than a joint database, it was agreed that the NIHRC and IHRC should develop and maintain their own databases on UK and Irish human rights obligations respectively, which would be accessible to both Commissions, and linked for public access.

9. Update on activities of the two Commissions

- 9.1 Each Commission gave an update on their respective activities over the past three months.

10. Date of next meeting

- 10.1 The 15th meeting of the Joint Committee will be held on 10 March 2005 in Dublin.

Note: This meeting was subsequently postponed pending the appointment of new NIHRC Commissioners.

11. Any other business

11.1 As this was his last meeting of the Joint Committee, Brice Dickson bade farewell to the group and recorded his appreciation for the work done by all of the Commissioners, particularly those that would be leaving the NIHRC in February 2005. He wished both Commissions success in their important work. Maurice Manning, on behalf of the IHRC, thanked the Chief Commissioner and the departing Commissioners for the work they had done in establishing the Joint Committee and taking forward its programme of work.

11.2 There being no other business, the meeting closed at 1pm.

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