



NORTHERN
IRELAND
HUMAN
RIGHTS
COMMISSION

179th COMMISSION MEETING
MONDAY 29 FEBRUARY 2016 AT 10:00am
IN THE OFFICE OF
THE NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,
TEMPLE COURT, 39 NORTH STREET, BELFAST, BT1 1NA

Present: Les Allamby, Chief Commissioner
John Corey
Milton Kerr
Grainia Long
Alan McBride
Marion Reynolds
Paul Yam

Apologies: Christine Collins

In Attendance: Virginia McVea, Director
David Russell, Deputy Director
Lorraine Hamill, Finance & Administration Manager
Rhyannon Blythe, Assistant Caseworker
Daniel Morris, Research Assistant
Colin Caughey, Policy Worker

1. Minutes of the 178th Commission meeting (HRC179.1)

1.1 The minutes of the 178th Commission meeting were agreed subject to one minor amendment.

2. Matters arising

2.1 Correspondence had been received from the Coroner's Office in relation to stillbirths and a meeting was being

sought to discuss further (item 9.2 of the previous minutes refers).

- 2.2 The update on FGM has been deferred until the next Commission meeting (item 12.1 of the previous minutes refers).

Action: Item on March Commission Agenda

3. Chief Commissioner Report (HRC179.2)

- 3.1 The Chief Commissioner reported on meetings and events he had attended since the last meeting. These included:
- Meeting with Sir Jonathan Stephens, NIO
 - Presentation to Sullivan Upper School politics society
 - Meeting with Patrick Corrigan, Amnesty International
 - A roundtable event with Johnston McMaster
 - Meeting with Judith Thompson, Victims and Survivors Commission
 - A roundtable event at TJI, Ulster University – speaker Alan Whysall
 - Meeting with Steve Fisher, Deputy Head of Human Rights and Democracy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office
 - Meeting with Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association
 - Meeting with the Joint Committee on Human Rights
 - Meeting with Colin Perry, NIO
 - Speaker at the Belfast Solicitors Association media conference

4. Commissioners' Reports

- 4.1 Commissioner Long raised the issue of homelessness and recent deaths. It was agreed that this issue would be considered later in the meeting.

5. Director's Report (HRC179.3)

- 5.1 Commissioners considered the Director's Report and noted the key issues concerning the Commission's human resources, finance and significant developments.

- 5.2 Commissioners were updated on progress in developing the new database which would act as a central repository for annual statement updates, treaty reporting, Universal Periodic Review and impact measurement. Work on the database should be completed by the end of March 2016.
- 5.3 Commissioners were updated on the International Ombudsman conference – ‘Human Rights – A 21st Century Approach to the work of Ombudsmen’ which is being held at the Stormont Hotel from 25-27 May 2016.
- 5.4 Commissioners were advised that the joint meeting with the Equality Commission Northern Ireland (ECNI) would most likely take place in May 2016.
Action: Joint meeting with the Equality Commission Northern Ireland to be confirmed
- 5.5 Commissioners were updated on the series of short films that were currently being produced highlighting rights issues including:
- Accident and Emergency
 - Migrant Workers
 - Participation for Persons with a Disability
 - Homelessness
 - Rights in the Community
 - Ombudsman and a Human Rights Based Approach
- 5.6 The Director reported that a job advertisement had been placed for one permanent position and four fixed-term temporary positions. Interviews for these posts would be held in March 2016. Management and staff had recently undertaken training on shortlisting, selection and interviewing skills.
- 5.7 It was noted that the average number of sick days per person had increased from the previous year. It was noted that the target was 4% and the Commission was at 5%. This will continue to be reviewed in the Director’s Report and monthly statistics.

6. Finance Report (HRC179.4)

- 6.1 Commissioners were updated on expenditure against budget for the period ending 31 January 2016.

6.2 It was noted that spend was on target for the period.

7. Strategic Plan Update (HRC179.5)

7.1 Commissioners discussed the responses received from stakeholders on the draft Strategic Plan for 2016-2019.

7.2 The Chief Commissioner agreed to reply to the stakeholders who commented on the draft Strategic Plan.

Action: Chief Commissioner to write to stakeholders who responded to draft Strategic Plan

7.3 The Chief Commissioner thanked Commissioner Long for facilitating discussions on the draft Strategic Plan and thanked Commissioners and staff for their input.

7.4 Commissioners approved the draft Strategic Plan for 2016-2019 having agreed amendments following stakeholders' feedback. The final version is to be uploaded to the Commission's website and forwarded to the Northern Ireland Office (NIO).

Action: Director to finalise draft Strategic Plan 2016-2019

8. Presentation and Discussion on Business Plan 2016-17 (HRC179.6)

8.1 Commissioners were provided with the Business Plan for 2016-2017 which had been drafted with linkage to the Strategic Plan for 2016-2019.

8.2 It was agreed that further time was needed to consider the Business Plan and Commissioners agreed to meet again to finalise their feedback in order that the Business Plan could then be completed.

Action: Commissioners to meet and finalise draft Business Plan for 2016-2017

9. Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) – A Guide for National Human Rights Institutions (HRC179.7)

9.1 The DDR paper was tabled.

9.2 Commissioners discussed the paper in detail and it was agreed subject to amendments. The amendments included the title of the document being changed, a greater emphasis on the need for societal ownership of any process, a greater alignment of the executive summary at the start of each chapter with subsequent contents and more clarity on the discrete role played by women and children during any conflict and their importance in post-conflict arrangements. Commissioner Reynolds noted her concerns about the wording 'an NHRI conducting work in a post conflict society'. The wording implies that DDR is applicable in all such societies and that the 'post conflict' stage can be separately applied; contrary to the holistic DDR framework and the eligibility criteria requiring to be satisfied to secure entry to it.

9.3 It was agreed that the DDR paper would be amended, a foreword produced and the final document would be presented to the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions (CFNHRI) and put on the website.

Action: DDR Paper to be amended and presented to CFNHRI and put on website.

10. Universal Periodic Review (UPR) Discussion on Consultation Lead in Process (HRC179.8)

10.1 Commissioners discussed the UPR and how the Commission's planned community engagement could be linked to the preparation process.

10.2 It was agreed that dates should be sought in Commissioners' diaries over the next 6 months for community engagement.

Action: Dates to be arranged for community engagement

11. European Union (EU) Referendum (HRC179.9)

11.1 Commissioners considered the briefing paper on the United Kingdom (UK) referendum on membership of the European Union (EU) and the potential human rights ramifications.

11.2 It was agreed that staff would conduct further research and return a further draft to the Commission for consideration.

Action: Staff to conduct further research and draft a further paper for the next Commission meeting

12. Termination of Pregnancy Court Case

12.1 Commissioners were informed that the termination of pregnancy court case was listed for 20-24 June 2016 in the Court of Appeal.

12.2 Commissioner Reynolds wished to record that following further reflection she was not supportive of the serious malformation of the foetus ground being pursued in the current proceedings. Commissioner Reynolds also outlined that on this specific issue her view would also apply to Commission responses to treaty monitoring bodies.

12.3 There was discussion on this specific issue and it was agreed to continue to pursue the legal challenge based on the international human rights standards with Commissioner Reynolds views on serious malformation of the foetus being minuted for the record.

13. Any other Business

13.1 Commissioners had a discussion on the human rights inquiry and possible subjects. This discussion included consideration of recent events in homelessness. It was agreed that a wider discussion was needed on the type of inquiry that the Commission should undertake in 2016-17.

13.2 Discussions are to commence at the April Commission meeting.

Action: Inquiry – agenda item for the April Commission meeting

The meeting closed at 3.20pm