

**MINUTES OF THE 31ST MEETING OF THE JOINT
COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE TWO HUMAN
RIGHTS COMMISSIONS ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND
(THE JOINT COMMITTEE)**

**Held on Wednesday 14 April 2010 in Dublin at the offices
of the Irish Human Rights Commission**

Present:

NIHRC

Commissioners

Monica McWilliams

Tom Duncan

Alan Henry

Colm Larkin

Staff

Peter O'Neill, Chief Executive

Nazia Latif, Research and Investigations Worker

IHRC

Commissioners

Maurice Manning (Chair)

Michael Farrell

Helen O'Neill

Conleth Bradley

Rosemary Byrne

Staff

Eamonn MacAodha, Chief Executive

Kirsten Roberts, Director of Research, Policy and Promotion

Roisin Hennessy, Senior Research and Policy Officer

1. Apologies

Apologies had been received from Anne Hope, Eamonn O' Neill, Colin Harvey, Geraldine Rice, Roger Sweetman, Suzanne Egan, Lia O' Hegarty, Robert Daly, Gerard Quinn, William Binchy, Katherine Zappone, Olive Braiden, Alice Leahy, Tom O' Higgins.

2. Minutes of the meeting held 3 February 2010

Monica McWilliams noted an amendment to the minutes on page 2 relating to the powers of the IHRC, which was agreed.

3. Updates on the work of the two Commissions

The NIHRC Chief Executive spoke to a report on the activities of the NIHRC since the previous meeting. Amongst items arising in discussion it was noted that the devolution of justice and policing powers will be of significance for the NIHRC. In relation to the Bill of Rights process, it was noted that the NIHRC has carried out a range of activities in this area with political parties and that it is currently awaiting direction from the Northern Ireland Office on how the process will be taken forward. In addition, it was noted that the NIHRC provided a submission to the UK Joint Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights in relation to the human rights implications of proposed changes to the Common Travel Area.

It was noted that the NIHRC has agreed a new Business Plan which it is happy to share with the IHRC.

There was some discussion in relation to the upcoming elections in the United Kingdom and it was noted that it may be useful for the Joint Committee to seek a meeting with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on the Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement following the elections. Finally, it was noted that the NIHRC's investigation on nursing homes is progressing well and that a public call for evidence had resulted in 200 calls to the NIHRC from the public.

The IHRC Chief Executive spoke to a report on the activities of the Commission since the previous meeting. Amongst items arising in discussion, it was noted that the IHRC had a successful launch of its Third Enquiry Report on the human rights issues arising from the operation of a

residential and day care centre for persons with a severe to profound intellectual disability.

In relation to the Education Project that is being funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies, it was noted that the co-ordinator and assistant co-ordinator have taken up their positions and are commencing work on bringing the project forward. It was also noted that the IHRC had made a submission on the Criminal Justice (Forensic Evidence and DNA Database) Bill 2010. In terms of upcoming events, it was noted that the Seamus Heaney lecture will be launched on 1 June 2010 by Mary Robinson and that the IHRC will be hosting a consultation meeting with civil society organisations on 28 April 2010. It was noted that the IHRC will now be administratively linked with the new Department of Community, Equality and Gaeltacht Affairs rather than the Department of Justice.

4. Report from Racism Sub-Committee

It was noted that the Racism, Migration and Trafficking Sub-Committee of the IHRC held a consultation meeting with NGOs working in the area of asylum and immigration law and that it had been a successful consultation meeting. Commissioner Byrne reported that she is representing the IHRC on a Roundtable Group which includes Government Departments, relevant agencies, statutory bodies and NGOs established under the National Action Plan Against Trafficking. She noted that there are some problems in relation to implementation due to the number of different organisations working in the area, but she noted the Garda Síochána is working closely with the different organisations to make provision for presumed victims of trafficking. Commissioner Byrne also noted that she had launched a research report on the impact of Direct Provision undertaken by AKIDWA, an NGO representing migrant women.

The NIHRC noted that the UK Government has submitted its report to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination but that it is not yet clear when the UK will be scheduled to be heard by the Committee. The NIHRC is preparing to submit a shadow report. In addition, it was noted that the Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is expected to visit the UK and Northern Ireland during 2010.

5. Consultation on the Migrant Workers Convention

It was noted that responses had been received from a small number of organisations responding to the Migrant Workers Convention Consultation Process but that the quality of the responses was good. It was agreed that the ICTU input would be formally accepted despite coming after the deadline. There was some discussion in relation to how to proceed with the consultation process and the submissions that have been received. It was suggested that one possibility would be to pull together the submission into a booklet form or to present it on the websites of both Commissions with a Joint Statement from the IHRC and NIHRC in relation to the Migrant Workers Convention. It was agreed that both Commissions would consider further what are the most appropriate next steps in relation to the consultation but that in principle publication should be considered. It was agreed therefore to write to all those who have been consulted to request any further submissions, including IBEC, and to enquire of those who have made submissions whether they would consent to their publication.

6. Charter of Rights for the Island of Ireland

In relation to the Charter of Rights, it was noted that members of both Commissions should be designated to meet and to bring the process forward. It was agreed that Maurice Manning, Monica McWilliams, Colin Harvey, Conleth Bradley and Colm Larkin would agree a date and venue to meet to agree how to progress the work of the Joint Committee on this issue.

7. International Developments

The IHRC reported on the meeting of the International Co-ordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions which had been attended by both Commissions in March. It was also noted that a meeting of the European Group had taken place. In addition, the NIHRC confirmed that it will be attending an upcoming Fundamental Rights Agency consultation event for NHRIs in Vienna at which the IHRC, as Chair, would have an active role.

8. Other Business

It was noted that the NIHRC will be holding an international conference which will most likely be held on 19 September 2010 on the question of Bills of Rights and Responsibilities.

9. Next meeting

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 1 July in Belfast.