



NORTHERN  
IRELAND  
HUMAN  
RIGHTS  
COMMISSION

## **MINUTES OF THE 74<sup>TH</sup> COMMISSION MEETING**

**HELD ON MONDAY 28 FEBRUARY 2005 AT 4PM AT  
THE NORTHERN IRELAND HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION,  
TEMPLE COURT, 39 NORTH ST, BELFAST, BT1 1NA**

**Present:** Brice Dickson, Chief Commissioner  
Margaret–Ann Dinsmore  
Tom Donnelly  
Christine Eames  
Tom Hadden  
Kevin McLaughlin

**In attendance:** Paddy Sloan, Chief Executive  
Don Leeson, Head of Corporate Services  
Ciarán Ó Maoláin, Head of Legal Services, Research  
and Policy  
Peter O'Neill, Head of Information, Education and  
Development

### **1. Minutes of the 73<sup>rd</sup> meeting (HRC 74.1)**

1.1 The minutes of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Commission meeting were agreed as an accurate record.

### **2. Matters arising**

2.1 There were no matters arising.

### **3. Report from the Chief Commissioner**

- 3.1 Interviews for the Chief Commissioner post took place on 26 February 2005. Commissioners noted that there had been a change in the composition of the panel for the interviews. It was hoped that the NIO would announce the new Chief Commissioner and Commissioners shortly.
- 3.2 The Chief Commissioner had written, in a personal capacity, to the Secretary of State to highlight his concerns about the Government's support for the Commission, which had received considerable media attention. The Chief Commissioner's intention was that his successor would not face the same difficulties that he, and his fellow Commissioners, had experienced.

#### **Margaret–Ann Dinsmore and Christine Eames joined the meeting at 4:20pm**

- 3.3 The Commission gave evidence to the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee on 28 February 2005 as part of its inquiry into dealing with the past. It was agreed that this should be followed–up with a letter to the Select Committee to reiterate the key aspects of the Commission's evidence. In particular, Commissioners feel that there is a need to secure the support of paramilitary groups for any truth recovery process to be effective, and would highlight truth and reconciliation as engaging two distinct processes.
- 3.4 Ian Pearson MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the NIO, wrote on 22 February 2005 to inform the Commission that the remit of the Parades Commission will be extended to cover supporters and followers of parades. This was an issue raised by the Commission in its response to the Quigley Review of Parades. A copy of the letter was tabled at the meeting.

- 3.5 The Irish Human Rights Commission announced its first inquiry on 24 February 2005. The inquiry will be into the human rights aspects of the law and practice in respect of certain social welfare benefits. More information on this will be available when the two Commissions (the Joint Committee) next meet – the date will be decided when the new Northern Ireland Human Rights Commissioners have been appointed.
- 3.6 The report into the rights of transsexual people has not yet been published. This project will now be taken forward in discussion with the new Commissioners.

#### **4. Report from the Chief Executive**

- 4.1 The audit of the Commission's accounts for 2001–02, 2002–03 and 2003–04 continues. It remains the intention to have the three sets of accounts approved by the Northern Ireland Audit Office by the end of March 2005.
- 4.2 The Commission has not yet signed the lease to take possession of the whole of Temple Court – discussions are taking place with the landlord over completing outstanding building works to the Commission's satisfaction.
- 4.3 Vacancies for the new Caseworker post, and for maternity cover for the Administrative Officer (Personnel), which were approved by Commissioners at their last meeting, were advertised during the week commencing 21 February 2005. Interviews will take place during April 2005.
- 4.4 The Commission had met with representatives of NIC–ICTU on 21 February 2005 to discuss a number of aspects of its work. In particular, NIC–ICTU pressed for greater emphasis to be placed on trade union rights in the Bill of Rights. A note of the discussions was tabled at the meeting.

## **5. Prevention of Terrorism Bill 2005**

- 5.1 Tom Hadden attended a meeting at the Home Office on 24 February 2005 to discuss the Prevention of Terrorism Bill 2005, which is currently progressing through Parliament. Tom tabled a paper setting out a number of concerns about the proposed legislation, particularly in respect of the nature and granting of control orders. The paper was agreed, subject to a minor modification, and will be made available as briefing for the imminent House of Lords debate on the draft legislation.
- 5.2 At the meeting at the Home Office, Baroness Scotland, the Minister of State for the Criminal Justice System and Law Reform, had indicated that arrangements could be made for the Commission to be formally included in the consultation process for similar UK-wide legislation that might have an impact on human rights in Northern Ireland. It was agreed to follow this up.

## **6. The Bill of Rights Project**

- 6.1 The final version of 'Taking Forward a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland', which documents the Commission's work to date and outstanding issues in relation to the Bill of Rights, was tabled at the meeting. The document represents a progress report, rather than the Commission's final advice, on the Bill of Rights. Further work is suggested as a result of recent discussions on women's rights, democratic rights and trade union rights. This document will be presented to the new Commissioners when they take-up their appointments before being published.
- 6.2 Commissioners asked that their appreciation be passed on to the staff involved in developing and printing the document.

## **7. Business Plan 2005–06 (HRC 74.2)**

- 7.1 Commissioners discussed a revised draft of the Commission's Business Plan for 2005–06, which had been amended in the light of discussions with staff and stakeholders, and at the February Commission meeting. The Plan was agreed by Commissioners, subject to some further minor revisions, and will be submitted to NIO for approval.

## **8. Omagh Support and Self–Help Group**

- 8.1 The Omagh Support and Self–Help Group has approached both the Commission, and the Irish Human Rights Commission, to seek support for a cross–border public inquiry into the Omagh bombing on 15 August 1998. Further work is needed before the two Commissions could take a position on this matter, including ensuring that the possible consequences of holding a public inquiry ahead of any criminal prosecution are clear to all concerned, and that this way forward is shared with all groups representing the victims of the bombing.

## **9. Any other business**

The 61<sup>st</sup> session of United Nations Commission on Human Rights runs for six weeks from 14 March to 22 April 2005. It was agreed that the Commission should be represented at discussions of the agenda items concerning National Human Rights Institutions, which will take place on 13 April 2005, and at the meeting of the International Co–ordinating Committee of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (the ICC) on 14–15 April 2005, in Geneva.

**The meeting closed at 5.20pm.**

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

18 March 2005