

**MINUTES OF THE 24th MEETING OF THE JOINT  
COMMITTEE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE TWO  
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSIONS ON THE ISLAND OF  
IRELAND  
(THE JOINT COMMITTEE)**

**Held on 14 May 2008 in the premises of the  
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, Belfast**

**Present:**

**NIHRC**

Commissioners:

Monica McWilliams, Chief Commissioner (Chair)

Jonathan Bell

Tom Duncan

Alan Henry

Ann Hope

Colm Larkin

Eamonn O'Neill

Geraldine Rice

Daphne Trimble

Staff:

Peter O'Neill, Chief Executive

David Russell, Head of Communications and Education

**IHRC**

Commissioners:

Maurice Manning, President

Michael Farrell

Staff:

Éamonn MacAodha, Chief Executive

Kirsten Roberts, Director of Research, Policy & Promotion

**IHRC/NIHRC**

In attendance:

Brian Gormally, Joint Contractor designate

## **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were recorded for Colin Harvey, Alice Leahy, Tom O'Higgins, Suzanne Egan, Gerard Quinn, Mervyn Taylor, Katherine Zappone, Roger Sweetman, William Binchy, Olive Braiden, Lia O'Hegarty, Robert Daly, Rosemary Byrne and Helen O'Neill.

## **2. MINUTES OF 23<sup>rd</sup> MEETING OF THE JOINT COMMITTEE**

The minutes were approved and signed by both the Chief Commissioner and the President, subject to an amendment in section 7 where it was noted that both commissions had publicly called on both the British and Irish governments to establish a review into the Omagh bombing and surrounding events, involving the appointment of a serving or retired judge of international standing to examine all available material to determine whether it is appropriate to institute an independent, cross-border, public inquiry into the atrocity.

## **3. MATTERS ARISING**

Brian Gormally was welcomed to the meeting as the recently selected joint contractor.

It was noted that the IHRC is organising a meeting for European NHRIs with representatives from the Council of Europe during 16-17 September 2008.

The President noted that there was an excellent opportunity to develop an annual conference of the NHRI's of the '4 jurisdictions' of England & Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Ireland, in light of the forthcoming establishment of the Scottish Human Rights Commission and recent establishment of the Equality and Human Rights Commission in Britain. In particular, the President noted that the many common issues between the commissions allowed for the development of both an informal framework and a more formalised structure for sharing of information and joint opportunities for work. It was agreed to further explore this proposal.

## **4. UPDATE ON ACTIVITIES OF THE TWO COMMISSIONS**

The chief executives of both commissions presented papers detailing recent activities.

## **5. SUB-COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Reports from the two sub-committee meetings that had met earlier during the day were considered.

In relation to the Charter sub-committee, a work programme was proposed with a paper due to be presented at a meeting of the Joint Committee in early 2009.

In regard to the Racism sub-committee, members reviewed recent work on the Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill, trafficking research commissioned on the Migrant Workers Convention by the IHRC and the new NIHRC investigation on homelessness and recourse to public funds.

## **6. INITIAL WORK PLAN FOR THE JOINT CONTRACTOR**

Members agreed that the work plan for the Joint Contractor would focus on:

1. Arrangements for the Joint Committee meetings in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> quarters of 2008.
2. Progress joint work on the Migrant Workers Convention drawing on the draft research report commissioned by the IHRC.
3. Scope a comparative review of human rights legislation between the two jurisdictions.
4. Develop a specific work plan in regard to the Charter of Rights for the island of Ireland for consideration at a meeting in early 2009.

It is expected that, as this is a new position, the Contractor will develop the role over the course of 2008 and all suggestions for both substantive work and practical initiatives were encouraged. It was agreed that a more detailed business plan for the first year of the contract will be developed during the summer having regard to the working methodology paper prepared by the two commissions, for ratification at the next Joint Committee meeting.

## **7. RESEARCH ON THE MIGRANT WORKERS CONVENTION**

Michael Farrell and Éamonn MacAodha reported on recent research commissioned by the IHRC on this convention and the potential of ratification by the Irish government. It was

agreed that this would inform the work of the Racism sub-committee and the work plan of the Joint Contractor.

#### **8. UPDATE ON THE BILL OF RIGHTS PROJECT IN NORTHERN IRELAND**

The Chief Commissioner reported on recent developments and the intention of the NIHRC to deliver its guidance to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on 10 December 2008. It was agreed that both commissions would liaise on the development of this work and on issues relating to the recent UK review of citizenship produced by Lord Goldsmith QC.

#### **9. INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS**

Members discussed work with the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and the strengthening of the ICC's legal and governance arrangements. In addition progress in regard to the ratification of the UN Convention on Disability Rights by both governments was reviewed.

#### **10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

It was agreed to circulate the paper on the Charter of Rights authored by Suzanne Egan and Rachel Murray, and to discuss the issue of TASERS at the next meeting.

#### **11. DATE AND LOCATION OF NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place on 3 September 2008 in Dublin.