General Assembly Meeting

Saturday 9th September 2023

12.30-14.30h (time zone: CEST)

Hybrid: University of Deusto, Auditorio/Zoom meeting

**Member Institutes Present 2023:**

* Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Serbia
* Bonavero Institute of Human Rights, University of Oxford, UK
* Center for Human Rights Science, Carnegie Mellon University, USA
* Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York, UK
* Centre for Criminal Justice and Human Rights (CCJHR), University College Cork, Ireland
* Center for Human Rights, Addis Ababa University, Ethiopia
* Centre for Human Rights, Ghent University, Belgium
* Centre for Fundamental Rights, Hertie School, Germany
* Centre for Human Rights Research, University of Manitoba, Canada
* Centre for Human Rights Studies, University of Zurich (UZHR), Switzerland
* Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, South Africa
* Centre for the Study of Human Rights Law, University of Strathclyde, UK
* Czech Center for Human Rights and Democracy (CCHRD), Czech Republic
* Department of Human Rights, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland
* Department of National and Supranational Public Law, University of Milan, Italy
* Dullah Omar Institute, University of the Western Cape, South Africa
* Erik Castrén Institute of International Law and Human Rights, University of Helsinki, Finland
* European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, University of Graz, Austria
* Geneva Academy of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights, University of Geneva, Switzerland
* Global Campus of Human Rights, Italy
* Global Justice Academy, University of Edinburgh, UK
* Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice, Sheffield Hallam University, UK
* Human Rights Institute, Binghamton University, USA
* Human Rights Law Centre, University of Nottingham, UK
* Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa, Canada
* Institute for Human Rights, Åbo Akademi University, Finland
* Instituto de Democracia y Derechos Humanos de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú/ Institute of Democracy and Human Rights (IDEHPUCP), Peru
* International Law and Human Rights Unit, University of Liverpool, UK
* Maastricht Centre for Human Rights, Maastricht University, the Netherlands
* Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM), University of Utrecht, the Netherlands
* Newcastle Forum for Human Rights & Social Justice, UK
* Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo, Norway
* Pedro Arrupe Institute of Human Rights of the University of Deusto, Spain
* Poznan Human Rights Centre, Poland
* Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Sweden
* School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden

# Member Institutes Represented by AHRI Chair 2023 (by proxy):

* Castan Centre for Human Rights Law, Monash University, Australia
* European Academy of Bozen/Bolzano (EURAC), Italy
* Law and Development Research Group, University of Antwerp, Belgium
* Minerva Center for Human Rights, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel
* Sussex Centre for Human Rights Research, UK
* UNESCO Chair in Human Rights, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg

**Member Institute represented by another Institution (by proxy):**

* Centre for Human Rights and Peace, University of Nairobi, Kenya (represented by Norwegian Centre for Human Rights)

**Apologies:**

* [Academy on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law of the Washington College of Law, American University](https://www.wcl.american.edu/hracademy/), USA
* Centre for Human Rights Erlangen-Nürnberg (CHREN), Germany
* Centre for Research and Development of Constitution and Human Rights, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia
* Chang Fo-chuan Center for the Study of Human Rights, Sowchos University, Taiwan
* Department for Human Rights and Politics, Institute for Political and International Studies, ELTE University Budapest, Hungary
* Human Rights Centre, Queen's University Belfast, UK
* Human Rights Centre, University of Potsdam, Germany
* Human Rights Implementation Centre, University of Bristol, UK
* [Irish Centre for Human Rights](http://www.nuigalway.ie/human_rights/), National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland
* LSE Human Rights, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK
* UCD Centre for Human Rights, University College Dublin, Ireland

**New Membership Applicant Institutes present:**

* Human Rights Center of the Metropolitan University in Venezuela
* Urban Morgan Institute for Human Rights, U.S

1. **Welcome**

The Chair warmly welcomed everyone to the meeting, in-person and online, and thanked the conference hosts for a wonderful event.

The chair noted that the Executive Secretary had earlier posted a draft of the Bilbao conference declaration in the shared folder with the agenda and annexes, which would be discussed at the end of the meeting.

1. **Adoption of agenda**

**DECISION:** Agenda adopted.

1. **Approval of minutes from Assembly Meeting on Friday 2nd September 2022 (Annex 1)**

The draft minutes were shared in advance. The chair invited any corrections. No corrections.

**DECISION:** Minutes approved.

1. **Report of the Chair**

Since the last Assembly meeting the Secretariat has continued to streamline policies and connect with members. Much of this year has been about preparing for the transition to the new Secretariat.

Thank you to everyone who has submitted items for the newsletter via the website. With the move to the new Secretariat, the newsletter/process may change but members are encouraged to keep up to date with information on publications, projects and work that is happening across the membership. This is one of the ways in which AHRI can be embedded amongst colleagues within the member institutes.

The Executive Board met on Thursday for the first in-person meeting since last year. The previous meeting was earlier in the year online.

1. **Financial Statements (Annex 2a & b)**

As a reminder, the AHRI financial year runs from July to June.

It has remained challenging to collect the majority of membership fees. The current Secretariat will follow up with individual representatives. It is normally an issue of invoices not being received or being received by an incorrect contact person.

Forty-three institutes have paid this year, including twelve that paid retrospective fees. These retrospective payments also account for the surplus amount in the account at the end of the financial year.

The balance at the end of the financial year, at 30th June 2023, was 9961 euros.

There is an additional 250 euros in the account since one institute paid after the end of the financial year.

There was some discussion at the Executive Board about what could be done with surplus funds, especially in light of inflation. For example, increasing the amount provided to the conference hosts (currently 8000 euros), support for doctoral students/early career researchers to attend conferences, and so on. This is contingent on increasing the number of institutes who are able to pay membership fees. The Executive Board will review this at the next meeting.

The chair invited questions. No questions from the floor.

Annex 2b is a breakdown of the conference costs for the previous year. This enables members to see the membership fee spend.

The chair invited questions. No questions from the floor.

1. **Election of Executive Committee members (Annex 3)**

The chair recalled last year’s decision, for legal reasons, to have a smaller Executive Committee and a larger Executive Board. The Executive Committee members are currently Kasey McCall-Smith, Elaine Webster, Magnus Killander, Manfred Nowak, Felipe Gomez Isa and Jan Wouters.

This year a seventh member will be added. Six members of the Executive Committee need to be present for meetings to be quorate therefore an additional member will provide some flexibility.

Last year, it was agreed that there would be a limit of two terms, with the first starting the year of adoption of the policy. The aim is to increase turnover whilst maintaining some continuity of members.

The terms of four members of the Executive Committee are coming to an end. The chair and executive secretary had intended to stand down. However, because of some administrative issues related to AHRI’s status as an international organisation in Belgian law, it appears preferable to remain for a transitional period. Both are therefore standing for another three-year term.

Both Manfred Nowak and Felipe Gomez Isa are also re-standing for election for a three-year term.

It is also necessary to elect a new Vice-Chair. Felipe Gomez Isa has agreed to assume this role.

It was noted that Jan Wouters has one more year remaining of current term.

The Chair invited a collective vote via zoom reactions. This was passed unanimously.

**DECISION**: Kasey McCall-Smith, Elaine Webster, and Manfred Nowak are re-elected for a three-year term, and Felipe Gomez Isa is elected as Vice-Chair for a three-year term.

Last year, it was unanimously agreed that the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria would assume the AHRI Secretariat.

Magnus Killander is thereby standing for election as Executive Secretary and Frans Viljoen as AHRI Chair.

Frans Viljoen (online) expressed apologies for being unable to attend the meeting in-person and expressed willingness to serve and to progress AHRI. One aim will be to advance the membership of AHRI in Africa.

The Chair invited zoom reactions. This was passed unanimously.

**DECISION**: Magnus Killander is elected as Executive Secretary and Frans Viljoen as AHRI Chair, and as members of the Executive Committee for a three-year term.

The following are members of the Executive Committee:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name of Representative**  | **Name of Institution** | **Elected for 3 years from:**  |
| Frans ViljoenAHRI Chair | Centre for Human Rights, South Africa | 2023 |
| Magnus KillanderAHRI Executive Secretary | Centre for Human Rights, South Africa  | 2023 |
| Felipe Gomez Isa AHRI Vice-Chair | Pedro Arrupe Institute of Human Rights, Spain | 2023 |
| Kasey McCall-Smith  | Global Justice Academy, UK  | 2023 |
| Manfred Nowak | Global Campus of Human Rights, Italy | 2023 |
| Elaine Webster | Centre for the Study of Human Rights Law, UK | 2023 |
| Jan Wouters | Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, Belgium | 2021 |

The Chair moved to the broader Executive Board.

Melissa Castan (Castan Centre for Human Rights Law, Monash University, Australia) has decided to stand down early due to taking on a new role in her institution. The Chair expressed thanks for contributions to the Committee.

Executive Board members who are standing for re-election this year are: Michael Lysander Fremuth (Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights, Austria), Alejandro Fuentes (Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Sweden), and Elizabeth Salmon (The Institute of Democracy and Human Rights, Peru).

The chair invited nominations from the floor. Anyone is welcome to stand, including those whose institutes have recently joined AHRI.

Dr Rebecca Smyth, Lecturer in Law at Birmingham City University, stood for election. Dr Smyth is particularly interested in promoting participation of early-career researcher and researchers from the Global South.

No further expressions of interest.

The chair read out the names of those standing for election and asked if anyone had any objections. No objections noted.

All members were welcomed or re-welcomed to the Executive Board, and thanked for participation in Executive Board meetings.

There was a suggestion from the floor to bear in mind the gender balance and geographical balance of the Executive Board. This is a responsibility on everyone to put themselves forward for the Board, which is a valued contribution to the network. The Chair agreed that this should be kept in mind for future. It was also clarified that meetings between conferences are online and that during the conference hybrid participation in Executive Board meetings is possible.

**DECISION:** Michael Lysander Fremuth, Alejandro Fuentes, and Elizabeth Salmon are elected for a second three-year term, and Rebecca Smyth is elected for a first three-year term.

The following are now members of the Executive Board:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Name of Representative**  | **Name of Institution** | **Elected for 3 years from:** |
| Elizabeth Salmon | The Institute of Democracy and Human Rights, Peru | 2023 |
| Michael Lysander Fremuth | Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Human Rights, Austria | 2023 |
| Alejandro Fuentes | Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Sweden | 2023 |
| Rebecca Smyth | Centre for Human Rights, UK | 2023 |
| Roman Wieruszewski | Poznan Human Rights Centre, Poland | 2021 |
| Vesna Petrovic | Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Serbia | 2021 |
| Suzanne Egan | UCD Centre for Human Rights, Ireland | 2021 |
| Viviana Fernandez  | Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa, Canada | 2021 |
| Aoife Nolan | Human Rights Law Centre, University of Nottingham, UK | 2021 |
| Thomas Bundschuh | Helena Kennedy Centre for International Justice, UK | 2022 |
| Eva Maria Lassen | The Danish Institute for Human rights, Denmark | 2022 |

1. **AHRI Conference 2024 and 2025**

The Chair reminded attendees that the 2024 conference was due to take place at the Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (Lund, Sweden).

Morten Koch provided an update on behalf of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute. The conference will be jointly organised with the University of Lund. The event will be from 12th-14th September. The 12th will include a PhD workshop. The General Assembly planned for the 13th September. The working title, subject to change, is ‘Human rights in a Polarized World: Realising Human Rights in the Green and Just transition.’ The call of papers is planned for December. The Chair gave thanks for the update.

In relation to the 2025 conference: this was decided in the Executive Board meeting this week. A decision is made 2 years in advance in order to ensure sufficient planning time. It is a pleasure to announce that the 2025 conference will be hosted by the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights, Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú.

The Chair invited the Institute’s representative at the Assembly, Valeria Reyes, to speak. Valeria Reyes thanked the Executive Board, also on behalf of Professor Elizabeth Salmon. The theme will be further developed but the aim is to address human rights and organised crime. The conference will take place in Lima. This will be the first conference in Latin America. The expected dates are 12-13th September 2025.

1. **AHRI Working Groups**

The Chair invited updates from the active working groups.

Institutional development: Viviana Fernandez provided an update. Thank you to everyone who responded to the survey at the end of last year/start of 2023. The point of the survey was to inform how the members connect and communicate with each other. From this, the working group developed a one-page proposal. This included having a ListServ email group for members, which will be a simple email address to allow people to communicate. Information shared might include invitations to conferences, or major publications. Such things are shared via the newsletter but this is a supplementary means. Another option is to be able to create thematic groups organically. For example, members will be able to write to the email address and share an invitation for anyone interested to contact them on their individual email address. It is hoped that this will allow groups to collaborate more organically. The ListServ could also be used to share, for examples, urgent statements and so on.

Members are also reminded to please share information about AHRI and encourage new members to join.

It was also suggested in the survey responses that the conference should remain hybrid. This responds to economic realities as well as inclusion. The Executive Board discussed this and encourages future conference hosts to facilitate some form of online participation.

Other ideas such as having an essay competition will be further discussed in the Board. Members are invited to keep this in mind and to contact the Secretariat if they are interested in supporting the Working Group and the Executive Board.

The Working Group remains active and members are encouraged to get involved.

There was a question about how the ListServ would be activated. It would be important to know some details so that members are able to distinguish this from any spam/phishing emails.

Magnus Killander said that the list was set up on Google Groups. All members should have received an email today (9th September). Members of the group can remove themselves from the Group and regulate the frequency of notifications via Google Groups. This should be distinguishable from phishing emails. AHRI would not request any personal information (although invoice emails are sent for the purposes of membership fee payments).

There was also a question about how many people can be added to the AHRI mailing list. The Executive Secretary explained that there must be at least one Official Representative contact and one Administrative Contact (these may be the same person). Member Institutes can have more than one of each. Some members have additional invoice fee contacts. In addition to the email list and the fee invoice list, there is the newsletter mailing list. All notified Official and Administrative contacts receive information on AHRI communications and are added to the newsletter mailing list. Anyone, whether affiliated to an AHRI member institute or not, can sign up via the website to receive the newsletter, and all recipients are able to unsubscribe themselves via the link in the newsletter from this list.

There was a question asking when the ListServ test email was sent. This was sent approx. 45 minutes ago. If this has not been received, members are invited to check spam email folders and contact Magnus Killander if not received. It should have been received from AHRImembers@googlegroups.com. One attendee noted that the email had been received.

AHRI history: The chair noted that this text was complete. Publication is planned as a chapter in a book in the AHRI book series.

It was requested that Elina Pirjatanniemi investigate whether there is any record of an AHRI conference taking place at Abo Akademi in Turku, Finland.

**ACTION:** Elina Pirjatanniemi to follow-up and respond to Manfred Nowak.

AHRI publications: The chair gave an overview of the books published, or in preparation, with the AHRI series with Edward Elgar.

There are two books that should both be published next year. One is related to the 2021 Maastricht conference on Human Rights Strategies, and details of the other will be shared in due course.

Two other proposals are being considered currently.

The Series Editors are Kasey McCall-Smith, Ingrid Westendorp, and Jan Wouters.

If the book proposal is related to the conference theme, proposals are reviewed by the Series Editors and Executive Board members may also be asked to review. If the book proposal is not related to a conference, this goes through the normal Edward Elgar peer review process.

1. **Admission of New Members (2 applications) (Annex 4 a, b, c & d)**

The Chair invited the representative from the Human Rights Center of the Metropolitan University in Venezuela to introduce themselves and their institute and the motivations for joining AHRI, and to respond to any questions arising.

Ms. Vanessa Castillo, Deputy Director, introduced the Centre and its work.

Members were invited to vote by via Zoom reactions and by raising hands in the room.

The Human Rights Center of the Metropolitan University was warmly welcomed by the Assembly.

The Chair invited the representative from the Urban Morgan Institute for Human Rights, U.S, to introduce themselves and their institute and the motivations for joining AHRI, and to respond to any questions arising.

Professor Bert Lockwood, Director,introduced the Institute and its work. Professor Lockwood also thanked the organisers of the conference on a wonderful event.

Members were invited to vote by via Zoom reactions and by raising hands in the room.

The Urban Morgan Institute was warmly welcomed by the Assembly.

**DECISION:** The membership of both institutes was confirmed.

1. **Next meeting**

The next Assembly will take place during the Lund conference, likely on Friday 13th September 2024, further details TBC.

1. **AOB.**
2. **Bilbao Declaration:**

The conference hosts have prepared a declaration related to the theme of the conference (Bilbao Declaration on Human Rights Defenders). A draft was circulated amongst the Executive Board and comments were received.

Th current draft was shared at the start of this meeting in the cloud folder with the agenda and annexes.

The Declaration was shared on screen. The Chair invited any amendments.

Suggestions included: mentioning the Aarhus Convention earlier in the Document; mentioning the other Special Rapporteur mandates that exist in other regions; adding ‘quasi-judicial’ bodies on page 2; adding reference to the ‘transnational character of activism and repression’ to paragraph 4; adding specific reference to children as human rights defenders as in the recent General Comment of the CRC Committee; adding ‘activists with disabilities’; adding reference to journalists and lawyers; add a pointing about access to justice to aid the fight against impunity; adding a reference to non-state actors; taking out ‘adequate’ development and instead emphasising effectiveness and creating and securing an enabling environment for the full exercise of rights.

It was also suggested to note the commitment of AHRI itself to supporting human rights defenders.

A small editorial change was suggested. It was also suggested that the document be read for English language precision.

The final version will be circulated.

**ACTION:** Any volunteers to translate the document are invited to contact the Secretariat.

Minutes taken by Elaine Webster

Executive Secretary