



Minutes: AHRI Annual Assembly Meeting 2015

Belgrade

Monday 21 September 2015

13:45-15:30

Member Institutions represented:

- Belgrade Centre for Human Rights
- Centre for the Study of Human Rights, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK
- Danish Institute for Human Rights, Denmark
- European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation, Venice-Lido, Italy
- European Training- and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, Graz, Austria
- Human Rights Centre, University of Essex, UK
- Human Rights Centre, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland, UK
- Human Rights Law Centre, University of Nottingham School of Law, UK
- UNESCO Chair in Human Rights, University of Luxembourg
- Newcastle Forum for Human Rights and Social Justice, Newcastle Law School, University of Newcastle, United Kingdom
- Institute for Human Rights, Åbo Akademi University, Finland
- Human Rights Centre, University of Padua, Italy
- Irish Centre for Human Rights, National University of Ireland, Galway
- Ludwig Boltzmann Institute of Human Rights, Austria
- Maastricht Centre for Human Rights, Maastricht University, Faculty of Law, The Netherlands
- Netherlands Institute of Human Rights (SIM), University of Utrecht, The Netherlands
- Norwegian Centre for Human Rights, University of Oslo, Norway
- Poznan Centre for Human Rights, Polish Academy of Sciences
- Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Lund, Sweden
- Swiss Centre of Expertise in Human Rights, Bern, Switzerland
- University of Zürich Competence Centre for Human Rights, Switzerland

- Czech Center for Human Rights and Democratization (CCHRD), Czech Republic
- Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, K.U. Leuven, Belgium
- The Centre on Human Rights in Conflict, University of East London, UK
- School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Sweden
- Research Centre Human Rights, University of Vienna
- Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa
- The European Academy of Bozen/Bolzano (EURAC)

Candidate Institutions represented:

- Human Rights Research Centre, Charles University in Prague
- The Centre for Human Rights Research (CHRR), the University of Manitoba, Canada
- The Global Justice Academy, University of Edinburgh
- Academy on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law of the Washington College of Law, American University
- Human Rights Centre, University of Potsdam

Agenda

The meeting was chaired by Thomas Gammeltoft-Hansen.

1. Adoption of Agenda:

The agenda was adopted.

2. Approval of minutes from Annual Meeting 2014:

The minutes from the Annual Meeting 2014 were approved.

3. Report of the Chair:

There were many debates at the Copenhagen conference on the different possibilities for AHRI. This is why this year, we decided to hold working groups on the various issues. The Chair pointed out that the working groups will report back to this Assembly meeting under Item 7 of the Agenda.

AHRI is growing as a network with five new applications for membership this year. The Chair said that he was very pleased that AHRI is expanding, and especially in North America, with two applications from that region.

4. Membership:

The secretariat had received five new membership applications. The Executive Committee endorsed the applications and recommended for them to be adopted by the Assembly. Applications had been received from:

- 1) Human Rights Research Centre, Charles University in Prague*
- 2) The Centre for Human Rights Research (CHRR), the University of Manitoba, Canada*
- 3) The Global Justice Academy, University of Edinburgh*

4) *Academy on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law of the Washington College of Law, American University*

5) *Human Rights Centre, University of Potsdam*

Applicants were invited to give short presentations and all of the applications were accepted by the Assembly.

5. Financial statement:

The Chair presented the financial statement and explained that it includes the final statement for the AHRI conference in 2014, as well as some additional information about the 2015 conference. Most of the support for AHRI in 2015 was made through in-kind contributions from the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights and the Danish Institute for Human Rights. It was agreed that the financial statement should be kept simple, but that the income section should be broken up into membership contributions and other contributions.

It was also discussed that there have been some problems with the credit card system for paying membership fees on-line. The Chair said that the Danish Institute for Human Rights will arrange an alternative method of payment, such as a bank transfer, when requested.

6. Constitutional amendments:

The Chair presented and explained the proposed amendments (found in Annex 4 of the Agenda), including to Articles 2, 6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 7.1, 7.3, 8, 9, 10 and 13. He explained that the amendments reflect the growth and development of AHRI as a network and invited comments from the Assembly.

Comments were made on the following Articles:

- *Article 6.1: it was discussed that the Chair and Vice-Chair positions would not be held by the same members for more than two terms, except for in exceptional circumstances. The Assembly agreed that the proposed amendments would be left as they are, but that it would be minuted that the working assumption is that members would not be in these positions for more than two terms and that an extension beyond this would only be considered in exceptional circumstances.*
- *Article 7.1: the Chair said that, at the Executive Committee meeting, it was proposed to remove the word “eight” from the original proposed amendment, to allow for maximum flexibility. The Assembly agreed to this and decided to add the sentence “The Assembly will decide how many members there will be on the Executive Committee”.*
- *Article 9: The Assembly agreed to add the phrase “if the member-institute brings the association into disrepute”, a standard legal clause, to this Article.*

All of the other proposed amendments in Annex 4 of the Agenda were adopted by the Assembly.

See Annex 1 to these minutes for a document reflecting the amendments agreed to by the Assembly (including originally proposed amendments and those added at the Assembly meeting).

7. Working groups and future directions:

The Chair invited the coordinators of the working groups to present the conclusions from the morning’s sessions to the Assembly.

Education and Teaching

Inga Bostad presented the conclusions from the Working Group on Education and Teaching. She said that the group discussed various options for AHRI in this area and agreed that there is a need for real commitments. Six possible projects were discussed and, of these, three were selected, namely: joint PhD courses, teacher exchange and MOOC

(e-learning). There was a lot of interest in this area and if the Executive Committee sends out a request for AHRI members to sign up to a working group on this topic, then there are many that would be interested.

Expanding the membership

Roman Wieruszewski presented the conclusions from the Working Group on Expanding the Membership. He said that the working group discussed the option of actively pursuing institutions to apply for membership, e.g. in the Global South. Roman said that the working group agreed that current membership criteria should be maintained. However, that it is possible to also work with individuals, e.g. in the Global South, to help them establish institutions that will later become members. There was interest in establishing a working group that will look at strategic outreach in regards to new membership.

The Assembly discussed the issue of membership fees and whether or not these could be reduced for potential members with fewer resources. It was agreed that support could be made available to allow for flexibility. Possible further expansion in North America was also discussed and encouraged by the Assembly.

AHRI as a policy maker

Eva Maria Lassen presented the conclusions from the Working Group on AHRI as a Policy Maker. She said that the working group discussed that it is important that AHRI, as the largest human rights research institute network in the world, raises its voice and increases its policy impact. This can be done in a number of ways, for example, through making issue statements on important topics, establishing an AHRI journal, or through collaborative research projects. For any of these initiatives to work, it is important that all AHRI members disseminate the messages and statements of AHRI in their respective countries. Eva Maria also said that there are still some important outstanding issues that need to be decided, such as who can speak on behalf of AHRI and how will our policy statements be different from e.g. Amnesty International. She said that it would be useful to establish a working group to work on this area until the next Assembly meeting.

The Chair asked the Assembly for a mandate to establish working groups to look at these various issues. This was agreed to by the Assembly.

8. Upcoming AHRI conferences:

The practice of alternating between small and large conferences was discussed and the Assembly agreed that this format works well and that it will be retained.

The Chair then discussed the hosting of the AHRI conference in 2017 and said that all members are invited to make a proposal for the hosting of the conference. The procedure proposed by the Executive Committee is that written proposals by institutions that wish to host the conference be sent to the Secretariat. These proposals should include the type of venue that would be available, logistics and funding, etc. All of the proposals will be evaluated and a decision will be made at the Executive Committee meeting in January.

Antoine Buyse presented information to the Assembly on preparations for the AHRI conference in 2016. He said that the dates of the conference will be Friday and Saturday, 2 and 3 of September 2016. This is earlier than in previous years to reflect a compromise between those that did not want the conference to be held in the summer and those countries where the University semester starts earlier.

The Chair then invited any representatives that would like to present their provisional wish for hosting the conference in 2017 to do so. He stressed that everyone has the opportunity to submit a proposal to the Executive Committee, whether or not they present something today, and that making a presentation would in no way prejudice the Executive Committee's decision.

John Packer presented his provision wish for the University of Ottawa to host the 2017 AHRI conference. He said that 2017 is the 150th anniversary of the Canadian constitution and proposed that the theme of the conference be human rights and constitutionality. He

said that the University of Ottawa is committed to fundraising for this conference, also to assist delegates with their travel from Europe. They also have access to facilities that they can use at no cost. However, a decision would need to be made early to allow for fundraising, etc.

9. AOB:

Re-election of AHRI Executive Committee members

The term has expired for the following Executive Committee members: Vesna Petrovic, Ingrid Westendorp, Sylvie Langlaude, Jan Wouters, Roman Wieruszewski, Antoine Buyse, and Ray Murphy.

All of these Executive Committee members, except for Sylvie Langlaude, would like to stand for re-election. The Assembly thanked Sylvie for the contribution that she has made in her time as Executive Committee member.

A decision was made to schedule the re-election for Tuesday, 22 September, to allow others the opportunity to express an interest in joining the Executive Committee.

On Tuesday, 22 September, no other members expressed an interest in joining and all of the following Executive Committee members were re-elected by the Assembly:

- *Vesna Petrovic*
- *Ingrid Westendorp*
- *Jan Wouters*
- *Roman Wieruszewski*
- *Antoine Buyse*
- *Ray Murphy*

AHRI as a legal entity

The Chair explained that Jan Wouters will be exploring the possibility of establishing AHRI as a legal entity and asked the Assembly to extend the mandate on this. The Assembly agreed to extend this mandate.

AHRI Belgrade Declaration on the Refugee Crisis in Europe

Manfred Nowak presented the draft Declaration on the Refugee Crisis in Europe to the Assembly. He explained that the working group on AHRI as policy maker and other interested members decided to draft this declaration, which is addressed to the European Union in relation to the special sessions on this issue that will take place in the following days. The Assembly discussed the wording of the proposed declaration and agreed on a number of amendments to the draft text. Members were also invited to discuss any stylistic issues or small changes with the drafters after the Assembly meeting. The Assembly agreed for the statement to be published on behalf of AHRI.