General Assembly Meeting

Friday 27th August 2021

1.00pm-3.00pm (timezone: CET)

Zoom meeting.

**DRAFT**

Member Institutes Present 2021:

* Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, Serbia
* Bonavero Institute of Human Rights, University of Oxford, UK
* Center for Human Rights Science, Carnegie Mellon University, USA
* Castan Centre for Human Rights Law, Monash University, Australia
* 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, Ghent University, Belgium
* Centre for Human Rights and Peace, University of Nairobi, Kenya
* Centre for Human Rights, University of Pretoria, South Africa
* Centre for Research and Development of Constitution and Human Rights, Universitas Sebelas Maret, Indonesia
* Centre for the Study of Human Rights Law, University of Strathclyde, UK
* Chang Fo-chuan Center for the Study of Human Rights, Sowchos University, Taiwan
* Czech Center for Human Rights and Democracy (CCHRD), Czech Republic
* Department for Human Rights and Politics, Institute for Political and International Studies, ELTE University Budapest, Hungary
* Department of Human Rights, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Poland
* 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 Centre, University of Potsdam, Germany
* Human Rights Centre, Queen's University Belfast, 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
* Law and Development Research Group, University of Antwerp, Belgium
* Maastricht Centre for Human Rights, the Netherlands
* Minerva Center for Human Rights, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel
* 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
* Sussex Centre for Human Rights Research, UK
* UCD Centre for Human Rights, University College Dublin, Ireland
* Department of National and Supranational Public Law, University of Milan, Italy

# Member Institutes Represented by AHRI Chair 2021 (by proxy):

* [Academy on Human Rights and Humanitarian Law of the Washington College of Law, American University](https://www.wcl.american.edu/hracademy/), USA
* Centre for Applied Human Rights, University of York, UK
* Erik Castrén Institute of International Law and Human Rights, University of Helsinki, Finland
* Human Rights Centre of the University of Potsdam, Germany
* [Irish Centre for Human Rights](http://www.nuigalway.ie/human_rights/), National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland
* European Academy of Bozen/Bolzano (EURAC), Italy
* UNESCO Chair in Human Rights, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg
* Instituto de Democracia y Derechos Humanos de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú/ Institute of Democracy and Human Rights (IDEHPUCP), Peru

Apologies Received by Member Institutes 2021:

* Centre for Criminal Justice and Human Rights (CCJHR), University College Cork, Ireland
* Centre for Human Rights Erlangen-Nürnberg (CHREN), Germany
* Human Rights Implementation Centre, University of Bristol, UK
* Swiss Centre of Expertise in Human Rights, Switzerland

New Membership Applicant Institutes present:

* International Law and Human Rights Unit, University of Liverpool, UK

1. **Welcome**

The Chair warmly welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted that the meeting was quorate.

1. **Adoption of agenda**

**DECISION:** Agenda adopted.

1. **Approval of minutes from Assembly Meeting on 4th September 2020 (Annex 1)**

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

**DECISION:** Minutes approved.

1. **Report of the Chair**

The chair reported that, since the last meeting, there had been many changes, particularly as a result of finalising AHRI’s status as an international association. The Executive Committee had been working behind the scenes to finalise and comply with the process. An official vote of thanks was given to Professor Jan Wouters for the final steps in the registration process, and to Dr Ingrid Westendorp for taking on the task of arranging the back account.

The new AHRI administrator was introduced, Molly Brooks. There is also a new AHRI email address for administrative matters: administration@ahri-network.org. Molly had been working on the website in order to make it more user friendly and to streamline connections with the member institutes. The chair requested, notably, that members submit any photos from previous AHRI events that might be suitable for the website. There is now a plug-in on the website that allows members to submit information for the monthly newsletter directly via the website. Publications can also be highlighted in the newsletter, therefore members are invited to share info in this way.

The Executive Committee met yesterday. One issue discussed was Executive Committee membership in relation to our legal obligations as an international association, and another issue discussed was the Maastricht Declaration (both agenda items). The chair reminded attendees that all members are welcome to get in touch at any time with any issues that they would like to see discussed at the Executive Committee.

**ACTION:** Member institutes invited to submit photos from previous AHRI events for the website (administration@ahri-network.org)

1. **Financial Statement (Annex 2)**

The financial statement reflects the bank balance at the end of June 2021, which is the end of the financial year in line with AHRI’s status as an international association under Belgian law. Some membership fees have been carried over from 2020.

The new bank account in Belgium means that details will remain the same when the Secretariat moves on. Historically, all of the monies received have been funnelled to the conference. It had been agreed last year that a sum would be reserved to the Secretariat to encourage take up of this role in future (the changeover will be in September 2023). The Secretariat now retains a sum for administrative support, website fees, and finance software.

The chair invited questions.

There was a question with a correction to the Zipbook software fees (should be 39 Euros rather than 29 Euros).

There was a question regarding the membership fee waiver option, and whether members had requested this. The chair clarified that three member institutes had been in touch over the past year regarding reduced fees/fee waiver. Many institutions had also paid for more than one year.

It was noted that, in future, fee invoices will go out in January in each year.

There was a question as to whether there were now additional costs for financial auditing. The chair stated that because the turnover is low and AHRI is a membership only association, there are very minimal demands. No external auditing is necessary.

The chair flagged that there are still many processes underway, to clarify administrative issues. One issue was that invoices can only be sent to one person, which causes some lack of clarity. This has been a slow process but will continue being worked on.

Members were invited to request that colleagues responsible for paying membership fees should also please include transfer fees, which vary significantly depending on where the fees are being transferred from.

Thirty-three institutions had paid so far, which was very much appreciated, especially considering the difficult circumstances last year.

The chair gave an update on finances since the end of the financial year. The balance was 15,067.00 euros as at 2 August 2021. This included a number of retrospective and prospective fee payments. Although conferences will likely be a hybrid attendance model in future, something that the surplus of funds could contribute to is, for example, scholarships for attending conferences.

**ACTION:** The chair will update the accounting software fees on the financial statement.

1. **Admission of New Members (1 application) (Annex 3)**

The Chair invited the representative from the International Law and Human Rights Unit, University of Liverpool, UK to introduce themselves and their institute and the motivations for joining AHRI, and to respond to any questions arising.

Professor Kanstantsin Dzehtsiarou thanked Professor Aoife Nolan (Human Rights Law Centre, University of Nottingham, UK) for supporting the application and introduced the Unit.

Professor Aoife Nolan also spoke in support of the membership application.

Members were invited to show support via Zoom reactions and principally to raise digital hands with any question or objections.

The International Law and Human Rights Unit was warmly welcomed by the Assembly.

The chair thanked everyone and expressed a final welcome to the new member, which takes the number of AHRI member institutes to more than eighty.

**DECISION:** The membership of the International Law and Human Rights Unit was confirmed.

1. **Election of Executive Committee members (Annex 4)**

The chair invited attendees to consult Annex 4 (Members of the AHRI Executive Committee).

The chair gave an overview of the role of the Executive Committee. Following the 2020 Assembly, the Secretariat and Executive Committee had continued to explore a policy on membership, including maximum terms and number of members.

Thanks were given to Başak Çalı who had discussed her previous experiences as Secretary General of the European Society of International Law with the Executive Secretary.

A key aim was to consider the optimal approach in line with AHRI’s reporting obligations as an International Association. Any changes to membership of the governance committee have to be notified in line with the relevant process under Belgian law, and this has a financial cost attached. Under AHRI’s Articles of Association the minimum number is six members and there is no maximum.

A further aim was to have broad geographical representation and a mix of new and experienced ExCo members, whilst being an efficient process in line with the Belgian regulations.

**ACTION:** The Secretariat and Treasurer to follow up on an Executive Committee membership policy.

The chair notified a point of clarification from the Executive Committee meeting the previous day: that members on the Executive Committee serve in their personal capacity, which means that any change in membership should be voted on during the General Assembly. This is not a change, but rather a clarification.

The chair noted a special vote of thanks to Antoine Buyse, who would be stepping down from the Executive Committee.

The chair invited nominations from the floor and two were received: Viviana Fernandez (Human Rights Research and Education Centre, University of Ottawa, Canada) and Aoife Nolan (Human Rights Law Centre, University of Nottingham, UK) addressed the Assembly.

The current Executive Committee members with expiring terms had all confirmed their wish to be re-elected. A question was raised from the floor to request clarification on which colleagues were being re-elected. The chair clarified that it was those in Appendix 4 who had been last elected in 2018, as it is a three year term.

**DECISION:** The following were elected, or re-elected, for a three year term:

Suzanne Egan, Viviana Fernandez, Magnus Killander, Aoife Nolan, Vesna Petrovic, Ingrid Westendorp (Vice-Chair and Treasurer), Roman Wieruszewski, and Jan Wouters.

The chair reminded colleagues that the Secretariat would changeover in 2023 after a two-year term. Anyone potentially interested would be welcome to have a Q&A session on the running of the Secretariat.

Action: Any members who would be potentially interested in hosting the Secretariat, are invited to contact the Executive Secretary.

1. **AHRI Conference 2022 and 2023**

The chair reminded attendees that the 2022 conference was due to take place at the University of Pretoria. The conference dates would be 2nd-3rd September 2022, with the early scholars part of the programme taking part on the 1st September. Professor Magnus Killander expressed the hope that it would be possible to attend the rescheduled conference at the University of Pretoria (hosted by the Centre for Human Rights) in person in 2022. It was planned that the conference would be held in the new African Futures complex and the theme is anticipated to be related to digital technologies and human rights.

It is also the role of Executive Committee to invite and review expressions of interest to host the annual conference. Three bids had been received and the chair thanked all colleagues who had prepared expressions of interest. These had been discussed at the Executive Committee meeting the previous day. Two of the three expressions of interest were submitted by institutes represented by two Executive Committee members, therefore both left the meeting while the proposals were discussed.

The Executive Committee had agreed that the Pedro Arrupe Institute (University of Deusto, Spain) would be invited to host the 2023 conference. The starting point for comparison had been the urgency and uniqueness of the theme proposed (on human rights defenders). A second key consideration was that an AHRI conference had not been held in the region of southern Europe.

Felipe Gomez Isa thanked the Executive Committee and the AHRI membership for the opportunity to host the conference. There were two main motives: The Institute would be celebrating its 25th anniversary and it would be the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders. The Institute had core expertise in this area and was also open to collaborating around the conference with member institutes with research expertise in this field. AHRI members would be warmly welcomed to Deusto in 2023.

The chair again thanked all who had submitted an expression of interest, and reminded all attendees that members should get in touch if they are interested in hosting an event ‘in association with AHRI’ (see AHRI’s Communications Note on the website).

**ACTION:** Any members who would be interested in hosting an event ‘in association with AHRI’ are invited to contact the Secretariat.

1. **AHRI Working Groups (Annex 5)**

The chair thanked Gentian Zyberi, member of the Executive Committee, for drafting a proposal (Annex 5), which had been adopted by the Executive Committee. The proposed working groups are: human rights education; human rights research; institutional cooperation and external fundraising; joint publication projects; and a short publication on AHRI’s history.

The chair opened the floor for comments.

A question was raised concerning the value of more specialised groups, on thematic areas of research, rather than all research groups fitting within one proposed group on human rights research.

A further question was raised on the research groupings. There was a suggestion to have, for example, a group on research methods as opposed to thematic areas.

A suggestion was made for substantive, temporary thematic groups. Members of the group could put forward a proposal to the Executive Committee to form a thematic, temporary sub group.

A question was raised regarding the distinct groups on research and funding, and whether this was a helpful separation. Clarification was requested on the place of the AHRI book series, which was under the heading of one of the working groups. Support was expressed for a group on education, and previous experience was shared of having a private space for educators to share syllabi to enable discussion on teaching related issues.

A suggestion was made to look at the European Society of International Law’s interest groups as a module. There was support for a general research working group, to avoid establishing groups of members who are already known to each other.

A comment was made on the short publication on AHRI history, to provide an overview of the scope and rationale for this. There was an invitation for others to support this project by recording conversations with a series of individuals. Anyone interested was invited to contact Manfred Nowak, Alejandro Fuentes and Vesna Petrovic.

There was a suggestion that the role of a research working group should be to connect colleagues, and that there was potential for AHRI to do more in the publication space.

General support was expressed for the establishment of working groups, which would support cooperation and networking. A question was asked about the functioning of working groups given that AHRI membership is institutional and not individual, and a question as to whether membership of multiple groups should be possible. Regarding research, it was suggested that any sub-groups should not be too limited in focus; instead, it was suggested that it would be helpful to have better insight into specific expertise within member institutes when looking for potential research collaborators. There was also a suggestion to consider the Council of Europe HELP programme as a useful source of inspiration.

The chair thanked everyone for their contributions. There had previously working groups but these became inactive, hence the suggestion to formalise the structure. It was possible that the website could be used as a way of people signalling interest in particular areas. Regarding publication specifically, the chair clarified that a book series had been established with Edward Elgar; one was retrospective from the Edinburgh conference, and one is forthcoming based on the Potsdam conference. The current members are Kasey McCall-Smith, Ingrid Westendorp and Jan Wouters. The series can be related to an annual conference or a proposal outside of the conference themes. Any colleagues from member institutes who would like to join that group are welcome.

The chair issued an invitation for colleagues to get in touch (via the Executive Secretary) if they are interested in helping to shape particular working groups. The chair suggested that a first step would be to move ahead with the working group proposal, with an Executive Committee member acting as a lead and liaison point between the group and the Executive Committee. Information would be sent via email.

**ACTION:** The Executive Secretary will circulate details by email to member institute representatives.

1. **Draft Policy on AHRI Statements (Annex 6)**

The chair notes that a question had arisen previously about the practice and parameters of AHRI Declarations and Statements, and therefore a proposal (Annex 6) had been drafted for discussion.

There was a request for clarification regarding the second category of statements, on who would be responsible for the drafting. The chair clarified that it would be for the suggesting member institute/colleague to take forward a draft after the suggestion has been reviewed by the Executive Committee.

**DECISION:** Policy on AHRI Statements adopted.

A Maastricht Declaration had been drafted for 2021, linked to the conference. Ingrid Westendorp (Maastricht Centre for Human Rights) provided background to the Assembly, noting that there had a special breakout discussion on the situation in Poland at the conference, and a former Ombudsman had been invited to speak. Thanks were expressed to the colleagues at the Poznan Centre for the first draft. This had been reviewed by the Executive Committee at the meeting on the previous day. The draft had been added today to the cloud folder alongside the Assembly files.

Discussion took place on some specific aspects of the draft. There was a question about the wording of the draft related to ‘continuing to monitor’ the situation, which seemed to be committing more than AHRI was institutionally capable of undertaking. There was a suggestion from the floor to change this to ‘remain vigilant’.

There was a question as to whether the Declaration would be translated, and a suggestion to add ‘academic freedom’ to the Declaration.

There was a question about a strategy for sharing the Declaration, and a further suggestion that the title of the draft Declaration (‘democratic backsliding’) might be overly vague.

The chair noted that Declarations are normally translated by volunteers (examples are on the website). The Declarations are normally shared via twitter and the website and member representatives are invited to share with their networks.

One of the drafters of the Declaration agreed with the suggestion to change the title to ‘human rights backsliding’.

There was a further suggestion to clarify in the title that the Declaration was linked to the 2021 Annual AHRI conference in Maastricht, to make this apparent to external audiences. There was support for this, including to incorporate this also in the opening lines of the Declaration. There was a further suggestion to explain the nature and remit of AHRI. Another comment from the floor to suggest making changes only to the title and opening lines but to maintain the ‘historic’ format.

Suggested changes were agreed, and a number of colleagues volunteered to offer translations.

**ACTION:** The chair would incorporate the suggested changes into the final draft.

The chair noted that it may also have been appropriate to have a statement responding to the situation in Afghanistan, but this had not been possible in the timescales.

**ACTION:** The chair would endeavour to initiate drafting of a statement relating to the situation in Afghanistan, and member representatives were invited to support this.

1. **Next meeting**

The next Assembly will take place during the Pretoria conference (2nd-3rd September 2022).

1. **AOB.**

None.

Minutes taken by Elaine Webster

Executive Secretary