



Minute of the 9th Board of Directors Meeting, 2023, Istanbul-Türkiye

OIC OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION (OICOA)

9th Meeting of the OICOA Board of Directors

5th October 2023, Istanbul, Republic of Türkiye

MINUTES

The 9th meeting of the Board of Directors of the OIC Ombudsman Association was held on 5th October, 2023 at Istanbul, Republic of Türkiye. The meeting was presided by the President OICOA, His Excellency Mr. Seref Malkoc (Ombudsman of Republic of Türkiye).

Agenda Item No.3

Opening Remarks by His Excellency, Incumbent President of OICOA

After the recitation of the Holy Quran, President of the OIC Ombudsman Association (OICOA), His Excellency Mr. Seref Malkoc (Hon'ble Chief Ombudsman of the Republic of Türkiye), warmly greeted the eminent participants who had gathered for the 9th Board of Directors Meeting.

This meeting consisted of five board members from Republic of Türkiye, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Kingdom of Morocco, and Republic of Azerbaijan. The representatives from Sudan and Djibouti were unable to attend, resulting in the presence of five out of the seven board members.

Mr. Malkoc highlighted the utmost importance of the OICOA as an institution committed to promoting efficiency. He emphasized the necessity of enhanced cooperation among member nations to combat infringements on human rights and tackle the urgent matter of Islamophobia.

Furthermore, he emphasized the necessity of directing attention towards projects concerning refugees, particularly those originating from Syria and Pakistan, and actively participating in efforts to promote peace.

Mr. Malkoc further commended the continuous devotion and commitment of the OICOA Secretariat, led by General Secretary, Dr. Asif Mahmood Jah (Hon'ble Federal Tax Ombudsman of Pakistan). He praised the Secretariat's proactive approach in taking on new activities that support the Association's goal and objectives.

Agenda Item No.4

Remarks by His Excellency, General Secretary OICOA

The General Secretary, His Excellency Dr. Asif Mahmood Jah, presented a thorough overview of the current initiatives within the OICOA Secretariat. He emphasized his commitment to creating a dedicated team of professionals to ensure the smooth operation of OICOA.

Dr. Jah provided the board with an update on the recent progress, which encompassed the successful launch of the OICOA website, the establishment of official social media channels, and the regular distribution of e-newsletters.

In addition, he highlighted the importance of conducting training sessions to enhance the capabilities of Ombudsman offices in member institutes. He also mentioned that the Forum of Pakistan Ombudsman's Trainings were expanded to include participants in OICOA's training sessions, fostering the exchange of knowledge, and collaboration.

Agenda Item No.5

Proceedings conducted by the Executive Secretary OICOA

The President then called upon Mr. Almas Ali Jovindah, the Executive Secretary of OICOA, to continue presiding over the meeting.

Mr. Jovindah commenced by expressing his deep appreciation for the active participation of the board members. He took a moment to recognize and commend the impeccable arrangements that had been made for the meeting. He also expressed his appreciation for the active engagement and participation of the attendees in all the initiatives that OICOA had undertaken.

Moreover, Mr. Jovindah echoed the sentiments shared earlier by the General Secretary, Dr. Asif Mahmood Jah. He reaffirmed the successful execution of OICOA's various initiatives, celebrating the wholehearted involvement of the participants in these endeavors.

He also acknowledged that the initiatives meticulously planned by the General Secretary had been diligently pursued by the dedicated staff within the OICOA Secretariat, hence, ensuring that these initiatives were not merely ideas but concrete actions, embodying the essence of OICOA's mission and objectives.

Agenda Item No.6

Approval of the Agenda of the 9th Meeting of the BOD of OICOA

The Executive Secretary provided the Board of Directors with a draft agenda for the 9th Board of Directors Meeting, which was then submitted for approval.

Previous Board of Directors Meeting was held online on 17th July 2023 and a physical meeting took place in Baku, Azerbaijan back in October 2022.

As the most recent physical meeting of the Board of Directors took place in Baku in 2022, therefore the agenda of the present meeting encompassed advancements achieved since then.

No objections, remarks, or comments were received from the Board Members.

Agenda Item No.7

Review of Previous Board of Directors Meeting held in Baku, Azerbaijan

The meeting delved into the review of the previous Board of Directors Meeting, which had been hosted in Baku-Azerbaijan. The Executive Secretary provided insights into the challenges posed by the global COVID-19 pandemic, which had disrupted planned activities, preventing the physical convening of meetings as intended.

During the Baku gathering, a pivotal decision was reached, outlining the establishment and functional operation of the OICOA Secretariat. This decision, which has been diligently implemented, stands as a significant milestone in the organization's journey toward heightened efficiency and impact.

Additionally, attention was drawn to the matter of membership fees and the creation of a Working Group designated for this purpose. However, specific details regarding these aspects were yet to be obtained, and as such, a comprehensive report on these matters could not be presented in the review.

Agenda Item No.8

Report of the President on the Activities of the OICOA

Recognizing the difficulties posed by the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Malkoc discussed how certain planned activities were unable to achieve their maximum impact. Nevertheless, he gave assurance to the board that he is fully dedicated to resolving the setbacks in the activities of the OICOA caused due to pandemic in the coming days.

In addition, Mr. Malkoc recounted his fruitful efforts from the previous international conference held in January 2023 in Ankara titled “The Future of Human Rights in the 21st Century”, which was organized by the Ombudsman Institution (KDK) and the European Union. This conference witnessed the participation of numerous Islamic countries, underscoring the Association's continuing commitment to fostering collaboration and engagement on an international scale.

Mr. Malkoc played a pivotal role alongside Hon’ble President of Türkiye, Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in accelerating humanitarian relief alongside negotiations for an immediate ceasefire between Ukraine & Russia. Mr. Malkoc chaired the meeting of the diplomatic exchange between His Excellency Mr. Dmytro Lubinets (Human Rights Commissioner of Ukraine) and Her Excellency Ms. Tatiana Moskalkova (Human Rights Commissioner from Russia) regarding an exchange of 40 war prisoners. Mr. Malkoc urged to strive for an immediate cease-fire and an honorable peace that will protect Ukraine's territorial integrity. This diplomatic engagement ultimately resulted in a substantial dialogue with the President of Türkiye over the prisoner exchange.

Agenda Item No.9

‘Membership Extension’ Among Other OICOA Countries and Consideration of Applications for Membership of OICOA

During the meeting, a matter of great importance was deliberated regarding the expansion of OICOA membership.

It was brought to the forefront that in the global population of around 8 billion people, 1.8 billion are Muslims. In addition to that, the 57 Islamic countries spanned across the globe, out of which, the OICOA boasted only 33 member countries, with 12 of them hailing from Pakistan. This left a mere 22 countries from the rest of the world in our membership ranks, signaling a clear need for expansion. In

response, a proposed membership form was presented and received unanimous approval from the Board of Directors.

To further drive this membership expansion initiative, the Board of Directors were encouraged to actively engage in inviting new countries to join the organization. The OICOA Secretariat pledged its unwavering support in facilitating this outreach and ensuring a seamless process.

Additionally, the membership applications from Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Libya, Togo, and Benin to become member institutes of OICOA were subject to thorough discussion and subsequently received unanimous approval of the Board Members after it was determined that neither of the member institutes face any contestation for membership.

It was unanimously agreed to present these applications to the General Assembly for further deliberation and final approval.

Agenda Item No.10

Proposed Amendment in the Statute and Formation of Working Group

During the meeting, an amendment proposed by Mediateur de la Republique Djibouti was brought to the table. The proposed amendment/recommendation was regarding the introduction of an 'Islamic Perspective' section in the 'Objectives' of the OICOA Statute, which will be reflective of the Islamic principles. The suggested amendment aimed at enhancing the capacities of the Mediators/Ombudsmen of OICOA Member States. It called for Ombudsman Office Staff training to be conducted in alignment with Islamic values and fundamental rights and freedoms.

This proposal from Djibouti was subject to thorough discussion among the Board of Directors. While some board members deemed it unnecessary, given the clarity of existing OICOA statutes addressing human rights and Islamic values, others believed that the matter should be presented to the General Assembly for further and more extensive deliberation.

As a result, it was unanimously decided that the proposal would be formally presented before the General Assembly for further debate and if any such approval is gained then a Working Group will be formulated to this effect.

Agenda Item No.11

Fixation of 'Annual Fee' and Budget Allocation for the Secretariat Business Affairs & Remuneration of the Office Staff

During the meeting, the issue of membership fees was addressed, building upon a decision made in the previous meeting held in Baku, Azerbaijan. While it had been determined previously that a fee should be instituted, the specific amount had yet to be finalized.

The Board of Directors engaged in an extensive discussion on this matter. Some Board Members raised concerns about the financial capacity of certain members, citing difficulties with banking transactions. Nevertheless, the majority held the view that a Membership Fee was indispensable, emphasizing that OICOA's operations and Secretariat initiatives relied on this revenue source.

To accommodate Member Institutions facing financial constraints, reliance was placed on Article 7(5) (e) of the OICOA Statutes which states the following:

“The Secretary General shall have the right to grant a one-time Membership fee waiver”

Therefore, by the virtue of Article 7(5)(e), the Secretary-General has the authority to provide a one-time fee waiver instead of entirely exempting a member from the fee.

As a result of this discussion, it was resolved that an annual fee of \$1000 would be instituted, with provisions in place for fee waivers for those unable to pay.

Additionally, it was discussed that the General Secretary should be granted the authority to utilize \$1000 per month as the approved budget for the operation of the OICOA Secretariat as per Article 16(8) of the OICOA Statutes which states the following:

“The Secretary General may incur the expenditure within the approved budget during each financial year to meet operating expenses for smooth functioning of the Secretariat and carrying out the functions of the Association ...”

In cases where expenditures exceed beyond the approved budget, it will require *ex-post facto* approval of the Board of Directors of OICOA by the virtue of Article 16(9) of the OICOA Statutes.

This proposal was slated to be presented before the General Assembly for further deliberation and approval.

Agenda Item No.12

Establishment of a Research/Resource Center at the ‘OICOA Secretariat’

The establishment of a resource and research center within the OICOA Secretariat was a pivotal point of discussion of the 9th Board of Directors Meeting.

His Excellency Justice Dr. Zabiullah Khodaeian, the President of the General Inspection Organization (GIO) of Islamic Republic of Iran, generously offered to collaborate and share valuable research resources from GIO's well-established research center. The Federal Tax Ombudsman of Pakistan also expressed their commitment to contribute substantial research assets in a consistent manner.

Both the Executive Secretary and General Secretary of OICOA assured the Board of Directors that dedicated members within the OICOA Secretariat will efficiently undertake coordinated efforts to establish a robust and effective research center. This commitment emphasized the importance of collective knowledge and research-sharing among OICOA members, underlining the OICOA's dedication to advancing its research capabilities.

It was agreed to present the above for further deliberation, suggestions, and approval to the General Assembly.

Agenda Item No.13

Input for OICOA E-newsletter, Webpage, and ‘Social Media’ Initiatives for OICOA

The Executive Secretary placed great emphasis on the critical nature of adopting contemporary digital communication tools, particularly e-newsletters and social media accounts.

Amidst a period marked by the swift circulation of information, the Executive Secretary described the potential of these channels to function as powerful tools for efficiently transmitting the mission and message of OICOA to an international audience. This perceptive observation inspired all the attendees, bringing them together in their shared determination to create and sustain official social

media accounts, a pivotal measure in enhancing the online visibility and participation of the organization.

Additionally, beyond reaching a unanimous agreement regarding the establishment of social media handles, the members exhibited a profound dedication to ensuring the quality of the content published, especially for the E-Newsletter. The explicit objective of the OICOA's E-Newsletter is to enhance OICOA's communication pursuits to global benchmarks, guaranteeing the distribution of information that succinctly and informatively mirrors the organization's mission.

Furthermore, it was also decided that to foster inclusivity, the e-newsletter would be made available in multiple languages. Utilizing tools such as Google Translate and with the help of member institutes; it would be translated to accommodate the diverse linguistic preferences within the OICOA member institutes. This action aligned with the organization's commitment to engaging a wider, global audience while respecting linguistic diversity.

It was unanimously agreed to present this for approval to the General Assembly.

Agenda Item No.14

Training & Capacity Building Workshops for the Member Institutions & their Staff and 'Internship Program' for Youth among Member Countries

Under this agenda item, it was brought to the forefront that OICOA Training sessions are already underway and are scheduled to become a regular feature in the organization's future activities. These training sessions are conducted online to facilitate accessibility.

In addition to enhancing communication through translation of E-Newsletters, the imperative of multilingualism for training sessions was also discussed. It was decided that training sessions should be conducted in multiple languages to ensure inclusivity.

To enhance the efficacy of these training sessions, a comprehensive approach was proposed. Prior to the training sessions, trainers' presentations will be shared with participants in advance, and these materials will be translated into French, English, Arabic and Turkish through the aid of Google Translate and by the participants themselves.

During the training sessions, the translated presentation slides will be displayed alongside the original materials. Furthermore, to facilitate participant engagement and clarity, any questions or queries posed by participants during the training sessions will also be translated.

As far as the latter part of this agenda point is concerned, discussions revolved around the initiative of the internship program within OICOA member states. It was collectively agreed that this program should be expanded to operate on an international exchange basis.

It was discussed that one member country would send its interns to another member country, fostering valuable cross-cultural experiences and knowledge exchange. Under this arrangement, the cost of airfare would be borne by the intern themselves, while the host country would provide essential support such as lodging, boarding, and transportation. The intern would also be accommodated at the residences of staff members during their one-month stay. It was decided that the internship initiative's inaugural launch will be led by Morocco and Pakistan.

The decision to present this proposal to the General Assembly for approval was unanimously endorsed by the Board of Directors.

Agenda Item No.15

OICOA Representation at Important Forums including United Nations (UN)

Within this agenda item, the significance of the OICOA forum was discussed as a pivotal platform for conveying the organization's message to a global audience, considering the substantial demographic of over 2 billion people worldwide and the need to actively engage with international forums like United Nations as a means of expanding OICOA's reach and impact.

It was emphasized that, in accordance with the Article 6(5) of the OICOA Statute, all members are both entitled and obligated to exert their utmost efforts in advancing the objectives of OICOA by *“entering into agreements with other international organizations and bodies working for the cause of Ombudsmanship and human rights.”*

A unanimous decision was made to accentuate the achievements and endeavors of OICOA, with an understanding that this mission would be a collaborative effort undertaken by all members and the OICOA Secretariat at an international level to highlight the organization's dedication to effecting positive change and raising awareness on crucial issues related to Ombudsmanship, human rights, and international cooperation.

Agenda Item No.16

Consideration of Dates and Venue for the ‘10th Board of Directors Meeting’ and the 4th General Assembly Meeting to be held next year and OICOA Calendar of Activities

Both Pakistan and Iran graciously volunteered to host the next Board of Directors and General Assembly Meetings.

The decision was reached that the OICOA Board of Directors meeting will take place in Islamabad in January 2024, and the OICOA General Assembly meeting will be scheduled for 2025 in Iran.

It was unanimously decided by the Board of Directors that this proposal of dates and venue for the next Board of Directors and General Assembly meetings will be formally presented to the General Assembly for approval.

Agenda Item No.17

Conduct of OICOA Board of Directors Election, 2023

Under this agenda point, the Board of Directors elections, the list of candidates, along with the ballot papers and scrutinization process, was shared and unanimously endorsed by all the Board of Directors.

It was noted that out of the seven board members, two candidates for the positions of President and Vice President were unopposed. The Secretary General, as nominated by the Forum of Pakistan Ombudsman, was also confirmed for the role. Additionally, nominations by Morocco and Azerbaijan were unopposed against the two member slots.

The unopposed nominations featured the President of OICOA from Republic of Türkiye (His Excellency Mr. Seref Malkoc – Chief Ombudsman of the Republic of Türkiye), the Vice President from Islamic Republic of Iran (His Excellency Justice Dr. Zabiullah Khodaeian – The President of the General Inspection Organization-Iran) and the General Secretary of OICOA from Islamic Republic of Pakistan (His Excellency Dr. Asif Mahmood Jah – Federal Tax Ombudsman of Pakistan).

Two other unopposed nominations against two slots of Members of the Board of Directors were from Republic of Azerbaijan (Her Excellency Ms. Sabina Aliyeva – Commissioner for Human Rights, Azerbaijan) and Kingdom of Morocco (His Excellency Mr. Mohamed Benalilou – Mediator of the Kingdom of Morocco).

All the nominations were deemed highly qualified for their respective roles. It was agreed that these candidates would be formally proposed before the General Assembly. It was further decided that the member institutes will be pursued to fill the remaining two member seats during the General Assembly.

While the balloting procedure was discussed, it was acknowledged that, given the unopposed nature of these nominations, balloting might not be necessary. However, if required, the specific procedure elaborated by the Executive Secretary will be followed.

Agenda Item No.18

Vote of Thanks

In the concluding moments of the 9th OICOA Board of Directors Meeting held in Istanbul, Türkiye, the OICOA President Mr. Seref Malkoc extended his warm appreciation and gratitude to all the esteemed Board of Directors members. He expressed his heartfelt thanks for their presence and active participation, acknowledging their invaluable contributions, insightful visions, and shared aspirations for the growth and advancement of OICOA.