

CFNHRI Steering Committee

Terms of Reference

1. Background

The Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Organisations (CFNHRI) is a member-led network of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) and other human rights accountability mechanisms such as ombudsmen and public defenders, that work to promote, protect and advance the rights of the Commonwealth's 2.4 billion citizens.

Our vision is "*A Commonwealth where human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled*".

Our mission is to ensure that international human rights standards are realised in practice across the Commonwealth by supporting the development of NHRs and their effectiveness.

The CFNHRI has never had a permanent staff or secretariat function and is therefore not a recognised legal entity.

2. Purpose of the CFNHRI Steering Committee

The purpose of the CFNHRI Steering Committee (the Committee) is to:

- Secure the future success and sustainability for the Forum through long-term and programme funding,
- Strengthen the culture of collaboration through increasing member engagement with the Forum;
- Increase the capacity of NHRIs through training, shared learning, and professional, technical and, where possible and feasible, financial support to attend meetings and knowledge-sharing opportunities.

- Enhance the Forum's reputation, raise awareness of its role, and develop partnerships and strategic relationships with a wide range of stakeholders.

3. Functions of the Committee:

- Help shape the direction and future shape of the CFNHRI's Permanent Secretariat
- Ensure agreed projects are aligned with relevant organisational strategy.
- Ensure that projects assets are properly utilized.
- Assist with resolving strategic level issues and risks.
- Approve or reject changes to projects with a high impact on timelines and budget.
- Assess progress of agreed projects
- Provide advice and guidance on business issues related to CFNHRI.
- Use influence and authority to assist in achieving outcomes of the CFNRHI.
- Review and approve project deliverables.

4. Membership

The Committee will be made up of the:

- i. Committee Chair;
- ii. Committee Vice Chair, and
- iii. Eight (8) elected Committee Members.

5. Responsibilities of the Steering Committee Chair

Should the Chair be unable to attend a meeting, the Chair must arrange in advance for the Vice Chair to step in on their behalf.

The responsibilities of the Chair are as follows:

- Sets the agenda for each meeting.

- Ensures that agendas and supporting materials are delivered to members in advance of meetings.
- Makes the purpose of each meeting clear to members and explains the agenda at the beginning of each meeting.
- Clarifies and summarizes what is happening throughout each meeting.
- Keeps the meeting moving by putting time limits on each agenda items and keeping all meetings to two hours or less.
- Encourages broad participation from members in discussion by calling on different people.
- Ends each meeting with a summary of decisions and assignments.
- Follows up with consistently absent members to determine if they wish to discontinue membership.
- Finds replacements for members who discontinue participation.

6. Responsibilities of the Steering Committee Vice Chair

The Vice Chair is responsible for stepping in for the Chair in circumstances where the Chair is unavailable to fulfil their duties, for whatever reason.

The Vice Chair should also support the Chair by providing a formal handover when they leave the role of Chair and proactively sharing knowledge from their term as Chair.

7. Responsibilities of the Steering Committee Members

As of 1 November 2025, Committee Members comprise:

NHRI	Contact
Australian Human Rights Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leanne Smith leanne.smith@humanrights.gov.au • Joanna Mansfield joanna.mansfield@humanrights.gov.ws
National Human Rights Commission of Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nasima Begum nfaiz84@gmail.com • Kazi Arfan Ashik ashik.nhrc@gmail.com
Office of the Ombudsman Namibia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leonard Luutsi luutsi@ombudsman.org.na
Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • David Russell David.Russell@Nihrc.org • Michael Boyd Michael.Boyd@Nihrc.org
National Commission of Human Rights Rwanda	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providence Umurungi providence.umurungi@cndp.org.rw • Aissa Umutoni aissa.umutoni@cndp.org.rw
Office of the Ombudsman/ NHRI Samoa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ulugia Rosa Toese rosa.toese@ombudsman.gov.ws • Phaedra Lameko phaedra.lameko@ombudsman.gov.ws

Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pamela Toela Sambo pamelasambo@gmail.com hrcsl19@gmail.com
Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> K.Kapilan Villavarajan dir.internationalrelations.hrcsl@gmail.com Menaka Herath Villavarajanchair.hrcsl@gmail.com
Zambia Human Rights Commission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mbololwa Wamunyima mbololwawamunyima@gmail.com

Committee Members have the following responsibilities:

- Understand the goals, objectives, and desired outcomes of agreed projects.
- Understand and represent the interests of project stakeholders.
- Take genuine interest in the outcomes and overall success of projects.
- Assist in contributing resources and collaborative initiatives towards the achievement of CFNHRI mission and vision.
- Actively participate in meetings through attendance, discussion, and review of minutes, papers and other Steering Committee documents.
- Support open discussion and debate and encourage fellow Steering Committee members to voice their insights.

7. Election of the Committee

Chair

CFNHRI is chaired in rotation from whichever country is hosting the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), provided that the member state is a GANHRI accredited “A status” NHRI.



If the next CHOGM is hosted by a member state that does not have an A status NHRI, then the nearest A status NHRI is to Chair the Forum.

In the unlikely event that the nearest A-status NHRI is not available to Chair, then the current Chair is to continue as Chair until the position can be passed to the next A status NHRI.

Vice Chair

The outgoing Chair of the Committee will automatically take up the role of Vice Chair when the new Chair is appointed.

Committee Members

Election of Committee Members is conducted at the Annual General Meetings (AGM). The Chair is responsible for holding the election and confirming membership of the Committee.

The Chair is to endeavor, where possible, to ensure the representation of all regions of the Commonwealth at the AGM. This includes by providing virtual attendance options (e.g. Zoom, Microsoft Teams).

Committee Members shall serve for a period of two (2) years and are eligible for re-election.

Release of Committee Member

Committee Members that are absent from two (2) consecutive meetings without reasonable explanation or excuse or without a proxy will be automatically released from the Committee.

Upon such release, the Chair will:

- i. issue a call for nominations to all CFNHRI Members for the vacancy on the Steering Committee within two (2) weeks of the date the release occurred;
- ii. carry out a vote on the nominated Members by way of email within two (2) weeks of the closing date for nominations.

The nominee with the most votes will become a member of the Committee.

8. Meetings

Frequency

The Committee shall meet every three (3) months (four (4) times per year).

The Committee may convene for extraordinary meetings if one is voted for by a quorum of Members.

Agenda, Minutes, and Decision Papers

A package will be sent to members three to five business days in advance of a Steering Committee meeting. This package will include the following:

- Agenda for upcoming meeting.
- Minutes of previous meeting.
- A progress report for the project.
- Decision papers.
- Any other documents/information to be considered at the meeting.

Proxies

Committee members must inform the Chair as soon as possible if they intend to send a proxy from their organisation to a meeting and no less than two business days before the scheduled meeting.

9. Quorum and Decision-making

Quorum

A minimum number of five (5) Committee Members are required for decision-making purposes. The quorum must include a minimum of one (1) attendee from the current Chair or Vice Chair and one (1) from the incoming Chair (to be confirmed).

Decision-making Process

Majority: a course of action requires support from more than 50% of the quorum of Members who attend the meeting.



Where the votes on the proposed resolution are tied, the Chair of the meeting has the deciding vote.

10. Validity

These Terms of Reference remain valid indefinitely and may be amended by agreement of a quorum of Committee members from time to time, on an as-needed basis.