



Global Rights Review

A quarterly newsletter of the Commonwealth Forum of
National Human Rights Institutions

October - December 2025



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A message from the Chair

Dear colleagues,

It is an honor to address you as Chair as we progress through this shared journey.

Recent months have brought to light some hard truths. At times, the lack of collective effort made progress slower and responsibility heavier than expected. Leadership in such circumstances is never easy, but it has reinforced the importance of resilience, perseverance, and clarity of purpose.

Despite these challenges, we achieved some milestones in drawing together the membership and progressing the priorities of the forum. These milestones remind us that even in difficult situations, determination and commitment can drive real change.

Looking ahead, the lesson is clear: progress requires shared responsibility. Greater collaboration, renewed energy and stronger engagement will ensure that we as NHRIs, Ombudsmen, human rights defenders can contribute meaningfully to a Commonwealth that promotes and protects human rights.

Faafetai lava for your support and trust.

Respectfully,

Lagafuaina Tavita

Chair of CFNHRI - Acting Ombudsman (Samoa Office of the Ombudsman/NHRI)

International Webinar



The Chair hosted CFNHRI's first webinar on 1 October 2025 this year on the topic: Disinformation as a Threat to Human Rights.

The webinar was pertinent to Pillar 1 of the Apia Declaration and brought together leading experts, NHRIs and key stakeholders to share knowledge, experiences and strategies on ways to deal with the spread of disinformation as a threat to human rights in the context of elections.

The webinar focused on how to identify disinformation in the context of elections, how to increase awareness of the impact of disinformation in human rights and shared the role of NHRIs and key stakeholders in combatting disinformation.

Presentations and Key Points of this Webinar have been circulated to the membership. These documents are available on request from cfnhrichair@gmail.com



1 October 2025

Steering Committee Meeting



21 October 2025

Pursuant to the CFNHRI TOR, the Steering Committee must meet on a quarterly basis to set the tone for upcoming initiatives and ensure alignment with the CFNHRI Apia Declaration

The Steering Committee gathered for its third Meeting during this quarter on 21 October 2025.

- **Key Decisions:** Strategic Plan finalized, Steering Committee Terms of Reference finalized
- **Challenges Raised:** Members discussed budget pressures, Permanent Secretariat considerations and upcoming activities
- **Next Steps:** AGM, Biennial Conference

The Committee reaffirmed its commitment to transparency, collaboration, and measurable progress as it guides the next phase of work.

Steering Committee Members include: Chair (Samoa Ombudsman), Vice Chair (Rwanda HRC), NHRIs and HRCs from Australia, Namibia, Northern Ireland, Sierra Leone, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Zambia.



Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions



UK Government



British High Commission Apia

**SAVE THE DATE –
THURSDAY 26 MARCH 2026**

FULFILLING A HUMAN RIGHTS MANDATE IN THE CONTEXT OF SHRINKING CIVIC SPACE

High level dialogue for CFNHRI Members

- Date: Thursday 26 March 2026
- Time: 1.00 – 5.00pm (UTC +0)
- Location: In person in London, UK and online
- Venue: TBC



High Level Dialogue 26 March 2026

Join us in London for a High Level Dialogue that we will be hosting, made possible with the support of the British High Commission in Apia and the UK Government.

The event will explore the increasing difficulties of fulfilling a human rights mandate in the context of shrinking civic space.

For more information or to register, contact: cfnhrichair@gmail.com

Annual General Meeting 2 April 2026

CFNHRI's Annual General Meeting will be held in Geneva, Switzerland in-person and online this year.

All CFNHRI members are encouraged to register and attend.

A full agenda will be sent to members prior to the meeting.

Email cfnhrichair@gmail.com for more info



Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions

**SAVE THE DATE –
THURSDAY 2 APRIL 2026**

Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Location: Geneva, Switzerland (venue TBC) and online
Date: Thursday, 2 April 2026
Time: 10.00am to 1.00pm (UTC +2)

The AGM will be hosted by the Chair of the CFNHRI. Formal invitation and agenda to follow. Please send any agenda items to cfnhrichair@gmail.com



Biennial Conference 30–31 October 2026

The CFNHRI Bi-Annual Meeting will be held at the margins of CHOGM in Antigua and Barbuda this year.

We will send through an agenda closer to the dates in collaboration with the Ombudsman of Antigua and Barbuda

Email: cfnhrichair@gmail.com for more info



CFNHRI Working Groups

CFNHRI has 5 current Working Groups, each tasked with a focus on specific areas of human rights. We warmly encourage you to nominate your institution or a representative to participate. Working groups are essential because they allow us to pool our knowledge, discuss challenges openly and design practical solutions together.

Please email cfnhrichair@gmail.com or the respective Chair of each Working Group if you have any questions about the role or expectations.



Sports and Human Rights

The Sports and Human Rights Working Group is chaired by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

Members include:

- National Commission for Human Rights Rwanda
- Human Rights Commission of Malaysia
- Human Rights Commission Sierra Leone
- Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman) Cyprus
- Equality and Human Rights Commission - UK
- Scottish Human Rights Commission
- Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
- Office of the Ombudsman/NHRI Samoa

The Working group met four times in 2025 and their key strategic priorities for 2026 are:

- Strengthening NHRI engagement with national sport bodies and Commonwealth Games associations.
- Promoting safe, inclusive, and rights-respecting sport environments.
- Sharing best practices and resources across regions.

For more information about this group, contact Jason.McKeown@NIHRC.org or Michael.Boyd@nihrc.gov

Rights of Women and Girls

This group is chaired (interim) by the Samoa Office of the Ombudsman/NHRI (Interim chair).

Members include:

- Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
- Te Kāhui Tika Tangata - New Zealand Human Rights Commission
- Commission for Gender Equality - South Africa (invited non-NHRI member)
- South African Human Rights Commission
- Commission des Droits de l'Homme du Cameroun - Cameroon Human Rights Commission
- Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

For more information about this group, contact phaedra.lameko@ombudsman.gov.ws



Health and Human Rights

This group is chaired (interim) by the Samoa Office of the Ombudsman/NHRI.

Members include:

- National Human Rights Commission of India
- Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman) – Cyprus
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission

For more information about this group, contact ellenlinamtumua@ombudsman.gov.ws



Climate Change and Human Rights

This group is chaired (interim) by the Samoa Office of the Ombudsman/NHRI.

Members include:

- Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
- National Commission for Human Rights – Rwanda
- Bangladesh Human Rights Commission
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
- South African Human Rights Commission
- Commission on Human Rights and Public Administration

For more information about this working group contact: rosa.toese@ombudsman.gov.ws



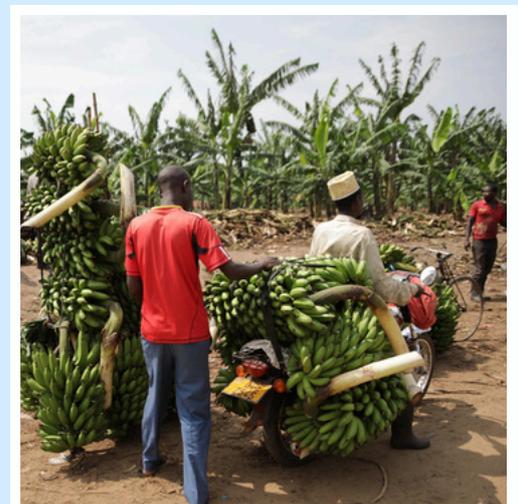
Business and Human Rights

The Business and Human Rights working group is chaired by the National Commission for Human Rights – Rwanda.

Members include:

- Commission of Human Rights and Administrative Justice – Ghana
- Commission de Droits de l'Homme du Cameroun/Cameroon Human Rights Commission
- Human Rights Commission of the Maldives
- National Human Rights Commission of India
- Bangladesh Human Rights Commission
- Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission
- Samoa Office of the Ombudsman/NHRI
- Human Rights Commission – Zambia
- Te Kāhui Tika Tangata – New Zealand Human Rights Commission
- Equality and Human Rights Commission – UK
- Commission on Human Rights and Public Administration – Eswatini

For more information about this group, contact providence.umurungi@cndp.org.rw



Upholding Human Rights in Business: The Mbondzela Community's Path to Dignity

Eswatini Commission-Led Intervention Sets Standard for Fairness in Development-Based Evictions



The Eswatini Commission on Human Rights & Public Administration/Integrity successfully intervened in the Mbondzela community situation in the Shiselweni region where 250 individuals from 27 homesteads faced the threat of displacement due to private land development.

The Mbondzela case underscores the real-life challenges communities encounter when business ventures intersect with fundamental rights. The looming risk of eviction brought to the forefront urgent concerns about the right to adequate housing and the duty to protect family dignity.

Recognising the gravity of the situation, the Commission acted swiftly and decisively. Since 2016, it has served as a crucial bridge, receiving reports, amplifying community voices, and fostering constructive dialogue among the community, landowner, and government authorities.

The Commission's unwavering commitment ensured that the affected families were not mere bystanders but active participants in shaping their future. Its oversight helped maintain a delicate balance, safeguarding both community rights and the property owner's interests.

Due to inadequate protections under the country's land laws, the affected families faced significant uncertainty regarding the outcome of their situation, which led to anxiety and threatened their overall well-being. Yet, through persistent advocacy and a collaborative approach, the Commission led efforts to design a resettlement plan grounded in respect, protection, and fairness. This process reflected international human rights standards, particularly the United Nations' guidelines on development-based evictions, which call for genuine consultation, through exploration of alternatives, and the



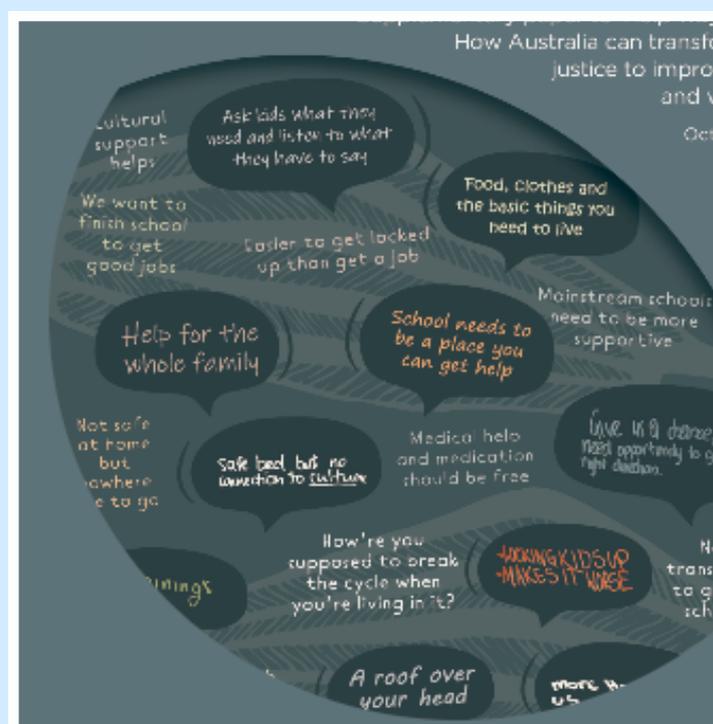


guarantee of adequate compensation and accommodation before any relocation. Tangible progress was marked by the government’s recent handover of newly constructed housing units to displaced families, a milestone officiated by the Minister for Natural Resources. This achievement not only secures dignified accommodation but also inspires hope for all awaiting just solutions. The Mbondzela story affirms that when business interests are balanced with respect for rights, sustainable and humane outcomes are possible.

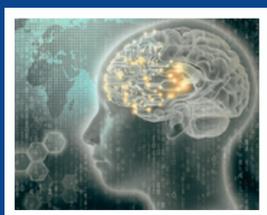
Children’s Rights and Youth Justice in Australia

A new National Children’s Commissioner for Australia, Deb Tsorbaris, commenced her term in early October, with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) welcoming her appointment and signalling a strong focus on children and young people’s rights.

The AHRC released an “Evidence-based approaches to child justice” supplement to Help Way Earlier!, and a related joint media release calling for earlier, preventive responses and systemic reform of youth justice.



Recent Updates from Australia’s Human Rights Commission



Technology

The Commission launched Peace of Mind: Navigating the ethical frontiers of neurotechnology and human rights, calling for urgent reforms to protect privacy, freedom of thought and non-discrimination in the context of rapidly developing neurotechnologies.



Climate

The AHRC launched its first major report on climate change, Human rights on a warming Earth. It emphasises that urgent and ambitious climate action is essential to protect human rights, reinforcing calls for stronger emissions reductions and climate justice measures.



Anti-Racism & Islamophobia

In mid-December the AHRC condemned a terrorist attack on the Jewish community, expressing condolences and reaffirming that violence, racism and religious hatred have no place in Australia.

Australian Human Rights Awards 2025

In October, the Australian Human Rights Commission announced finalists for the 2025 Australian Human Rights Awards, showcasing 20 individuals and organisations across the Human Rights Medal, law, media, community and young people’s categories.

On 11 December, a further media release celebrated the 2025 Human Rights Awards recipients, describing them as “human rights champions” advancing equality across areas such as climate, justice, disability and community advocacy.



2025 Human Rights Award Recipients



Human Rights Medal – William Tilmouth (Northern Territory)

For dedicating his life to reform, justice, opportunity and self-determination for First Peoples. William has led numerous community organisations and is the founding chair of Children’s Ground, a First Peoples-led reform movement. William is a member of the Stolen Generation and was NAIDOC Male Elder of the Year in 2023.



Media and Creative Industries Award – Ben Doherty (NSW)

For reporting on human rights and humanitarian issues, from domestic servitude to experiences of forced migration and asylum.



Law Award – Elisabeth Armitage (Northern Territory)

For her work as Coroner and judge in making institutions accountable for upholding human rights and removing barriers so every citizen can enjoy full, safe and equal lives.



Community Award – Ramnik Singh Walia (NT)

For advocating for inclusion and accessible services for older people, people with disability and First Peoples, especially in remote areas.



Young People’s Award – Shakira Robertson (Tasmania)

For her trauma-informed work to prevent domestic and family violence and transform Tasmania’s systemic response.

Celebrating International Human Rights Day in Samoa

The Samoan Office of Ombudsman and National Human Rights Institution (Office), in collaboration with the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights (OHCHR), ran a variety of activities in the lead up to International Human Rights Day, culminating with a full day of events on 10 December.

In the lead-up to the day and under the international theme 'Human Rights - Our Everyday Essentials', the Office and OHCHR ran an art and poetry competition for children, which asked entrants to creatively describe the rights they consider their 'everyday essentials'.

The Office and OHCHR also co-hosted two special editions of TV 5's Thursday night Trivia which tested participant knowledge about international human rights.

A green drive to collect fresh fruit and vegetables for donation to Mapuifagalele Home of the Elderly was held and all staff members of the Office participated in delivery of the fresh produce on 8 December, followed by a cultural exchange between staff and residents and a lively siva (dance).

The celebrations on 10 December commenced with an exhibition of the art and poetry competition, followed by a screening of the documentary YUMI – The Whole World, which showcases the journey of students from the Pacific who demanded legal accountability for climate change at the world's highest court. The audience was then treated to a Q&A and reflection session hosted by Patrick O'Grady Walshe (OHCHR) and youth climate advocates Audrey Lee Hang and Luna-Rossa Lomitusi-Ape.

In the afternoon, an awards ceremony was held for the art and poetry competitions, Trivia, and to announce the winners of the Office's annual Human Rights Champion Awards (see page 6 for the Award winners).



Ms Karla Hershey gave the keynote address

Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Honorable Afamasaga Leone Mati opened the proceedings with an introduction to the theme of this year's International Human Rights Day, reiterating Parliamentary support for the promotion and protection of human rights.

The Keynote address by Ms Karla Hershey, UN Resident Coordinator for the Cook Islands, Niue, Samoa and Tokelau, reminded the audience that human rights form the foundation of daily life. Ms Hershey stressed the importance of Constitutional protection of human rights, an independent judiciary, a parliament that passes and enforces laws that protect human rights, and an independent National Human Rights Organisation to monitor, investigate and advise government on human rights issues. Ms Hershey also highlighted the essential role of a free press and civil society organisations in supporting human rights awareness and education.

The Office received a video message of support from the Government of Samoa, delivered by Prime Minister, Honorable La'aulialemalietoa Leuatea Fosi Schmidt. The message, which was posted on the Government's official communication channels on 10 December, honoured International Human Rights Day and reminded us that human rights are not just legal obligations, but lived realities.

Samoa's 2025 Human Rights Champions

On International Human Rights Day, Samoa recognised the following individuals and organisations as Human Rights Champions for 2025.

Luna-Rossa Lomitusi-Ape Young People's Human Rights Champion

Luna was chosen in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights in the area of climate action and sustainable entrepreneurship.



Goshen Trust Community Human Rights Champion

The Goshen Trust was selected in recognition of the organisation's unique contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights in the area of mental health and quality care. The award was accepted by Naomi Eshraghi, CEO Goshen Trust.



Rudy Barley Media and Creative Arts Human Rights Champion

Rudy was awarded the Media and Creative Arts Human Rights Champion Award posthumously in recognition of his exceptional contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights in the area of press freedom and educational awareness. Rudy's mother, Margie Barley, accepted the award on his behalf.



Women in Business Development Inc (WIBDI) Business and Human Rights Champion

WIBDI was selected for this year's Business and Human Rights Champion in recognition of the organisation's outstanding contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights in the area of sustainable entrepreneurship and equal employment. Fumiaono Rosalia Me, WIBDI Culture & Protocols Adviser, accepted the award on behalf of WIBDI.



Tiara Tuulua Komesina o Sulufaiga Award

Tiara was chosen as the 2025 Komesina o Sulufaiga Award recipient in recognition of her exceptional contributions to the promotion and protection of human rights in the area of quality care, maternal health, and the rights of the child.

