

# **Webinar: AOMA, the I.O.I and the value of being a member.**

**A presentation by John R. Walters, former Ombudsman of Namibia, on the importance of belonging to both AOMA and the I.O.I.**

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## **INTRODUCTION:**

I warmly welcome the invitation by our colleagues at the AORC, to participate in this very important webinar on the value of being a member of both the AOMA and the I.O.I.

## **The I.O.I and AOMA – Learning Institutions**

A good starting point for this presentation is to share with you the sentiments expressed by Adrienne Clarkson, former Governor General of Canada at the 6<sup>th</sup> I.O.I World Conference, 2004 in Quebec City.

“The I.O.I is a good example of the institutions that are raising to the meets of a world that feels ever smaller, it is a learning institution; one that can grow because of the accumulated knowledge of its members and which can be of practical benefit to citizens around the world”

Unlike medical doctors and lawyers who graduate through medical and law school and programmes of practical training; Ombudsmen “graduate” through events, workshops, conferences and meetings organized by AOMA and the I.O.I where Ombudsmen share their hard-earned knowledge gained by experiences over many years.

Exchanging experiences with colleagues is a very useful mode of interplay at domestic, regional and international level. I Agree with Marten Oosting that “contact with colleagues is a source of inspiration for one’s own work, whether it leads to the acquisition of useful insights that are worth following up or whether it renews one’s confidence in an existing practice.”

Like the family which is “the natural and fundamental group unit of society”, so is the I.O.I the global group unit of Ombudsmen and AOMA the regional group unit of Ombudsmen in Africa. Unlike the family, neither the I.O.I nor the AOMA is a natural group unit, but voluntary organizations where Ombudsmen have the choice to belong to or not. Unfortunately membership is not free. Through their collective membership, members of AOMA and the I.O.I own the organizations; they are not shareholders, but co-owners .

## **Benefits of belonging to the I.O.I**

During its infancy, the most important aspect of the I.O.I’s work was promoting the institution of Ombudsman and providing support to existing institutions, particularly through training. Forty four (44) years later, the I.O.I is:

- federalized in six (6) chapters: Africa, Asia, Australasia and Pacific, Europe, the Caribbean, Latin America and North America.
- a network of like-minded institutions: The initial purpose of the I.O.I was important and remains perhaps the foremost reason why Ombudsmen joined. Networking has become much more effective.
- an information repository: The information function has been seen as central throughout the I.O.I's history.
- acting in defence of Ombudsmen: This has become a central focus of the I.O.I and it has become involved in countries where Ombudsmen are threatened or come under attack.
- supporting capacity building: Developing skills, knowledge and resource of Ombudsmen was and still is an important function of the I.O.I. Training has become more systematic because of the availability of more resources and partnership with specialized bodies in the anti-corruption and anti-torture fields.
- holding a world conference and meeting every four(4) years.

### **Benefits of belonging to AOMA**

- federalized in six(6) sub-regional chapters: Southern, Central, Eastern, Western, North Africa and Indian Ocean.
- established the African Ombudsman Research Centre (AORC) with key functions:
  - education and training for Ombudsmen and staff,
  - sharing of international/best practices,
  - serves as a focal point for Ombudsmen offices in Africa by coordinating their activities and supporting them with provision of information and training.
- AOMA hold biennial conferences and general meetings where members are eligible to be elected to office.
- AOMA members are eligible to be elected as regional presidents of the I.O.I with seats on the Board of Directors and or/Executive committee.
- Former Ombudsmen who have made an exceptional contribution in respect of the purpose of the I.O.I or who have rendered outstanding services to the organization may be awarded Honorary Life Membership to the I.O.I.

### **Conclusion**

The AORC and the I.O.I must be commended for not allowing Ombudsmen to become islands (especially during these trying times), by providing constant information as well as training to members in the comfort of their homes or offices – a true demonstration of worth.

While enjoying these benefits, Ombudsmen must always remember to pay their dues timeously to AOMA and the I.O.I.