

## **AORC / IOI Webinar - “AOMA and the IOI – Value of Being a Member”**

25 January 2022 / 10.00 AM SA (GMT+2)

### **Contribution by IOI Secretary General Werner Amon**

Ladies and Gentlemen, Esteemed colleagues,

It is my great pleasure to speak at today’s webinar on *“AOMA and the IOI - the value of being a member”*.

The African OM and Mediators Association – AOMA – and the International Ombudsman Institute – IOI – are organizations, which can look back at many years of work and support for OM institutions on the African continent and all over the world. AOMA and the IOI are well known organizations. Our wide and diverse membership, and the projects and services we offer to our members, are proof that members see our organizations as valuable supporters of the OM concept.

Despite the fact that AOMA and the IOI are so firmly established, I still consider it important to reflect every now and then upon what are the values of being a member, and which benefits come with IOI membership. I therefore thank AOMA and the AORC for hosting this webinar today and for giving us an opportunity to contemplate about the services and benefits we offer to OM around the world and how we can best support them as an organization.

I would also like to echo the sentiments of our esteemed President Chris Field, who underlined that IOI and AOMA are equally important to their members and that a close cooperation and exchange between them are essential. The multiple joint ventures we offered to our members in the past are living proof of that.

It is now my turn to speak to you about the benefits of being a member of the International OM Institute.

The most important services that the IOI offers to its members are:

- regular conferences to meet and exchange knowledge;
- training;
- regional subsidies;
- publications & reference material;
- support to colleagues under threat.

## **CONFERENCES**

The IOI holds a World Conference every four years. In-between this period of time, other IOI-related events are taking place in the six IOI regions.

Coming together at these events is an important opportunity to meet with colleagues from around the world, to exchange our experiences and to widen our knowledge. We form business relations – friendships even – with colleagues from other countries, who have varying mandates, other resources and different ways of working. These events are therefore great opportunities to enrich our knowledge and to forge closer ties with colleagues for future cooperation.

## **TRAINING**

Another key priority of the IOI is to enhance its members' capability by way of training.

From 2010 onward, the IOI has offered training courses in Vienna on a regular basis. In addition to this, training workshops are also hosted by IOI members in the regions. The IOI seeks to offer training content, which is important to its members. We managed to forge close ties with well-known partner institutions such as, the Scottish Queen Margaret University, the Association for the Prevention of Torture, or the International Anti-Corruption Academy.

Training we offered to our members so far included topics such as:

- complaint handling practice and investigation techniques;
- anti-corruption;
- torture prevention;
- unreasonable complainants; or
- how to deal with the media.

The IOI offers training to its members **free of charge** and we also try to fund a certain amount of scholarships, to make sure that staff from offices with limited financial resources can also benefit from training.

With its diverse and broad offer of training the IOI enables members to improve the already comprehensive services they provide. Our training programme also has a sustainable effect, because the knowledge that participants gain during these workshops, is afterwards brought back to the staff of each OM institution itself.

The positive feedback from member institutions shows a strong demand for training and we strive to offer training on matters, which are of relevance. In order to do that, the IOI relies on its members. I therefore invite you all to approach us with ideas and proposals for training content, that you would consider important for your work. It is with your help that we can continue to improve our services.

## **REGIONAL SUBSIDIES**

Direct benefit for members also comes from the IOI's annual regional subsidies programme. Within this programme, the IOI makes a certain amount of money available for each of its regions to help finance OM-related projects.

Member institutions can submit project proposals, which are then screened by the General Secretariat and presented to the Regional Presidents and the IOI Board for approval. The high number of applications that we receive each year shows the increasing need for direct financial aid.

In these past years, the IOI was able to co-finance many promising initiatives, which included – among others:

- training initiatives in all IOI regions;
- the development of a starter kit for OM institutions, implemented by our Australian colleagues;
- an awareness-raising programme for women's and children's rights in Pakistan;
- training on transparency and good governance in Nigeria;
- guidance material on how to implement a human rights based approach to the OM's complaint handling work, developed by the Northern Ireland OM;

- or guidance on how to measure the impact of OM investigations, as proposed by one of our members from Canada;

If you have interesting projects you would like to implement but can't because of a lack of funding, please look out for our next call for project proposals within the IOI regional subsidies programme. Make sure you contact us and let us know the details of your project, and we will see if and how the IOI could support it.

## **PUBLICATION AND REFERENCE MATERIAL**

A different way to benefit as a member – although not as obvious as our offer of training and funding – are the IOI's publications and reference material.

A few years ago, the IOI introduced its publication series of **Best Practice Papers**. With these papers, we aim to provide guidance material on key features and matters, to inform strong and independent OM institutions. Our Best Practice Papers are intended to be practical, rather than academic. They were introduced as a possible way of shared learning. They draw on the experience of OM institutions and highlight ways of working, which are likely to bring about success. They are developed “by members, for members”, if you will. Best practices are continually developing as OM institutions adapt to new developments. The IOI therefore welcomes new suggestions for this publication series. This makes sure that the papers we publish remain relevant and are perceived by our members as useful guidance material.

Another important publication series is the IOI's **comparative studies**. They offer comprehensive data on OM offices in the IOI regions. They analyse offices in terms of their assignments, mandates, and competences and they have become an important and comprehensive source of information on OM around the world. The IOI has finalized comparative studies for Asia, Australasia and the Pacific, as well as Europe. A comparative study on OM institutions in Africa is still work in progress. Due to the Covid pandemic, there have been some minor delays in finalizing this publication, but we are hoping to do so soon.

While the Best Practice Papers can be accessed by the broader public on the IOI website, the comparative studies are available to IOI members only in the member area of our website.

## **OM UNDER THREAT**

One of the last key priorities I would like to mention, because it is of high value to our members, is the topic of IOI support for OM under threat.

Unfortunately, the issue of “OM under threat” has not ceased to stay relevant and I am afraid we will see colleagues who experience difficult situations, verbal attacks, political pressure, budget cuts, or open harassment in the future.

The IOI has made it one of its priorities to help colleagues who come under threat. We have established a set of guidelines, which explain the procedure the IOI undertakes when a member institution faces threats to its independence. In order to ensure, that our support has impact and does not cause further harm, we are in close touch with the colleagues concerned, and count on their input on how the IOI can best be of help.

I would like to take this opportunity to once again underline that the IOI is ready to stand in solidarity with colleagues, who face threats to their independence. In doing so, we will count on the close relations we have established with AOMA, so we can join forces when and where necessary, to support colleagues in the African region, should they come under threat.

I hope I have been able to provide more insight into the IOI’s services and present the main benefits you can enjoy as members of our organization.

I once again thank our colleagues from AOMA and AORC for hosting this webinar. It was a great opportunity to showcase the IOI’s work and to bring greater understanding about what is the value of being a member and what are the benefits that come with such a membership.

Thank you for your attention!