

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

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

Contribution by IOI President Chris Field

Introduction

Thank you very much.

I commence by acknowledging my International Ombudsman Institute colleagues, friends old and new: IOI Secretary General and Austrian Ombudsman, Mr Werner Amon; IOI Treasurer and Public Protector of Zambia, Caroline Sokoni; President of the AOMA, Chairperson of the AORC Board, IOI Board member and Public Protector of South Africa, Busisiwe Mkhwebane; and former IOI President and former Ombudsman of Namibia, Mr John Walters.

I also thank the Inspector General of Government, Uganda, the Honourable Beti Kanya Turwomwe, for facilitating today’s webinar.

As you know in today’s webinar, we are discussing the AOMA, the IOI and the value of African Ombudsman institutions being a member. The topic is of personal importance to me as one of my key commitments during my term as President of the IOI, is to ensure that there is very strong collaboration and support for African Ombudsman institutions.

While I will confine my remarks to the value that the IOI can provide to members, I will simply observe that I believe the greatest value for African Ombudsman institutions is derived from being a member of both the AOMA and IOI. I will not speak further on this matter as I have noted that John Walters will speak on this exact issue shortly.

Before moving to the topic at hand, I do want to thank the AOMA and AORC for their very kind invitation to contribute to today’s webinar. I note the highly cooperative and valued relationship between the AOMA and the IOI, which has included the signing of a memorandum of understanding in 2013. The MoU is a solid foundation upon which we continue to learn from each other.

Speaking more personally, I have long been a very strong admirer of the AORC. It is my view that the AORC undertakes world leading Ombudsman research and training. As President of the International Ombudsman Institute I am deeply grateful for the work they do for the Ombudsman of Africa, but also for Ombudsman all around the world.

I also thank Professor Brian McArthur, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Acting Head of the College of Law and Management Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal for his welcome to the webinar. I particularly thank Professor McArthur and the University of KwaZulu-Natal for their support of the AORC.

I also take this opportunity to express my deepest condolences on the passing of Archbishop Desmond Tutu late last year and acknowledge his extraordinary contribution to the people of South Africa, and indeed, the whole world.

You have asked me to touch on the functions of the IOI and how it operates. I am delighted to do so.

The IOI was established in 1978 and is the global organisation for the cooperation of more than 205 independent Ombudsman institutions from more than 100 countries worldwide. The IOI is organised in six regional chapters: Africa; Asia; Australasia & Pacific; Europe; the Caribbean & Latin America and North America.

Each of these regions elects a regional president and directors who sit on the Board of the IOI. In the case of Africa, African Regional President, Florence Kajuju, IOI Treasurer Caroline Sokoni, and Directors, Busisiwe Mkhwebane and Ms Antonia Florbela De Jesus Rocha Araújo.

The IOI Board meets yearly, in different parts of the world, and holds a quadrennial World Conference, the next scheduled to be held in 2024.

The IOI strives to increase its presence, to further develop its influence, to strengthen its authority and to be the authoritative body on Ombudsman matters worldwide. It endeavours to be recognized as the voice of Ombudsman institutions within the international community. The IOI can only do so when it works highly cooperatively

with other regional representative bodies including AOMA, ILO in Latin America and CAROA in the Carribean.

The work of individual African Ombudsman offices is strongly supported by cooperative and representative bodies such as AOMA and the IOI. In all the IOI's work we are dedicated to being of value for our 205 (and growing) members and particularly how we provide tools and assistance to strengthen the capacity of African Ombudsman institutions to be the most efficient service that is responsive to the needs of the citizens of their respective countries.

Let me mention just a few of these types of tools and assistance. First, the IOI provides significant monetary grants undertaken as part of a major yearly regional subvention program with a fixed amount dedicated to the African region. Second, we provide formal letters of solidarity, and other means of support including visiting countries if required, for offices under threat or requiring support. Third, advice and support is provided by the IOI's Secretariat in Vienna. Fourth, the IOI provides training programs provided to members and a range of best practice and other guidance materials. Fifth, the IOI also provides further monetary support for training programs offered by members and translation services. My colleague Werner Amon will discuss these matters in detail in his presentation to you next.

To further the value of being a member of the IOI, the IOI is very strongly focused on international engagement. We are continuing to forge closer ties with the United Nations and other supranational bodies for the benefit of all members and undertaking further work to promulgate the Venice Principles and the United Nations Resolution on *The role of Ombudsman and mediator institutions in the promotion and protection of human rights, good governance and the rule of law*.

In May this year, to further this vital engagement with the UN, IOI World Board members and the Secretary General and Secretariat of the IOI will hold our annual Board meeting in New York and undertake a significant level of engagement with the UN and Ambassadors to Permanent Missions to the UN. Our IOI Board members, Treasurer Caroline Sokoni, African Regional President, Florence Kajuju and Director, Busisiwe Mkhwebane will play an integral part in this work.

Conclusion

Colleagues, in conclusion, I want to express my sincere appreciation to the AOMA and AORC for initiating and organising this very relevant and timely seminar. As our worlds have grown apart as a result of the tragic and ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is vital that we continue to create opportunities to meet and share knowledge.

The Ombudsman institutions, in either its national or subnational context, is a bulwark against the misuse of the power of the state against its citizens, a protector of the basic dignities and fundamental human rights of our most vulnerable citizens, a promoter of the rule of law and democracy and a proactive agent for change so that governments continue to serve its citizens in the most fair, just and effective way.

Where members combine together under the umbrella of the IOI and AOMA, the significant powers of the institution of the Ombudsman then we can be even more powerful, even more transformative upon the administration of government, and ultimately, the lives of citizens.

I close by saying to my many friends and colleagues throughout the extraordinary continent of Africa, you have my greatest admiration and you will always have my strongest interest and support. The IOI stands with you each and every day. We are here to serve you and provide you with meaningful and direct benefits.

We should always remember that while individual offices may be relatively small, together, we are very large. Together, we can, and do, achieve extraordinary results.

Thank you.