



## **6<sup>TH</sup> CONFERENCE OF OMBUDS INSTITUTIONS**

### **FOR THE ARMED FORCES (ICOAF)**

**GENEVA, 26-28 OCTOBER 2014**

#### ***Conference Statement***

As the International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (ICOAF) enters its sixth year, the conference has promoted the exchange of experiences and deepened cooperation among ombuds institutions.

Hosted by the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) with support of the Swiss Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport, the sixth ICOAF took place in Geneva on 26–28 October 2014. The sixth ICOAF focused on the role of social media, image of the armed forces in society, as well as on continued capacity development to better serve both new and existing ombuds institutions.

With the inclusion of old and new institutions from 37 states, the conferees had a productive exchange aimed at strengthening their institutional expertise.

The Conferees declare the following:

#### Introduction

1. Building on the successes of the previous five International Conferences of Ombuds Institutions for Armed Forces in Berlin (2009), Vienna (2010), Belgrade (2011), Ottawa (2012), and Oslo (2013), the Geneva Conference sought to strengthen cooperation and sharing of good practices among independent institutions.
2. We recognise that ICOAF has established itself as an important international forum for promoting and ensuring democratic oversight of the armed forces, with participants sharing common aspirations towards preventing maladministration and human rights abuses.

3. Recognising that each national context is unique, we underline the importance of ongoing international dialogue among ombuds institutions to promote and protect human rights within and by the armed forces

#### Social Media

4. In light of the rising prominence of social media use, it should be a key priority for both the armed forces and ombuds institutions to identify the advantages and challenges posed by social media. Furthermore, we acknowledge that there is a need for further guiding policies for the increased use of social media in the armed forces.
5. We note with positive interest that a number of ombuds institutions have begun monitoring implementation of social media policies in the armed forces. In general, ombuds institutions should be encouraged to develop their experiences in using social media and addressing complaints where social media play a role.
6. Acknowledging the need to further analyse the role and potential of social media for ombuds institutions for the armed forces, we request that DCAF develops a guidance note on this topic, which can be used in future capacity development events by both new and established ombuds Institutions.

#### Image of the Armed Forces in Society

7. We firmly believe that well-functioning ombuds institutions for the armed forces have a positive impact on the image of the armed forces by addressing issues concerning human rights and maladministration.
8. Taking into account the special characteristics of military service, ombuds institutions should consider ways of supporting armed forces in their efforts to become more attractive employers.

#### Capacity Development

9. Many ombuds institutions are still faced with a lack of sufficient resources to fulfil their mandate effectively. We reiterate that continuous capacity development is important to improve the functioning of ombuds institutions, to assure that complaints are effectively and

efficiently addressed and to ensure that ombuds institutions contribute to the effective and accountable governance of armed forces.

10. Following up from a request made at the fifth ICOAF, we are pleased to learn that DCAF, in collaboration with the Office of the Norwegian Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, plans to develop a guide on the handling of gender-related complaints in the armed forces. We are confident that this new resource will be of benefit for both new and established ombuds institutions.
11. Ombuds institutions for the armed forces should actively seek to share their experiences, in order to raise awareness and educate members of the armed forces, policy makers, the media, members of the public, as well as other ombuds institutions on issues of importance to their mandate.

#### Conclusions

12. Future conferences will continue to expand and deepen the cooperation between ombuds institutions.
13. The ICOAF remains open to relevant institutions from states that have not participated in the previous conferences.
14. The seventh ICOAF will take place in Prague, Czech Republic, October 2015.

Geneva, 28 October 2014