



***5<sup>TH</sup> CONFERENCE OF OMBUDS INSTITUTIONS  
FOR THE ARMED FORCES (ICOAF)  
OSLO, 20-22 OCTOBER 2013-10-10***

***Conference Statement***

As the International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (ICOAF) enters its fifth year, the conference has further strengthened the exchange of experiences and cooperation between Ombuds Institutions.

Jointly hosted by Norwegian Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), the 5th ICOAF took place in Oslo on 20-22 October 2012. The 5<sup>th</sup> ICOAF focused on the role of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces in dealing with complaints related to veterans and gender.

With the inclusion of old and new institutions of over 30 states, the participants had a fruitful exchange about strengthening their institutions. As such, more than ever, ICOAF has become an important initiative in promoting and ensuring democratic oversight of the armed forces, while protecting against maladministration and human rights abuses.

The Conferees declare that:

**Introduction**

1. Based on the successful four International Conferences of Ombudsman Institutions for Armed Forces in Berlin (2009), Vienna (2010), Belgrade (2011) and Ottawa (2012), the Oslo Conference sought to deepen the cooperation of the independent institutions

2. The Oslo Conference specifically sought to effect and enhance the aspirations expressed in statements of the previous conferences which had underlined the importance of the democratic control of armed forces in countries with a democratic constitution through transparency and focused on the many benefits which flow from this.

### Veterans

3. While various states use different definitions, legal approaches and policies to veterans, conferees recognise the sacrifices that veteran armed forces personnel have made for their country.

4. States establish special policies for veterans because of the duty of care, to improve the image of the armed forces as a good employer as well as to support a broader social agenda.

5. A comprehensive mandate of Ombuds Institutions to deal with veterans include the following elements: a) To receive complaints from veterans, family members and colleagues; b) To investigate individual cases on the basis of veterans' complaints; c) To start own motion or thematic investigations into issues regarding veterans; d) To give recommendations on issues regarding veterans to the government, armed forces and parliament.

7. The role of Ombuds Institutions regarding veterans' issues can be enhanced by conducting the following activities: a) to monitor whether the legal definition of a veteran is line with society's current expectations; b) to conduct thematic investigations into systematic violation of rights of veterans; c) to review the legal framework concerning veterans; d) to carry out awareness raising campaigns among veterans, public officials and civil society regarding veterans.

### Gender

8. The role of women in the armed forces is crucial from the point of view of equality before the law as well as the recognition that women and men alike have unique capacities to contribute positively to security and to the various roles of modern armed forces, varying from, monitoring missions, delivering humanitarian aid, peacekeeping and peace-building missions to protecting states against asymmetrical threats, including terrorism, organised crime, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and cyber security threats.

9. Women enjoy full equality before the law. Nevertheless, servicewomen are still frequently exposed to discriminatory policies and practices. Ombuds Institutions play an important role in protecting and promoting the human rights of servicewomen.

10. Good practices related to the role of Ombuds Institutions in receiving and investigating complaints concerning gender include the following: a) to adopt a gender focus in annual reports of the Ombuds Institution; b) to investigate under-reporting, in particular of sexual violence; c) to systematically analyse complaints related to gender; d) to review the legal framework pertaining to the role of women in the armed forces, in particular whether the investigation of cases of sexual harassment is supported by sufficient legal standards; e) to evaluate whether women face no obstacles in submitting complaints; f) to assure that men and women are equally represented in promotion campaigns of the armed forces; g) to appoint a gender advisor or focal point within the Ombuds Institution; h) to monitor whether the armed forces facilitate a work/life balance for armed forces personnel with family and caring responsibilities; i) to monitor long term trends in gender related complaints; j) to conduct thematic or own-motion investigations into gender issues, in particular with regards to indirect or 'invisible' discrimination; k) to maintain working relations with military association and civil society organisations.

11. Ombuds Institutions benefit from international cooperation between institutions; in this context, the conferees request DCAF to develop a handbook on the role of ombuds-institutions in gender and armed forces which can be used in future capacity-building events in both new and established Ombuds Institutions

### Conclusions

11. Future conferences will continue to expand and deepen the cooperation between ombuds-institutions.

12. The sixth ICOAF will take place in Paris, France in 2014

Oslo, 22 October 2013