

4ICOAF Conference Statement

As the International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces (ICOAF) enters its fourth year, the conference has reached a milestone.

The 4th ICOAF held on 23-25 September, 2012 in Ottawa, Canada has been instrumental in carrying ICOAF into new territory, both figuratively and literally as it is the first conference held outside of Europe, while at the same time remaining true to its roots.

Strengthened by its venture outside the European continent and by the inclusion of numerous new participating institutions from five continents, participants discussed the important issue of domestic outreach, and how to bring about greater awareness to those individuals each ombuds institution is mandated to assist. Participants also had a fruitful exchange on the increasingly important topic of capacity development, and the challenges all ombuds institutions face in always seeking to improve their institutions. As such, ICOAF has become important tool in promoting and ensuring democratic oversight of the armed forces, while protecting against maladministration and human rights abuses.

The Conferees declare that:

1. The Ottawa conference sought to expand cooperation of independent institutions represented at the three previous International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces.
2. The Ottawa Conference specifically sought to advance the intentions and aspirations of the previous three conference memorandums, which have 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.
3. Outreach is a key mechanism by which an ombuds institution can enhance the awareness, understanding and relevance of its mandate directly with those it represent. It should also be viewed as an important tool that enables the ombuds institutions to listen to how their constituents live the reality of military service and the impact it has on them and their families.

4. Outreach is one of many valid means of measuring client satisfaction and the effectiveness of an ombuds institution in delivering its program to promote and protect the human rights of armed forces personnel.
5. Outreach in its various forms is a function already in place in many ombuds institutions and this practice must continue as well as evolve to embrace new and emerging technologies as pertinent and worthwhile methods of meeting the needs of our constituents.
6. Outreach can be an important activity to pursue for the emerging ombuds institution actively seeking to increase its profile within the armed forces community it is mandated to represent.
7. 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.
8. Capacity development is a task undertaken by both newly established and well established institutions and is a persistent on-going effort.
9. A needs assessment of capacity-development and ombuds-institutions for the armed forces conducted by DCAF would greatly assist in expanding knowledge of other ombuds institutions. The aim of the study would be to identify the needs and the willingness of ombuds-institutions to be involved in this important area of work.
10. Future conferences will continue to seek to expand participation of other ombuds institutions for the armed forces.
11. The Fifth International Conference of Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces will be held in Oslo, Norway on 20-22 October 2013.

Ottawa, 25 September, 2012.