

Bled Conference on the Effectiveness of Ombudsman Institutions and NHRIs: *Tackling Contemporary Challenges*

***(Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of the Human Rights Ombudsman
of the Republic of Slovenia)***

Rikli Balance Hotel, Bled, Slovenia, 5 and 6 December 2024

Annotated agenda

The high-level conference aims to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Slovenia by bringing together heads of institutions and other international and national experts, practitioners, and policymakers to discuss the effectiveness of Ombudsman institutions (OIs) and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in addressing contemporary human rights challenges.

Our roles within Ombudsman and National Human Rights Institutions have never been more vital, especially amidst the evolving landscape marked by increasing challenges such as rising populism, nationalism, digitalisation, and threats to human rights defenders. Despite these challenges to our independence and effectiveness, it is incumbent upon us to confront them head on, adapt, and seize the opportunities they present. The conference will provide a platform for heads of institutions to engage in substantive discussions against the inspiring backdrop of Bled, Slovenia.

The main objectives of the conference are to assess the current effectiveness of OIs and NHRIs, to explore innovative approaches and strategies for enhancing the impact of these institutions, and to foster collaboration and coordination among national and international human rights mechanisms. The aim is to identify and address emerging human rights challenges, including those related to digital transformation, artificial intelligence, climate crises, migration, and an ageing society. In this context the high-level conference also aims to provide a platform to share best practices, successful case studies, and innovative strategies to enhance the effectiveness and the impact of these institutions in promoting and protecting human rights.

Following the opening statements and the keynote address by the President of the European Court of Human Rights, the discussions will be structured around three panels and a concluding wrap-up discussion. Detailed information about the content of these panels and the wrap-up discussion is provided below.

Panel 1: Effective Human Rights Advocacy: Is there a need to enhance the impact and effectiveness of Ombudsman Institutions and NHRIs?

Description: This panel will examine the current landscape of human rights advocacy, focusing on the roles and effectiveness of OIs and NHRIs. It will also consider their additional mandates, such as serving as a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), an Equality Body, an Ombudsperson for Children or an independent body monitoring the rights of persons with disabilities. The discussion will aim to identify potential areas for improvement and strategies to enhance their impact in protecting and promoting human rights in an increasingly complex global context. Some points for discussion:

- **Assessing Current Effectiveness:** What are the strengths and weaknesses of OIs and NHRIs? What are the pros and cons of multi-mandate institutions that hold multiple mandates? How effective have these bodies been in addressing contemporary human rights challenges, and how can we increase the implementation of their recommendations?
- **Enhancing Collaboration and Coordination:** What are the benefits and challenges of collaboration of OIs and NHRIs with national authorities? How do the activities of OIs and NHRIs interrelate with activities of other national independent bodies, civil society, especially human rights defenders, or international human rights mechanisms?
- **Addressing Resource and Capacity Constraints:** What are the key resource and capacity constraints facing these institutions and what strategies can be employed to address these limitations and enhance their operational effectiveness?
- **Adapting to Emerging Human Rights Challenges:** What are the emerging human rights challenges that these institutions need to address? How can they adapt their strategies and approaches to remain relevant and effective in a changing world?
- **Improving Public Awareness and Engagement:** How can these institutions improve public awareness and understanding of their roles and functions? What approaches can be taken to increase public engagement and trust in these institutions? How can these institutions improve public awareness and understanding of current human rights issues?

Panel 2: The Role of Ombudsman Institutions and NHRIs in Protecting Human Rights in the Digital Era

Description: This panel will delve into the critical role OIs and NHRIs play in safeguarding human rights within the rapidly evolving digital landscape. It will focus on the various challenges posed by digital transformation and how OIs and NHRIs can effectively address them. Some points for discussion:

- **Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights:** Examining the ethical implications and human rights considerations of artificial intelligence (AI) deployment and usage and investigating the human rights considerations surrounding the deployment and usage of AI.
- **Digital Inclusion and Equality:** Tackling the digital divide and ensuring equal access to digital technologies and the internet for all. Which vulnerable groups should be given specific attention and how can OIs and NHRIs effectively address such challenges?
- **Freedom of Expression and Fake News:** Balancing the right to free speech with the need to combat misinformation and hate speech online. What are the examples of good practices in combating fake news and hate speech online? Which measures and campaigns are preferred?
- **Cybersecurity and Human Rights:** Ensuring the protection of human rights in the face of increasing cyber threats and digital vulnerabilities. Is there a need for more awareness raising?
- **Privacy and Data Protection:** Addressing the challenges of protecting personal data in the era of big data, AI, and surveillance technologies.

Panel 3: Ombudsman Institutions Addressing Complex Human Rights Challenges: Climate Crises, Migration, and an Ageing Society

Description: This panel will explore the interconnected human rights challenges posed by climate change and migration, as well as an ageing society. It will focus on the role of OIs and NHRIs in advocating for and protecting the rights of vulnerable populations affected by these overlapping issues. Some points for discussion:

- **Protecting the Rights of Migrants and Refugees:** Strategies for OIs and NHRIs to ensure fair treatment, integration, respect of human rights, and support for migrants and refugees in the face of growing displacement.
- **Climate-Induced Migration:** Addressing the human rights implications for individuals and communities forced to migrate due to climate change impacts such as rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and resource scarcity.
- **Ageing Populations and Social Justice:** Examining the challenges of an ageing society, including access to healthcare, social services, deinstitutionalisation, and protection from discrimination, and how these are exacerbated by climate change and migration pressures.
- **Intergenerational Equity and Environmental Justice:** Discussing the responsibilities of current generations to protect the environment for future generations and ensure equitable treatment of older persons in climate policies.

Wrap-up discussion: Is There a Need for Innovative Approaches in Ombudsman Institutions and NHRIs to address Modern Challenges?

Description: This concluding panel will bring together insights from the conference to discuss the necessity and potential for innovative approaches within OIs and NHRIs to effectively address contemporary human rights challenges. The panel will consider how these bodies can evolve and adapt to better protect and promote human rights in an increasingly complex and dynamic world.

Some points for discussion might include identifying modern challenges; innovative practices and approaches; technology and digital transformation; collaborative and multidisciplinary approaches; building resilience and adaptability; public engagement and participation; policy and legislative innovations; evaluating impact and success; learning from best practices; future directions and recommendations. By exploring such points, the wrap-up discussion will aim to synthesise the insights gained throughout the conference and provide a forward-looking perspective on the role of innovation in strengthening human rights advocacy.