

Amnesty International Call with the Independent Review Panel, 22.02.2019

Minutes

Participants:

- Colm O'Cuanachain, Senior Director, Office of the Secretary General, Amnesty International
- Danny Vannucchi, Head of Impact, Amnesty International
- Gabriela Quevedo, Lead Adviser Organisational Learning, Amnesty International
- Veronica Sabino, Lead Adviser, Planning and Resource Allocation, Amnesty International
- John Clark, Independent Review Panel (Chair)
- Elodie Le Grande, Independent Review Panel
- Rocio Moreno, Executive Director, Accountable Now
- Ezgi Akarsu, Programme Manager, Accountable Now

The call allowed an opportunity to discuss the Independent Review Panel's [feedback](#) on Amnesty International's [2017 accountability report](#) and agree on key points for Amnesty to focus on in their next report. The key area of discussion was staff wellbeing in the context of Amnesty's Global Transition Programme.

Amnesty welcomed the fact that the Panel had suggested that **organisational culture, people and wellbeing be the focus of their next report** - particularly since there have been some important developments over the course of 2018 which were outside of the timeframe covered by our report. Following the deaths of an Amnesty staff member and an intern and high levels of stress and dissatisfaction amongst staff in recent years, Amnesty has been exploring the underlying reasons and undertaking an extensive change management process.

Amnesty highlighted the fact that **three reports have been released in recent weeks around these issues** – the [Laddie Report](#) review into the death of Gaetan Mootoo, the [Rosalind McGregor Review](#), and the [KonTerra Staff Wellbeing Review](#). In addition, they referred to staff surveys in 2017 and 2018 which revealed significant rates of bullying, marginalisation, or harassment.

In line with the **Global Transition Programme** which aimed to decentralise the organisation and move Secretariat roles to regional offices, 300 London-based roles were flagged for relocation between 2013-2017. 99 staff members were given new roles within the organisation's London office, and a further 156 individuals were made redundant in London. Very few staff actually opted for relocation,



despite efforts by Amnesty to provide supportive relocation packages, and the option to trial relocation for a year and opt for redundancy if they did not wish to remain overseas. These developments had a huge impact on organisational culture and the feeling amongst staff.

The Panel questioned the reason for the relatively rapid **pace of change and reduction in staff numbers** (25%). Amnesty clarified that the 25% figure covered not just International Secretariat (IS) staff, but all staff, including those in 70 national entities. Some of the staff reductions were due to internal issues in those entities, unrelated to the Global Transition – in particular a number of sections have had to reduce staff due to financial reasons. On the other hand, the number of IS staff has actually increased since the process began. It was further clarified that the decentralisation process began almost 30 years ago, with the first regional offices being set up in the early 1990s. Even then, there was a lot of internal resistance.

Amnesty shared the difficulty of balancing their role as a human rights organisation whose primary accountability is to the people they work to help, with their responsibility to staff. A lot of resources have been redirected internally in recent years – this has also been a challenge. The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) acknowledges the impact of organisational changes and their role in that. All members of the SLT are ready to step down and leave Amnesty as soon as there is a new structure in the organisation under new Secretary-General Kumi Naidoo, and are continuing to support Kumi until that point.

The Panel also enquired about **whether the issues experienced in the IS have been echoed in other offices around the world**, and how those offices have responded. Amnesty provided background in terms of the external environment the organisation is operating in. Over the past five years, there have been several attacks on Amnesty offices and staff, including shootings, arrests, detentions, and raids on offices in various countries. This has been accompanied by a general deterioration in public attitudes towards Amnesty, with an increase in online trolling of staff, including negative/harassing comments on social media and via email. This has all had a serious impact on staff, and led to a change in work dynamic. Amnesty shared that at their last meeting of sections in July 2018, an alarming number of staff reported concerns around stress, wellbeing, and being overworked and overstretched. There have been interventions in 12 sections recently to provide support in this regard.

The Panel noted positively that **Amnesty has already shared the Panel's feedback letter with relevant internal stakeholders**, who will be able to provide comments and feedback before Amnesty's response letter is composed. The response letter will elaborate on the points covered above.

Amnesty's next report, an interim report covering 2018, will also elaborate on these points and what progress has been made, and will provide information on how



Amnesty listens to internal and external stakeholders. A new global strategy is being created, which won't only focus on the issues Amnesty will work on, but also how the organisation operates internally and how it works together with partners. As such, 2019 will be dedicated to discussions with stakeholders on how they want to see Amnesty working in the future. There will be a focus on external evaluation processes, how to get better feedback from partners on a daily basis, and how to do this at the programmatic level. By the time they submit their next report, Amnesty is expected to have a solid methodology to pilot in the coming year. There are already some good practices within the movement, and Amnesty will be sharing these. Ultimately, the approach should be fit for purpose whilst being sustainable.

Amnesty made the point that Accountable Now is an important actor in bringing together organisations who are struggling with similar issues, learning from one another, and exchanging experiences. They are eager to continue working with Accountable Now to this end, and are exploring options such as peer learning events in person or via webinars.

The Panel and the Accountable Now Secretariat noted the difficulties posed by the hostile environment Amnesty (and other members) find themselves in currently, and have offered to provide any assistance which might help overcome some of these challenges.