

Update to the Report of the Amnesty International UK Governance Taskforce (GTF) produced for the 2015 AGM

Background

The 2013 AGM agreed the setting up of a 12 month Governance Task Force, made up of members drawn from different parts of the organisation. The first meeting of the GTF (at which I was elected Chair), took place on 27 July 2013. At that meeting we set up 4 sub-groups, each with a specific remit that determined its area of focus, but also agreed a number of cross-cutting issues to be addressed by all. We agreed that the minutes of our meetings and associated documents would be posted on the GTF section of the AIUK website (see link). At the 2014 AGM we sought and were given an extension of 12 months.

Process

The GTF has met as a whole on 12 occasions. At each meeting we have considered the reports and work plans of each Sub-Group and, taking into consideration the cross-cutting issues, have made a significant number of recommendations to the Board. We have undertaken consultation on various aspects of governance with the Nominations Committee, individual Board members, key activists, other international sections, and (via work jointly commissioned from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations by the Board and GTF) with SOC, the Returning Officer, some sub-committee members and AIUK members. We have also considered and made recommendations on legal advice obtained by the Board on the Articles and Constitution from legal consultants Bates Wells and Braithwaite.

Considerations

AIUK has a legal status as a Company with a separate legal Charitable Trust. It is also a single national section in an international movement. It is a democratic organisation with a large activist base, a large number of members who may simply be active as donors, as well as an indeterminate number of donors who are not members. Even within its activist base of Groups and Networks, many committed volunteers are not individual members of AI. This leads to a rather complex system of governance and accountability, with sometimes competing demands, as we have discovered in our deliberations.

We have reviewed the constitution, existing governance structures and the relationships between them and many of our governance procedures. We have considered the effectiveness of these as measured against the core values of Amnesty International, current legal requirements and the potential impact on the delivery of AI's work promoting and protecting Human Rights.

We were also cognisant of the concerns within the organisation which were exemplified by the call for, and agenda of, the EGM in 2012

The GTF has met on two occasions since the AGM to conclude its work. We have agreed 2 additional recommendations regarding the composition, Terms of Reference, transparency and workings of Board Committees. In the main however, we have concentrated our efforts on working with the Board, advising them on the next stage of consultation on and consideration of reform of the Constitution, Articles and Standing Orders.

Conclusion

The list of all GTF recommendations on the website (which has been fully updated to reflect their current status) should give you some idea of the breadth and scale of GTF considerations.

It has not been an easy task - it took us quite a while to find our feet and to gel together as a group. Some of our debates have been robust, which is not surprising given the passion everyone feels for the organisation and its membership, but through dedication and sheer hard work the GTF has produced well-reasoned recommendations the vast majority of which have been agreed by the Board and many of which are already making a significant difference to the governance of AIUK.

Our task has now concluded but there is still work to be done and we would encourage all members to engage in the next stage of consultation and participate in the decision making process.

I wish to again thank everyone involved for their participation, hard work and support of me as the Chair.

[Link to GTF website here](#)

Sheila Banks

Chair GTF
July 2015

GTF Members:

Clive Briscoe
Malcolm Dingwall-Smith
Eilidh Douglas
Ciarnan Helfetty (part)
Tom Hedley
Naomi Hunter
Liz Mottershaw (part)
Sarah O'Grady
Peter Pack
Michael Parkinson (part)
Hannah Perry
Chris Ramsey
Mike Read
Sheila Banks