

## Minutes of the HRLA Annual General Meeting on 4 March 2024

**Chaired by:** Joe Middleton KC, HRLA Chair

**Recorded by:** Marianne Schönle, HRLA Secretary

### **Agenda:**

1. Welcome
2. Report of the Chair
3. Report of the Treasurer
4. Report of the Young Lawyers Committee
5. Resolution to ratify proposed constitutional amendments
6. Resolution to elect Lord Justice Singh as Honorary President of the HRLA (*subject to the ratification of the proposed constitutional amendment to make the President role an Honorary President role*)
7. Election of the Executive Committee and Officers 2024
8. Appointment of the Young Lawyers Committee 2024
9. AOB.

### **1. Welcome**

Haylea Campbell (HC), Pro Bono Associate at Hogan Lovells and outgoing member of the HRLA Executive Committee, welcomed attendees to Hogan Lovells. HC delivered a housekeeping notice regarding the fire alarm and also drew the attention of attendees to the link to documents in the Zoom chat. HC lauded the HRLA as a wonderful way to convene and have conversations.

Joe Middleton KC (JM) echoed HC's welcome to attendees joining online and in person, confirming that the meeting was quorate.

JM announced that Leanne Targett-Parker (LTP), HRLA Treasurer, was going to give her report first.

### **3. Report of the Treasurer**

LTP made reference to her report with exhibits setting out all the information with regard to the accounts from 1 December 2022 to 30 November 2023. LTP explained that on the basis that members had read her written report, she would just whizz through her report now.

LTP apologised that she could not be at the AGM in person, noting that this was her final report and final meeting. LTP observed that after 15 years, some new blood was needed. She would hang around for a couple of months to make sure the transition takes place as smoothly as possible. LTP thought she was the longest serving member of the Executive Committee and hoped that she can impart that in any way she can from her memory of being around from such a long time.

LTP reported that a new software programme had been set up last year. That has gone very well, it would continue to be used, and LTP was training the new Treasurer in it.

LTP explained that the HRLA has two bank accounts now: with HSBC and Metrobank. The Metrobank account gives us a card and is more flexible, rather than having members and Officers funding the HRLA and then having to do an expense form. LTP was transferring funds from one account to the other. Both accounts are going to need amendment to the mandate to take LTP off and put the new Treasurer on.

LTP had set out the bank account balances at the end of the financial year. It had not been a healthy financial position for the HRLA but since the end of the accounting period she was talking about, not only had the HRLA had increased corporate membership, but individual members' fees come through predominantly in February. The HRLA had received those and was in a much healthier position.

LTP explained that we have two sets of accounts for each bank, the current account and savings account. The savings account is ring-fenced for the bursary. There was also a set of management accounts and profit and loss, which set out where we are with regard to the accounting position. LTP was not going to go through the management and profit and loss unless anyone had any questions.

LTP emphasised that corporate membership was very key to the HRLA. The HRLA used to make applications for grants, which seems to have gone by the wayside, but that was being dealt with by the funding subcommittee. LTP noted that costs have reduced significantly upon the resignation of the HRLA's Administrator, as rather than seeking a new Administrator, the roles have been split up amongst the Officers and the EC. However, it was important to get corporate members to continue to renew their membership and considerable effort had been made to ensure that takes place. LTP had set out a table of comparison. There was not much more that LTP could add, unless there were any questions.

JM thanked LTP and members were invited to raise any questions.

LTP stated that her email was in the report.

LTP expressed that it had been an honour to be part of the organisation and there will be quite a gap in her life, thanking everyone for all the support in the last 15 years.

JM thanked LTP again, noting that Camila Zapata Besso (the new Treasurer) will be supported and that we would continue to be extremely grateful to LTP. JM wished LTP an enjoyable rest of her holiday.

## **2. Report of the Chair**

JM began by saying that attendees did not need him to tell them that it had been a pretty significant year for human rights in the UK and beyond. A lot of concern had been expressed about the Rwanda litigation and legislation which continues to work its way through Parliament. But there were a lot of other concerns, not least events in the Middle East and

Gaza, how we conduct ourselves in the UK, and demonstrations and restrictions. As ever, there was a huge amount for human rights lawyers to do and be concerned about.

JM set out the HRLA's programme of events. There had been a session with Edward Fitzgerald KC and Maya Sikand KC on the Bill of Rights Bill. There had also been a very stimulating evening with the HRLA's President, Lord Justice Singh, and Baroness Kennedy talking about the challenges and achievements of the Human Rights Act, which as ever continues to be pertinent, with Lord Justice Singh, being a sitting judge, having to be quite careful about what he said and Baroness Kennedy, not being so constrained, having a very insightful exchange with our President on those issues. The HRLA had a terrific, exceptionally successful event in October as a 20th anniversary celebration, with speakers including Robert Spano, Baroness Chakrabarti, Dominic Grieve KC, and Geoffrey Bindman KC. JM had brought some of the leftover commemorative booklets, and encouraged attendees who had not got one to take one. Those online were invited to email JM if they wanted a copy and JM would send it. The commemorative booklet included contributions from about 29 human rights lawyers of all sorts of backgrounds and JM hoped attendees would find it an interesting read.

JM reported that it had also been a fantastic year for the YLC. When JM took over the role of Chair from Aswini Weeraratne KC a year ago, she said that the YLC just gets on with it and put on a really good programme of events, and she was absolutely right. JM noted that Tooba Kazmi (TK) was stepping down as chair of the YLC and leaving us, thanking her for the fantastic work she and Claudia Hyde (CH) have done leading the YLC.

JM touched on the financial position. He said a key point was the fact that we do not have an administrator. Karen Kinross, who was with us for (JM thought) 5 years, decided last summer that she wanted to move on. This came with a big silver living, as although Karen's work was really appreciated, the cost of her salary was something the HRLA was struggling to meet. The HRLA will therefore have more money for the Bursary Scheme. The downside is that the roles Karen used to have were being distributed to the EC, and the EC will work out which roles new EC members will be taking. JM invited members to bear with the HRLA, acknowledging that it was not as efficient as when Karen was there but that it will get there.

JM touched on the constitutional amendments but said we will come back to that later in the agenda.

JM concluded with a few words of thanks, thanking HC and Hogan Lovells. JM also thanked all of the EC members for all the work they had done and Marianne Schönle, the HRLA's Secretary, for her good humour. JM offered further thanks to our President and Patrons as well as to attendees for coming in person and online. JM encouraged attendees to spread the good word and if anyone can think of any corporate members or sponsors for the HRLA to please explore that. Members were then invited to raise any questions.

#### **4. Report of the Young Lawyers Committee**

Tooba Kazmi (TK), Chair of the Young Lawyers Committee, delivered the report. TK said it had been a real privilege to be Chair of the YLC and she was so proud of the work the YLC had done this year in delivering its events. TK ran through the highlights.

Last year, the YLC had launched the Lord Kerr Essay Competition. It was the second year that the YLC ran the event. TK reported that it was a real success. The YLC had seen real interest from young lawyers in its events, and it saw that in this competition. The essay question was 'Is there a human right to live free from poverty? Should there be?'. The winning essay could be read on the HRLA's website and on the UKSC blog. Claudia Hyde (CH) and Jess Wallis ran the competition event, which was focused on whether the UK should have a bill of socioeconomic rights. It was very interesting to listen to all the panelists. TK thanked CMS for hosting that event this year and noted that it had been great building on the partnerships from last year.

TK thought that one of the biggest events was the Careers Day. Nikki Taylor was one of the leaders for that. It was annually the YLC's best attended event, with lots of interest from students and aspiring lawyers. The Careers Day was held at Goldsmiths, University of London. TK thought this relationship which they had reignited had been really beneficial. Goldsmiths had provided volunteers and were really helpful. The Careers Day had a keynote speech from Amanda Weston KC and fireside chat with Nani Jansen. TK reflected that it was great to have such a broad range of people speaking.

The third activity highlighted by TK was the Judicial Review Moot Competition. Connie Dale from the YLC led that project. It went very well, with very fierce competition. The final took place at the Royal Courts of Justice (RCJ), judged by Lord Justice Singh, and Camila Zapata Besso and Philip Rule KC from the EC. It was great to see how engaged people are, advocacy at such a high level, and the future of human rights lawyers. TK thanked the RCJ, Liberty, and Church Court Chambers (who provided a mini-pupillage for the winners).

TK expressed that it had been a really good year for the YLC. The YLC had strengthened its relationship with the EC this year. TK wanted to share that it had been great working with JM, Shoaib M Khan, Lui Asquith, and all the EC. TK also said she couldn't thank CH enough as Vice Chair of the YLC.

TK emphasised that nothing would have been possible without the YLC members, who have really put the time and effort in, and she was really proud that the YLC had managed to impact so many people. TK concluded by saying that she was really looking forward to seeing what the new Committee does.

## **5. Resolution to ratify proposed constitutional amendments**

JM drew attention to the document with the edits which had been proposed and which have been agreed by the EC but have to be ratified (or not) by the membership. JM explained that there was a mixture of minor editorial changes and changes to things which had not been written very well, commenting that he was afraid to say the Constitution was not very well written. The EC had taken a knife to it and hoped to make it more internally consistent and comprehensive.

JM added that some amendments were devised so that the Constitution reflects how the HRLA actually operates. The best example of this was that at the moment, the President of

HRLA, Lord Justice Singh, was said to be a member of the Executive Committee, so if he does not come to more than a certain number of meetings we are supposed to kick him out. JM had spoken to Lord Justice Singh to suggest it would be more appropriate to have an Honorary President, and Lord Justice Singh had said yes if this was the wish of the Association.

JM said he would just highlight a couple of more substantive changes. The first in Article 8 was about the membership of the EC, increasing the number of members of the EC who come from the YLC. Before this it was two members and it was now going to be four. JM expressed that the EC was very happy that this would reflect the influence that the YLC can have on the EC.

JM also highlighted a change to take down the provision on branches of the HRLA.

JM drew attention to a change concerning co-opted members, explaining that at the moment there was just one co-opted member, from Liberty, whereas the Constitution makes provision for five, and the number of co-opted members was being reduced to three.

The resolution to ratify the proposed constitutional amendments was carried without objection.

## **6. Resolution to elect Lord Justice Singh as Honorary President of the HRLA**

The resolution to elect Lord Justice Singh as Honorary President of the HRLA was carried without objection. JM said he would inform Lord Justice Singh.

## **7. Election of the Executive Committee and Officers 2024**

JM explained that we do not have to have an election, as if there are as many or fewer people standing than places there is no need for an election. JM confirmed that all of the Officers, with the exception of LTP, were re-standing, and offered a particular welcome to the new members of the Executive Committee: Jack Dingley, Mark Emerton, Oliver Jackson, Jenn Lawrence, Louise Loder, and Vicki Prais.

## **8. Appointment of the Young Lawyers Committee 2024**

JM explained that the appointment of the YLC was not something on which a vote was required because of the way that is done. JM confirmed that TK was stepping down, but he was very happy that CH was staying on. JM noted that there was quite a large number of new members of the YLC and expressed a very warm welcome to the new YLC members, whom he looked forward to meeting in due course.

## **9. AOB**

JM thanked attendees again for coming and said he looked forward to another year. JM invited those present in person to take a copy of the HRLA's 20th Anniversary Commemorative Booklet and wished everyone an enjoyable evening.