

12<sup>TH</sup> WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL OMBUDSMAN  
INSTITUTE  
“GIVING VOICE TO THE VOICELESS”  
Dublin, Ireland, 26-27 May 2021

**Closing Address**

**Chris Field**  
**President, International Ombudsman Institute**  
**Ombudsman Western Australia**

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Outgoing President of the IOI, Ombudsman and Information Commissioner for Ireland, Mr Peter Tyndall, IOI Secretary General and Chair of the Austrian Ombudsman Board, Mr Werner Amon, Regional Presidents, outgoing and incoming Directors of the World Board, Ombudsmen and distinguished guests, I am absolutely delighted to join you, albeit virtually, for the Closing Ceremony of our 12<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial IOI World Conference held in Dublin.

I also acknowledge, and sincerely thank, Australia’s Ambassador to Ireland, the Honourable Gary Gray AO, for joining us at this Closing Ceremony. I am honoured by your presence Ambassador and deeply grateful for the strong support extended to me by the Western Australian Government and the Australian Government, including Australia’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Ireland and Australia are great friends and also enjoy a trading relationship valued at over 5 billion dollars. As many of you know, Australia is home to one of the largest Irish diasporas in the world. My first visit to Dublin was hosted by Peter and included a walk through the magnificent Trinity College followed by a coastal train to Sandycove and a visit to the James Joyce Tower and Museum. I can attest to the fact that, while a literary master for the ages, a day spent with Joyce can be challenging. I am delighted to say, by contrast, a day spent with the outgoing President, is most agreeable indeed.

It is for all these reasons that I am so pleased that Dublin, Ireland is the host of our world conference.

I take this opportunity to welcome all new Directors of the World Board and farewell, and thank, outgoing members of the World Board. To my Executive Committee

colleagues: First Vice President Viddhavat Rajatanun, Chief Ombudsman of Thailand; Second Vice President Diane Welborn, Ombudsman Dayton and Montgomery County, Ohio; and Treasurer, Caroline Sokoni, Public Protector of Zambia, I congratulate each of you on your election. You are already close colleagues of mine and I am very excited to continue to work with you in the years ahead.

I wish to acknowledge, and formally thank, the Austrian Government for their generous support of the IOI Secretariat. Without this support, the IOI could not operate in an effective way. My particular thanks go to the staff of the IOI Secretariat, Uli, Karin and Ursula, all of whom I have worked with for nearly a decade. I reserve particular thanks for IOI Secretary General and Chair of the Austrian Ombudsman Board, Mr Werner Amon, in whom we have a wonderful supporter of the institution of the Ombudsman and someone who I am looking forward to working with closely as we strive to advance the IOI's mission and goals.

This conference has been a great success, achieved in difficult circumstances, and I wish to acknowledge Peter Tyndall for his leadership, Aidan Moore of the office of the Ombudsman Ireland and the IOI Secretariat for their good humoured and tireless work in organising the conference and Abbey Conference and Events.

It is customary for the incoming President of the IOI, during the Closing Ceremony of the World Conference, to outline their vision for the next four years. However, I cannot commence my remarks about the future without reflecting on the past and how we arrived at today. In 2012, I was in Wellington, New Zealand, for the 10<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial IOI World Conference. At that stage, I had just joined the World Board as a Director following my election as the President of the Australasian and Pacific Region of the IOI. I recollect, as though it were today, Peter Tyndall setting out a vision for the IOI. He articulated this vision in 2016 in Bangkok upon his election as President of the IOI at the 11<sup>th</sup> Quadrennial IOI World Conference. He stated that the IOI needed to live its values and be a team of people demonstrably sharing common goals and values, characterised by collegiality and companionship. His vision is now the reality of the IOI. This is a legacy that he bequeaths to me.

But Peter has done much more again. Peter has been instrumental in creating an organisation that is respected globally as the representative for the institution of the Ombudsman. With a nod to your days in Wales as head of the Arts Council Peter, there could be no greater coda to your term of President than the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of Resolution 75/186, *The role of Ombudsman and mediator institutions in the promotion and protection of human rights, good governance and the rule of law* in December last year.

However, let me reserve my final comment about Peter to the one I hold most closely – a personal comment. Peter has become a great friend of mine over the last four years. I could not have asked for a more enjoyable and fulfilling working relationship,

one characterised by great personal camaraderie and respect. Peter, if I was in Dublin now, I would walk over and give you a hug – I'm genuinely sorry I can't do so.

Colleagues, you have humbled me by choosing me as your next President. I say to every one of you – thank you. It is a singular privilege to lead the IOI.

I have a clear vision for the IOI and I intend over the coming years to work tirelessly, but always collaboratively and consultatively, to achieve that vision. My vision is in five parts:

First, to continue to enhance our international leadership and influence on the vital issues facing nations and the global ombudsman community, including forging closer ties with the UN and other supranational bodies, promoting the Venice Principles and ensuring the United Nations Resolution on *The role of Ombudsman and mediator institutions in the promotion and protection of human rights, good governance and the rule of law*, informs our work and leads us to the next iteration of the Ombudsman institution;

Second, I will seek to focus the work of the IOI on advancing human rights, protecting minorities, access to justice, the rule of law, good governance and supporting developing democracies and emerging ombudsman institutions. This includes standing resolutely with ombudsmen under threat;

Third, it is very important to me that we ensure inclusion of every IOI region and member in all of our work, so that all voices are fairly represented and heard, with particular care given to offices in developing democracies and smaller nations;

Fourth, the COVID-19 pandemic has been an utter tragedy – with over three and a half million lives lost, and also significant economic loss and social disruption. The IOI must continue to support Ombudsmen around the world as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic; and

Fifth, I will seek to continue the productivity, professionalism and collegiality that have defined the Board's work and seek to continue the outstanding leadership provided by Peter Tyndall.

My friends, the Ombudsman is one of the noblest institutions within the firmament of the modern State. Every day we provide access to justice for citizens who otherwise could not afford that justice. We stand as a bulwark against government excess, mediating the relationship between the state and citizen and ensuring that the relationship is fair and just. We promote good governance in all the work we do. In all our activities, and most identifiably as NHRIs, NPMs and our own-initiative investigations, we protect and promote human rights. We are a great defender and

champion of the single greatest protection that exists against a government of whim or caprice – the rule of law.

As we look forward to the challenges ahead of us, and they will be many and varied, we do so emboldened in the knowledge that, unprecedented times have seen unprecedented responses from our offices. As an institution, the Ombudsman has had to find new ways of working, new ways of caring for its staff and new ways of reaching the most vulnerable citizens. I commit to working with you, strengthened by the knowledge of the last year, that when citizens need an institution to stand by them, and to give voice to the voiceless, they can turn with confidence to the Ombudsman.

Every day more than 200 Ombudsman institutions from over 100 countries, do the vital work that enables our citizens to be confident and empowered in their dealings with the State. These institutions do so with the unwavering commitment of the IOI to support them in undertaking this vital work. This is what the IOI believes is their role and this is what I, as your President, will champion every day for the next four years. I thank you for the honour and privilege that you have bestowed on me to be able to do so.