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## MINUTES OF DIGNITY BOARD SEMINAR JANUARY 29-30, 2026

AT Hotel Ottilia, Bryggernes Plads 7, Copenhagen

PARTICIPANTS: Lars Udsholt, Emil Kiørboe, Anna Mette Nathan, Una Marquard-Busk, Maja Lærke Kielsholm, Marie Louise Nørredam, Peter Vedel Kessing, Lotte Leicht, Manfred Nowak, Bettina Jæger

ON TEAMS: Nomfundo Mogapi

ABSENT:

FROM MANAGEMENT: CEO Rasmus Grue Christensen

GUESTS: DIGNITY Clinic's Advisory Board at pt. 7, DIGNITY's management group and former Human Rights Watch' CEO Kenneth Roth at pt. 11

REFERENT: Mette Grimstrup

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### **1. Approval of agenda of board meeting and seminar Jan. 29-30, 2026**

The agenda for the board meeting and seminar was approved. Lars Udsholt (LU) opened the meeting and introduced the programme, highlighting the participation of the Clinic's Advisory Board and guest speaker Kenneth Roth.

### **2. Orientation from the Chairperson**

No additional matters were raised.

### **3. Orientation from the CEO**

CEO Rasmus Grue Christensen (RGC) provided an update on key developments. A recent meeting with Ales Bialiatski, founder and chair of the Belarusian organization Viasna, who had been imprisoned for several years and released shortly before Christmas, was highlighted as a powerful reminder of the resilience of DIGNITY's partners and the importance of the organization's work. In addition to documentation of torture and human rights violations, DIGNITY also supports the work with former detainees.

The Executive Committee (EC) has approved a concept note for a new initiative in Syria, currently launched as a pilot funded by internal resources, with expectations of eventually securing external funding. Several key tender processes are also underway.

RGC also informed the board of upcoming travels to Liberia, where DIGNITY is exploring funding opportunities linked to a newly established war crimes tribunal, and to Ukraine in relation to a potential programme supporting veterans.

Nationally, activities are progressing according to plan, with continued attention to positioning the organization in relation to the Danish healthcare reform.

The board discussed the importance of maintaining focus on underfunded contexts, and the implications of geopolitical change for advocacy. RGC acknowledged that DIGNITY might gradually adapt its advocacy approach towards a broader group of international actors in the light of the recent geopolitical changes.

#### **4. Disposition in the EC**

Projects above 4 mio. DKK approved by the Executive Committee (EC), including:

The EC has approved of a consortium project to support veterans in Ukraine. The Danish Red Cross is the lead partner and DIGNITY is one of the consortium partners. The project is supported from the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

#### **5. Strategic Priorities 2025**

Management presented the status on strategic priorities for 2025. Results were described as very strong, with record-high performance across several key indicators, despite significant external pressures, including funding cuts affecting partners, increasing political constraints, and ongoing crisis management.

The board took note of the 2025 status report and expressed strong appreciation for the organization's ability to deliver high levels of activity and impact under challenging conditions.

#### **6. Strategic Priorities 2026**

RGC presented the draft strategic priorities for 2026, comprising a combination of strategic objectives from the overall strategies and key operational deliverables reflecting both national and international agendas.

The board welcomed the overall direction and noted that the organization is in a relatively strong position compared to many peers in the sector. Members emphasized the importance of communicating both achievements and strategic challenges clearly to staff, strengthening the strategic narrative and ensuring coherence across the organization given the number of priorities.

Several strategic perspectives were discussed, including the need to support the practical implementation of Denmark's war crimes legislation, to explore new outreach models nationally, and to ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities across HQ and country offices. And to respond strategically to geopolitical changes. It was emphasized that the perspective must not only be how to navigate DIGNITY through murky waters, but also how to support and maintain the international normative framework and institutions around the ban of torture. RGC assured that this was very much on the agenda in all of DIGNITY's work.

The board approved the strategic priorities for 2026, noting that the structured format for 2026 functioned well as a tool for accountability, while recommending an additional narrative framing of both results and upcoming priorities going forward.

## **7. Meeting w. the Advisory Board**

*Joint meeting with DIGNITY's Rehabilitation Clinic's advisory board, consisting of former clients from the clinic. The Advisory Board functions as a sound board for projects developed in the clinic and has participated in conferences presenting their stories and the Rehabilitation Clinic's work.*

The board met with members of the Advisory Board, who presented their work in the advisory board and shared personal reflections on their experiences of torture, rehabilitation, and the long-term process of rebuilding their lives. The exchange was received with deep appreciation and described by board members as a powerful reminder of the human impact and purpose of DIGNITY's work.

Advisory Board members emphasized the importance of hope, recognition and trust in the recovery process, and highlighted the continued stigma, silence and retraumatization that many survivors experience, including in public discourse. They encouraged the board to continue advocating for a more nuanced public understanding of refugees and survivors, including recognition of their resources and potential contributions.

Visibility of DIGNITY's services emerged as a key priority. Advisory Board members noted that many survivors, as well as general practitioners and other health professionals, are not sufficiently aware of available treatment options. Long referral pathways and delays were also identified as barriers to timely support. They called for stronger outreach, improved cooperation with the healthcare system, and faster access to treatment.

The Advisory Board expressed a clear interest in continued dialogue and closer collaboration with the board and the organization more broadly. The question of how to bring survivor perspectives more systematically into board discussions was raised, and it was agreed to follow up on this at a future meeting.

## **8. Review of the board's self-assessment**

Feedback from the board self-assessment was generally very positive, though the response rate was limited. The Executive Committee will follow up on governance-related themes, including aspects of board responsibilities, at a later meeting.

A broader discussion addressed the functioning of the board as an international body. Members highlighted the strong value of international perspectives and diverse professional backgrounds, while noting the challenges of hybrid participation and unequal conditions for online members. The board agreed to work with the hybrid meeting formats to ensure more equal participation, and management was encouraged to continue to make active use of board members' expertise between meetings, when relevant. Going forward, the board will also focus on how to have the experience of partners represented and deepened. It was also agreed that alternative formats for future self-evaluations should be explored.

## **9. Election of Executive Committee**

Anna Mette Nathan is stepping down from the Executive Committee. Emil Kiørboe agreed to join the Committee and was elected with applause. The EC then consists of Chairperson Lars Udsholt, vice chair Lotte Leicht and Emil Kiørboe.

## **10. Preparing annual CEO development interview**

Closed point. The board held a closed discussion regarding the CEO development interview.

## **11. Geopolitical perspectives – Human Rights under Pressure**

*Presentation by Ken Roth, former CEO of Human Rights Watch. DIGNITY's management group also participated in this discussion.*

Ken Roth presented an overview of the current geopolitical context and its implications for the human rights movement. He emphasized that governments often have strong incentives to violate human rights and that the role of the human rights community is to shift the cost-benefit calculation by increasing political, reputational, and diplomatic costs.

The presentation identified three major trends: a more openly transactional and law-indifferent approach to international politics, increasing geopolitical fragmentation, and growing pressure on democratic institutions. While the number of democracies is declining, Roth noted that public demand for democracy remains strong in many regions, even where protests are met with repression.

A key message was that violations of international law should be framed as breaches rather than evidence that the legal framework itself is collapsing. Consistent international responses are essential to maintaining the credibility of the system. Roth also stressed the importance of strategic advocacy, coalition-building and targeted pressure, including the role of media attention and coordinated state action.

The subsequent discussion focused on how to increase the political costs of human rights violations, the growing role of courts and litigation, and the need to adapt advocacy strategies to a more multipolar world. Members discussed the implications of shifting global influence, including the increasing presence of Russia and China in regions such as Africa, and the importance of supporting local civil society in documenting impacts and exposing the gap between external narratives and local realities.

The discussion also addressed the relationship between security agendas and human rights, the need for more credible policy responses to migration within a legal framework, and the importance of incremental progress. The overall conclusion was that, despite a more challenging environment, there remain meaningful opportunities for influence if advocacy is strategic, focused, and persistent.

## **12. Decentralisation and Local Leadership**

*Presentation by CEO Rasmus Grue Christensen and COO Morten Olesen and board discussion*

Management presented DIGNITY's approach to localization, covering both organizational decentralization and strengthened local leadership of partners.

While the organization has increased financial transfers and decision-making authority to partners, experience shows that decentralization is more complex and resource-intensive than initially expected and may increase operational risks in restrictive environments. Project management responsibilities have been moved closer to implementation in larger country offices where feasible, while grant management remains centralized.

The board discussed the balance between country offices and strong partnerships, cost-benefit considerations, risks related to partner concentration, and the evolving donor landscape. It was noted that localization remains an important and sensible donor expectation, a principled approach, and a strategic necessity, but that its operational implications vary across contexts.

Further follow-up on localization will be presented at future meetings.

### **13. AOB**

No additional items.