
MINUTES OF DIGNITY BOARD MEETING JANUARY 30-31, 2025

AT Jægersgård Allé 93, Gentofte

PARTICIPANTS: Lars Udsholt, Emil Kiørboe, Tomas Martin, Anna Mette Nathan, Sadia Khan, Marie Louise Nørredam, Dea Seidenfaden, Louise Holck, Lotte Leicht

ON TEAMS: Nomfundo Mogapi

ABSENT: Manfred Nowak

FROM MANAGEMENT: Rasmus Grue Christensen

GUESTS: Jonas Christensen, Friday, presenting AI – perspectives for DIGNITY

REFERENT: Mette Grimstrup

1. Approval of agenda of board meeting and seminar Jan. 30-31, 2025

The agenda for the board meeting on Thursday was approved.

Due to a last-minute speaker cancellation on Friday, the Friday program was rescheduled.

2. Orientation from the Chairperson

Dea Seidenfaden (DS) was delayed, and Lars Udsholt chaired the meeting in her absence. Rasmus Grue Christensen (RGC) presented an overview of the upcoming program.

The board was informed that in addition to the chairmanship that automatically constitutes part of the Executive Committee (EC), also Anna Mette Nathan and Lotte Leicht had agreed to candidate for the EC.

As DS will end her term in the board and thus step down from the chairmanship later this year, the EC will then be reconstituted.

3. Orientation from the CEO

RGC provided an update on DIGNITY's operations, noting both current challenges and opportunities. The recent election of Trump led to the freezing of U.S. grants, directly affecting DIGNITY's Belarus programmes. The budgets will have to be adjusted and new donors explored. Many of DIGNITY's partner organizations around the world may face even more dire consequences. We are still in the process of assessing the situation, including possible ways to assist our partners in this situation.

In other places of the world, difficulties with registration and banking operations are also causing challenges, as (semi-)autocratic regimes find new ways of counteracting civil society.

Also potential new opportunities arise. Right now we're exploring possible new programmes in several countries, including Syria and Bangladesh.

The main project document with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) (formerly known as the DED) has been signed, securing a solid DIGNITY's financial framework for programmes in Africa and Eastern Europe in the next five years.

Management is now focusing on DIGNITY's analysis and strategic positioning vis-à-vis the upcoming structural reforms in the Danish healthcare system and how we can contribute positively.

The board discussed these challenges and emphasized the importance of adhering to the newly approved strategy while also remaining agile and responding to the rapidly changing world. Agility is a cornerstone in the new strategy. RGC was asked to provide the board with an overview of the impact of the American funding freeze on both immediate operations and long-term programming at the next board meeting.

4. Disposition in the EC

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

Concept notes on projects in Bangladesh and Georgia have been approved by the EC. Both focus on support for victims and accountability.

5. Strategic Priorities 2024

RGC presented the final status on Strategic Priorities 2024, noticing the sheer number of fully implemented priorities as quite an accomplishment on top of the strategy process and key negotiations with main donors.

Focusing on the few not-yet-fully-implemented goals, it was noted that progress is being made in Eastern Europe, with new programmes and country office set to open in Kyiv, though a full updated strategy has yet to be developed. Research localization and survivor-centered approaches are also advancing but full coherent concepts for the efforts are still under development. We are also still working intensely on long-term donor diversification.

The board thanked for the overview. The following discussion touched upon GDPR compliance, which has improved significantly, though balancing compliance with operational flexibility remains an ongoing challenge. The board also discussed trauma-informed approaches, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging the backgrounds of staff members working in traumatized cultures. RGC agreed that securing a good working environment also internationally was high on the agenda. Furthermore, the board highlighted the importance of prevention work, which has received less public focus compared to rehabilitation and accountability efforts. RGC thanked for the discussion.

6. MFA recommendations

The board was presented with DIGNITY's implementation plan for the MFA recommendations from the 2024 review process and noted that almost all recommendations had already been fully implemented.

7. Strategic Priorities 2025

The Strategic Priorities for 2025 will follow a similar format to 2024, but more explicitly aligned to the newly adopted multi-year strategies. Discussions centered on the localization agenda and strategies for developing an increasingly international organization. RGC informed the board that the organization is working on a five-year plan that will outline its future structure at both headquarters and country office levels.

It was noted that measuring advocacy success through the signing of a Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with the African Commission may not be the optimal approach. Additional indicators should be developed.

Additional teaching activities and knowledge-sharing initiatives were also suggested, with potential summer courses or collaborations with universities. RGC remarked that training is an integral part of many of our international programmes and also other activities, but also that such explorative initiatives would require additional funding.

Finally, the board debated how to measure agility, as the Strategic Priorities format and follow-up doesn't allow for much creativity. RGC suggested that reporting henceforth should include unplanned but impactful initiatives.

The board approved of the strategic priorities 2025.

8. Review of the board's self-assessment

DS expressed satisfaction with the positive feedback received. With four new board members joining in 2025, more time will be dedicated to the reflecting on board work and onboarding at the seminar next year. Some members had not responded to the assessment, and it was emphasized that participation is essential for ensuring good governance.

The board discussed the transition to an international board which has been extremely valuable but also taken a while. It will be important to evaluate the transition also in order to determine future directions. The earlier discussed inclusion of individuals with refugee backgrounds was raised as an important consideration in that respect. The clinic's new advisory board was also mentioned, with suggestions to integrate it more with the board's work.

The board agreed that these discussions should be addressed strategically, and perhaps wait till the next board seminar, to ensure focus and efficient onboarding of the many new board members in 2025.

9. Election of EC

The EC was constituted with Dea Seidenfaden as Chairperson and Lars Udsholt as Vice Chairperson. Anna Mette Nathan and Lotte Leicht were elected as EC members.

10. Preparing annual CEO development interview

Closed point.

11. AOB

Nothing pt.

SUNDAY PROGRAM

Geopolitical perspectives – Human Rights under Pressure

Presentation by Rasmus Grue Christensen and board discussion

The board discussed the increasing pressure on human rights due to geopolitical changes. The number of democracies is diminishing, autocracies are becoming more sophisticated, and the perception of human rights as a Western-imposed ideology remains a challenge. Strategies for addressing these misconceptions include building alliances with non-Western actors and emphasizing the institutional and capacity-building aspects of human rights.

The expansion of the human rights was also discussed. While the inclusion of socio-economic rights might be an important aspect of acknowledging the critique of colonial residues in the human rights system in the global South, the inclusion of sexual and reproductive rights and climate rights has also, all though in many ways a tremendous success, caused a huge backlash in the support for the human rights.

Concerns were raised about the global migration agenda, which is putting pressure on fundamental human rights. Counter-terrorism measures could also reintroduce risks to anti-torture protections. Despite these challenges, the board agreed that the fundamental principle of banning torture remains widely supported. However, human rights institutions face increasing skepticism, and there is a need to reinforce their legitimacy while still exploring alternative justice systems.

AI – perspectives for DIGNITY

Presentation by Jonas Christensen, DareDisrupt, and board discussion

The board explored how AI could be leveraged to enhance DIGNITY's work. Potential applications include automating compliance reporting, translating documents, and supporting capacity-building efforts.

Ethical concerns were discussed, particularly regarding data privacy, GDPR compliance, and maintaining strong partner relationships. The use of AI in advocacy and accountability efforts, such as facial recognition of perpetrators, was considered, but ensuring security and ethical application is crucial.

The board requested a report on how AI could be used efficiently while maintaining ethical standards and ensuring full compliance with AI relevant laws, including new EU rules. The importance of clear communication with staff to address concerns about AI's role in the organization was also stressed.

Finally, the board discussed its own role and responsibilities in this area and emphasized the importance of setting strategic directions rather than getting involved in daily operations. They debated whether DIGNITY should position itself as an AI frontrunner or take a more cautious approach and suggested that RGC presented the different scenarios for further discussion at a future board meeting.