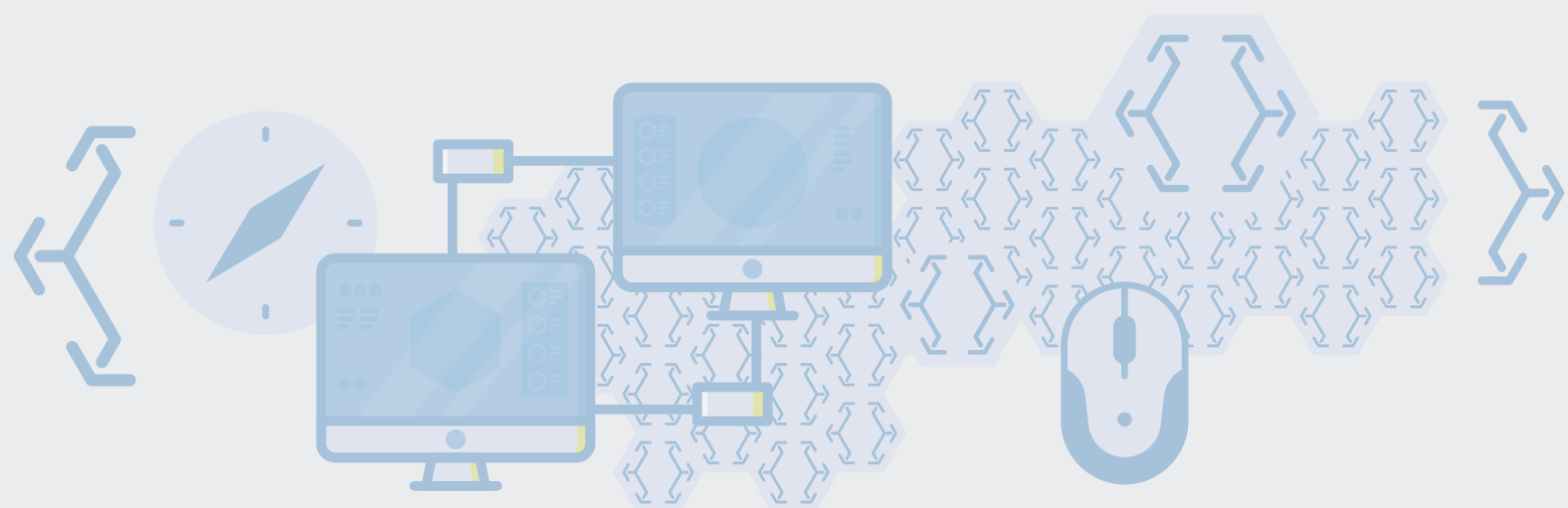


International Conference
of Ombuds Institutions
For the Armed Forces

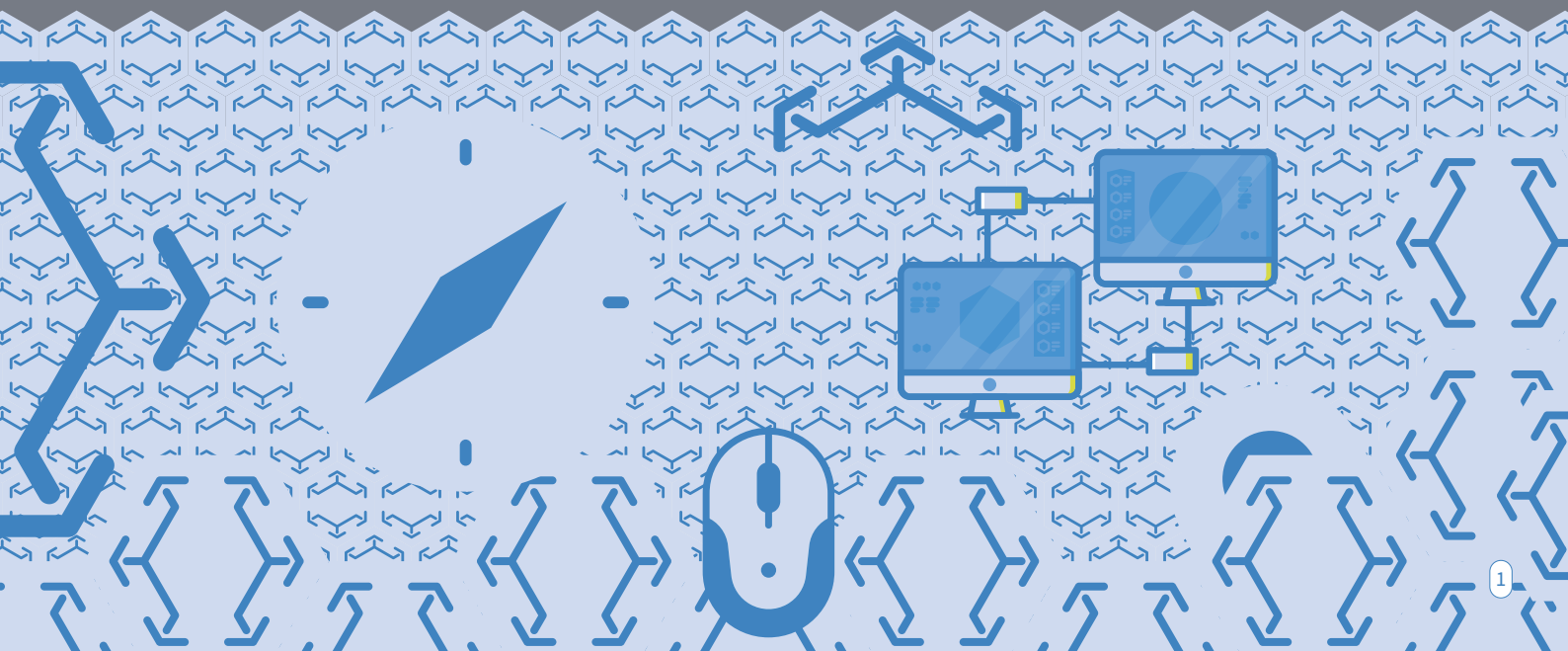


Impact of Covid-19 on Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces



12ICOAF PROGRAMME

26 – 30 OCTOBER 2020



MONDAY, 26 OCTOBER 2020

- 14:00 - 14:15** **CONFERENCE OPENING**
- 14:15-14:30** **Technical introductory remarks**
- 14:30-16:00** **SESSION 1: Impact of Covid-19 on the armed forces**

TUESDAY, 27 OCTOBER 2020

- 14:00-15:30** **SESSION 2: Impact of Covid-19 measures on the freedoms and rights of citizens, including those in uniform**

WEDNESDAY, 28 OCTOBER 2020

- 14:00-15:30** **SESSION 3: Complaints-handling in time of Covid-19**

THURSDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2020

- 14:00-15:30** **SESSION 4: Impact of Covid-19 on fieldwork**

FRIDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2020

- 14:00-15:30** **SESSION 5: Ombuds institutions after Covid-19**
- 15:30-16:00** **Adoption of the conference statement**
- Announcement of the 13th ICOAF in Australia, October 2021 (VIDEO)**
- Closing remarks**

SPONSORS

This conference has been made possible thanks to the generous support of the German Federal Foreign Office, which as a primary sponsor of the event. DCAF also kindly acknowledges the support from the Austrian Parliamentary Commission for the Federal Armed Forces and the Norwegian Parliamentary Ombudsman for the Armed Forces.



Impact of Covid-19 on Ombuds Institutions for the Armed Forces

INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the world severely, causing an introduction of a range of measures on global and national levels to suppress it. Covid-19 have had an overwhelming impact on both the functioning of the states and daily lives of people. Governmental responses have consisted of a variety of exceptional legal, organizational, and practical measures to fight Covid-19, with a huge impact on the lives, well-being and rights of not only citizens at large, but also of armed forces personnel who were tasked with important functions in addressing the pandemic.

12ICOAF will be devoted to assessing the impact of Covid-19 on not only ombuds institutions, but also on society, and the armed forces. In the majority of countries, armed forces have been called upon to assist civilian authorities in tackling this public health emergency, exposing them to new and often unusual tasks in a fast-changing environment, but also a higher risk of infection.

Facing this trend, ombuds institutions need to reflect on their practices and adapt their work to guarantee the protection of the rights of armed forces personnel during and after Covid-19, as well as the rights of citizens impacted by the activities of the armed forces. Thus, this year's conference will examine ways in which ombuds institutions can respond to the challenges posed by Covid-19.

Participants will have an opportunity to compare notes and identify good practices related to how Covid-19 has influenced complaints, both in terms of their dynamics and handling procedures. Special attention will be given to working methods, from interviews, correspondence (oral and written), as well as other information gathered formally or informally. Responding to the continuing interest of ICOAF participants in different dimensions of fieldwork, 12ICOAF will devote a separate session to in-country and overseas field visits.

Finally, 12ICOAF will also consider important changes in the organizational and logistical aspects of ombuds institutions' work, in terms of office hours, remote work, video conferencing, different ways of communicating with complainants, and similar.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This conference hopes to draw upon lessons learned from previous ICOAFs and continue fostering a dynamic and participatory environment conducive to generating new ideas and insights.

Covid-19 not only impacted on the format of 12ICOAF, but also on the objectives and content of the conference. The objective of 12ICOAF is for ombuds institutions to share their knowledge and learn from their peers in how they can continue to fulfil their mandate in the context severely affected by Covid-19. To that end, the specific objectives are to assess the impact and challenges caused by Covid-19, and to identify good practices on how to remedy negative consequences posed by this pandemic. Good practices shared during the conference will be compiled and endorsed by participants in a non-binding Conference Statement.

Before the conference, a questionnaire on the impact of Covid-19 was circulated to ICOAF participants. The turnout was impressive, resulting in a wealth of interesting data, which will be shared before the conference and presented during the event. The results of this questionnaire have greatly contributed to the drafting of the programme, as well.

The structure of the conference sessions consists of panel and breakout sessions, as in previous ICOAFs. The conference starts with two panel sessions focused on the wider Covid-19 context, in terms of its impact on the armed forces (session 1), and the impact of the measures taken to fight Covid-19 on the freedoms and rights of citizens, including those in uniform (session 2). Remaining three sessions examine the impact of Covid-19 on ombuds institutions. Third and fourth sessions will be in a breakout format, to allow concentrated discussion on different trends and challenges

in complaints-handling during Covid-19 depending on the type of ombuds institutions (session 3), and on effects of Covid-19 on the ability of ombuds institutions to conduct field visits, both in-country and abroad (session 4). The final fifth session returns to panel format and will be devoted to identifying practices developed by ombuds institutions during the pandemic that should be kept after Covid-19, as well as to looking ahead at ombuds institutions' work after Covid-19.

Participants possess vast experience in handling and responding to complaints, including in these uncertain Covid-19 circumstances. They are expected and encouraged to share their experiences – both positive practices and gaps in capacity – to draw out good practices and areas of need that may prove to be informative to their peers.

This year's conference will be the first organized virtually. A downside of it is the inability to have discussions in person, not only on formal conference sessions but also during the breaks and social events, which has always been an essential feature of the ICOAF experience. However, the new technological possibilities of hosting online events are certainly welcome and are, in fact, beneficial as they can increase participation, cooperation and communication. The conference will be hosted on Zoom, as it has proven to be the most versatile platform for large-scale online events, allowing interactive discussions, interpretation and various working modalities (including breakout groups).

The participation at the conference is by invitation only. The registration is compulsory. All security features of Zoom platform will be used to keep uninvited guests out. 12ICOAF will be closed to the public and will operate under Chatham House Rules unless otherwise noted.

MONDAY, 26 OCTOBER 2020

Conference opening

14:00 – 14:15

SPEAKER : Ambassador Thomas Guerber, Director, DCAF

Technical introductory remarks

14:15 – 14:30

SPEAKER: Luka Glušac, Project Coordinator, DCAF

Panel format

14:30 – 16:00

MODERATOR: William McDermott, Project Coordinator, DCAF

SPEAKERS: Eva Hoegl, Parliamentary Commissioner for the Armed Forces, Germany

Vusumuzi Masondo, Military Ombud, South Africa

Emmanuel Jacob, President, European Organisation of Military Associations and Trade Unions (EUROMIL)

SESSION 1: Impact of Covid-19 on the armed forces

In the vast majority of countries, the measures taken by governments to fight Covid-19 have included the deployment of the armed forces to assist civilian authorities. In some cases, reserve forces have been called upon as well. Deployed armed forces personnel have been under increased exposure to Covid-19, resulting in a high rate of infection among them in some countries (comparing to country/armed forces size).

Finally, the mandate of armed forces was affected as well. For instance, some domestic military exercises and education in military schools have been suspended, and military exercises abroad have been cancelled. This session aims to explore the impact of Covid-19 on the legal and constitutional framework, mandate, roles, equipment as well as the readiness of the armed forces and their personnel to deal with the pandemic.

Questions for discussion:

- Have the armed forces been deployed in your country to assist civilian authorities in responding to Covid-19 and what type of tasks have the armed forces been given?
- Have the armed forces deployed been properly equipped and protected while performing Covid-19 related tasks?
- How has Covid-19 impacted the mandate of armed forces in your country?

TUESDAY, 27 OCTOBER 2020

Panel format

14:00 – 15:30

MODERATOR: Jerald Joseph,
Commissioner of Human Rights,
Human Rights Commission of
Malaysia (SUHAKAM), Malaysia

SPEAKERS: Reinier van
Zutphen, National Ombudsman,
the Netherlands

**Faith Sialai, Legal Officer,
Commission on Administrative
Justice (Office of the
Ombudsman), Kenya**

**Giorgi Burjanadze, Deputy
Public Defender, Georgia**

SESSION 2: Impact of Covid-19 measures on the freedoms and rights of citizens, including those in uniform

In order to fight Covid-19, governments worldwide have introduced a range of legal and practical measures, including through declaration of a state of emergency, allowing them to limit or restrict certain human rights, such as freedom of movement and freedom of assembly. These measures have affected armed forces personnel from the perspective of both them as citizens, and as a force called on by the government to ensure that these measures are effectively implemented. This session aims to explore the human rights implications of the states' response to Covid-19.

Questions for discussion:

- How have human rights been impacted by anti-Covid-19 measures?
- Which human rights of armed forces personnel have been additionally limited or restricted?
- Have ombuds institutions received complaints by citizens relating to armed forces involvement in implementing measures against Covid-19? If so, what kind of complaints?

WEDNESDAY, 28 OCTOBER 2020

Breakout groups (by type of ombuds institution)

14:00 – 15:30

INTRODUCTION: Luka Glušac,
Project Coordinator, DCAF

SESSION 3: Complaints-handling in time of Covid-19

The results of the Covid-19 questionnaire indicate that most specialized ombuds institutions have recorded an increased number of complaints from both armed forces personnel and civilians during Covid-19, with an important number of them related directly to Covid-19. On the other hand, general ombuds institutions have received a modest number of Covid-19 related complaints, with many observing either the usual number of complaints or even a steep decrease of complaints. This session aims to discuss these conflicting trends in complaint dynamics among different types of ombuds institutions in various countries.

Questions for discussion:

- Has your office observed any trends in complaints received since the Covid-19 outbreak?
- What is the relation of complaints filed by armed forces personnel compared to those of the general population, in terms of their number and substance? What are the most common concerns complainants have raised?
- What was the impact of Covid-19 on complaint-handling procedures?
- Has Covid-19 harmed the efficiency of your office?

THURSDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2020

Breakout groups

14:00 – 15:30

INTRODUCTION: Luka Glušac,
Project Coordinator, DCAF

SESSION 4: Impact of Covid-19 on fieldwork

Most ombuds institutions conduct field or site visits, meaning military barracks and other installations under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence and/or the Armed Forces. Field visits may be announced or unannounced, depending on the purpose of the visit. Such visits may be performed for evidence gathering as part of ongoing investigations, as an instrumental part of drafting thematic reports, or, for instance, for preventive purposes, given that some ombuds institutions are entrusted with a preventive function as well. Finally, site visits may be conducted in-country or abroad. This session aims to explore how has Covid-19 influenced ombuds institutions' ability to use this important method of work.

Breakout 1: In-country field visits

According to the questionnaire, a vast majority of institutions stopped this activity during Covid-19. Only some institutions have continued to conduct them, mostly remotely. This breakout group seeks to explore how the ombuds institutions will conduct field visits if Covid-19 continues.

Questions for discussion:

- How has Covid-19 influenced your office's ability to conduct in-country field visits?
- Have you managed to keep conducting some types of field visits despite Covid-19 or come up with alternative ways of conducting them?
- What is your plan if Covid-19 measures keep preventing your office of performing field visits in a traditional way?

Breakout 2: Overseas visits

Oversight visits to the armed forces deployed abroad have become an essential activity of many ombuds institutions. The number of ombuds institutions that have already conducted visits to personnel deployed in international missions (led by the United Nations or regional organizations), or bilateral missions, has been increased substantially in recent years. According to the questionnaire, almost all ombuds institutions indicated they have stopped conducting overseas (international) visits since the Covid-19 outbreak. This breakout session aims to explore the consequences of that fact.

Questions for discussion:

- What are the consequences of an inability to perform overseas visits?
- Is there a possibility to conduct some overseas oversight activities remotely?
- How would your office respond if the Covid-19 situation does not change soon?
- What substitute or alternative ways of conducting overseas visits are at ombuds disposal?

FRIDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2020

Panel format

14:00 – 15:30

MODERATOR: Hans Born, Assistant Director and Head of Policy and Research Division, DCAF

SPEAKERS: Catalina Crespo, National Ombudsperson of Costa Rica, Defensoría de los Habitantes, Costa Rica

Mamadou Cherif Thiam, Director for International Relations, Médiateur de la République, Senegal

James Gaynor, Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force Australia

SESSION 5: Ombuds institutions after Covid-19

While causing a variety of challenges, Covid-19 has however also proven to be a good opportunity for ombuds institutions to further develop their digital procedures. It seems that institutions have adapted well to remote work and have used this situation to perfect their electronic case management systems, as well as to become more present in an online environment, making themselves more visible and accessible.

Questions for discussion:

- Would you have done anything differently in your office's response to Covid-19?
- What good practices will be kept after Covid-19?
- What will ombuds institutions have to permanently change in their work?

CONFERENCE CLOSING

Adoption of the conference statement

15:30 – 16:00

CHAIR: Hans Born, Assistant
Director and Head of Policy
and Research Division, DCAF

**Video Announcement
of the 13th ICOAF in
Australia, October 2021**

Closing remarks

SPEAKER: Hans Born, Assistant
Director and Head of Policy
and Research Division, DCAF

Adoption of the conference statement

Before closing the conference, the conference statement will be discussed and adopted by the participants.

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