

ASIAN OMBUDSMAN ASSOCIATION
24th Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors
11 September 2023, Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan

MINUTES

The 24th Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors (BoD) of the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA) was held on 11 September 2023 at Kazan, Republic of Tatarstan. The meeting was presided by the President AOA, His Excellency Mr. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi, Federal Ombudsman of Pakistan. Ambassador (R) Abdul Moiz Bokhari, Executive Secretary of the AOA Secretariat coordinated the meeting.

2. The following members of the BoD participated in the meeting:

Sr. No.	Name	Position	Organization
1.	Mr. Ejaz Ahmad Qureshi	President	Federal Ombudsman, Pakistan
2.	Ms. Sabina Aliyeva	Vice President	The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Republic of Azerbaijan
3.	Ms. Winnie Chiu Wai-yin	Secretary	The Ombudsman, Hong Kong, China
4.	Mr. Justice Dr. Zabihullah Khodaeiyan,	Treasurer	President, General Inspection Organization, Islamic Republic of Iran
5.	Ms. MU Hongyu	Member	Represented National Commission of Supervision (NCS) of China
6.	Mr. Mokhammad Najih	Member	Chairman, The Ombudsman of the Republic of Indonesia
7.	Mr. Sugawara Nozomu,	Member	Director General, Administration Evaluation Bureau, Japan (online). Ms. HIGASHITANI Yuko, Officer from Embassy of Japan in Moscow attended in person.
8.	Mr. Tae Kye, KIM	Member	Vice Chairperson, Anti-Corruption & Civil Rights Commission (ACRC), Republic of Korea (online)
9.	Mr. Seref MALKOC	Member	Chief Ombudsman, The Ombudsman Institution of Turkiye, Republic of Turkiye
10.	Amb. (R) Abdul Moiz Bokhari	Executive Secretary	AOA Secretariat, Islamabad

Agenda Item No. 1

Remarks by the Chair and the Host

3. The Meeting was opened with the welcoming remarks by the President AOA, the Commissioner for Human Rights in the Republic of Tatarstan being the host of the meeting including the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation and the guest of honor, Chairman of the State Council of the Republic of Tatarstan. The President AOA welcomed the participants to this family reunion since it met last on 18 October 2022 at Baku. He thanked the members who were participating online which was reflective of their commitment to the regional fraternity. He stated that the 24th Meeting of the Board of Directors was the last meeting of the Board elected for the term 2019-2023. The President said that the current Board would close its term with a deep sense of satisfaction for having made positive contribution to the growth and development of the Asian Ombudsman Association (AOA). He added that the Association has gradually developed necessary features essential for any successful and effective professional body of international character. The President stated that the AOA was recognized amongst the active regional ombudsman bodies by the UN Resolution 77/224 which offered the Association a distinguished place in the global fraternity. He complimented the members who have completed their terms of office for their contribution to the work of the Association thereby adding to its stature.

4. The President thanked H.E. Ms. Saburskaya Sariya Kharisovna, Commissioner for Human Rights, Republic of Tatarstan for hosting the meeting and invited her to deliver her welcoming remarks. The Hon'ble Commissioner expressed her happiness on hosting the members of the AOA family once again at Kazan and conveyed warm greetings of the leadership in the Republic. Her speech was followed by welcoming remarks by the High Commissioner for Human Rights in the Russian Federation H.E. Ms. Tatiana MOSKALKOVA and the inaugural address by H.E. Mr. F. Kh. Mukhametshin, Chairman of the State Council of the Republic of Tatarstan. He welcomed the participants on behalf of His Excellency, the President (Rais) and the People of the Republic of Tatarstan and invited them to explore the rich cultural heritage and the growing socio-economic development in the country. He outlined the growth of ombudsmanship culture in the country and expressed confidence that it will gain greater strength in the future. He assured the participants of full support and cooperation from the leadership in strengthening cooperation between the Russian Federation and the Asian Ombudsman Association.

5. Following the conclusion of the inaugural session, a break of five minutes was observed. Thereafter, the President called to order the working session of the 24th Meeting of the Board of Directors and asked the Executive Secretary to proceed with the Agenda.

Agenda Item No. 2

Approval of the Agenda of the 24th Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors

6. The Executive Secretary AOA gave a brief overview of the items on the draft agenda before the Board.

7. No objection, observations or comments were received from the participants.

Decision:

The Board unanimously approved the Agenda.

Agenda Item No. 3

Submission of the Minutes of the last (23rd) Meeting of the Board of Directors of AOA (18 October 2022, Baku)

8. The draft minutes of the 23rd Meeting of the Board of Directors of the Asian Ombudsman Association, held on 18 October, 2022 at Baku (Republic of Azerbaijan) were circulated among the Hon'ble members of the Board vide email dated 14 November, 2022 for observations and feedback. In response, the observations received from the esteemed members were incorporated in the minutes, and thus, the final minutes were circulated among the members vide email dated 25 November, 2022. The AOA Secretariat has thereby continued to follow up on various activities during 2022/23 in the light of the decisions taken by the Board. These minutes were submitted for formal confirmation by the 24th Meeting of the Board.

Decision:

In the absence of any objection/observations, the minutes of the last (23rd) Meeting of the Board of Directors were confirmed by the Board. It took note of the effective follow up on various activities by the AOA Secretariat during 2022/23 and concurred to place these minutes before the General Assembly for approval in terms of Article 6(4)(f) of the Bye Laws of the Association.

Agenda Item No. 4

Report of the President on the Activities of the Association 2022/23

9. As per Article 9(2) of the Bye Laws of the AOA and Clause 5-5 (i) of the Code of Conduct of Business of the AOA, an Annual Report on the activities of the Association was presented by the President to the Board.

10. The President emphasized that the period following the 23rd BoD meeting has been very rewarding as a good number of ongoing and new activities were undertaken during 2022/23. He commended the efforts of the Hon'ble members and the AOA Secretariat in undertaking series of activities from the AOA platform.

11. A booklet on the Asian Ombudsman Association outlining the growth and potential of the regional fraternity was prepared by the AOA Secretariat for enhancing the Association's outreach.

Decision:

The Board approved the Report of the President for the year 2022/23 and appreciated the efforts of the President AOA and the Secretariat in carrying out the activities of the Association in an effective and professional manner. It gave its consent to place the Report of the President before the General Assembly under Article 6(4)(f) of the Bye Laws.

Agenda Item No. 5

Approval of the Audited Financial Statement of the AOA Accounts for the year 2022.

12. The Audited Financial Statement for the year 2022 was prepared by M/s W.A. Associates in term of Article 6-5 of the Code of Conduct of Business. The Hon'ble Treasurer Mr. Justice Dr. Zabihullah Khodaeiyan formally placed the Audited Statement before the Board in terms of Article 8(2) of Bye Laws of the AOA.

Decision:

The Board approved the Audited Statement for the year 2022 and gave its consent to place the same before the General Assembly for approval under Article 6(4) (f) of the Bye Laws of the AOA.

Agenda Item No. 6

Up-gradation of the Resource Centre at the AOA Secretariat

13. The Resource Centre facility at the AOA Secretariat is an effective instrument for promoting the objectives of the Asian Ombudsman Association. The Board was apprised that the facility would serve as a store house of information about the growth, evolution and progress of ombudsmanship in the Asian region. The upgraded Resource Centre shall contain all necessary documents (online as well as hard copies) including books, professional journals/magazines, display items, annual reports, research papers, documentaries and related publications in respect of the AOA member institutions.

14. The facilities available at the Resource Centre would be provided on gratis basis to the researchers, scholars, institutions and professionals from the AOA member countries. The AOA Secretariat was vigorously pursuing this initiative and sought active support of the entire membership. The Executive Secretary apprised the Board that the Board of Directors at its 23rd Meeting (18 October 2022, Baku) had approved Pak Rs.526,500/- equivalent to USD2310/- approximately for purchase of national pole flags and table flags of the AOA membership from the local market. He informed the Board that these flags have been duly purchased and were prominently placed in the AOA Secretariat.

Decision:

The Board took note of the significance of the Resource Centre facility towards achieving the objectives of the Association and appreciated efforts of the AOA Secretariat to pursue its up-gradation. The Board also encouraged the AOA members to actively contribute in the development of the Resource Centre. It gave its consent to place the matter before the General Assembly for its information in terms of provision 4-1 of the Code of Conduct of Business.

Agenda Item No. 7

Launching of e-Profile Directory on the AOA website of the AOA Members & Alumni Members

15. The initiative of launching e-Profile Directory of the AOA members and Alumni members was approved by the 22nd meeting of the Board of Directors (17 November 2019, Istanbul) with a view to providing:

“Ever ready database of the Member Institutions for their closer interaction and sharing of information and experiences supporting the cause of Ombudsmanship in the Region and beyond. Federal Ombudsman Pakistan had given his consent to manage necessary resources from his own account without any burden on the Association Funds.”

16. The AOA Secretariat periodically updates the e-Profile Directory to incorporate changes, if any, in the profile of the head of member institutions, focal persons or in case of change of address etc. It is important that necessary information is shared by the membership with the AOA Secretariat to update the contents of the e-Profile Directory on regular basis. As regards the Alumni Directory, information from the member institutions was still awaited.

Decision:

The Board took note of the status of the e-Profile Directory and the Alumni Directory on the AOA website and encouraged the member institutions to regularly provide the requisite information to the AOA Secretariat. It concurred to place the matter before the General Assembly for information in terms of provision 4-1 of the Code of Conduct of Business of AOA.

Agenda Item No. 8

Subscription of News Items for the AOA e-Newsletter

17. The AOA Secretariat is regularly issuing monthly e-Newsletter since June 2018. It is an effective vehicle for exchange of information and sharing of experiences within the AOA membership. The Secretariat compiles information received from various institutions till the 25th of every month on subjects of professional interest, processes it and uploads the same in the format of e-Newsletter by the 5th of every month. It was pointed out that a good number of member institutions were contributing news items/press releases for inclusion in the AOA monthly e-Newsletter. However, greater participation and support to it by the membership was necessary to enrich the contents of the e-Newsletter and enhance its outreach.

Decision:

The Board underlined the importance of the e-Newsletter in promoting the objectives of the Association and concurred to place the matter before the General Assembly for its information and emphasis.

Agenda Item No. 9

Expanding Membership of the AOA

18. The Board was apprised that the AOA comprised 44 members representing ombudsman institutions from 25 countries in Asia. The AOA President was in contact with some Ombudsman institutions in the region. Necessary documents and application forms had been shared with them by the Secretariat. The President emphasized that in order to further enhance the outreach of the AOA, all members may approach institutions within their contact, which were not yet member of AOA, and encourage them to consider joining the Asian Ombudsman fraternity.

Decision:

The Board appreciated the efforts of the President and agreed that all members should encourage others institutions in their contact to join the Asian Ombudsman fraternity, promoting thereby the cause of ombudsmanship in the region. It gave its consent to place the matter before the General Assembly for its notice and emphasis.

Agenda Item No. 10

AOA Calendar of Activities during 2022-2023

19. The Board of Directors at its 23rd Meeting (18 October 2022, Baku) was apprised that in order to carry out regular activities from the AOA platform, the Association may adopt the practice being followed by most international bodies and develop annual calendar of activities on the basis of the offers by member institutions to organize activities in pursuance of the objectives of the Association. Accordingly, the Board approved preparation of an annual calendar of activities and encouraged the AOA membership in terms of Article 4(2) of the Bye Laws to offer activities/events aimed at promoting mutual cooperation and upholding the cause of ombudsmanship. In this context, Federal Ombudsman Secretariat, Pakistan organized before the end of the year 2022, an online AOA workshop on the Role of Integrated Computer

Technologies in the Public Grievance Redressal System on 28-29 December 2022. Two training sessions were organized by Federal Tax Ombudsman (FTO) Secretariat, Pakistan (a member of AOA), on 16 May and 07 June, 2023 in the hybrid format. Federal Ombudsman Secretariat, Pakistan also organized AOA Webinar on Informal Resolution of Disputes (IRD) on 14 June 2023. Details of various training activities on important professional themes held during the year are given in the President's Report on the Activities of the Association (Agenda Item-4).

20. Recognizing the significance of organizing AOA activities on regular and sustained basis, the Board approved preparation of an annual calendar of activities for 2024. It requested the esteemed members to identify and offer activities/events to be hosted by them during 2024 at the national level with an online option for participation by AOA members. Information in regard to such activities/events may be shared with the AOA Secretariat for coordination with the Association's membership.

Decision:

The Board approved preparation of an annual calendar of activities for 2024 and encouraged the AOA membership to offer activities/events aimed at promoting mutual cooperation and upholding the cause of ombudsmanship. It concurred to place the matter before the General Assembly for its notice and emphasis in terms of provision 4-1 of the Code of Conduct of Business of AOA.

Agenda Item No. 11

Status of Payments of Annual Membership Fee 2019 – 2022

21. Pursuant to the decision of the 23rd Meeting of the Board of Directors (18 October 2022 - Baku), a Position Paper prepared by the AOA Secretariat on the status of payments of Annual Membership Fee 2019-2022 was presented to the AOA membership. The Position Paper contained a detailed presentation on the International Payment Routing Mechanism (IPRM) prepared by the designated MCB Bank.

22. The Executive Secretary apprised the Board that the three categories of the member institutions i.e. (i) who have not paid annual membership fee since 2019; (ii) made only part payments; and (iii) remitted less amounts; related to three different situations and thereby needed to be dealt with differently. The status of member institutions in the first category who

have made no payments has already been dealt with vide Resolution No.5 of 2017 (15th General Assembly meeting, 16th May 2017 – Republic of Korea). The relevant provisions of the Bye Laws of the Association have accordingly been amended to give effect of deprivation to a defaulting member of its right to vote, right to contest election and right to avail any facility from the AOA involving financial implications.

23. The member institutions in the second category are those who have not made payments regularly and some gaps existed. The reasons for irregular payments include budgetary constraints on the part of member institutions and/or procedural difficulties in obtaining official approval for remitting membership fee. For this category, the AOA Secretariat may continue issuing reminders and pursue the matter with such institutions.

24. The third category relates to those institutions who have regularly paid annual membership fee but a small shortfall occurred and the amount credited in the AOA account was short due to banking transfer procedures. This shortfall ranged between USD 03/- to USD 35/-. During 2019 short payments were received from 05 institutions, in 2020 these were from 05 institutions, 07 payments were short in 2021 and 07 payments were short in 2022. The total impact of these short payments was calculated as USD 438/- approximately in four years (2019 - 2022).

25. The procedure for transfer of payments from member institutions in different countries was thoroughly studied. The process of international transfer of funds involves service charges/transfer fee charged by the sender bank and/or intermediary bank or their Agent. All intermediary banks charge service fee which is fixed by them and is subject to change as well. The process of transfer of funds sometimes required more than one intermediary bank.

26. The MCB Bank has recommended that the member institutions may use “OUR” charge code when remitting annual membership fee to the AOA account. The Bank has further offered that in order to provide better customer services, MCB will absorb itself all incidental charges marked “OUR” and will not pass on these charges to the AOA Account which will get full payments as credited by the correspondent agents in its nostro accounts with them. Moreover, once the approval for using charge code “OUR” is conveyed by the AOA Secretariat, the MCB Bank will credit the agent’s incidental charges to the AOA Account from all incoming funds with effect from 2019.

27. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), regulator of the banking system in the country, was consulted in the matter. The SBP has upheld the response submitted by the MCB Bank. It has been further clarified that the amount deducted in case of “OUR” charge code, pertains to clearing charges by overseas correspondent bank in foreign jurisdiction and MCB has not deducted any charges. It is appreciable that in future MCB will bear any such clearing charges and credit the full amount in the AOA’s account under “OUR” charge code (Field 71A in Swift Message).

Decision:

The Board took note of the Position Paper along with the presentation of the MCB Bank on the International Payment Routing Mechanism and approved the following course of action:

- i. Underlined the implications for non-payment of dues by the members as contained in the relevant provisions of the Bye Laws of the Asian Ombudsman Association as amended in the light of Resolution No.5 of 2017;*
- ii. The AOA Secretariat may issue reminders to member institutions who have not paid annual membership fee regularly since 2019 or made payments with gaps;*
- iii. In order to avoid shortfall in the credited amount of annual membership fee in the AOA Account, the member institutions may benefit from the recommendations made by the designated Bank as in para 26 above.*

The Board further agreed to place the matter before the General Assembly for its information and notice.

Agenda Item No. 12

Consideration of Applications for Membership of AOA

28. Two applications for membership of AOA were received in the month of August 2023 from the following institutions:

- i. Commissioner for Human Rights in the Republic of Kazakhstan.*
- ii. Seoul Metropolitan Citizens’ Ombudsman Commission, Republic of Korea.*

29. The AOA Secretariat drafted working papers for the Executive Committee of the Board to consider and recommend its proposals in terms of Section 1-4 of the Code of Conduct of Business. The review carried out by the AOA Secretariat concluded that the both applicants were eligible for membership under the existing criteria identified in the Code of Conduct of Business of AOA.

30. The Executive Committee comprising the President, Vice President and the Secretary of AOA considered the applications through circulation and recommended that the Board of Directors may accept the applications under Section 1-5 of the Code of Conduct of Business of AOA.

Decision:

The Board of Directors unanimously approved the application of the Commissioner of Human Rights Republic of Kazakhstan for full membership with voting rights and the application of the Seoul Metropolitan Citizens' Ombudsman Commission, Republic of Korea for full membership without voting rights as the Republic of Korea already enjoyed the voting rights under Article 5(1) and (6) of the Bye Laws of the AOA. The Board in terms of Section 1-5 and 1-6 of the Code of Conduct of Business of the AOA recommended for approval to the General Assembly membership of the said two institutions under Article 6(4) (a) of the Bye Laws of the AOA.

Agenda Item No. 13

Grant of Honorary Life Membership of the Association to Former Office Bearers/Members.

31. The Board of Directors at its 23rd meeting (18 October 2022 - Baku), briefly considered this matter and observed that it would be discussed at a later date when sufficient information was available on the subject. In this regard, the Board considered the working paper received from the Hon'ble Ombudsman Hong Kong, China which proposed a framework and procedure for grant of honorary life membership of the Association. It was pointed out that in terms of Article 5(3) of the AOA Bye Laws, "Honorary Life Membership may be conferred by the Board of Directors on persons who have made outstanding contributions to the Ombudsman ethos or functions".

32. The working paper proposed that in assessing the suitability for Honorary Life Membership, the following aspects may be considered: significance of contributions to the AOA in respect of its objectives as provided for in Article 4 of its Bye Laws, length of office/service, professional recognition, advancement of ombudsmanship across Asia, support for ombudsman institutes/members, etc.

Procedure

33. Nominations and approval for Honorary Life Membership may follow the procedure below:

- i. Any member of the AOA may nominate a person with his/her consent (where appropriate) for Honorary Life Membership by submitting a written proposal with justifications;
- ii. Nominations for Honorary Life Membership should be sent to the Executive Secretary of the AOA for processing;
- iii. The Executive Secretary should screen the nomination and submit the nomination to the Executive Committee of the AOA within two months upon receiving the nomination and all relevant supporting evidence/documents (if any);
- iv. The Executive Committee should consider the nomination and where necessary, seek clarification about the nomination with the help of the Executive Secretary;
- v. If the Executive Committee approves the nomination, a recommendation should be made to the Board of Directors for conferring Honorary Life Membership on the nominee;
- vi. The President of the AOA may decide whether (iv) and (v) above should be handled by way of circulation or at a meeting convened in accordance with the AOA Bye Laws and its Code of Conduct of Business;
- vii. In case of circulation, the President may specify the timeframe for (iv) and (v) above;
- viii. In the absence of member's nomination, the Executive Secretary may propose nominee (s) in writing with justifications for the consideration for the Board of Directors to confer Honorary Life Membership at any meeting of the Board of Directors; and

- ix. Under normal circumstances, up to three persons may be granted Honorary Life Membership each year.
34. The AOA Secretariat should announce any grant of Honorary Life Membership as soon as practicable through the AOA's official channels and make a pertinent report for the General Assembly's information at its next meeting.

Decision:

The Board approved the framework and procedure for grant of Honorary Life Membership of the Association (paras 32-34 above) which would guide processing of the subject cases and gave its consent to place the matter before the General Assembly for its information.

Agenda Item No. 14

Consideration of the Dates and Venue for the 25th Meeting of the Board of Directors in 2024 and the 18th General Assembly Meeting in 2025

35. The member institutions were invited by the AOA Secretariat to give proposals for hosting the 25th Meeting of the BoD in 2024 and the 18th General Assembly Meeting in 2025 vide its email dated 7 August 2023. In response, the following offers were received during the meeting:

- i. The Chief Ombudsman, Republic of Turkiye offered to host the 25th Meeting of the Board of Directors in 2024 at Istanbul.
- ii. National Commission of Supervision (NCS), People's Republic of China offered to host the 18th General Assembly and the BoD meeting preceding it in 2025.

Decision:

The Board welcomed the above offers for hosting of AOA Meetings in 2024 and 2025 and agreed to place the same before the General Assembly for decision. The AOA Secretariat was directed to coordinate with the host institutions precise dates and venue for the above mentioned meetings.

Agenda Item No. 15

Conduct of AOA Elections 2023

36. The Executive Secretary apprised the Board that as per the procedure laid down in Article 5(10), Article 7(1) and Article 7(2) of the AOA's Bye Laws as well as Section-II, paras 2-1 to paras 2-12 of the Code of Conduct of Business of AOA and guided by the procedure approved by the 21st and 23rd Meetings of the Board of Directors (30 October 2018 and 18 October 2022 respectively), the election process has commenced three months ahead of the scheduled date of the General Assembly. In this regard, Notice inviting nominations for all positions on the Board was issued by the AOA Secretariat on 07 June 2023.

37. The other steps taken for the conduct of election included the following:

i. Scrutiny of nomination forms

The nomination papers were submitted by the AOA Secretariat to the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors comprising the President, the Vice President and the Secretary, to scrutinize the same and confirm the eligibility of the candidates, proposers and seconders as defined under para 2 - 3 of the Code of Conduct of Business of AOA.

ii. Approval of the list of candidates

The Board was informed that the list and nomination forms after due vetting and scrutiny by the Executive Committee were available in the meeting and may be seen by the Board members, if so desired.

iii. Procedure for Balloting and Counting of Votes

The Executive Secretary stated that in order to ensure conduct of election in a fair and transparent manner, the AOA Secretariat has prepared the following three documents:

1. Ballot Paper
2. Election Control List
3. Votes Counting Sheet

However, the number of candidates (09) since being equal to the number of positions (09), the balloting will not be required.

iv. Selection of the Presiding Officer

The Executive Secretary apprised the Board that as required in terms of Article 6(6) of the Bye Laws and Section 2-9 of the Code of Conduct of Business of the AOA, Presiding Officer shall be appointed to conduct the election process.

Decision:

The Board appreciated the preparatory work undertaken by the AOA Secretariat to hold election in a fair and transparent manners as per the prescribed procedures and expressed satisfaction on the arrangements made for the conduct of election 2023.

Agenda Item No. 16

Any other item

38. No matter was raised under this item.

Agenda Item No. 17

Vote of thanks

39. H.E. Ms. Sabina Aliyeva, Commissioner of Human Rights in the Republic of Azerbaijan, speaking on behalf of the members of the Board expressed deep appreciation and gratitude to H.E. Ms. Saburskaya Sariya Kharisovna, Commissioner for Human Rights, Republic of Tatarstan for hosting the 24th Meeting of the Board of Directors at Kazan. She complimented the host institution, the leadership and the people of the Republic of Tatarstan for extending warm hospitality to the participants and making excellent arrangements for the meeting.
