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EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW
(VENICE COMMISSION)

in co-operation with
THE IRISH COURT SERVICE

Study visit
OF THE REGISTRARS OF THE COURTS
MEMBERS OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN JUDGES COMMISSION
Dublin, 27 November – 1 December 2006

SYNOPSIS

In cooperation with the Irish Court Service the Venice Commission organised a study visit for the Registrars of the courts members of the Southern African Judges Commission (SAJC). The visit took place in Dublin from 27 November to 1 December 2006. This event is part of the 2005-2007 programme of activities of the Venice Commission with the SAJC funded by the Irish Government.

Participants from Botswana, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, South Africa, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia took part in the visit. The Court Service of Ireland arranged for meetings with judges and registrars/clerks of courts of all layers of the Irish judicial system: District, Circuit, High and Supreme Courts. The participants attended several courts' hearings, visited the judges' library, met with the judges' researchers, visited the Irish Parliament building, and the office of the Attorney General; an on-hand-IT session was also organised. Both Irish members of the Venice Commission, i.e. Ms Finola FLANAGAN, Director General of Attorney General's Office and Mr James HAMILTON, Director of Public Prosecutions, met with the group. A lot of practical information such as job descriptions of courts' registrars and many other working documents were made available to the participants. In addition, two trainers were assigned to the group who accompanied the group throughout the visit and, notably, gave useful tips as to methodology of retaining the information and of "back-home" briefing/training sessions. Each participant is asked to organise at least one such session within 4-6 weeks after their return.

The participants were active throughout the visit and appreciated its content and organisation very much. Main concerns were:

- to what extent certain aspects of the Irish experience were applicable as far as much bigger but poorer countries were concerned;
- how to get the support back home for possible reforms and novelties inspired by this visit?

It was interesting to note that although the majority of the training goals of the participants concerned the support services for the legal system and the role of the registrars in different courts, the guarantees for judicial independence was one of the most frequently asked questions. What also became apparent was that the Registrars – as this is the case for Chief Justices – needed regular meetings to exchange information on existing problems and good practices.

The organisation of the visit was excellent and the Venice Commission is grateful to the Irish Courts Service, in particular to Ms Nuala McLoughlin and Ms Theresa O'Rourke.