

The International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) is the only cooperative organisation representing independent ombudsmen around the world.

It will hold its 11th World Conference in Bangkok this November.

Secretary General Gunther Krauter, who is also the Austrian ombudsman, talked to *The Nation's* political desk about the event and the role of ombudsman institutions.

#### CAN YOU DESCRIBE THE IOI IN A FEW WORDS?

The IOI is the only global non-political organisation of parliamentary Ombuds-institutions. It was established in 1978 in Canada and since 2009 has its headquarters in Vienna. I have the honour of being the secretary general. Today, we have 175 members in more than 90 countries, six regions. The main duties of the IOI are to provide training for ombudsman staff, do research and offer regional subsidies.

#### WHAT ARE THE CORE RESPONSIBILITIES OF OMBUDSMAN INSTITUTIONS?

The core responsibilities are handling individual complaints of citizens against public administration, initiating ex-officio investigations, protecting and promoting human rights. Some Ombuds-institutions even have an anti-corruption mandate. If ombudsmen find cases of maladministration, they have the power to make rec-

## Ombudsmen – ‘a mirror on the work of governments’

ommendations to authorities. They, therefore, can be seen as a permanent mirror for governments, administration officials and members of parliaments.

#### IN NOVEMBER THE 11TH IOI WORLD CONFERENCE WILL TAKE PLACE IN BANGKOK. WHAT IS THE PROCEDURE TO CHOOSE A VENUE FOR SUCH A BIG EVENT?

Every four years, the IOI invites its members to attend a world-conference. In 2013, we conducted a tender to find a suitable and capable candidate. Applicant institutions from Asia, Africa and Europe presented their offers to the IOI board meeting in Vienna. The board members then voted in a secret ballot and elected the Ombudsman of Thailand to host the World Conference 2016. This will be the first time for the conference to be held in Asia.

#### WHAT ARE THE MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE WORLD CONFERENCE?

I think there are two overriding goals. First, organisational course settings, such as the global IOI electoral reform that foresees a more democratic voting procedure for officials of the IOI, introducing universal suffrage.

### EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



KRAUTER

Second, we concentrate on the “Evolution of Ombudsmanship” and discuss themes like a stronger human rights approach in the daily work of ombudsmen or the support of ombudsman-institutions under threat.

#### YOU MENTIONED OMBUDSMEN UNDER THREAT. WHAT KIND OF THREAT DO YOU MEAN, IN PARTICULAR?

Unfortunately, in some regions Ombudsman institutions are under pressure such as through financial cuts, or the loss of competence due to amendments of laws or privatisation, leaving citizens without protection. In special cases, authorities or even parliaments do not table the reports for discussion or institutions can be undermined in

many ways. Therefore, the IOI is preparing the endorsement of a “Bangkok Declaration” to strengthen the concept of the independent ombudsman to protect and promote good governance and human rights.

#### WHAT IS THE “BANGKOK DECLARATION” EXPECTED TO CONTAIN?

First of all, the declaration will be a clear statement for democracy and the rule of law in all countries. It will also entail a perspective for a stronger human rights focus in the future, especially by a close cooperation with citizens and civil society. Finally, the strengthening of our member institutions through a clear and straightforward procedure, if they are under threat.

#### WHAT DO YOU AS SECRETARY GENERAL PERSONALLY EXPECT FROM THE WORLD CONFERENCE?

I am convinced that the Ombudsman of Thailand will be a very professional and enthusiastic host. We can expect exciting discussions and far-reaching decisions. Hopefully, with the presence of so many independent ombudsmen, we will also contribute to democratic development in Thailand.