



1 October 2007

IFSW STATEMENT ON WORLD HABITAT DAY 2007

A Safe City Is A Just City

'Social workers endorse the theme of this year's world Habitat Day – '*A safe city is a just city*', said David N Jones (IFSW President) on 1 October 2007. 'The theme highlights the miseries which come with insecurity, violence and deprivation as a result of social inequalities, social exclusion and lack of institutional and social order', he continued.

'These are all familiar realities for social workers who daily work alongside people in cities, responding to these problems and helping people to find order in their lives. IFSW calls on national, city and business leaders to listen to the voice and experience of urban dwellers, especially the millions living on less than a dollar a day, and make a reality of the Millennium Goals.

'Without a radical global reappraisal of priorities, millions will continue to live in extreme poverty. This is a denial of the human spirit. Social workers have the skills, knowledge and unique experience to help make this happen. They just need the tools, support and recognition', David N Jones concluded.

#### NOTE TO EDITORS

IFSW is the global federation of national social work organisations in more than 80 countries representing almost 500,000 social workers. IFSW has special consultative status with United Nations Economic and Social Council and is also accredited to the International Labour Organization, UNICEF and the Council of Europe. IFSW is a UN Habitat partner organisation.

For more information and links to other sites, visit:

World Habitat Day 2007

- <http://www.worldhabitatday2007.org>

IFSW - The Millennium Development Goals Report 2007

- <http://www.ifsw.org/en/p38000959.html>

The UN Millennium Development Goals

- <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals>

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## Background

The seriousness of rapid urbanization threatens to turn cities into slums, especially those in the South, and needs to be addressed afresh. The pledge by world leaders at the Millennium Summit seven years ago to *improve significantly* the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers was recognition of this reality. A lot has been done, and much more needs to be done. Measures that protect urban communities from deprivation, unemployment, homelessness, illiteracy, injustice and social disintegration will also protect and empower women, youth and the vulnerable groups. These measures need to be put in place and the UN has a key role. It must not only remind governments of their obligations to fight urban inequalities, by complying fully with the international agreements they have centred into, but also provide timely, policy-oriented information about the progress being made by governments to honour this commitment.

IFSW believes that city residents in general and slum dwellers in particular should be encouraged to dream and believe in their future so that they can build their self esteem, feel they have a stake in the future and harness their abilities to the ends they choose. Extreme deprivation of basic life necessities can force adults, children and youth to seek ways of survival that undermine security and can involve criminal activities. Isolation of certain groups and stigmatization of neighbourhoods denies the urban poor respect, a voice and the capacity to help themselves in the face of rapid growth of unemployment and the breakdown of the family structure and kinship ties. The issues of peace, social justice and empowerment in cities are interlinked and without a radical global reappraisal of priorities, millions will continue to live in extreme poverty. This is a denial of the human spirit.

While good work has been done, social workers are concerned that a number of countries continue to ignore the rights of some citizens to access health services, education, clean water, sanitation and opportunities for growth. In fact many citizens do not know their rights, let alone how to exercise them. They live in cities, yet they do not belong there. The root causes of urban crime may not be clearly understood, IFSW considers declining incomes, lack of work opportunities as products of social inequality and social exclusion and the consequent frustrations, particularly for youth, are important contributing factors which must be addressed in order to have sustainable cities which are safe, just and friendly to all.