

## **Declaration from 4th International Conference on Social Work in Health & Mental Health, Quebec 2004**

We, the 4th International Conference on Social Work in Health & Mental Health, representing 49 countries from all continents, endorse declarations from the United Nations and the World Health Organisation in asserting that health is a basic human right. As social workers, we call upon the governments of the world to redouble efforts to close the gap between this vision and the reality of peoples' lives.

The primary determinants of health are social, economic, political and environmental rather than solely a product of health care services. We condemn as intolerable the extreme inequalities in human health which mean that the average life expectancy in the poorest countries is approximately half of the richest. We condemn in particular the rapid fall of life expectancy in Sub-Saharan Africa. We also condemn differences within countries. These differences cause indigenous peoples and other disadvantaged groups to bear an unjust burden of sickness and a greatly shortened average life expectancy compared to the majority. Health inequalities are the embodiment of social injustice.

We, as social workers, commit ourselves to continue to struggle for social justice and compassion as essential characteristics of healthy human societies and as pre-requisites for effective health and social care services. Psycho-social interventions should be an integral part of prevention, healing and alleviating the trauma of war and pandemics.

We will continue to work together with people who are poor, marginalised and excluded, and to speak out against the unjust circumstances of their lives. We will seek to constantly re-examine our own practice in the light of this commitment.

We believe this will lead to a safe, healthy and equitable world for all.

### **Action Plan**

We ask for urgent and far reaching action from our governments and international institutions on the following issues which are crucial to the health and security of the world.

1. Action to reduce poverty and its multiple dimensions. This means as a minimum:
  - Ensuring universal access to clean water, adequate food, shelter, health and education;
  - Developed countries recommitting themselves to meet the Pearson target of giving 0.07 of GDP in untied aid;
  - Agreeing and ratifying an international trade treaty which has the reduction of inequalities in income and wealth between and within countries as a core objective;
  - Recognising in practical ways the central role which women play in economic and social development, their right to safety and freedom from violence and abuse, and ensuring that their voices are prominent in programmes of action;
  - Implementing the United Nation's Declaration on the Rights of the Child.

2. Action to increase international stability and justice by :
  - Reinforcing the role of United Nations as the forum through which disputes which threaten civilians with displacement, assault, injury and death should be resolved;
  - Re-affirming the principles of the Geneva Convention and their wide application;
  - The implementation of action on anti-personnel mines;
  - Supporting the International War Crimes tribunal;
  - Upholding the values of diversity and tolerance across differences of ethnicity, religion and language.
3. Action to secure a sustainable approach to the global environment. This means as a minimum:
  - Agreeing and implementing an international treaty on global warming.
4. Action to develop an international initiative to extend access to essential health and social care to all world citizens by 2020.
5. Action to ensure that citizens in marginalised and disadvantaged groups are involved as powerful partners in decisions taken about their health and social care and socio-economic circumstances.