



Statement in Support of Social Workers in South Caucasus Region

The European Region of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW Europe e.V) wishes to express support for the development of the social work profession in the South Caucasus region and acknowledge the challenges that our colleagues in that locality face in their day to day professional activities. We compliment them on the very real progress they have made in articulating the concern shared by all social workers to secure a just and fair society.

A humanistic profession as diverse as the population it serves, social work is firmly established globally as a profession that promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Social workers are committed to challenging the abuse of human rights that regrettably continues to occur in all parts of the world and to overcoming resistance to the values and principles that underpin the essential services we provide.

The infrastructure necessary to ensure that social workers have the necessary knowledge, skills and support to perform their duties effectively is less well developed in countries that have a turbulent history of conflict and change and where democratic accountability is a relatively new phenomenon. We are proud to be associated with the substantial progress that has been made in firmly establishing social work practice in the countries of South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

Professional regulation is an essential element of our accountability as social workers and IFSW Europe urges all the relevant stakeholders to support professional bodies in their efforts to establish the systems necessary to protect the interests of those who use our services.

We would like to congratulate and encourage all Armenian, Azeri and Georgian social workers in the region to continue their efforts to challenge unacceptable cultural practices, overcome political opposition and advocate for human rights, social justice, women's equality and the further development of the practice of social work in South Caucasus.

About the Region: South Caucasus

South Caucasus is a geopolitical region located on the border of Eastern Europe and Southwest Asia. The region consists of three countries: Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. All these countries share the soviet history. The region remains one of the most complicated in the post-Soviet area, and comprises three disputed territories Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia and Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan.

Social Work Emerging in South Caucasus

Social work development in each of the South Caucasian countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgian,) is characterized by particular specificities, yet this process shares common trends as well. In all the three countries social work has been developing since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Social work practice emerged in this region as a response to the severe socio-economic crisis brought about by the collapse of the soviet empire and influenced by the recommendations of the international stakeholders. Having a tradition of "no social problems", the official view of the socialist utopia of the Soviet Union that in a just social system (communism) social problems would disappear, these countries are faced with a significant number of social and economical challenges. Several wars, including the 2008 South Ossetia war, Georgian-Abkhazian conflict and the Nagorno-Karabakh war have been waged in the region.

Despite 20 years of history in the region, social work has little tradition as an academic or professional path in most former Soviet countries. The training program for social workers at the university level was established in 1996 in Armenia, whereas the academic level education was introduced in 2005 in Azerbaijan and in 2006 in Georgia. The need for well-trained social workers is profound in all post-communist societies, with Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia being no exception.

Professional Associations in the Region

Pioneer social workers in the region have formed thriving associations as professional touchstones for all social workers. In Armenia and Georgia the associations were established in 2004 when social work had no professional body or a code of standards, and few opportunities to work in the field. The associations have helped not only raise the profile of social work within their respective countries, but also supported the development of social work education as well as establishment and enforcement of a professional code of ethics, key characteristic of the profession. These developments were followed by Azerbaijan establishing the association in 2009.

18th March, 2014

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