

Human Rights Commission Report to IFSW General Meeting for period July 2016 – July 2018

IFSW Regional Commissioners

We have the following HR Regional Commissioners for 2016-2018:

- Global Secretary to Human Rights Commission: Nigel Hall
- Europe contact person: Ana Radulescu
- Asia-Pacific contact person: Raed Amira
- Latin America/Caribbean contact person: Verónica Silva
- North America contact person: Dr Colleen Lundy
- African contact person: Kgomotso Jongman

Major concerns since Seoul 2016:

1. Imprisonment of Munther Amira, Dec 2017

The HRC has been very concerned at the imprisonment of Munther Amira, the former President of the Palestinian Social Workers Association, convicted by the Israeli authorities for non-violently protesting against the detention of Palestinian minors on 12 March 2018. Munther was sentenced to six months in prison and five years' probation on four charges relating to his participation in demonstrations, including "participating in a march without a permit", holding placards in support of teenage activist Ahmed Tamimi and organising demonstrations without the authorisation of the Military Commander of the West Bank – none of which are recognised criminal offences under international law.

Following his detention and later imprisonment, the IFSW Human Rights Commissioner Nigel Hall, the North American representative Colleen Lundy, Asia-Pacific representative Raed Amira and IFSW Main Representative to the United Nations in Geneva Priska Fleischlin have followed up with communications and letters to relevant persons and agencies, including the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, and the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention. Following the initiative of Felipe Duarte in Canada, an international petition calling for Munther Amira's immediate release has circulated separately on the Internet and has gathered more than 15000 signatures.

Munther was eventually released from prison on 6/6/18 and has extended his appreciation to everyone who has provided their support and solidarity. Additionally Michael Lynk, the United Nations Special Rapporteur in OHCHR has thanked IFSW for its support of Munther.

2. Boot out Austerity movement, May 2017 ongoing

The HRC has fully supported the initiative of the British Association of Social Workers to highlight the serious consequences of austerity in the UK and internationally. A march organised by the BASW Chairperson involved walking 100 miles from Birmingham to Liverpool arriving at the BASW AGM and Conference. Inspired by this, social workers from Aotearoa / New Zealand organised a march in September 2017 advocating an end to poverty, homelessness, inequality and the privatisation of social services.

The UK march was launched by IFSW President Ruth Stark, while I as IFSW Human Rights Commissioner marched with the group for the full distance. On the way we visited

community centres, churches and food banks that are responding to the harsh realities of austerity. Significant leaders in the UK supported the march including Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn and the film maker Ken Loach who recently made the film about austerity in the UK called 'I, Daniel Blake'. At the BASW AGM at the end of the march delegates voted to support the IFSW policy paper The Role of Social Work in Social Protection Systems as a basis to counter Government austerity. The *Developing Fight Against Austerity Campaign Pack* was also generated by the group.

3. Workshop on Marginalization and Neo-liberalism, Reykjavik, Iceland, June 2017

Our Human Rights Commission presented a workshop to the IFSW Europe Conference held in Iceland. This examined the meaning of marginalization in the context of neo-liberalism from a human rights perspective, and how this can be tackled through positive social action. Key conclusions from this workshop were the following:

- It is important for social workers to speak up on behalf of their own profession and working conditions.
- Social protection is a key strategy to ensure that people are cared for and protected.
- Social Protection Floors proposed by the ILO and endorsed by IFSW through its links with the UN system should be supported by all social workers.
- We should work together much more closely, sharing information and building strategies.
- We should recognize the power we do have through our links with so many different groups and organizations.
- This power needs to be manifested collectively – the BASW Austerity march and the Spanish Orange Tide are good examples of this.
- We should develop grass-roots campaigning where we encourage colleagues to stand for political office, or at least become more engaged in the political arena.
- We should speak up more for disadvantaged vulnerable groups – including the wider population who are facing austerity cuts.
- We need to be much more political and strategic.
- We should make more use of the media through writing and documenting our work, letting people know what social workers do.

4. Possible development of a Social Work Defenders' Committee (with partner organisations)

Some discussion took place with Vasilios Ioakimidis (when previously with IASSW) to develop this action Committee, possibly with the assistance of a Human Rights Legal Adviser. As a major concern of the HRC's work is to safeguard the human rights of practitioners, it would be strategically useful to develop our capacity to respond when these abuses occur. The main objective of this Committee could be to:

- a) Monitor, update and analyse data with regards to social workers who face persecution resulting from adhering to their duty. In order to monitor specific incidents as well as changing global patterns, in an effective and responsive manner, the Committee will be responsible for maintaining an up-to-date data base related to attacks and harassment of social workers.
- b) Assess the severity and establish the relevance, urgency and validity of reports that reach the Committee and respond to incidents of victimisation and ill-treatment.
- c) Decide on specific actions in defence of persecuted social workers.

5. Work on preparing Policy Statement on Forced Harvesting of Organs

Those who attended the last meeting in Seoul may remember that a neighbouring stand to IFSW was hosted by the organisation Doctors Against Forced Organ Harvesting (DAFOH) who were concerned about the serious situation regarding the harvesting of bodily organs from both executed prisoners and living persons, held in detention facilities in China. DAFOH hoped we would be able to highlight and support their concerns from an IFSW position. After returning to the UK I met up with activists with DAFOH who have sent me further material.

Organ harvesting is a very serious concern and although the situation in China may be very alarming this is also being practised elsewhere in the world. Consequently, I have been working on a draft Policy Statement on the general issue of organ harvesting as this needs to take a more global position and focus on the issues of concern from a social work perspective. Work is still proceeding on this document.

Possible future actions

I will be stepping down from my post in Dublin and a new HRC Commissioner will be selected. There will be an HRC meeting to plan further strategic action, which may include some of the following areas

1. Continue with the focus on austerity.
2. Continue to produce relevant statements on issues of concern
3. Continued statements on Human Rights Day.
4. Continued collaborative work with other members of the Commission and in particular work towards enhancing regional reporting mechanisms.
5. Consider whether the Social Work Defenders' Committee, or similar organisation, is a worthwhile idea.

Statements of concern

20 June 2018

United States withdraws from UNHRC: IFSW HRC Statement

Expressing our concern that the United States of America under the Trump administration has withdrawn from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), an action that has been roundly condemned by rights groups. Although there may be need for reform of the Human Rights Council, the Council plays a vital role in addressing serious rights abuses around the world.

23 April 2018

Argentina and the Disappeared

This commemorated the more than 40 years on from the military coup in Argentina that led to gross human rights abuses against social workers and others in that country. Also termed 'The Dirty War', and lasting from 1976 to 1983, and was a seven-year campaign by the Argentine government against suspected 'dissidents and subversives'.

16 March 2018

Concern on Imprisonment of Social Worker Munther Amira

Expressing concern at the imprisonment of the former President of the Palestinian Social Workers Association, convicted by the Israeli authorities for peacefully protesting against the detention of Palestinian minors.

16 January 2018

Update concerning detention of Munther Amira 15th January 2018

Noting on behalf of more than 15000 persons from all over the world who have signed the petition calling for the immediate release of Munther Amira, the IFSW Human Rights Commission, together with the IFSW Main Representative to the United Nations in Geneva, have sent letters to relevant agencies at the United Nations.

7 January 2018

Release Social Worker Munther Amira Immediately!

The IFSW Human Rights Commission calls for the immediate release of Munther Amira, a Palestinian Social Worker who was arrested on the 27th December 2017 while peacefully protesting to defend the rights of children who had been detained by Israeli authorities. Mr Amira has previously served as the Secretary-General of the Palestinian Union of Social Workers & Psychologists (PUSWP).

9 December 2017

Statement on World Human Rights Day

Underlining the fact that social work today has the responsibility to advocate that human rights are respected all over the world, particularly where new global realities mean that basic elemental human rights are no longer valued and people are often treated as if they don't matter.

23 October 2017

IFSW Human Rights Commission Supports Yemeni Social Workers

Supporting the initiative of the General Union for Sociologists, Social Workers and Psychologists in Yemen in assisting deprived children in the country and drawing attention to the need for international agencies to intervene and respond to people and displaced persons most affected by conflict and war in Yemen.

23 June 2017

Grenfell Tower Fire and Inequality

Expressing condolences and concern following the 14 June 2017 fire that engulfed the 24-storey Grenfell Tower in London, UK. This demonstrated a pattern of lack of concern about the interests of the marginalized and vulnerable population residing in a stigmatized area of the city, albeit surrounded by some of the wealthiest residents in the country. A message of condolence from the HRC and IFSW was left with other messages at the site.

8 December 2016

Statement on World Human Rights Day

Human Rights Day in December 2016 was marked by a statement/presentation by the IFSW HRC on the theme of human rights in social work and how this relates to values and principles in social work.

The different 'generations' of human rights were discussed with practitioners and educators – firstly civil and political rights, secondly economic, social and cultural rights, and thirdly participatory, collective, developmental and environmental rights. This was then related to our current Global Agenda theme. Relevant social work responses in relation to these challenges included the importance of promoting sustainable communities, respecting human rights and reducing social exclusion and working closely with families, communities and civil society. Social and community involvement was seen to be important, including engaging in areas new to social work, including action on environmental issues.

Nigel Hall
Secretary to IFSW Human Rights Commission