

IFSW Permanent Committee on Ethical Issues Executive Committee Report

June 19, 2018

In July of 2016, the Secretary of The Permanent Committee on Ethical Issues of the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) was appointed to work collaboratively with members of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) to review the IFSW Statement of Ethical Principles and determine whether there was a need for revisions. In making that determination, members were asked to consider the Global Definition of Social Work approved at the IFSW General Meeting and the IASSW General Assembly in July 2014.

The members of the ethics committee have changed within the two-year timeframe. The current IFSW Permanent Committee on Ethical Issues consists of the following members:

1. Secretary -Dawn Hobdy
2. European Representative - Jane Shears
3. Asia-Pacific Representative - Theo Ai Hua and Seyed Hasan Mousavi Chalak
4. LAC Representative - Kenia Batista
5. Africa - Joachim Mumba
6. North America – No representative

Since the beginning of its work in July of 2016, the Permanent Committee on Ethical Issues, also referred to as the Ethics Committee, held four group skype meetings. Most of the work completed by the committee occurred via emails and additional individual skype calls. The Ethics Committee Secretary also held skype meetings with the Secretary-General, Dr. Rory G Truell and President, Ruth Stark. Finally, a total of 4 skype meetings were held with the IASSW review chair, Dr. Vishanthie Sewpaul. Other communications were conducted via e-mail. The Ethics Secretary met with various entities an average of one time per month for the past two years.

The following is the timeline for the review process:

1. July 2016 – October 2016: Establishment of ethics committee members
2. October 2016 – January 2017: Met with individual ethics committee members and held preliminary meetings with IASSW – discussed the vision for the draft.
3. February 2017 – May 2017: Development of and distribution of a survey to determine how the current ethical principles are being used.
4. May 2017 – July 2017: Consultation with the IFSW membership. (IASSW also consulted with its membership)
5. July 2017: First draft of the proposed Statement was developed by IFSW based on the feedback received from the work of the ethics committee.
6. August 2017 – After review and approval of the IFSW Executive Committee, the draft was shared with IASSW.

7. August 2017 – February 2018 – IFSW and IASSW worked to revise and finalize the Statement of Ethical Principles. The work was conducted via emails and skype calls.
8. March 2018 – The proposed draft, including nine agreed upon principles, was submitted to the IFSW Executive Committee for review and approval.
9. April 2018 – The Ethics Secretary informed the Ethics Committee and IASSW that the draft was not approved.
10. June 2018 – Two versions of the Statement of Ethical Principles were finalized and submitted to the General Secretary for presentation at the General Meeting.

Summary

Challenges:

There was a slow beginning in the development of these drafts due to challenges including:

- Establishing and maintaining active members of the committee
- Finding time to meet as a group. From the time of the July appointment, the first meeting could not be scheduled until October due to summer and holiday schedules. Only one member attended that meeting. As expected, time differences posed a challenge as well.
- Obtaining timely feedback from members of both associations
- Establishing the best working relationship between IFSW and IASSW
- Agreeing on the purpose and goals of a statement of ethical principles

Despite these challenges, the IFSW Permanent Committee on Ethical Issues remained committed and confident that it would complete its charge of reviewing the ethical principles and making a recommendation. We worked diligently and were able to complete the work by the original deadline of the IFSW Global Meeting in 2018.

Survey and consultation:

The survey was developed and shared with the membership through the regional reps and the ethics committee members. Comments and questions included; would it be best to distribute the surveys to organizations or individuals. Another question was what is the difference between an ethical principle and ethical standards?

Statement development:

While conducting our collaborative work, IASSW and the IFSW Ethics Committee were challenged with agreeing on the purpose and goal of the Statement. IASSW expressed a strong desire to expand upon the language of the Statement. Vishanthie Sewpaul, representing IASSW also expressed a requirement that the document serve as a springboard for debate and dialogue in the decolonization agenda. IASSW also wanted to introduce the concept of “recognition of the embodied vulnerability of humanity”. This was problematic for IFSW because we did not want to include language or concepts that were not universally accepted. IFSW was adamant about making certain that we produced a product that: 1) focused on the purpose and goal of ethical principles and 2) included language that was simple, clear, concise and could be easily translated and 3) did not include language that was more appropriate as an ethical standard or Code of Ethics. Due to these conflicts, IFSW and IASSW determined that we could not agree upon a joint statement that would be satisfactory to each organization. It was decided, however, that both statements would be based on the same agreed upon principles. The proposed agreed upon principles were as follows:

1. Recognition of the inherent dignity of humanity
2. Promoting human rights
3. Promoting social justice and equality
 - 3.1 Challenge discrimination and institutional oppression
 - 3.2 Respect for diversity
 - 3.3 Access to equitable resources
 - 3.4 Challenge unjust policies and practices
 - 3.5 Building solidarity
4. Promoting the right to self-determination
5. Promoting the right to participation
6. Respect for confidentiality and privacy
7. Treating people as whole persons
8. Ethical use of technology and social media
9. Professional integrity

IASSW presented a longer (8 page) draft of these principles. IFSW presented a briefer (4 page) version with the same basic principles as well as a briefer 2-page statement.

IFSW Executive Committee decision:

During its Executive Committee (EC) meeting held in NY, March 24 – 26, the IFSW EC reviewed the draft of proposed principles. After careful consideration, the EC recommended that the Ethics Committee consider going back to the original IFSW draft. They acknowledged the efforts of the Ethics Committee to compromise and develop a joint statement but felt that the proposed draft was not simple enough, included language that went beyond principles and did not meet the needs of the IFSW membership. The EC acknowledged that this would signify the end of the collaboration and effort to submit a joint statement with IASSW. The Executive Committee noted that the Statement of Ethical Principles is used as a legal document, and therefore must be clear and concise.

The Ethics Committee respected the recommendation of the Executive Committee but advocated for presenting the joint draft. It felt that the language, in its final draft, met the requirements of the IFSW membership and allowed us to honor our commitment to submit joint principles with IASSW. The IFSW president requested that we submit both drafts for consideration during the General Meeting.

The Ethics Committee would like to present two drafts for consideration at the General Meeting being held in Dublin, Ireland. The request is that the membership review both drafts to determine which would better serve the needs of the membership. Please keep in mind, Draft I, is based on the original language drafted solely by IFSW. It would not be considered a joint statement or shared principles. Draft II, if accepted would be considered joint principles with IASSW.

The Ethics Committee will accept the decision of the General Meeting and will move forward with finalizing the selected draft for distribution. We humbly thank you for your time and consideration of this important document.

Respectfully,

Dawn Hobdy