

# **IFSW Human Rights Commission**

## **Report 2018-2020**

- Global: Colleen Lundy (Canada)
- Africa: Kgomotso Jogman (Botswana) and Charles Dra-Ecabo (Uganda)
- Asia Pacific: Luis Arevalo (New Zealand) and Raed Amira (Palestine)
- Europe: Marcin Boryczko (Poland)
- LA & C: Xanthis Suarez Garcia (Nicaragua)
- NA: Mark Lusk (USA)

I was appointed to head the IFSW Human Rights Commission in August 2018. As the Global Commissioner, I am honored to report on the work of the IFSW Human Rights Commission for the last two years. During this time, we have a number of accomplishments, as well as challenges and have been an active Commission.

### **Actions**

#### **Meetings**

- Attended the Executive Meeting in Rheinfelden Switzerland (July 6 and 7<sup>th</sup>, 2019)
- Skype meeting with Rory Truell, Silvana Martinez and Lola Casal-Sanchez (Dec 11, 2019).
- Participated in regular meetings via Skype with The Israeli Censure Working Group (ICWG), a sub-committee of the IFSW Executive, which includes participation of the Human Rights Commissioner, and has the goal of addressing and hopefully resolving the Censure imposed on the Israeli Union of Social Workers in March 2018.
- Meeting with regional commissioners via videoconferencing (June 18, 2020).

#### **Documents**

- Produced a description of duties and responsibilities of regional commissioners.
- Prepared a Human Rights Commission Report for the Executive Meeting in Rheinfelden in July 2019.
- Regional Human Rights Reports are now posted on the IFSW web site.

#### **Statements**

The HRC prepared a number of statements either recognizing the international days currently observed by the United Nations or responding to current human rights violations. These include:

- December 9, 2018 *Statement on Human Rights Day* (with Secretary-General Rory Truell and President Silvana Martinez)
- November 28, 2019 *International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People*
- December 10, 2019 *Statement Regarding International Human Rights Day.*
- December 18, 2019, *International Migrants Day*
- January 18, 2019. *Statement Regarding the Deepening Crisis and Human Rights Violations in Zimbabwe*
- Feb 3, 2019 *Statement for Democracy, Social Justice, and the End of International Manipulation in Venezuela*
- July 1, 2019 *Human Rights Commission and Social Workers World-wide Take Action on US Mexico Border*
- July 30, 2019. *IFSW Human Rights Commission Statement Regarding Trafficking and Exploitation.*
- May 6, 2020 *Violence against Women Must End* (with President Silvana Martinez)

### **Letters**

- Letter to support a social worker, a president of a social workers union, who was charged for advocating on behalf of his members and fighting for their rights so that they can defend and protect the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized.

### **Communication**

Communication with Michael Lynk, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967.

### **Main Issues: Challenges and Achievements**

#### **Challenges**

This is a deeply troubling time and human rights are under attack. The lethal, global pandemic has had an impact on all of us, albeit with differing challenges and resources depending on our geographic location and social, economic, and political conditions. At the same time, we witness the rise of extreme right political forces, ongoing armed conflict, increasing division between extreme wealth and poverty, erosion of democratic processes and massive migration of refugees. Many around the world struggle to stay alive.

All this is in the context of the deepening climate crisis with extreme weather resulting in typhoons, floods, wildfires, and drought. Many are experiencing food insecurity, starvation, and water shortages. Also, the pandemic has exposed, and intensified society's inequalities and the hardship for many has increased enormously.

But for all of these injustices there is resistance. Social workers have joined the recent mass mobilization against racial injustice that was initiated in the USA and spread to cities around the

world. Social workers are taking action to uphold human rights, their own and those of their clients. In some areas, the rights and lives of social workers are threatened.

These conditions present immense challenges for social workers in all five regions and for the work of the regional human rights commissioners.

### **Achievements**

All regions now have commissioners, and each is engaged in responding to human rights concerns in their area. The regional human rights reports are now posted on the IFSW web site. Collectively we have developed an action plan for the coming year.

European Regional Commissioner Marcin Boryczko approached the Social Workers Forum in Poland (The National Assembly of Social Workers) to have Human Rights in Social Work Practice as a main theme of the 2020 annual meeting/conference. They agreed. He also surveyed social workers internationally on human rights in social work practice and a report will be forthcoming.

### **Planning for the Next Two Years**

- Quarterly Meetings of the regional commissioners will facilitate the work of the HRC.
- In the fall of 2019, I joined preliminary discussions with Rory Truell and Priska Fleischlin (IFSW UN Commissioner) regarding the development of a practitioner's guide to replace the 2000 Manual on *Human Rights and Social Work*. The plan is to continue this work in the next two years with a planned production date of 2022 for the new manual/book. I will engage the HRC in the process.
- Regional Commissioners identified the need for curriculum resources on human rights practice and this also will be a focus of our work.
- Connect with others advocating for human rights i.e. IASSW and Amnesty International.
- Contact UN Special Rapporteurs as needed regarding human rights violations.
- Continue issuing statements to highlight human rights concerns and social work response and the regional commissioners will be engaged in this process. The Commission also will attempt to issue these statements into the international media so that the social work voice can inform others.

I encourage you to contact the human rights commissioner for your region with human rights concerns and/or ideas of how the Commission can be more effective.

In closing, I send you greetings of solidarity.