

JOINT REPORT TO THE ONLINE IFSW 2020 GENERAL MEETING

Dr. Silvana Martínez, IFSW President

Dr Rory Turell, IFSW Secretary-General

11th July 07:00 TUC

Dear IFSW members and observers to the IFSW 2020 General Meeting,

On behalf of the Global Executive, we warmly want to welcome you to this important event. This is the first online General Meeting held by the Federation, and we are excited that it provides the opportunity for all of our members to participate directly in all the conversations and decision making processes. Although it was not our choice to have this meeting conducted online, over the course of this meeting, we will all learn if it is an effective way to conduct our highest-level meeting and a method of overcoming the cost and travel barriers that prevent so many of our members from participating in past meetings.

We, Silvana Martinez and Rory Truell, have chosen to make this report jointly. This decision reflects our mutual working relationship in overseeing the global work of the Federation and in facilitating the executive meetings. We want to start by acknowledging the executive for the hard work they have performed since we held our last General Meeting in 2018 in Dublin, Ireland. The executive has had to face many complex challenges, including managing relationships with partner organisations that are shifting in their focus as well as the organisation of regional conferences. The executive has of course also helped their national-level members and worked tirelessly on the Federation's coordination of the social work response to the COVID-19 crisis.

At the executive and global level, this has involved making quick decisions relating to cancelling events, adapting working methods to ensure the safety of people and their communities and ensuring that our members have a global platform to share and learn from one another as we move through these challenges.

We further and equally want to acknowledge the work of the Commissions and Committees and Officers of the Federation. Each commission, committee and officer has produced statements and strategies that advance the profession. We are pleased that their extensive work is now summarised in the reports that are available throughout this General Meeting. Also, we want to acknowledge the work of the Secretariat staff who in this crisis have been working seven days a week to provide this General Meeting platform as well as the online systems for the World Conference that starts in four days.

Mostly, however, we wish to acknowledge you, the IFSW member organisations. Through this COVID-19 crisis, many of you have shared your learning so that others can adapt and develop strategies within their countries. This process started much earlier than governments, when in February IFSW members started sharing information through the Federation. Consequently, the social work profession has had a significant impact as an essential life-saving service.

There is no doubt that as a result of the quick actions taken by IFSW and its member organisation that the profession of social work is more visible, more understood and more highly regarded by the public as well as by governments. In many countries, we won the argument that a social response was needed alongside a medical response. We won the struggle that social services must stay open and adapt to the conditions. We won the fights that specialised services need to be developed for marginalised people, that had previously been ignored by policy and services. In other countries, social workers took independent responsibility, even when their governments would not act, and set up social education and support systems for population's that would have otherwise succumb to the virus or starvation.

These successes have produced major changes in the understanding of social work and social services delivery. The struggle now, however, is to maintain and expand on those gains in a context where the virus is still emerging in many countries, expected to return in others, and the reality that the world is facing a major economic depression.

The next phase of our profession's global response will no doubt highlight the need for communities to be a part of decision-making in this crisis. Also that governments must not turn to the failed economic theories of austerity and that citizens and communities must be supported by the profession to enhance solidarity in supporting each other's rights.

How we set, this strategy will be at the heart of every agenda item we will discuss in this General Meeting and also the following online world conference. The 2020 online World Conference will bring together politicians committed to change, community representatives, like-minded social work partner organisations and you the IFSW members. Our task in this conference will be to work together to in developing the next Global Agenda themes for 2020-2030. This and our General Meeting now will set the strategies. It is an exciting time, but also a time of responsibility, and all of us must endeavor to conduct our discussions as fully and as inclusively as possible.

We hope you enjoy the General Meeting and that you find solutions to the online challenges of expressing your opinion and being able to hear others. We are all facing this technical challenge together and we hope that a strong culture of support emerges between us all in our learning processes.

We want to end this joint report by expressing our condolences to the families of social workers who have died as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. The profession has been at high risk, and for all the significant live-saving work, there has been a price to pay. For those that have died as a consequence of their active social work duties, we regard them as heroes.

We look forward to interacting with each of you in all the General Meeting agenda items. We send you our love and best wishes,

Sivlana Martinez and Rory Truell