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Proposal on relaunching the old IFSW Human Rights Commission as the 'Commission for Social Worker's Rights.

Background

The IFSW Human Rights Commission (HRC) commenced in the 1980s as a platform to highlight and support social workers whose human rights were abused. Over the years, the HRC morphed into adopting a wider focus and started to identify itself as a commission that sought to address all human rights. This however proved to be extremely complicated given the lack of resources available to IFSW to investigate worldwide human rights abuses. Thus, the Commission struggled over several years to provide meaningful ways to interact or intervene in improving these areas of concern.

In 2022, the IFSW executive noted the significant frustration of all the members of the HRC and consequently paused (disbanded) the Commission while alternative structures were explored. The executive asked Rose Henderson (immediate past Asia-Pacific Regional President and Global Vice President) and Rory Truell (Secretary-General) to identify clear terms of reference for a new Commission that would replace the HRC.

In May 2023 an initial set of considerations were presented to the executive. These were:

- 1, That human rights is a core focus for all social workers and all IFSW Commissions. Separating general human rights in a standalone Commission is artificial, as each part of the IFSW's structures

articulate social work responses to human rights abuses and advocate for human rights.

2, That there is already a well-resourced global body (the United Nations) that highlights HR concerns and is far more effective than IFSW in identifying and highlighting general HR's concerns around the globe. However, this body does not articulate issues from a social work perspective and one option would be for the IFSW UN Commission to have a role to bring a social work perspective to the UN on HR's concerns.

3, That the 2022 General Meeting, adopted a new policy that formally widens the Federation's articulation of rights. The new framework includes environmental, social, cultural, as well as, individual rights. Consequently, even the name of the "HRC" is outdated.

4, That there is no international body that has its main focus, the abuse of social workers rights. Yet there is significant concern about the high numbers of social workers that are killed or persecuted whilst engaged in practice.

The Executive supported in principle that the terms of reference for a new commission relate to a tighter focus on social workers rights as was originally intended when the HRC was established. This, the executive noted, would enable the new commission to be inclusive of advocacy work such as working conditions and de-professionalising of the profession along with highlighting and supporting social workers whose rights are being abused.

The Executive affirmed their intention that the new commission's terms of reference and description would be presented to the 2024 General Meeting and that this meeting would finalise the relaunch of the new commission. The Executive asked Rose and Rory to continue

consulting with the other commissions and prepare draft Terms of Reference and descriptions.

Working draft on Terms of Reference and description of the 'Commission for Social Worker's Rights.

The Commission for Social Worker's Rights has been established to support social workers whose rights are being abused for undertaking professional activities that are consistent with the policies and procedures of the global social work profession.

Abuses of social workers rights can include:

- Being arrested or persecuted when the social worker(s) professionally advocates for other people's rights.
- The social worker is expected to work in unsafe conditions.
- The working conditions mean it is not possible for the social worker to effectively carry out their professional role.

The commission is able to receive notifications from member organisations or individual professional practitioners, acknowledging that sometimes social workers and IFSW members organisations are not able to make public statements themselves. Such notifications will be validated by the Commission and action plans developed.

Action plans could include:

- Public statements highlighting the abuse.
- Building of partnerships to pressure the relevant government / authority to take a different action.
- Engaging with legal representation for the social worker(s).
- Providing support for the affected social worker(s)

Notes:

The rationale for this tighter focus, which incidentally aligns to the original focus, is that if IFSW does not provide a mechanism for supporting social workers who's rights are being abused, then no one is acting to protect social workers in these situations, noting that local Associations are often compromised or unable to provide any advocacy in such situations.

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It is envisaged that a re-launched Commission would be structured in accordance with other Commissions, comprising a global Commissioner and regional representatives and would engage in an initial re-orientation period to develop processes and guidelines e.g. referral process, validation process etc