Final Statement – IFSW, 12th Session of EMRTD

29.10.2025

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On behalf of the International Federation of Social Workers, which I have the honor of representing today, we would like to warmly **thank** the organizers of this session for inviting us.

The **IFSW** represents social workers across more than 150 countries - representing more than 5 million social workers worldwide. Social work is, by definition, a human rights profession. While social work practice is contextual, we share common values and approaches as stated in the IFSW Global Statement of Ethical Principles.

Social and community workers engage **within and on behalf of communities and feel and know the pulse of their concerns**. Social workers serve as advocates, both as implementers of social policies and witness their limitations. We have a nuanced understanding of how development is experienced, negotiated, interpreted and claimed on the ground and we hear through our practice, the voice and experience of communities about what would enable them to develop.

We observe that social work and the right to development share core principles and speak the **same language**.

Social workers in practice often engage with human rights frameworks that are enforceable at the individual and family levels. While the right to development offers an interesting **normative framework for communities** to claim their self-determined vision of development, it remains of **limited relevance to social workers**, partly because it is not legally binding and cannot be enforced by individual practitioners or communities against institutions.

Participation in the Declaration is encouraged, but there must be systemic recognition of the value and opportunities of participation in States fostering favorable conditions.

Second, The Declaration **does not mention communities** or community development. Its use of “persons” and “peoples” leaves ambiguity about who the beneficiaries are and how development justice works, requiring interpretive work to understand the collective dimension of rights. Indigenous and local communities must be considered as holders of the right to development and as experts of their own development.

Third**,** the current normative framework to the right to development **largely ignores the interplay between human rights, the rights of nature and community development**. The right to development should be interlinked with the rights of Indigenous peoples and the right to a clean environment, recognizing that people and nature are interdependent.

Now two **Examples** to nourish the imagination of the UN, but also the duty bearers - the States.

First, in Costa Rica. Social workers proposed a new human rights-based approach, embodied in the legislation **"Puente al Desarrollo" – A Bridge to Development in 2016**. This law applies community development methodology and binds government departments to work together and to listen to and implement the concerns and priorities of the community.

Studies showed that by the following year, multidimensional poverty was reduced by 41% by integrating social work principles into national policymaking and planning structures without additional government or UN funding.

The second example: After Covid, the IFSW co-led an unique partnership to convene the **People's Summit in 2022** in form of a people's assembly through an inclusive, virtual, bottom-up, co-ideation and co-building process, which brought about the People's Charter as living document, representing communities' vision of a new eco-social world order, that was handed over to the High Political Forum.

We would like to make a **provocative proposition**: Could the UN commit resources and promote more inclusive and people-centered engagement such as people's assemblies?

We call upon States, the UN, and civil society to embrace more inclusive, bottom-up collaborative, and eco-social approaches and to create **in partnership with social workers** a systemic mechanism in which **communities themselves are experts of their own development and aspirations**, as a parallel mechanism to the one we are participating in.