

## **Statement by the German Association for Social Work (DBSH e.V.) for the Special Delegates Meeting of the IFSW on 18 February 2026 on the Motion to Suspend or Exclude the Israeli Association of Social Workers**

*Berlin, February 2026*

The German Association for Social Work (DBSH) views the ongoing violence in Gaza, Israel, and the occupied Palestinian territories with deep concern and is deeply distressed by the many civilian victims of this conflict. As a professional association of social work, we are committed to the Global Statement of Ethical Principles, the DBSH Code of Ethics, and the fundamental values of human dignity, human rights, social justice, and peace.

In light of Germany's historical responsibility toward the State of Israel and Jewish life worldwide, it is of particular importance to us to formulate our position in a differentiated and responsible manner and on the basis of human rights and ethics centred around peace. This responsibility also means that we are firmly committed to opposing antisemitic violence and, with equal consistency, to naming and condemning human rights violations, regardless of their perpetrators.

We condemn serious violations of international humanitarian law, including attacks on civilians, displacement, the destruction of civilian infrastructure, and the obstruction of humanitarian aid. We likewise condemn acts of violence committed by Hamas and other armed groups against the Israeli civilian population. Social work has a mandate to counter dehumanisation, make structural violence visible, and actively contribute to peace-building and reconciliation processes.

Against this background, the DBSH takes the debate and vote on the membership of the Israeli Union of Social Workers (IUSW) in the IFSW very seriously. At the same time, we note that it has not yet been clearly defined how a suspension is to be understood under the IFSW regulations. We therefore consider it essential that the IFSW, in cooperation with the Parliamentarian and, if necessary, legal counsel, provides a clearer definition of suspension.

Based on comparable regulations in national association law, we assume that a suspension corresponds to a dormant membership, associated with the loss of voting and electoral rights as well as the possibility of holding offices and mandates within the organisation.

A suspension is therefore not merely a symbolic instrument, but a serious measure to demand accountability, reaffirm ethical standards, and initiate necessary processes of reflection without completely terminating dialogue.

The DBSH rejects the exclusion of the IUSW. From the perspective of social work, we do not regard the marginalisation and exclusion of actors in conflicts as a contribution to conflict resolution, but rather as a risk of further escalation, polarisation, and entrenchment of opposing positions. A permanent exclusion would interrupt essential channels of communication and influence and significantly weaken opportunities for joint human rights- and peace-oriented positioning.

This position is also supported by the Global Statement of Ethical Principles. Point 9.3 explicitly states that social workers should promote peace and nonviolence. Point 9.7 further refers to possible tensions between ethical obligations that must be professionally negotiated, transparently reflected upon, and responsibly weighed—rather than addressed through authoritarian or purely punitive procedures. Throughout the Global Ethical Principles, dialogical, ethically reflected

decision-making, de-escalation, and peaceful conflict resolution run like a common thread as guiding orientations for the profession, both internally and externally.

Our professional self-understanding commits us to prioritise dialogue, participation, and joint problem-solving processes. Only through continuous communication, critical engagement, and mutual recognition can conflicts be transformed and sustainable strategies developed for all those affected.

At the same time, we understand the profession of social work—and thus the role of professional associations—as a public voice and an active actor in the political and social sphere. Professional associations bear responsibility for supporting their members in implementing ethical principles, while also addressing misconduct and taking clear positions when fundamental values such as human rights, democracy, and professional ethical standards are violated.

In view of the profound impact of geopolitical conflicts on people's living conditions worldwide, it is imperative for social work to take a clear stance, assume responsibility, and actively advocate for peace, the protection of civilians, and social justice.

In this context, the DBSH opposes exclusion but supports a time-limited and clearly framed suspension of the IUSW. Such a suspension must not be understood as a punitive measure without perspective, but rather as an instrument to promote reflection, accountability, and dialogue. It can only be effective if accompanied closely by the IFSW in its role as a mediating and supportive body.

We therefore call for the following measures:

- The IFSW Ethics Committee should prepare a comprehensive expert report on the application of global ethical principles in armed conflicts, particularly in the context of Gaza/Israel-Palestine. This report should address, among other issues, questions of compulsory military service, non-participation in hostilities, and the profession's commitment to peace. In particular, Point 9.3 of the Global Statement of Ethical Principles, which calls for non-participation in armed conflict, should be further specified, as it currently leaves open how this is to be implemented in situations of compulsory military service.
- On this basis, the IUSW should review its code of ethics, critically reflect on its role in the conflict, and further specify its responsibility for peace, human rights, and democracy. These outcomes should be presented transparently to its members and to the IFSW and documented in a comprehensible manner.
- Under the guidance of the IFSW, a structured and professionally facilitated dialogue process should be established between the IUSW and the Palestinian Union of Social Workers and Psychologists. The aim is to build trust, develop joint ethical positions, and promote shared peace-oriented projects. If necessary, the Executive Committee or the General Meeting may establish a corresponding commission.
- This process should follow a clearly defined timeline and be regularly reported to the relevant IFSW bodies. No later than the Global Delegates Meeting in 2028, a binding written report on the progress of this reflection and dialogue process should be submitted. If required, a further extraordinary digital Delegates Meeting should be convened.

From the perspective of the DBSH, the forthcoming special Delegates Meeting must address the serious ethical concerns raised without resorting to measures that primarily deepen division and alienation. We advocate for a solution that concretises global professional ethics, holds all involved associations accountable, and strengthens the IFSW as a space for dialogue, solidarity, and shared peace-building. At the same time, we see the IFSW as having a clear responsibility to take this long-standing - also internal - conflict as an opportunity for critical self-reflection, particularly with regard to insufficient procedures for conflict management, prevention, and internal communication. The position paper on “Good Governance” adopted by the Executive (at the General Meeting in Panama) must not remain without consequence, but must be consistently applied, reviewed, and firmly embedded in the organisation’s further development.