

To the International Federation of Social Workers  
(IFSW)  
President, Mr. Joachim MUMBA

Bern, 26th January 2026

**Statement by AvenirSocial for the Extraordinary General Assembly of the IFSW of 18 February 2026 regarding:  
Motion to suspend or exclude the Israeli Association of Social Worker**

Dear Joachim,  
Dear colleagues of the IFSW,

At the European Delegations Meeting of the IFSW held from 3 to 5 October 2025, the motion to suspend or exclude the Israeli Association of Social Workers from the IFSW was adopted. The Board of the IFSW subsequently convened an Extraordinary General Assembly for 18 February 2026 to address this motion. After careful consideration, the Board and the International Affairs Commission of AvenirSocial recommend rejecting the motion. AvenirSocial regards dialogue as a central element of the self-understanding of social work and proposes a compromise to enable the conflict to be addressed constructively. Before presenting our arguments, we would like to offer a few introductory considerations.

The statement of the Palestinian Union of Social Work and Psychologists expresses criticism of the IFSW Board, which had issued a reprimand to the Israeli professional association. It accuses the Board of insufficient action, of bias, and of double standards. Furthermore, the Palestinian association accuses Israeli social workers of systematic human rights violations and of killing Palestinian social workers.

- We have the impression that the Palestinian Union does not sufficiently distinguish between the actions of the Netanyahu government and the conduct of Israeli social workers involved in the war. The consequence is a generalized attribution of guilt directed at the Israeli association. In doing so, the Palestinian association hardens the ideological front between the two parties, which leads to a situation in which neither actor is able to adequately empathize with the suffering of the other. We consider the condemnation of the IFSW Board to be disproportionate, as in its function it must take into account the overall circumstances of the situation and of the federation as a whole.
- By originally admitting the Israeli association as a member of the IFSW, the federation knowingly accepted an organization from a context that has been shaped by severe conflicts for decades. In doing so, the IFSW also assumed responsibility for accompanying conflicts within its membership through dialogue. Excluding the Israeli association would contradict this self-understanding and would undermine the goal of promoting understanding and mutual respect.

In our assessment, the European Union and its associations of social work have so far not made a substantial contribution to resolving the Middle East conflict. Against this background, the uncompromising demand to exclude the Israeli association appears

disproportionate. Instead, we would welcome a constructive attitude and an open dialogue among all those involved.

The following argumentation leads AvenirSocial to the conclusion that the suspension and exclusion of the Israeli association should be rejected:

1. The reprimand issued by the IFSW Board to the Israeli association is based on Article 9.3 of the Global Statement of Ethical Principles of Social Work, which stipulates that social workers must not participate in armed conflicts. On this basis, the Board derives the demand that the Israeli association should request the Israeli government to suspend social workers from military service. From our perspective, however, this ethically high standard is applied in a way that does not sufficiently take into account the highly complex reality of the Gaza or Israel–Palestine conflict.

The application of Principle 9.3 in this context falls short, as it does not adequately consider the multifaceted nature of the situation and the differing perspectives and responsibilities involved. The resulting demand in particular fails to achieve its objective, as it is more likely to provoke defensive reactions than to promote a constructive and dialogue-oriented approach to the conflict. While Israel's legitimate right to self-defense is not explicitly denied, it remains insufficiently contextualized in the argumentation. Overall, we consider the application of this principle to this situation to be insufficiently differentiated to do justice to the reality of the conflict.
2. In our assessment, there is a significant risk that a corresponding request by the Israeli association to the Israeli government would remain without effect or might even lead to measures being taken against the association. Against this background, the assumption of the IFSW Board that such a request could make a positive contribution to a process of trust-building between Palestinian and Israeli civil society organizations appears, in real political terms, only partially plausible.

Rather, it is to be feared that such a demand would further restrict the scope of action of the Israeli association and undermine its ability to contribute constructively to alleviating the suffering of the people in Gaza and to a possible de-escalation of the conflict. In our view, the goal formulated by the IFSW of achieving humanitarian improvements and fostering trust requires other, more differentiated measures than calling on the Israeli association to submit such a request.
3. In contrast to Article 9.3 of the Global Statement of Ethical Principles of Social Work, Articles 9.7 and 9.8 more appropriately reflect, in our view, the role and self-understanding of social work in conflict situations. Professional associations can find themselves in difficult positions, particularly in highly polarized political contexts. In such situations, they are called upon to address conflicts responsibly, seek dialogue with the actors involved, and contribute to sustainable solutions, rather than being placed under additional pressure through sanctions or mechanisms of exclusion.

Article 9.8 also emphasizes the obligation of social work to create, in the respective countries, the conditions under which the ethical principles of professional associations and of the IFSW can be lived in practice. This requires scope for action, capacity for dialogue, and institutional presence. These would be significantly weakened by an exclusion of the Israeli association.

The recently published report of the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights underscores this understanding of social work. It describes its role as providing support, empowering people, and connecting them with solutions, as well as acting as a key partner for just and people-centered development. AvenirSocial shares this assessment. Against this background, we consider neither the reprimand issued nor a possible exclusion of the Israeli association to be appropriate means. Rather, we see an obligation – also for the IFSW – to engage actively, in a dialogue-oriented and mediating manner, in processes of conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

**Conclusion:**

1. On the basis of the considerations set out here, AvenirSocial considers the exclusion of the Israeli professional association to be inappropriate. The exclusion of the Israeli association contradicts the fundamental principles of social work, which are aimed at developing solutions.
2. AvenirSocial is of the view that, in light of the severe humanitarian situation in Gaza, and taking into account the ethical principles of social work, the Israeli professional association should assume shared responsibility for improving and alleviating the suffering of the Palestinian population. On the basis of the Global Statement of Ethical Principles of Social Work, the IFSW Board is justified in calling for commitment in clarifying the role of the Israeli association. AvenirSocial proposes that, instead of excluding the association, its agreement to a constructive approach should be encouraged.

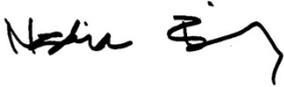
**Motion**

The request to exclude the Israeli association is to be denied. Instead, we propose the following approach for the debate at the General Assembly:

1. The Ethics Committee of the IFSW shall prepare an expert opinion on the question of how its ethical principles apply to the current situation in Gaza and propose what the role of Israeli social work should be in this specific context. A professionally and substantively well-founded report shall be prepared. This position paper can also be used for other conflicts worldwide.
2. On the basis of the expert opinion, the Israeli association shall examine to what extent it needs to adapt its code of professional ethics to the situation of the Middle East conflict and its history. In doing so, it shall clarify, among other things, its role in society and with regard to democratic principles (Section B of its Code of Ethics) and the meaning of the “well-being of society” and the contribution it can make in this regard (Chapter 2).
3. The Israeli association shall take a position on the UN resolution for the Gaza peace plan. It shall set out its political preferences, for example the two-state solution, the containment of land appropriation by settlers, and, if necessary, other issues, and define what contribution the association can make to reconstruction and to supporting stability in Gaza.
4. The IFSW, with the involvement of recognized experts, should show how a binding, constructive, and equal-level dialogue between the Palestinian and the Israeli associations of social work can be initiated and designed. In addition, the IFSW should actively accompany and support this process in order to ensure that appropriate dialogue and conflict resolution formats are not only designed, but also effectively implemented.

The possible effects of an exclusion of the Israeli association on global dialogue – on peace initiatives and on social work cooperation in general – should be carefully considered. AvenirSocial and the International Affairs Committee are aware of the importance of the issue and the serious questions that accompany it. Our statement is intended to contribute to a responsible, reflective, and solidarity-oriented debate.

AvenirSocial



Board and International Affairs commission, represented by  
Nadia Bisang, Co-Executive Director, AvenirSocial