



Aotearoa New Zealand  
Association of Social Workers  
Te Rōpū Tauwhiro i Aotearoa



Tangata Whenua  
Social Workers Association

## **IFSW Coordinating Body – Aotearoa New Zealand**

### **Statement on the Israeli Union of Social Workers (IUSW)**

For the Special General Meeting 18 February 2026

#### **SUMMARY**

After extensive consideration of expulsion versus suspension and drawing on IFSW Ethical Principles and Special General Meeting procedures, we have concluded that suspension best upholds professional integrity while allowing space for dialogue and accountability.

We reviewed written positions from IFSW member associations and the IFSW Secretariat's background report ahead of the Special General Meeting, alongside the wide-ranging views expressed across the profession.

This decision addresses the conduct and responsibilities of the IUSW as a member body. It is not a statement on the State of Israel, nor a denial of suffering experienced by Palestinian or Israeli civilians.

We deplore all actions that target civilians. We condemn the ongoing mass civilian harm in Gaza and the West Bank. We condemn the attacks by Hamas and continue to call for the immediate release of all hostages.

#### **DECISION**

**The IFSW Coordinating Body Aotearoa New Zealand votes to suspend the Israeli Union of Social Workers (IUSW), effective immediately, with a formal review proposed at the 2026 General Meeting in Nairobi (23–24 June 2026).**

#### **RATIONALE**

This decision recognises and supports the dignity, the mana and professional standing of the more than 400 frontline Israeli social workers who have expressed that their voices are not being heard or acted upon by the IUSW.

## **Misalignment with Social Work Ethics and Values**

It is our considered position that there is a serious misalignment between core social work values and the failure to publicly call for peace, advocate for the protection of civilians, and advocate for safeguards to ensure social workers are not required to participate in direct combat roles.

Social work is grounded in human rights, social justice, and the protection of life. We consider that silence in the face of genocide, apartheid practices, large-scale humanitarian harm and civilian suffering is inconsistent with the ethical foundations of social work and diminishes the integrity of the profession.

## **Commitment to Indigenous Peoples and Opposition to Oppression**

As a profession in Aotearoa grounded in Te Tiriti o Waitangi and committed to the rights of Indigenous peoples, the voices of whom were embodied in the 1835 He Whakaputanga o te Rangatiratanga o Nu Tireni (The Declaration of Independence of the United Tribes of New Zealand), we cannot ignore what numerous credible international observers and human rights organisations have described as genocide, apartheid, and an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

Guided by He Whakaputanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, we respond to patterns of severe civilian harm with a commitment and an obligation to uphold equity, protection of life, and authentic engagement with those most affected.

The current situation in Gaza has involved extensive destruction of civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, housing, water and sanitation systems, alongside large-scale loss of civilian life as documented by United Nations agencies and humanitarian partners.

United Nations reporting has warned of catastrophic levels of food insecurity and acute malnutrition, with sustained humanitarian access identified as essential to prevent further famine conditions.

The International Court of Justice has issued provisional measures recognising a risk of genocide and ordering actions intended to protect civilians and enable humanitarian access. These measures form part of an ongoing case under the Genocide Convention.

Naming the scale of civilian harm and disproportionate impact should not be controversial. It is consistent with social work ethical values and principles and our obligation to protect life. We expect professional bodies representing social workers to demonstrate similar clarity of ethical values and principles.

## **THE CHALLENGE**

It is the considered view of the IFSW Coordinating Body of Aotearoa New Zealand that:

- **Representation:** IFSW and its member countries exist first to uphold and actively represent the voices and work of frontline social workers. Legitimacy rests in authentically reflecting frontline realities rather than protecting organisational positioning.
- **Consistency:** IFSW must act consistently when conflict or policy compromises the dignity, safety, and work of social workers and the communities they serve. This includes the courage to challenge a member organisation where necessary. These ethical values and principles must be applied consistently across all member countries without exception.
- **Membership:** IFSW must ensure that any member country is genuinely and authentically representative of, and responsive to, frontline social workers, whether or not they are formal members of the national body.
- **Collaboration:** IFSW and member countries must work collaboratively, navigating difference with integrity, to uphold the ethical values and principles that are the foundations of the profession, the practice and the standing of frontline practitioners.

We affirm the spirit of Harambee and Kotahitanga, togetherness and shared responsibility.

## CALL TO ACTION

### **Strengthening Values and Accountability**

We call on IFSW to make its core ethical values, human rights commitments and principles, as stated in the Global Definition of Social Work, explicit and operational in measurable ways.

Membership must carry clear expectations. Where member organisations act in ways inconsistent with the profession's foundations of ethical values and principles, including silence in the face of large-scale humanitarian harm, there must be transparent processes for review and accountability.

IFSW's credibility and integrity depends on its willingness to uphold its ethical values and principles consistently and without exception.

### **Clear Ethical Guidance**

IFSW must develop guidance regarding the ethical position of social workers in active combat zones and clarify expectations of member organisations whose governments are engaged in armed conflict.

This guidance should address advocacy for peace, protection of civilians, adherence to international humanitarian law, and the preservation of the professional integrity of

social work roles within military contexts, ensuring they are not required to participate in direct combat or actions that conflict with social work ethical values and principles.

### **Expectations of the Israeli Union of Social Workers**

Clear expectations should be established for the IUSW, including:

- A public position calling for peace and protection of civilians,
- Advocacy for safeguards to ensure social workers are not required to undertake direct combat roles,
- Demonstrable and transparent engagement with frontline social workers who have raised authentic concerns, including evidence of response and consideration of their position.

We support a transparent, time-bound review process grounded in IFSW's ethical principles, where accountability is clear, measurable, and exclusion is a final option.

### **Direct Engagement with Frontline Signatories**

IFSW should make direct contact with the signatories of the open letter to the IUSW to better understand their experiences and expectations.

They should be invited to participate in shaping accountability measures and in determining whether agreed actions have been met as a condition for lifting suspension.

Accountability must include those whose voices initiated the call.

## **THE MOEMOEĀ | VISION**

Social work is an agent of social change. We are called to practice pursuing ethical values and principles, authentically and in ways that strengthen families and communities, protect the vulnerable, and uphold human dignity and mana.

We uphold rangatiratanga as self-determination and authentic authority.

We commit to whakaiti as humility in leadership and listening.

The challenge is to listen carefully and respectfully, act intentionally on what has been shared, ensure safety, and unite rather than divide.

We conclude with a whakataukī from our Indigenous knowledge:

Te kai a te rangatira, he kōrero

The food of the leader is dialogue

Te tohu a te rangatira, he manaaki

The sign of the leader is generosity

Te mahi a te rangatira, he whakatira i te iwi

The work of the leader is to unite the people