

**Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW) and the Consejo General del Trabajo Social
(CGTS, Spain)**
Joint statement for the IFSW Special General Meeting, 18th February 2026
On the expulsion of the Israeli Union of Social Workers (IUSW)

1. Introduction and purpose

The Irish Association of Social Workers (IASW), as proposer of the motion that has convened this Special General Meeting, alongside the Consejo General del Trabajo Social (Spain) and the Hellenic Association of Social Workers (Greece), will vote for the expulsion of the Israeli Union of Social Workers (IUSW) from the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), and calls on all member organisations to do the same.

This Special General Meeting has been convened on foot of repeated, documented breaches, two formal censures (2018; 2025), and the IUSW's explicit refusal to meet minimum requirements articulated by the IFSW in relation to peace, non-violence, and the non-participation of social workers in active combat. The Federation is therefore being asked to answer a question that goes to the core of its purpose: whether the Global Statement of Ethical Principles operates as a binding professional standard or as an aspirational text with no institutional force. What is at stake here is the meaning of membership itself. If the IFSW continues to confer legitimacy, voting authority, and standing on a member organisation that refuses these baseline obligations in the midst of illegal occupation, apartheid, and an unfolding genocide, then the Federation converts its ethical framework into rhetorical cover, communicates that ethical obligations are negotiable when power demands it, and demonstrates that impunity can be accommodated within the profession's highest institutional forum.

2. Israel's breaches of international law: occupation, apartheid, genocide

This motion arises in the context of Israel's prolonged and unlawful occupation of the

occupied Palestinian territory, alongside an entrenched regime of segregation and domination, in which Israeli institutions, including the IUSW, operate and with respect to which they have particular professional obligations. Since 1967, Israel has occupied the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip, and Palestinians living under these arrangements have been subjected to systematic violations of basic civil and human rights.¹ This landscape of domination is rooted in, and has been compounded by, the mass displacement of Palestinians beginning in 1948 and the continuing denial of Palestinian refugees' right to return.²

The International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion of the 19th of July 2024 found Israel's continued presence in the occupied Palestinian territories since 1967 to be unlawful, and held that Israeli laws and measures amount to racial segregation and apartheid.³ A year later, on the 16th of September 2025, the UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry concluded that Israel is committing genocide against Palestinians in Gaza.⁴

3. IUSW's involvement and complicity

Our position concerns the conduct of the IUSW as an organisation, not the intrinsic identities or personal beliefs of individual Israeli social workers. The key issues are:

- The IUSW has refused to issue any public statement calling for a ceasefire or peace, despite the scale of civilian casualties and the clear expectations set out in the IFSW's own ethical principles.
- The IUSW has confirmed that its members serve as combatants in a military campaign that multiple bodies have described as genocidal, and has rejected the request to seek exemptions for social workers from combat roles.
- Over many years, the IUSW has declined to act as an independent professional voice in relation to occupation, apartheid and the systematic violations of Palestinian rights, including those of Palestinian social workers.
- The Palestinian Union of Social Workers and Psychologists (PUSWP) and numerous other organisations have documented killings, torture, arbitrary detention, displacement and the destruction of infrastructure, including services in which social workers are employed⁵. The IUSW has not taken a public stand in defence of these colleagues or communities.

Over 400 Israeli social workers have signed an open letter ⁶ calling on the IUSW to *'express a clear and courageous position against the destruction and starvation taking place in the Gaza Strip'* and to formulate ethical rules for social work practice in this context. They remind the union that *'upholding the values of peace, equality, social justice, solidarity and the protection of human rights are at the heart of our professional ethics'*, and that *'active and unequivocal opposition to war is... a clear expression of our commitment to professional ethics and human morality'* ⁶. The letter makes clear that, in the current situation, *'refraining from action constitutes tacit consent to crimes against humanity'* and that the union's silence on starvation, mass killing at food distribution points, plans for ethnic cleansing and the killing of thousands of children is *'unacceptable'*. To date, the IASW has been unable to locate a public response to this from the IUSW where it acknowledged or acted on these demands.

Similar concerns have been voiced in other parts of Israeli civil society. In 2025, more than a thousand Israeli academics signed an open letter to the heads of academic institutions stating:

'It is human societies, not governments alone, that commit crimes against humanity. Some do so by means of direct violence. Others do so by sanctioning the crimes and justifying them, before and after the fact, and by keeping quiet and silencing voices in the halls of learning. It is this bond of silence that allows clearly evident crimes to continue unabated without penetrating the barriers of recognition.' ⁷

The IUSW statement in 2014 is sometimes cited as proof of its ethical stance. In it they stated support for a two-state solution, reconstruction of Gaza and a dignified, self-determined life for Palestinians. Yet a decade on, every principle asserted in that statement has been systematically violated: Gaza has been decimated, settlement expansion has and continues to accelerate, apartheid has been formally identified by international mechanisms, and Palestinian displacement and dispossession have intensified. There is no documented record of the IUSW acting to defend, implement or even publicly restate those commitments. A 2014 statement followed by a decade of silence in the face of opposite developments cannot credibly be presented as evidence of sustained ethical leadership

4. Social work ethics

Social work ethics demand more than general appeals to compassion, rather they require opposition to genocide, ethnic cleansing, racial segregation, collective

punishment, starvation and forced displacement, and a refusal to permit professional knowledge, practice and institutional standing to be mobilised in the service of inhumane ends. The Global Statement of Ethical Principles is clear on this. Principle 1 affirms inherent dignity and self-determination; Principle 4 requires social workers to challenge unjust policies and practices; and Principle 9.3 commits the profession to peace and non-violence and to preventing social work knowledge and skills being used for inhumane purposes. These are not merely symbolic aspirations, they are minimum standards and they must have governance consequences where they are persistently refused.

The open letter from 400 Israeli social workers referred to above gives this ethical position concrete form. It rejects 'selective compassion and empathy', insists on an obligation of social workers to warn of grave human rights violations and systematic harm to human life, and argues that silence in the current circumstances amounts to 'tacit consent to crimes against humanity'.⁶ In other words, the insistence on ethical action is not only being advanced by Palestinian colleagues or international bodies, it is being demanded from within Israeli social work itself.

The IFSW's own account of the profession's 'core mandate' similarly emphasises the development of '*critical consciousness through reflection on structural oppression and privilege*'⁸. A professional association that frames occupation as 'not a social work issue', and refuses to acknowledge apartheid and genocide, has withdrawn from that mandate and, in doing so, undermines the ethical basis of its membership.⁸

5. IFSW's actions and IUSW's (lack of) responses

The Secretariat's report, *Membership of the Israeli Union of Social Workers in the International Federation of Social Workers: Historical Background, Ethical Concerns, and Procedural Basis for the Special General Meeting*, sets out more than a decade of engagement between the IFSW and the IUSW. It documents serious and repeated concerns that the IUSW has failed to act as an independent professional voice in relation to Palestinian rights and the occupation.

In March 2018, the IFSW Executive Committee issued a first censure of the IUSW for its failure to function as an 'independent voice for the profession in Israel' and its refusal to work 'in accordance with the Federation's Statement of Ethical Principles'⁹. This move followed the IUSW concluding that the 'solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and an end to the occupation' was 'not a social work issue'. The General Meeting

endorsed that censure. It was later lifted in 2022, despite no clear, sustained change in the IUSW's orientation to occupation and apartheid.

In January 2025, following renewed complaints from member organisations, including the PUSWP, the Executive issued a new censure ¹⁰. In its exchanges with the IFSW, the IUSW confirmed that some of its members were serving in active combat roles in Gaza and elsewhere, and that it would not request that social workers be exempted from combat duties, nor issue any public statement calling for peace. The Executive concluded that this breached the Global Statement of Ethical Principles, particularly clause 9.3 on peace, non-violence, and refusing the use of social work knowledge and skills for inhumane purposes.

The significance of the refusal is that it was not a rejection of expansive political demands, but of minimal professional steps. If a national association cannot publicly affirm peace and non-violence during an onslaught described by UN mechanisms as genocidal, nor request non-combat exemptions for its members, then that association is describing a loss of independent professional capacity, which is precisely what the IFSW membership presupposes.

The IFSW's own formulation of censure makes clear that it allows the member *'to continue to be active within the Federation and enable full voting and speaking rights in all IFSW forums'*, merely registering that its actions *'fall short of expectations of membership'* ⁸. In the present context, where IUSW members are active in combat while genocide is occurring in Gaza and the union refuses any statement calling for peace, such a limited measure is no longer adequate.

6. Ireland's historical experience and professional responsibility

The IASW approaches this SGM from a particular historical location. Ireland has been shaped by colonisation, land dispossession, forced famine and starvation, cultural suppression, partition and militarised policing. These experiences have left deep traces in public life and in our understanding of how state power operates. Social workers in Ireland know from our own history how easily 'security' language can be used to normalise domination, and how professional silence can be used to manage and contain those who are oppressed. This history reminds us that so-called peacebuilding can sometimes become a smokescreen that leaves structures of colonial dispossession intact rather than dismantling them. It is also one reason why Irish solidarity with Palestine has been sustained over many decades, reflected in Ireland's advocacy for

Palestinian statehood and in Irish social work's commitment to stand with colleagues facing occupation and apartheid.

We are wary of flattening distinct histories into one narrative, however, at the same time, our own experience makes it impossible to accept calls for 'neutrality' when one side holds overwhelming military and structural power and when the other is living under occupation, apartheid and the threat of extermination. For social work, it is neutrality in such conditions that amounts in practice to the abandonment of our ethical duty to oppose injustice.

7. IASW's position: why expulsion rather than suspension or retention

The immediate precipitant for this meeting is straightforward: after formal censure, the IUSW declined to call publicly for peace and declined to seek non-combat exemptions for social workers, despite Principle 9.3 and IFSW's explicit requests. Therefore, the IASW's view is clear that expulsion is warranted, and we outline our reasons for this below.

Firstly, the pattern of engagement since 2018 shows that lighter measures have not been effective. A censure in 2018, its lifting in 2022, and a new censure in 2025 have not produced the minimum ethical actions expected: a call for peace, a request for exemptions from combat roles and a clear stand against genocide and apartheid.

Secondly, we are not dealing with an isolated incident, but rather with an ongoing situation that multiple expert bodies identify as involving genocide, apartheid and systematic violations of international humanitarian law. In such a context, to retain full membership for a body that confirms combat participation and refuses a peace stance sends a devastating signal to Palestinian colleagues and communities, and to all those who look to the IFSW for leadership in other conflict-affected settings.

Thirdly, it is important to be clear that expulsion does not foreclose future engagement. The By-Laws and Procedural Rules provide for reinstatement where the grounds for a sanction no longer apply and where the Executive recommends such a step to a General Meeting. Expulsion would mark a much-needed boundary: that the IFSW cannot continue to grant full membership to an organisation that declines to meet its minimum ethical requirements in the context of an ongoing genocide. Taken together, these actions and omissions show a pattern of IUSW alignment with the state's military and colonial project and a refusal to uphold the basic ethical duties

expected of an IFSW member organisation.

8. Arguments which have been raised against expulsion

In the period leading up to this SGM, several arguments have been advanced for retaining IUSW membership or confining the response to suspension only. The IASW engages these arguments directly because taken together, they have the effect of shifting attention away from an organisation's documented ethical breaches and towards a procedural debate about process, tone, and 'dialogue', while the material conditions of occupation, apartheid, and genocidal violence continue unabated.

'Dialogue and peacebuilding'

A recurring claim is that expulsion would undermine dialogue and peacebuilding, and that social work should prioritise inclusion as a general professional orientation. The IASW is not opposed to dialogue, rather we are opposed to the way 'dialogue' is being mobilised to recast a colonial relation as a dispute between two equal parties and to displace the issue before this SGM which is the repeated ethical breaches of the IUSW.

The IASW is also particularly concerned by dialogue framings that erase the structural realities of occupation, apartheid, and genocide by presuming symmetry between coloniser and colonised, oppressor and oppressed. Critical dialogue presupposes equality of rights, and where one party denies the other's right to exist as a self-determining people, what is offered is not dialogue but merely the performance of dialogue while the material conditions of oppression continue. In such circumstances, 'dialogue' detached from enforceable ethical standards has repeatedly functioned as a professional language of delay, conferring legitimacy and time on institutions that have already demonstrated refusal to meet minimum obligations.

The IASW also notes that Palestinian social workers have addressed with clarity the kinds of 'dialogue' formats that are frequently proposed in this context. In their 2022 letter, the PUSWP rejected a model of dialogue that reframes a colonial relation as a dispute between two parties marked by 'mistrust', while omitting occupation, apartheid, and colonisation. They emphasised that dialogue without an honest recognition of power and history functions to obscure founding violence, normalises ongoing dispossession, and simulates equality while domination remains intact ¹¹.

'Complexity', 'self-defence', and the misreading of ethical obligations

A second argument suggests that the situation is uniquely complex, that the application of Principle 9.3 is overly rigid, and that the IFSW's expectations were unrealistic given the political context in which the IUSW operates. The IASW accepts that social work frequently works amid acute political pressure, polarisation, and state violence, and that is precisely why ethical principles exist: not to be invoked only in low-stakes circumstances, but to set limits on professional complicity when harm is organised, legitimised and normalised.

The IFSW did not demand that the IUSW resolve the conflict, abolish conscription, or dismantle state militarism. It sought two minimum actions consistent with professional ethics: a public call for peace and non-violence, and a request that social workers be exempted from combat roles. The IUSW refused both. If a national association cannot publicly affirm peace and non-violence during an onslaught characterised by UN mechanisms as genocidal, and cannot even request non-combat exemptions for its members, then it is describing a collapse of independent professional capacity. A professional association that cannot set ethical boundaries for its members in relation to participation in mass violence is not simply operating under 'complexity', it is relinquishing the core functions that justify its standing within an international federation of ethics-bound professions.

The IASW is also concerned by framings that elevate 'security' into an organising logic that renders ethics conditional and accountability illegible. The concept of security theology is relevant here not only as an analysis of individual subjectivities, but because professional associations can institutionalise this logic by presenting militarised state violence as regrettable necessity, by treating participation in armed assault as ordinary civic duty, and by positioning ethical scrutiny as naïve, hostile, or externally imposed⁸,¹²,¹³. When a professional body reproduces this framework, it participates in legitimising the political and moral order through which dispossession and exterminatory violence become administratively thinkable and professionally tolerable. For a social work association, that is an ethical failure with institutional consequences, because the association's duties include setting standards, issuing guidance, and resisting the capture of professional practice by inhumane purposes¹⁴.

'Generalised guilt' and the object of this motion

A further concern is that expulsion rests on 'generalised guilt' and the need to

distinguish between the actions of the Israeli state and those of Israeli social workers. The IASW agrees that collective blame based on nationality, ethnicity or religion is unacceptable. This call for expulsion is not grounded in such logic, it is grounded in the decisions and omissions of the IUSW as a professional association. A national association is not a passive reflection of the state; its role is to set standards, give guidance to members, defend those who act on ethical principles and speak out when human rights are violated. If an association describes itself as unable to meet these minimum responsibilities because of its political context, that is not an argument for protecting its standing within the IFSW; it is an admission that it is not functioning as an independent body.

Why suspension and further process are inadequate

Suspension, expert reports, and facilitated dialogue processes are also proposed as a proportionate compromise. The IASW does not oppose additional ethical clarification for the Federation's future work, and the development of clearer guidance may be valuable across multiple contexts. However, since 2018, censures and 'engagement' have already been tried, and the ethical minimum has still been refused. Proposals that defer decisive action into open-ended processes extending years into the future effectively ask Palestinian social workers to live through an indefinite period in which an association whose members serve in combat, and whose leadership refuses a peace stance, retains legitimacy and full organisational privileges within the IFSW. In circumstances of ongoing genocidal violence, this delay is not acceptable, and it is a choice that distributes time and protection to the institution that has refused compliance, while demanding patience from those living under annihilating conditions.

Inclusion, accountability, and the meaning of ethics

Finally, it is argued that expulsion conflicts with social work's commitment to inclusion, and that a punitive approach is inconsistent with professional values. The IASW understands expulsion as a governance decision within a voluntary federation that has conditions of membership, not as the banishment of individuals from professional life. Every professional community recognises that serious and persistent breaches of ethical codes can result in loss of standing, accreditation, or office. The integrity of any ethical framework depends on the possibility of consequences when minimum standards are refused. Where institutional complicity in genocide and apartheid can be

met only with suggestions for dialogue, reports, and indefinite process, ethics then becomes branding rather than meaningful and binding principles and loses all credibility. The IFSW's own history also indicates that the Federation has previously recognised that apartheid conditions require decisive organisational boundaries when it took decisive measures in relation to apartheid South Africa, recognising that membership is not an unconditional right.

9. Due process, consistency and misuse of antisemitism

The IASW supports the consistent application of IFSW ethical principles across all member organisations. Where comparable involvement in armed conflict or serious human rights violations arises, comparable processes should follow. This case proceeds on the basis of repeated censures, formal complaints from the Palestinian member organisation, explicit confirmation of combat roles, and refusal to meet minimum expectations set out by IFSW.

This motion concerns the conduct of a professional association and the ethical implications of its relationship to the policies and practices of the Israeli state, including occupation, apartheid, and genocide as characterised by UN mechanisms and major human rights bodies. The IASW rejects antisemitism, Islamophobia, and all forms of racism. We recognise the real risk that principled critique of Israeli state practices is mischaracterised as antisemitic and that antisemitism can be instrumentalised to foreclose accountability. Evidence-based criticism of Israel as a state, including describing its practices as apartheid or settler-colonialism, and support for non-violent political measures such as boycotts or institutional suspension, is not in itself antisemitic, as per the Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism ¹⁵.

10. Call to member organisations

For these reasons, the Irish Association of Social Workers:

- will vote in favour of the motion to expel the Israeli Union of Social Workers from the IFSW
- strongly urges other member organisations to do the same
- if expulsion does not reach the required 75% majority, urges support for

suspension as an absolute minimum step, while recognising that this falls short of what the current conjuncture demands.

We also encourage member organisations to communicate openly with their own members about the reasons for their vote and to consider what this decision means for social work practice in other contexts of genocide, occupation and structural violence.

This Special General Meeting will indicate whether the Global Statement of Ethical Principles is treated as a meaningful guide to action or merely as symbolic language that can be set aside when it becomes uncomfortable. The IASW believes that expelling the IUSW is necessary to protect the credibility of the Federation and of the social work profession, to heed the calls of Palestinian colleagues and communities, and to affirm that social work will not provide professional cover for genocide, apartheid and occupation. A profession that claims commitments to dignity, human rights and social justice cannot treat complicity as a tolerable difference of opinion, and it cannot outsource accountability to future reviews while people are being bombed, starved, displaced and erased in the present.

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