

News from our societies: IFSW

International Social Work

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DOI: 10.1177/00208728261481340

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The first half of 2026 was a period of significant advocacy, democratic participation and leadership transition for the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW). Across global policy spaces, member-led gatherings and international conferences, the social work community demonstrated its capacity to respond to division and uncertainty by strengthening solidarity, widening participation and co-building pathways towards more just and sustainable societies.

At the beginning of the year, IFSW expanded its engagement at the intersection of social work, public health and violence prevention by joining the Global Coalition for WHO Action on Firearm Violence. Bringing together nearly 100 organisations from more than 30 countries, the Coalition called for stronger and more coherent World Health Organization leadership in recognising firearm violence as a preventable public health issue. IFSW's participation brought a distinct social work perspective: social workers witness how firearm violence traumatises children, disrupts families and deepens inequality, and the Federation emphasised that prevention must extend beyond clinical responses to include community trust, trauma-informed support, social protection, long-term recovery and action on the structural injustices that allow violence to flourish.

The Federation convened a Special General Meeting online in February, in accordance with the IFSW Constitution, to consider two motions relating to the membership of the Israeli Union of Social Workers. Following debate and voting by member organisations, the membership of the Israeli Union of Social Workers remained unchanged.

In March, social workers around the world celebrated World Social Work Day under the theme “Co-building Hope and Harmony: A Harambee Call to Unite a Divided Society.” Inspired by the African philosophy of harambee, meaning pulling together, the theme highlighted social work's role in rebuilding trust, overcoming polarisation and strengthening inclusive and resilient communities.

At the United Nations in Geneva, international leaders, practitioners and educators explored how social work can contribute to social cohesion and sustainable development within an increasingly divided global context. The programme connected the World Social Work Day theme with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the commitments adopted at the Second World Summit for Social Development.

The global theme also found local expression in Midsayap, Mindanao, in the Philippines, where the IFSW Interim Secretary-General Pascal Rudin joined social workers, community leaders and international representatives to reflect on inclusion, peacebuilding and community resilience in a region shaped by cultural diversity, strong traditions and experiences of conflict and displacement. The celebration demonstrated that peace is not built only through international declarations, but through relationships, local leadership and the everyday work of people committed to dignity and coexistence. An Eid al-Fitr Quran reading event, which welcomed people of different faiths into a shared public space, offered a living example of harmony, recognition and inclusive community practice.

The first half of the year also marked the conclusion of Dr Rory Truell's 15-year tenure as IFSW Secretary-General. During these years, the Federation expanded its international engagement, strengthened collaboration across regions and deepened its contribution to global social policy and

advocacy. As Dr Truell concluded his service, IFSW expressed its sincere appreciation for his dedication to the Federation over many years and wished him well for the future.

In June, national member organisations representing 81 countries gathered in Nairobi, Kenya, for the 2026 IFSW General Meeting. Held in a hybrid format, the meeting was characterised by thoughtful debate, democratic participation and a shared commitment to strengthening the Federation for the future. For the first time, an IFSW hybrid General Meeting was conducted in all three official languages: English, French and Spanish. This important step widened access, particularly for French-speaking organisations across the African continent, and reinforced the Federation's commitment to linguistic inclusion.

Members reviewed achievements, finances, governance reforms, regional activities and the work of the IFSW commissions. They welcomed new member organisations from Belgium, Benin, Somalia and South Africa, further expanding the Federation's global reach. The General Meeting also elected new global and regional leaders, including Eva Ponce de Leon as IFSW Global President, while expressing its appreciation to outgoing President Joachim Mumba and other departing members of the Executive for their leadership and service.

Immediately following the General Meeting, more than 1000 social workers, educators, researchers, policy-makers, community leaders and people with lived experience gathered for the Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development. Convened by IFSW, the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Council on Social Welfare, the conference centred on the theme "Harambee for Sustainable Shared Futures."

Participants recognised the interconnected effects of armed conflict, climate change, displacement, inequality, declining humanitarian assistance and economic insecurity. They called for renewed investment in universal social protection, strong public services, quality social work education, decent working conditions and meaningful community participation. The Nairobi Commitment reaffirmed that communities must not be treated merely as beneficiaries of change, but recognised as partners and leaders in creating it. It also renewed the tripartite partnership's commitment to advancing the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development through coordinated local, national and international action.

The momentum created in Nairobi carried into the opening weeks of the Federation's new leadership. In July, newly elected President Eva Ponce de Leon undertook her first official overseas visit, to Thailand. The mission strengthened emerging partnerships among IFSW, the Philippines and Thailand and promoted South-South cooperation, professional education, research and social innovation. Meetings with social work organisations, the IFSW Asia-Pacific representative to the United Nations regional office in Bangkok and the Faculty of Social Administration at Thammasat University demonstrated a commitment to connecting professional associations, universities, civil society and international institutions.

Through democratic dialogue, global advocacy, leadership renewal and the spirit of harambee, IFSW has continued to strengthen the profession's collective capacity to respond to global challenges. Across communities, institutions and international policy spaces, social workers are co-building hope and harmony and advancing a shared future grounded in human dignity, social justice, solidarity and sustainability.

Eva Ponce de Leon
IFSW Global President

Pascal Rudin
IFSW Interim Secretary-General