



Colegio de Profesionales del Trabajo Social De Puerto Rico

OPEN LETTER TO THE MEMBERS OF THE INTERNATIONAL FEDERATION OF SOCIAL WORK (IFSW)

June 1, 2012

Dear Colleagues:

The petition of the *Colegio de Profesionales del Trabajo Social de Puerto Rico* (College of Social Work Professionals of Puerto Rico), to be considered as a member of the International Federation of Social Work, and to form part of the Latin America region is on the agenda for discussion at the 2012 General Assembly in Stockholm. Our professional college is a private nonprofit organization with over 7,000 members, created by Act. 171 of May 11, 1940. Its purpose is to organize a professional guild of social workers and regulate professional practice in Puerto Rico. It is the only organization that has this responsibility in Puerto Rico. We are also a totally separate organization from the National Association of Social Work (NASW) of the United States, which has a chapter in Puerto Rico of about 150 members. However, the College of Social Work Professionals of Puerto Rico has a mandatory nature, since all professional social workers must be members of our professional college in order to practice in the country.

The **mission** of this organization is to represent the interests of the professional class to achieve values such as respect for human dignity, equality, freedom and social justice. Part of this mission is to ensure professional performance guided by the highest values and ethical standards for the welfare of society.

The **vision** states that the College of Social Work Professionals of Puerto Rico is the professional organization representing the members of this discipline to maintain an alert attitude towards all the issues that threaten its integrity and to defend their rights, as well as the rights of those diverse and excluded populations to which they provide services.

For the last four years, the College of Social Work Professionals of Puerto Rico has expressed in various communications our interest in affiliating to the International Federation of Social Work. The response to this request has been that Puerto Rico cannot join the Federation as a partner, because it is "part of the United States". The current legal status of Puerto Rico is a Commonwealth, subjected by a territorial clause to the Congress of the United States.

Despite such legal factors, Puerto Rico maintains itself as a Latin American and Caribbean nation, and claims its right to self-determination and the full exercise of its sovereignty. For this reason, several international professional organizations recognize Puerto Rican organizations. This is the case of the following organizations:

- The National Association of Schools of Social Work of Puerto Rico is a member of the Latin American Association of Teaching and Research in Social Work.
- The Association of Psychology of Puerto Rico is associated with the Inter-American Society of Psychology (SIP), which is associated with the International Union of Psychological Sciences (IUPsyS), a division of the International Council of Scientific Unions.
- The Puerto Rican Association of Professional Counseling is a member of the Latin American Network of Guidance Professionals and the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance

Likewise, Puerto Rico is recognized as a participating nation in other international instances, such as in the Olympics.

Moreover, resolutions in support of our request have been adopted by the assemblies of the following Latin American events:

- The 19th World Conference of Social Work held in Salvador Bahia, Brazil, 2008.
- The 19th Latin American Seminar of Social Work celebrated at Guayaquil, Ecuador in October 2009.
- The 5th International Congress and 7th National Congress of Social Work met in Costa Rica from September 29 to October 1, 2010.
- The 2nd Meeting of Associations of Social Workers of the Latin American and the Caribbean Region of IFSW, celebrated in Mendoza, Argentina on August, 2011.
- The 28th Meeting of the Mercosur Committee of Professional Organizations of Social Work, and the International Workshop on the International Definition of Social Work of the IFSW, celebrated in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on March, 2012.

These resolutions concluded:


- The acknowledgement of the right of Puerto Rico to be recognized as a Latin American and Caribbean nation.
- An expression in favor of Puerto Rico's right to participate, in an autonomous way, in any forums of Latin American and Caribbean integration that it deems pertinent.
- Recognition of the right of the Puerto Rican people to be affiliated as an independent entity of the United States, to any organization that they understand to be suitable and convenient to their interests as a nation.

Accordingly, they favor that the College of Social Work Professionals of Puerto Rico be accepted as a member of the International Federation of Social Work.

We reiterate our statement that the position of the IFSW to not accept Puerto Rico as a member because of its political status is not in line with international law, nor is it consistent with the ethical standards of our profession. Therefore, **we ask that our request to incorporate Puerto Rico as a member of the International Federation of Social Work be favorably endorsed at this year's General Assembly.**

We appreciate your attention and consideration to this important issue for the profession of Social Work in Puerto Rico. On this occasion, we hope for a positive response to enable Puerto Rico to add to the Latin American and Caribbean regional representation at the IASW.

Cordially,



Gloria Rivera Centeno

President

College of Social Work Professionals of Puerto Rico