

Secretary-General's Report to the IFSW General Meeting

To be presented on the 24th June 2016

One of the policies that we will be voting on in the next two days contains the following passage:

Worldwide the daily work of social workers involves: Strengthening solidarity between people, promoting people to caring for others, engaging people to respect the rights of others, strengthening solidarity within a family, a community and society (The Role of Social Workers in Social Protection Systems).

The internal work within IFSW, the work carried out between its members, and within the IFSW regions has, I believe, lived up to this description. IFSW acts as if it were itself a social worker, and it is this expressed action of solidarity that is steering us successfully forward. We are:

Attracting more country-level members, and many more individual members in the Friends programme.

Achieving enormous global expressions of unity and actions on World Social Work Day and in response to key political crises.

Creating a professional confidence that defines our roles as social workers and makes explicate the profession's significant and unique contributions to the whole of society.

I want to pause on each of these points for a moment. You may remember when we last met in 2014 we admitted 4 new countries into membership and a further two as new 'coordinating bodies'. Since then 5 new country members have joined and you voted for all of them by postal ballot.

These were:

The Social Work Association of Nepal

The Hellenic Association of Social Workers (Greece)

The Haitian Association of Social Workers

The Panama Association of Social Workers.

The India Network of Professional Social Work Associations (comprising 6 Associations of Social Work)

That is 9 new country-members and a further 8 associations entering into coordinating agreements to meet IFSW requirements. Now, we are poised to

accept a further two countries, Lebanon and Liberia and there are more developments in the pipeline as other national social work organisations move to meet our standards.

We therefore, in this two-year period, will have grown by 11 new country-level members and more are coming. Why such substantial growth we may ask? I want to talk about Nepal and India which provide us with some explanations. These examples also move us on the second point that I wanted to talk about: 'Achieving enormous global expressions of unity and action'.

The Social Work Association of Nepal (SWAN) is very young. Professional social work training is relatively new, only commencing in our generation, though now there are several schools of social work. SWAN applied for IFSW membership following our last world conference. They explained that as a newly formed association they wanted to be surrounded by more experienced social work organisations and be a part of this dynamic world movement. They also said that belonging to IFSW gave them more credibility in their home country.

Shortly after their successful membership application I visited them as I was in Dhaka, only one hours flight to Kathmandu. I reported in the [IFSW News](#) stories of their excellent social work contributions in promoting women's rights in rural districts and setting up services for children with disabilities and I also suggested they build links with their colleagues in Asia-Pacific region. They did, and then reached out again a year later when the Kathmandu Valley was devastated by an earthquake. Members of SWAN had heard the stories of social workers responding in Tsunamis, avalanches and storms that ripped communities to pieces, but responding to a major earthquake was a completely new challenge. They reached out to their IFSW colleagues saying: We are a new Association, please other members of IFSW can you give us advice on what we should do?

In this room, in this General Meeting, we have colleagues who can advise us on Social Work under dictatorships from Latin America. We have colleagues from Southern Europe who can advise us on maintaining and building social work systems when your country is in economic ruin. We have colleagues who can tell us best practice social work in extreme poverty from our African region (the list of practice skills is endless), but in this instance it was our colleagues in Asia-Pacific who know the best practice principles in recovering from natural disasters.

Asia-Pacific reinforced the message that social work is as vital to the rescue and recovery efforts, as engineering is to rebuilding the roads and houses. They advised SWAN members to place themselves in front of their government bodies and tell them that SWAN can provide community engagement services that enlist

the communities efforts in their own recovery. “Tell them”, said Asia-pacific, “that the Government and all the parties involved with the recovery process must do two things: One, design the reconstruction strategy with the people who have survived. For this to happen the survivors need to have an equal voice alongside the other agencies and be engaged / empowered in their own recovery. And secondly to use this disaster as an opportunity to built the capacity and rights of the lives of the community members who survived”.

SWAN acted on this advice and from the first days after the earthquake, they played an effective and vital role, ensuring a social work perspective in the recovery strategy. This was international social work solidarity in action. This is what we want IFSW to be doing. You can read more about SWAN their great contributions [here](#).

The other example that highlights the reason why new members are making the efforts to join is India. The India Network of Professional Social Work Associations (comprising 6 Associations of Social Work) was formed shortly after World Social Work Day last year when we saw on Facebook Indian Social Workers carrying the IFSW posters in street demonstrations and taking IFSW messages to their governing bodies and communities.

We wrote to them all saying that now was the time for all of the Indian associations to come together to strengthen the national identity of Indian social work and to bring their voice to the future developments of the profession. The Association in Bengaluru took on this task and for the first time in history united all the Indian Associations into a single body and forged ahead with a successful application for full membership.

I highlight this because it is another example of the impact of IFSW global unity. Our WSWD campaigns based on the messaging of the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development reach beyond our members. Indeed in 2013 our poster was spontaneously translated by members and social workers into 33 languages, in 2014 forty languages and in 2015 it was translated into 45 languages. The messages speak to social workers worldwide to such an extent that people react, overcoming obstacles and even political and geographical challenges because they want to be a part of what IFSW does and they want to contribute to IFSW’s developments.

There have been many other international IFSW coordinated campaigns in the last two years such as ‘Social Work for Peace and Self-determination’ when the profession globally applied social work principles in response to the Israeli Government’s Occupation of Palestine and the terror the unfolded in 2014. This campaigning included our members in in the effected region. Again I cannot stress enough that these powerful examples of social work applying its professional principles and acting upon them grows our profession, highlights its relevance to political bodies, governments and assists in shaping excellent social

work practice in every country. We have been able to demonstrate the link between macro and micro social work. We have not shied away from stating that social work is an 'applied political profession'.

As well as our actions, I believe we are also strengthening our policies bridging the micro and macro divides. We are shaping our policies to have relevance and provide guidance to practitioners wherever they work. The policy we will shortly be discussing 'The Role of Social Workers in Social Protection Systems provides a good example. Here we say:

From the perspective of social work, social protection systems and welfare states should be designed to promote the sustainability and wellbeing of the population as a whole. Rather than a strategy that provides relief for people who have been failed by their societies. In this sense the social work profession advocates that social protection systems are agencies for social transformation, which centre on building solidarity within communities and between communities, and promoting self-determination through encouraging democratic participation and strengthening voices in wider society.

Such statements clarify the purpose of the profession and provide support for practitioners in all settings. Our job now is to support social workers in achieving such statements in their job descriptions so that their unique and critically valuable contributions to society are recognised and they are enabled to carry out their tasks.

In the next hours we will also be discussing our constitutional review. In this work we are stating that IFSW is an organisation that acts in consistence with its principles. My priority as Secretary-General has been to restore that 'social justice' is central to all the work we do. You will have seen that the proposed new constitution commences with a new set of objectives:

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) is a global organization comprising national social work organizations worldwide . The mission of IFSW is to enhance and improve the quality of life of people by advocating for social justice, human rights and social development through plans, actions, programs and the promotion of best practice models in social work within a framework of international cooperation.

Our constitutional review is important, as it is necessary for the profession to be clear about its intentions and aims, as all our work flows from these statements. I hope that we find agreement on these statements and will bring the profession forward in meeting new global challenges. There is one aspect within the constitutional review however, where in my opinion, we are not meeting our professional principles as fully as we can. This has to do with the motion made at our last General Meeting in 2014 by our Palestinian Member, - on behalf of our members and social work organisations in Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Lebanon and Yemen - when they asked for the constitutional review process to consider the

establishment of a Middle Eastern Region that would have the same rights as Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean and North America.

The suggestion to create a sixth region was rejected by the representatives of the other regions in the Global Executive in their meeting in Geneva in 2015 and therefore needs to be referred back to this General Meeting for further direction.

As our membership grows in this area of the world and our existing regions are already stretched this is not an issue that will go away. Our success in building our global membership begs us to address this issue in the coming years. There is already an Arabic Federation of Social Workers that brings together our colleagues and now is the time to explore with them how we might best proceed and come back with proposals to our next General Meeting in Dublin in 2018. This needs wider discussion amongst all our members, not just in the Executive. Our principle of 'self-determination' is a key element in this discussion. Especially at a time when the Middle East region is widely misunderstood by much of the world. A region that suffers extreme prejudice, has wars inflicted upon it by superpowers that drive extreme responses. It is in my view that the social workers in this region need to be recognised and given voice that can assist all of us in playing our role to bringing social work perspectives and solutions to a part of the world that has been plagued by misunderstanding, conflict, war and occupation for too long.

I make these points for your consideration when coming to discuss the constitutional review. And I am confident that one-way or another IFSW will find a way to support the voices of our colleague who day-in and day-out face the most extraordinary complications as they work in building peace in very conflicted societies.

Another important proposal that you will consider in the next two days is to establish an IFSW Indigenous Committee. You will see that the aim of this is to build on our Policy on Indigenous People, which validated indigenous social work and confirmed that social workers should not assume that western/colonial ideals, or the norms of the dominant cultures, best serve the indigenous populations. Like recognising the importance of social work in the Middle East, providing space for the voice for indigenous social workers is not only constant with our values of inclusiveness, it in my opinion, will make both the Federation and profession stronger and more unified.

So while we have had many successes we have more work to do, which brings me to the next stages of IFSW's development. You will know that IFSW has had two developments with its publications. Ruth Stark has mentioned that we will shortly be adding a new section to our journal, International Social Work, called Voices From Practice. We envisage this will provide opportunities to highlight real world practice examples to inspire others and share our stories with others. We have also launched IFSW Books and this is your place to write and publish the examples from your countries. We hope that you take these opportunities and use them fully as there is so much to say about the application and benefit of social work in every land.

IFSW is made up of many points of view, we are a broad coalition but we all agree on 'social justice' and the utilisation of our professional principles to achieve social justice. Our next stages of development also include reviewing our Statement of Ethical Principles and I hope all of you will engage in this review to strengthen and build on the successes we have had with the current Statement.

We also need to continue to build on the expressed solidarity between our members. Some of our greatest moments in the past two years are when members came together to formulate a social work response to political crises, natural and human made catastrophes. Examples are the members in Asia-Pacific holding forums and training on the social work response to storms, tsunamis and earthquakes. In Athens, Greece, members from the countries forced into austerity worked together to build solidarity and jointly campaign for the wellbeing of citizens who have been abandoned by their governments; and in Vienna on World Social Work Day 26 country-member representatives came together to provide a social work response to the political crisis that forced people into refugee status and displacement. Other successful events at the United Nations in New York and Geneva provided more opportunities to highlight the importance of political action that is needed to promote the role of social work in helping people recover and rebuild their lives after asylum and displacement has been forced upon them.

These IFSW led examples build support for the workers at the frontline, they share idea of best practice and they set examples for politicians to follow. Our next Global Agenda theme relates to community and environmental sustainability. And again we will have many opportunities make a major impact on those who suffer the consequences of community and environmental instability. We have the opportunity for engagement and to set more examples for others to follow. We can demonstrate that social development; human rights and climate change go hand-in-hand. They are all necessary components in addressing in our mission for social justice.

I end my report by saying that we as a profession, as a Federation which represents social work practitioners across the world have made major advances in bridging the political macro with the work we do with individual, families and communities.

It has been an honour to have held office and acted as Secretary-General over this period and I would like to thank and acknowledge many people for their contributions to international social work. There are however a few key people that have worked exceptionally hard over the last two years and played significant roles in driving IFSW and social work forward.

President Ruth Stark for consistently putting the views of people who use social work services at the forefront of every decision and championing practitioners. Silvana Martínez, Mariko Kimura and Rose Henderson who have worked tirelessly in shaping their regions activities and supporting new member applications. David Jones for his work on the Global Agenda. Dunja Gharwal,

Alois Pölzl, Maira Moritz and the entire leadership of OBDS our Austrian member who hosted the symposium on Political Crisis that Forced People in to Refugee Status and Displacement and represent the Federation at the United Nations in Vienna. Our Greek member, The Hellenic Association of Social Workers who hosted the Symposium on Social Work and Austerity. Morel Cassie and Daniel Asiedu for taking driving forward the constitutional review. Nigel Hall for championing our human rights agenda. Klaus Kühne and the Swiss Representative team for building our presence at the United Nations in Geneva so that we are effective in engaging with and shaping UN policies. Michael Cronin, Robin Mama and all the representatives in New York who each year highlight the profession at the United Nations headquarters. Charles Mbugua who represents IFSW at United Nations in Nairobi. All of the IFSW Executive members who have represented their regions and contributed to all of the Federations successes. Sue Dvorak-Peck, IFSW's Ambassador who continues to mentors and guide many in the IFSW leadership; and last but definitely not least Pascal Rudlin our Administrator for his endless organisational dedication. It has been wonderful working with you all.

Thank you.

Rory Truell
IFSW Secretary-General