



**Child Sex Abuse Inquiry: Time 4 Action & Justice 14<sup>th</sup> January 2014, London**

**Message of Support**

At our General Meeting in Melbourne, Australia in July 2014 IFSW we approved guidance for social workers working with sexual abuse. Colleagues from throughout the world spoke to the issues they had encountered in Child Sex Abuse Inquiries. They talked of the lack of satisfaction experienced by people who had been abused, people who had been or had thought about whistleblowing and social workers who wanted to know more about how to prevent abuse.

IFSW seeks to support, from our knowledge and experience of child sexual abuse, any process that is working for just outcomes to such inquiries. The knowledge of what happened is already well evidenced, the examination of how the abusers were able to go on abusing over many years has not been as well investigated or understood. This lack of knowledge hinders the development of future protection of children and young people.

As social workers we do not have the same perspective as a survivor, but what we do have is knowledge about how systems work and we have an understanding of system abuse. We also have experience of what happens to whistleblowers and, as you know, we struggle at all levels to support people who are in this situation.

Social workers throughout the world will acknowledge that a person who has been abused will only share that information with someone they trust. The power of the abuser has already severely damaged that ability to trust. In a Court the lawyers and judges will hear about a very few instances in detail to get a conviction. In their lives they are not reliving many experiences over a lifetime - when some normal social interchange, a word, a gesture - triggers that trauma again.

From the experience of a social worker there are two main areas of concern. Do our current inspection systems pick up what goes on behind closed doors? Do they see the triggers?

The second is the journey from concern to court process. To be taken seriously we need evidence to satisfy the Court. The social worker has to rely most often on people who are being abused or have been abused telling them. Then agreement has to be reached to take that information further. This should include a commitment to support them when required through the processes that follow. Always there is the abuser emotionally overlooking that work, wanting to interfere. Are the resources there and are they visible? It could be argued that most survivors disproportionately find asylum in the mental health and criminal justice systems. This is not a good social justice solution.

Any involvement from IFSW is done from an international perspective, based on our members' knowledge and experience and is confined to the principles and values in our ethical statement. We campaign with others to free silenced voices, to make sure that every person is treated with the dignity and respect that is their right and we work with people to help them achieve their sense of social justice

Ruth Stark  
President IFSW

7<sup>th</sup> January 2015