

2014 IFSW Asia Pacific President's Report

The region has completed its project on building social work capacity to respond to disasters and to mitigate its cost to human lives and property. This was a funded project by IFSW. A report of the three training workshops will be available in Melbourne from the Japanese Coordinating Committee, which contributed leadership in the project. Going forward, it is hoped to continue on this project with the same chair towards producing training and case material for university social work teaching and field training. The regional members agree that it is important to equip social workers with better readiness skills and knowledge to play a more visible role in disaster mitigation, response and recovery in view of the increasing frequency of disasters happening in the region and believe that material generated from our ongoing work will have usefulness to other regions as well.

This brings me to my next point, which is to report on the decision to shift the emphasis in the regional conference towards more focused project-based workshops. It is envisaged that this will enable more social worker participation, generate a greater sharing of resources of a more practical nature, which addresses urgent issues in the region and facilitate more networking among social work practitioners across countries through joint action. It will also be less daunting for countries to consider playing host. We have had difficulty in recent years to encourage member countries to bid for an opportunity to host a regional conference. For example, there is to date no official indication of interest from any member country to host the 2015 regional conference. It is hoped that a smaller scale targeted workshop will be more manageable to host. However, with this emphasis, it has been decided that the regional IFSW and APASWE will no longer bind themselves to holding joint conferences. Instead it will adopt a more flexible approach in deciding on venue selection and conference dates while keeping open the possibility of joint hosting where there is alignment of interest and hosting possibilities.

The region is embarking on capability building of the regional organization to equip it for more effective collaborative work in the region as well as better membership service. Its work has hitherto been hampered by lack of funds and difficulty in contacting members, former members and prospective members. Elected members have no opportunities to meet other than at regional or world conferences. A regional secretariat would greatly facilitate the work of the region and this will be discussed and deliberated upon, with all the financial implications that this involves. An issue to be taken up in this project is to look into ways of making IFSW documents and training material more accessible to non-English speakers represented in the membership. This is a long-standing problem and has caused us to lose contact with important segments of our community.

In the past year, the region has encouraged and fostered sister organization memoranda of agreement between member countries to deepen contact between social workers at the ground level. Such bilateral agreements have been signed between countries such as Korea, Japan (Okinawa), Singapore and

Vietnam. Going forward, it is hoped that more such agreements will be signed between countries and across regions especially between countries with more resources and a longer history of social work and newer members needing support.

In this connection, we plan to embark on a scheme to open a register of colleagues with special expertise, interest and experience in international work so that we can tap on their expertise to support work in the region such as in organizing training workshops and providing consultation to governments in the region.

Effective marketing of social work services will also promote awareness of the potential of social work to contribute to national development. Awareness of this potential has to be promoted at the highest level not only in the country but regionally, including at the United Nations office in Bangkok. I am happy to report that social workers in more countries are celebrating international social work day and attracting national and international attention to what social workers do. For this reason, countries such as China and Vietnam have in recent years officially promoted social work as a profession and accelerated the training of social workers to meet needs in the country.

In the past year, the region has been able to provide support and encouragement to members in the Middle East, especially Yemen and Palestine (Bethlehem branch). It is exciting to learn of the vibrancy of social work in these member countries and to report on their activities in our regional newsletter and at the global level. Work has also been ongoing to encourage more countries to join (rejoin) IFSW. I have communication from India that colleagues there are making every effort to constitute a coordinating committee for IFSW membership application. Similar work has been ongoing to encourage a Nepal membership application.

Some member countries in the Middle East have started the process towards forming an Arab regional association. There is also some expression of interest to form an indigenous committee within IFSW towards better representation of the needs of indigenous peoples. I support the reasons behind the initiatives but any proposal, which is not provided for in the existing IFSW Constitution will require careful study at the global level.

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