



President's Report for the 2012 General Meeting

Gary Bailey

This report reflects of my work as President over the past 2 years and also identifies some of my thoughts and observations about the challenges and opportunities facing all of us at IFSW and as members of the global social work community.

IFSW, as I hope you can tell from the reports you have received, is truly an organization that has been very active since we last met together in Hong Kong. Through our work at the regional and national and global levels I believe that we are having and making a significant impact yet there is so much that confronts all of us on a daily basis that reminds us all of how much more we can and need to do! I believe that the presentations here in Stockholm 2012 will show us some of the best of what we are doing, and the impact that we as social work practitioners can and are having around the world! I hope that despite all of your busy schedules while here that we will find the time to talk with colleagues, share ideas, "best practices" and even at times agree to disagree, but with respect and civility!

I have divided the past two years into the "P-RT" and "A-RT" years. The acronyms stand for pre- Rory Truell and after- Rory Truell. I said in one of my first communications after Rory's selection as our new Secretary General that:

"We are indeed delighted that he has joined IFSW and as I have said in other venues he is an individual who has an equally strong vision for the future and who will also build upon IFSW's past successes." Those sentiments are truer today than they were a little over a year ago. Rory has made such an important contribution to IFSW in such a short period of time and to our direction as an organization on so many important levels, from our newly developed website to the Global Agenda.

Prior to Rory's arrival I was ably supported by our Steering Committee which is comprised of Charles Mbugua and Fiona Robertson(more about them both later), and along with René Schegg our Policy and Communications Officer whom I know worked and continues to work many more hours for IFSW than many of us are truly aware of. His work on the website, managing the never ending number of emails, designing the visuals World Social Work Day(s) as well as his considerable linguistic talents and communication skills really have helped to make such a difference; and he is also an all around nice guy – who sees the best in all situations and tries his upmost to accommodate most if not all that is asked of him! Thank you René!

A number of individuals have provided IFSW with a commitment and have ensured that as an organization we are both influential and credible. My appreciation to our UN representatives especially for the ways in which they have increased our visibility and capacity especially as it relates to the Global Agenda: our Geneva team led by Ellen Mourvaieff-Apostol and now joined by Klaus Kühne , our team in New York City led Michael Cronin and Robin Mama , our team in Nairobi led by Charles Mbugua , our

team in Vienna led by Georg Dimitz and now also our team in Santiago Chile led by Omar Cruz. These individuals have worked tirelessly to ensure that that we are seated at the tables where decisions are being made and more importantly where questions are and should be asked!

Our Regional Presidents have been active and have worked to identify new member organizations who wish to become a part of IFSW some of whom will be put before the meeting here in Stockholm. There is a wide variety amongst our members, some are quite strong and active, but others lack the basic resources. Newer members value IFSW's support and look to us to help them build their capacity and we have seen some of our member association's step up to support the fees and offer other supports to smaller and developing members. Thank you!

The effective and efficient use of IFSW regional funding in Latin America/Caribbean and Africa has led to successful meetings and conferences that will only serve to enhance the work of IFSW. I have had the opportunity both here at home and away to meet our members and to see the work that is occurring in some of our other regions. I was pleased to be able with René to have been invited to attend and participate in the European Delegates meeting held in Brussels in 2011 and to be able along with the rest of the IFSW Executive while we were meeting in Dublin Ireland in 2012 to be asked to take part in the 40th anniversary celebration of the Irish Association of Social Workers and to meet Ireland's former President Mary MacAleese as well as former IFSW President Augusta MacCabe and to reconnect with former Executive member Monica Egan.

I have attended tripartite meetings in London, and Alexandria, Virginia and have had the opportunity to meet with numbers of delegations from around the world while they were in the United States when their work or travels brought them to Boston. I am deeply appreciative of the kindnesses which have been extended towards me and for the opportunity to meet such dedicated social workers and individuals.

In my written communications I made it a priority to promote both the Global Agenda as well as showcase IFSW policies with a particular focus in the areas of women, HIV/AIDS, environmental sustainability, health / mental health, human rights, indigenous people and the global occupy movements. Working with our technology department at Simmons College (my special thanks go to Ms. Jamie Traynor who helped me in this effort in her off time) I attempted to develop a more professional looking and visually appealing WSWD videos that could be used on YouTube and in other arenas going forward.

I have continued over the course of my first two years to build upon the legacy of those who have gone before me and to move forward the work of the Global Agenda process. My thanks go to former IFSW President David Jones for his willingness to continue to support this work and to help us move from ideas to action

I continue to be reminded of 5 overarching themes that I have continually come back to over the course of the last 2 years and they are:

The social work profession is necessary for creating and maintaining healthy families and communities.

Globally, social workers are trained professionals with unique education and experience.

Social workers provide a wide range of services across the human life span and in a wide variety of settings.

The social work profession is facing serious threats, which affect its ability to fulfil its societal purpose;

And finally, Governments have a responsibility to support the social work profession.

It is my firm belief that the more we link to our own policies that it can only help to promote and strengthen IFSW as well as the global social work profession.

Since his arrival a year ago Secretary General Rory Truell and I have begun an organizational change process that has required that we (IFSW) look simultaneously inward and outward and identify what it is that makes IFSW unique and even more important what makes us necessary and increases our vitality and influence. Rory and I have had a number of face to face meetings, and countless phone and email conversations where we have discussed how IFSW moves forward and we both look forward to hearing your thoughts and ideas. Change as a concept is one thing but putting change into action is quite another; but change is an important and necessary undertaking. The process of self-reflection often identifies where one is not and where one wants to be, but it can also allow for a period of reflection that also allows one to see how far you have come from where you started. Have we made progress; the answer is a resounding yes, but there is still a great deal more for us to do. To that end my priorities include:

- Exploring & increasing new revenue streams
- Identifying the structural obstacles to effective collaborations and partnerships
- Developing new and strategic partnerships
- Encouraging and accelerating innovation
- Capitalizing on our enhanced Information Technology and web infrastructure to contribute to our growth
- Creating strategies to respond to changing global demographics
- IFSW becoming a recognized expert

We are living in period of great complexity. These are times when great investments are being made in banks and not in people and yet there seems to be surprise when those who have been at the bottom and existing on the fringes of the world societies say enough, rise up and begin to fight back. From Tahrir Square to Wall Street we need to make sure that we as social workers are viewed as those who are indeed 'making a world of difference', to borrow a quote from our 50th anniversary slogan.

A few years ago I had the honor of attending a meeting at the United Nations in New York City hosted by then Secretary General Kofi Annan. During our meeting he said that the world was confronted by "issues without passports". When my turn came to speak I asked what he saw as the role for global social work in addressing these issues. He replied that we needed to speak with a passionate voice and to join with the UN as they attempted to address the disparities which confront so many of our fellow human beings. We have an obligation to speak forcefully on the issues of the day and to confront the status quo and challenge the concept of "business as usual" sharing with the world our own perceptions and the experiences of those whom we know are often marginalized and forgotten! The threats to social programs are increasingly real and poverty and unemployment and generational tensions abound.

Much of society believes they only encounter a social worker when dealing with a problem, such as moving a family member from a hospital to a nursing home, and because of that, there is limited public understanding of the role of the social worker. However we work to empower individuals, families, and communities and the need for social work services will only grow with time. During the course of my career I have met numbers of people who have a universal awareness of social work, yet lack an accurate knowledge related to the education and credentials needed to be a professional social worker; they did not appreciate the diversity of the work It is only when situations occur as they recently have in my own family where a tragedy or impending tragedy has occurred that relatives have said – after being assisted by a social worker that someone will say "oh- now I understand what it is that you do !

Social work as a profession is often not understood by those who are not a part of what we do. Our services are often confused with charity and often are at the bottom of politicians' or governments priorities. Our work is perceived by some as threatening, or as an attempt to ensure that those who are most often forgotten, the clients/service users' voices find their way into the process and we are seen as a threat to the way things have always operated!

For many the global financial crisis of 2008 is still a major crisis and poverty rates around the world are increasing. Austerity efforts and conservative ideology say "let the free market do what it does best" and there is less and less discussion of a social safety net for many of the world's people. Given this reality the cuts and reductions in social spending becomes even more alarming. It is not surprising that the actions by governments and oligarchs create massive injustices which can and have erupted into protest and civil unrest. I do not believe that any amount of social work intervention should take away an individual's right to protest against injustice and unfairness and that is why IFSW supported the Global Occupy movement and I was involved here in Boston and in talking to news agencies such as the BBC about what was occurring !

The profession of social work plays such an important role in all of our societies. We all know that globally nations are facing many complex and converging challenges: catastrophic natural disasters, increased food costs or a lack of food entirely, a lack of clean water, forced migration and the hatred and resentment of immigrants, a lack health care and access to needed medication and a decrease in public spending and unwillingness of many to spend more to provide for the less fortunate. We must remember that we as social workers globally, provide critical services in rural, urban and suburban settings and have long been society's safety net for a broad range of issues including child welfare, mental and behavioral health, aging, corrections, and healthcare. While each of these challenges individually demands the comprehensive engagement of a nation's social workers, these trends – taken together – suggest a significantly increased need for professional social work services within vulnerable communities. While it is clear that the social work community will be strained to meet this increased demand, a broader assessment of the true scope of these demands, along with a comprehensive plan to provide for adequate service to all in need is of vital importance.

The profession of social work and social workers improve and enrich the lives of individuals and families and help build strong and vital communities- and we have to believe in ourselves and in our profession especially during these tumultuous times. We understood in Hong Kong in 2010 that we needed to develop a more enhanced promotion of our profession and that the Global Agenda could served as a centering theme our work with governments, UN agencies and other partners .This year saw a Week of Action between WSWD 2012 and SW Day at the UN, and also saw the utilization of social media such as Face book ,Twitter and YouTube to mobilize our members and to get our message out beyond our own constituents and we will continue to have the implementation and realization of the Global agenda and its commitments as a top priority.

Finally, this General Meeting is a time that allows us to also acknowledge and celebrate some VERY dedicated leaders, some of whom are unable to be here with us.

Anthea Agius will be stepping down from her role after this meeting as the Member at Large for Europe. She has made a significant contribution to IFSW Europe, Social Work in Malta and on the global Executive and we completely support her decision to put her family and other personal circumstances first, and know that Anthea will continue to be an active supporter of IFSW and of the social work profession and I am convinced that when her circumstances change, she will return and play a significant role within IFSW .

Nicolai Paulson ,Vice President for Europe after six years as Regional President, and before that 3 years as a member of the European Executive Committee ,chair for the Permanent Committee on EU Issues, has decided understandably not to stand for reelection and that it is time for him to devote more time to his family and other pursuits. Nicolai led at my request the successful search process that brought us our Secretary General-Dr. Rory Truell and has also represented IFSW in our work with IASSW on the discussions in relation to the Definition of Social Work. He along with Veronica Marsman of Canada also led our strategy process and he has been an indispensable member of the IFSW Executive.

Ivanete Salete Boschetti, Member -at- Large for Latin America/Caribbean has been a trusted and highly respected member of the Executive and someone whom I have always known that I could turn to for support and advice. She has represented her region well and we will miss having her with us both for her skills and commitment to IFSW/FITS but also for the warmth of her character. Obrigado Iva

Isabelle Bohrer, Executive Director, Avenir Social who left to pursue other career opportunities provided visionary and committed leadership and support as well as a home for IFSW during stress filled times!

Dr. Elizabeth “Betsy” Clark, after 11 years as the Executive Director of NASW-USA has announced that she will be stepping down once a replacement is hired. Betsy has worked tirelessly to reengage NASW-USA in the international arena and in IFSW and for that we are deeply grateful. She has been a good friend and supporter of IFSW and our work and was an active participant on the committee on Fees.

Eugenia Moreno, who retired as the Executive Director of the Canadian Association of Social Workers (CASW) and for many years served as the IFSW Elections Officer retired since our last meeting and we wish her well. It was at a meeting with Eugenia in the CASW offices in Ottawa that I was first introduced to IFSW in my then new role as Vice President, North America region.

Darlene MacDonald, who was the President of CASW and Vice President for North America was unable to remain in her role both with CASW and IFSW due to a wonderfully exciting promotion at her work but which required that she step down from both roles. I know they are both thinking of us and we send them our sincerest thanks and best wishes for the future.

Charles Mbugua, President for Africa and IF 1st vice President under both David Jones and my tenure has been a steady and stalwart force who has in a very thoughtful yet unassuming way increased IFSW’s visibility in Africa and I hope will continue to provide the stewardship that is so necessary for the region to continue to grow and to thrive.

Ellen Mouravieff-Apostol, the recipient of this year’s Andrew Mouravieff-Apostol Medal has during her tenure given to IFSW an enormous amount of work and has helped to make many of these General Meetings a success. Above and beyond all that she has done for IFSW through her work in Geneva, I have so appreciated her continued willingness to act as a tireless translator for our Latin American colleagues which helped to ensure that they were able to participate as fuller participants, for this and for so much more, merely saying thank you seems just so insufficient!

Last but not least, is the enormous debt of thanks and gratitude owed to **Fiona Robertson** who has served as IFSW Treasurer and IFSW all around go to person. As a member of the Executive and of the Steering Committee Fiona deep understands and appreciation of the history and intricacies of IFSW never cease to amaze me. No matter what I as president have asked of her she has always said yes and agreed to help - as evidenced by the outstanding report she provided to our members on IFSW records

which we discussed in Dublin; and she has done in a timely and most efficient manner – even lately as the earth under her feet in Christchurch seems to not cease moving about. Fiona is one of those individuals who sees something that needs doing and rather than saying can someone else do it – rolls up her sleeves and gets to work – often without others knowing or acknowledgement! She is a true team player and someone whom I have come to depend upon and respect greatly! And personally she has helped me to better understand the true meaning of Kiwi!

To all of these individuals, as an organization we owe a great deal of thanks and to those others who will remain with us and who will help people lead our Federation, thank you for your willingness to serve and to be of service !.

Thirty years ago, I made a decision to become a professional social worker. I was introduced to the field of social work by a woman who was teaching a winter intercession course at my alma mater of Tufts University. Until that time I was preparing to pursue a career in medicine. In her class I was introduced to a field that resonated with my desire to be a catalyst in people's lives for change; and to create opportunities where previously there had been none. I have never regretted that decision. As president of the International Federation of Social Workers and as a proud professional social worker it is my strong professional opinion that the demand for social work is increasing at a rate much faster than the current social work community can meet alone and we are indeed lucky to have all of you as partners and together we will continue to make our profession that much stronger!

Gary Bailey
IFSW President