



PROPOSALS FOR THE PROFESSION OF SOCIAL WORK

By Dr Silvana Martínez,

Nominee for the 2018 – 2022 President of The International Federation of Social Work

BASIS

The IFSW has grown rapidly in recent times. Presently it has 128 country-level member organisations among the five regions that comprise the Federation. These organisations represent more than 3 million social workers. With this growth, IFSW and the social work profession has excellent potential in advancing significant changes in every region and globally. We, the profession are in a privileged position of working within every community, and we have the skills and networks to influence change for more just societies, the realisation of everyone's rights and a sustainable world where love and social connection are at its core.

In standing for the position of IFSW President I have the support of more than 90 years of social work from across the Latin American region and many social workers worldwide. I bring their voice and wishes to the upcoming election. Voices that say strengthen our capacity, sharpen our political strategy, and bring the wisdom of social work out into the open. However, the realisation of this potential implies not only growth but also professional and institutional development. To consolidate our work and the goals it is necessary to look at the quality of the processes and not just at the number of members.

This requires concrete actions that will strengthen the internal cohesion between members, increase the global visibility of social work as a profession and show the advantages and power of collective work. Our task is to consolidate external ties with other organisations, influence professional education as well as generating actions that will improve the working conditions and professional practices of social workers so that they can trigger social work's transformative power into reality.

PROPOSALS

1. INSTITUTIONAL ASPECT

I am a firm believer in the power of people working together to build their lives for the better. As a result of the significant growth in IFSW we must now involve all the new voices and perspectives to further strengthen the profession and coming direction of IFSW. In this aspect, the objective of this proposals is to promote the empowerment and development of the IFSW as an organisation.

1.1 Democratization

We have an urgent need to ensure that information is shared and socialised, that the mechanisms that guarantee participation in the decision-making process are in place, that there is legitimate representation, that all voices are heard, and that everyone enjoys effective equality as a member under democratic principles. The more perspectives, the more inclusion, the stronger we will be in realising our aspirations.

1.2 Respect the diversity and the plurality

In social work, we all know that we are all different, and differences are important because they enrich and compliment us. Differences don't have to be an obstacle for institutional development; on the contrary, they lead to understanding and action. This will be achieved through medium and long-term strategic objectives, with collective projects that balance individual, group and broader interests. In this sense, it is necessary to empower those differences by building a shared vision of the present and the future.

1.3 Promote the incorporation of new members

Of the many challenges and opportunities, we face, one priority is to quickly bring new members into the centre of discussions and global reflections. New members are requesting this so they can learn from older members. More established members are asking for the views of newer members so they can learn how social work has assisted people in different contexts. To achieve this outcome, we need stronger facilitation and care in bringing social work representatives and practitioners together. To absorb the best of what all have to offer we need to be open, to take risks in learning and listening and to be a model for the rest of the world in ensuring that all are included and their experience valued.

1.4 Strengthen the regions

So far I have talked about the voices and perspectives within countries and bring these into the global domain, yet we also know that the regions are the foundation of IFSW. In this sense, it is necessary to take further steps in supporting the work and the activities that each region carries out and strengthen the capacity of the regions in building their own networks and work programmes that interconnect globally. This needs to include supporting the existing leadership and promoting new leadership.

2.POLITICAL ASPECT

Social work is a political activity. We all share a belief in social justice and equality - this is a requirement to be called a social worker. In this aspect, the objective of the proposals is to promote the building of a global political project for IFSW that establishes a vision and charts a clear path for all its members.

2.1 Building the IFSW as a Relevant Political Actor at a global level

2.1.1 Our goal should be to maximize the exposure of all IFSW's declarations, pronouncements, documents, and studies. All people in the world should know that social workers have significant skills, experience, knowledge and also a political stance regarding

human rights violations, armed conflicts, force migrations, relevant social and economic issues, threats or damages to civil liberties and the democratic way of life, among other things, is clearly stated.

2.1.2 To achieve the above we need a greater presence in the media. The media is a fundamental instrument in turning the IFSW into a political actor at the country, regional and global levels.

2.2 New Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development

There is also a need to build a new Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development for the 2020-2030 period. The new Global Agenda needs to encompass professional interests on one hand and the most relevant global social problems on the other. The new Global Agenda must be both strong in lasting messages and flexible to take account of the daily issues that social works face. It must also fit with other global development agendas but with the clear focus of the social work contributions.

2.3 Greater presence and influence in international organizations

The participation of the IFSW's representatives in international organisations is fundamental not only for institutional visibility, but it is also fundamental to carry out more concrete and practical contributions, and influence the outcomes that other organisations have on their agendas. Furthermore, this participation is essential in order to obtain information about financing programs and lines of credit to fund projects that could be implemented in different countries and regions.

2.4 Influence national governmental policies

2.4.1. As a global federation, we need to support our members in their role as advocates in their national parliaments. The issues that they bring forward on social development, gender, human rights, labour rights, infancy, childhood, adolescence, disability, the elderly, indigenous peoples, ethnic groups, migrations, and refugees, are essential to all members despite differences in context. A victory in one country increases opportunities in all other countries; therefore, IFSW needs to support developments and help disseminate their successes.

2.4.2. We further need to make recommendations to national governments alongside our members regarding the effective observance of human rights, the construction of a socially just economy, environmental sustainability and the solidification of social relationships.

3. PROFESSIONAL ASPECT

In this aspect, I propose that our objective is to promote the strengthening of the visibility of social work as a profession.

3.1 Promote professional organization of social workers

IFSW needs to act as an advisor in the creation of legislation that puts in place regulations and controls that advance the professional practice of social workers. We need to support and defend the labour rights of social workers, as well as encourage cohesion and unity among professionals and the building of collective research and projects.

3.3. Bring the IFSW closer to social workers

IFSW can also become more relevant by building closer and more relevant relationships directly with practitioners. We want social workers to feel a part of this worldwide organization because it represents their interests, it knows their needs and supports their struggles.

3.4 Bring the IFSW closer to communities and citizens

IFSW has the capacity to build popular power by supporting and having an effective presence in communities. This can be achieved by promoting mass-organisation, supporting social movements, participating in collective events and encouraging leadership in communities that support social relationships, and civic responsibility.

3.5 Greater participation in general assemblies and world conferences

Increasing the number of social worker practitioner's participation in general assemblies and world conferences needs further consideration. These environments are spaces for training, professional updates and the collective construction of the profession.

3.6 Professional education of social workers

Consolidating the work that the IFSW Education Commission is also a priority as there is a need to establish the minimum quality educational standards at a global level.

3.7 Relationships with other social work organisations

Also important is the strengthening of institutional ties with the International Association of Schools of Social Work, the International Council on Social Welfare and other like-minded institutions.

These proposals and reflections have been generated by IFSW members from throughout the world. It has been my privilege to be a part of these discussions, and now my honour to bring these points to the election campaign for IFSW President and as a platform for change.