



IFSW Human Rights Commission Report for General Meeting July 2012 - July 2014

Introduction

This has been a busy two years for the Commission. This report will therefore highlight the issues that we have been working with, the detail you will find in papers published on the IFSW website

Traditionally the work of the commission has been to campaign when our colleagues have their human rights violated - but in recent years we have also worked on wider issues that members have brought to us about lack of recognition of rights, campaigns to have human rights and social justice on the agenda of policy developments that affect the people with whom we work and to suggest improvements to systems to enhance people's rights. We have also taken the lead through our training manuals and website to highlight human rights and social justice as core to social work.

Individual Cases

The individual cases that we have been able to respond to include workers in Hungary, Northern Cyprus, DCR, Azerbaijan and Bahrain. We have had some other situations that cause us deep concern but we have to be very careful that we do not make matters worse by publicity that places vulnerable people in a more risky situation.

International Policy developments

International Surrogacy

At the General Meeting in Brazil in 2008 the meeting passed a resolution in respect of international trade in reproductive medical interventions. This work has now progressed to consideration about whether an international Hague Convention should be developed around international surrogacy. A meeting of government officials, consulate representatives, lawyers, people involved in surrogacy arrangements and researchers was held in January this year and we have been asked through IFSW to raise awareness of this ongoing work and to clarify what is understood by 'international surrogacy'. In its most narrow form practitioners have stressed the biological connections to the parents. In other places it is viewed as the purchasing of babies. There is no agreed definition of what is being considered appropriate to include in any possible international convention.

Allied to and covering some of the same issues for children and adults is the issue of

Birth Registration

In Hong Kong in 2010 we had a special seminar on birth registration, recognising the thousands of people who do not have a birth registration or identity card. In December 2013 we submitted a report to the UN who are reviewing their work in promotion of birth registration. We suggested that this may now be a time for a complete re-think about people register their identity in this digital age. The full report is on the website.

Campaign for Real Rights

In Stockholm in 2012 the ethical and human rights commission started discussions about the relationship between the two commissions. In 2013 the European Executive raised the issue

about how few countries had actually signed the protocol that would signal a move from tokenistic acceptance of human rights to the reality of governance and civil society.

One of the issues that is beginning to be explored from the global perspective is the relevance of the manner in which the current Universal Declaration of Human Rights is universally meaningful. This was raised at the UN in New York on Social Work Day at the UN 2013 and has also emerged in research done by Richard Hugman, convenor of the Ethical Committee

Death Penalty

There will be a proposal at Melbourne following the report submitted with the Ethical Commission to the UN in relation to the continued use of the death penalty. The report is on the website.

In this report we have not only highlighted concerns about the continued use of the practice of legally taking life by some states parties but the increased in the number of countries considering legislating to extend the death penalty for LGBT people. Dr Gary Bailey has done much in his Presidency to explain and campaign about the unacceptability of these legislative and policy developments.

Organ Harvesting

Not only has the issue of people's right to life been at the heart of the Commission's work in the past two years but the exploitation of people and their body parts. This trade between those in absolute poverty and those who feel they have the right to purchase unfairly a part of another person's body requires social workers across the world to campaign to stop this trade. In rich countries we must counsel people not to take this route to exploit others for their own health and we must support our colleagues who might find themselves advocating for the victims in situations where organised criminals are powerful and want to be in control.

The Rights of Women and Children

The kidnapping of girls in Nigeria took the media spotlight to the issue of the rights of women and children in society. We must however also try to take that spotlight to positive interventions by social workers that strengthen the position of people in society. On the website there is a report from a project in Tanzania that shows what can be done in civil society and this we will be able to take to the UN as an example of social workers contribution to human rights.

Sexual Abuse Guidelines

The Commission contributed to the development of the Guidelines which are now out for consultation following the Resolution at the last General Meeting.

UN Representation

The IFSW has a number of people representing us at all the major UN Centres. This is covered in other reports – but it is important that we make the links internally in IFSW so that our work makes the maximum impact in helping to develop policies that at this level impact on our members at the frontline and with the people with whom we work. This work has to make a reality of the prominent word on our website – CONNECT!

There is much we have done but even more to do – together we can make a difference!

Ruth Stark IFSW Human Rights Commission

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