

Report of IFSW Representative to Amnesty International 2012

IFSW is proud to be associated with Amnesty international. Over the 30 years AI has broadened its campaigning on human rights beyond civil and political rights to include economic and social rights. Its current campaigns fit well with the Global Agenda. The organisation itself shows how small beginnings can translate into a global movement if it taps into deeply felt human aspirations.

The last eighteen months has seen determined efforts and sustained protests against the denial of basic rights in North Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia. However these protests and citizen action have not been matched by effective international action where the inherent weaknesses of the UN Security Council have been exposed. As Amnesty's Secretary General said " the language of human rights is adopted when it serves political and corporate agendas, and shelved when it is inconvenient or stands in the way of profit."

While we are meeting in Stockholm the UN Conference on the Arms Trade treaty is meeting in New York. AI is supporting such a treaty as without the Security Council is weakened by the self-interest of the veto held by the permanent members of the council who include the world's largest arms suppliers exporting 70% of the world's arms.

The financial crisis which has affected the world in the past four years threatens the social contract between government and governed. The banks which generated the crisis through profligate lending in pursuit of profit have often been bailed out as 'too big to fail'. Yet the price of the crisis is being met by austerity measures imposed on the poorest and most vulnerable as the fragile safety net of the state is dismantled. And the slowdown in global growth even in rapidly growing countries like China and India will bear heavily on the most marginalised in society.

So what can be done to address the continuing injustices in the world and the accumulating evidence of a widening gap between the rich and poor – not just between rich and poor countries but between rich and poor within countries?

Amnesty calls for a system based on the rule of law which restrains the powerful and protects the powerless, which adheres to international standards of due process, fair trials and the independence of the judiciary, and which creates an environment which encourages the growth of civil society and full participation in political life.

Its Annual Report maps how far there is to go before that vision is achieved. Restrictions on free speech exist in at least 91 countries and examples of people being tortured or ill-treated were noted in 101 countries. On the positive side there was continuing progress towards abolition of the death penalty, the erosion of impunity for past abuses in the Americas, and the arrest and trial of leaders in the former Yugoslavia for war crimes.

The direct relationship between IFSW and Amnesty was originally about individual social workers in detention. It is now increasingly about the alignment of the agendas of the two bodies.

