

International Social Work

<http://isw.sagepub.com>

NEWS AND VIEWS ... from IFSW

Nigel Hall

International Social Work 2009; 52; 848

DOI: 10.1177/0020872809348550

The online version of this article can be found at:

<http://isw.sagepub.com>

Published by:



<http://www.sagepublications.com>

On behalf of:



International Association of Schools of Social Work

ICSW

International Council of Social Welfare



International Federation of Social Workers

Additional services and information for *International Social Work* can be found at:

Email Alerts: <http://isw.sagepub.com/cgi/alerts>

Subscriptions: <http://isw.sagepub.com/subscriptions>

Reprints: <http://www.sagepub.com/journalsReprints.nav>

Permissions: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav>

Citations <http://isw.sagepub.com/cgi/content/refs/52/6/848>

NEWS AND VIEWS ... from IFSW

The three global social work and social welfare organizations (IFSW, IASSW and ICSW) are building up to the 2010 social work conference in Hong Kong. The conference will not only set the new social agenda for the next decade, but also see decisions made on key global documents. IFSW has established working committees to develop its policy and focus more clearly on the tasks to be developed. This *News and Views* focuses on the processes underpinning three key areas for review in Hong Kong: the ongoing review of ethical principles; the review of the definition of social work; and the revision of the Human Rights Manual, all being undertaken jointly with IASSW.

Review of ethical principles

Ethics is fundamental to social work and ethical issues are high on the IFSW agenda, as well as on the agenda of its member organizations. The first international code of ethics was adopted by IFSW in 1976, supplemented in 1986 by a declaration of ethical principles and merged in 1994 into one basic ethical document *Ethics of Social Work – Principles and Standards*. This led in 2004 to an agreed joint document with IASSW: *Ethics in Social Work: Statement of Principles*. As with the other policies developed by IFSW, this was never seen as a final and complete document, but one in the process of constant revision. As part of this revision, two members of the IFSW Ethics Committee (Richard Hugman – the Chair – and Sarah Banks) met in Durham, UK, in June 2009 with Lena Dominelli from IASSW to explore proposed changes to the joint statement of ethical principles. Taking into account comments from members of the IFSW Ethics Committee, from IASSW members and consultations held at several global and regional conferences, some changes are being proposed and circulated for comment. As always, the statement must be acceptable in all countries; consequently it cannot be too specific. The working group suggests that the statement must be constructed in the same spirit as, and drawing on similar concepts to, the UN conventions on human rights, where the

concept of 'human rights' takes on a special international 'manifesto' sense. A revised statement will be distributed for formal consultation over the coming months and presented at the Hong Kong Conference in June 2010.

Review of the definition of social work

The global definition of social work sets out the parameters of the profession and helps identify the roles and functions that social workers play in society. The first definition, which emphasized the role of the profession in social change, was agreed in Brighton, UK, in 1982. This served the profession for many years, but as social work developed in new directions and spread over the world, it was felt there was a need to broaden and deepen the definition. Between 1996 and 1999, a joint task force with IASSW was set up to draft a modern and up-to-date definition that would have global relevance, led by Isadora Hare. Representatives from each of the five regions of the world and specialist resource persons crafted the current definition, which was accepted at the Montreal General Meeting in 2000 and agreed with IASSW in 2001. This definition emphasizes principles of social justice and empowerment, and widens the scope of the profession to embrace work at a variety of levels from individual to global, where '*social work in its various forms addresses the multiple, complex transactions between people and their environments*' (IFSW, 2009). However all-embracing this current definition is, there is still felt to be a need to focus once again on the meaning of social work and gear the definition to current global challenges. Work on this is continuing with Nicolai Paulson, IFSW Europe President, leading an international team including IASSW partners to consider possible changes to recommend to the 2010 Conference.

Revision of the Human Rights Manual

IFSW has always considered that human rights awareness is fundamental to social work. Over the years IFSW has both promoted and developed policy and practice that supports and extends the profession's commitment to its human rights heritage. This has meant supporting individual social workers, who are members of its various associations and who have run into trouble with oppressive regimes for advancing human rights causes. IFSW has a joint policy on human rights, agreed with IASSW in 1996, and has set up a Human Rights Commission with a network of regional contact persons to help in this work. In 1999, following a joint drafting initiative with IASSW colleagues, and the

Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), IFSW produced a Human Rights Manual which reproduced key international protocols and conventions and provided some context and practical examples of the kind of activities that social workers undertake in advancing human rights. IFSW has also published a Manual on Social Work and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

As part of IFSW's jubilee celebrations, key human rights messages were produced, underlining IFSW's commitment to human rights, dignity and social justice. These emphasized that social workers should respect people's right to make their own choices and decisions; empower them in all aspects of their lives; and identify and develop strengths of individuals, groups and communities (IFSW, 2006). The IFSW committee concerned with the revision of the Manual and the IFSW Human Rights Commission now wants to ensure that these do not remain words, but link directly with the practice realities faced by social workers around the world. IFSW and IASSW are working together to develop an up-to-date edition of the Human Rights Manual, with the intention of launching a web-based version of the Manual in 2010.

Hong Kong agenda building process

The deliberations of the various IFSW committees are also part of the preparation of the agenda for the next decade, as these topics address key policies of IFSW and will provide direction for the discussion of the future of social work and social development. In preparation for the 2010 Joint World Conference in Hong Kong, IFSW is inviting social workers worldwide to join the democratic process in building the agenda for social work and social development for the next decade by discussing the following three themes: social work and poverty eradication; social work and ageing; and social work's relation to service users. This will be advertised and promoted on the IFSW website at www.ifsw.org in due course. IASSW and ICSW will also be producing discussion papers, in order to encourage debate and to enable colleagues to prepare for Hong Kong 2010.

These three IFSW agenda papers are transferring the more theoretical approaches of the work on the Human Rights Manual, ethical principles and definition of social work into practice realities. The discussion on poverty eradication is part of the human rights discussion; the paper on ageing and the relation of social work with service users are strongly linked with ethical issues. As social work is also a practical academic discipline, the democratic process of building the agenda is expecting to anchor its principles for the next decade in the daily work of social

workers to promote social development worldwide, supporting the attainment of the UN Millennium Development Goals. As such, it has implications for the definition of social work. This is a new approach to preparation for a World Social Work Conference, quite different from previous conferences. It aims to promote participation of all of IFSW's professional social work membership. The motivation to make the agenda reality should demonstrate more commitment to its identified goals as it will have been defined by social workers from all parts of the world. It should be a powerful restatement of the objectives of social work, the moral grounding of the profession and the priorities for action. We hope you will take part in the consultations and participate in the discussions in Hong Kong.

Nigel Hall

IFSW Publications/Editor

Acknowledgments

Sarah Banks, IFSW Ethical Commission

René Schegg, IFSW Policy and Communications Officer

David N Jones, IFSW President

References

IFSW (2006) *50 Years of International Social Work. The International Federation of Social Workers celebrates its Golden Jubilee!* Berne, Switzerland: IFSW.

IFSW (2009) *Definition of Social Work*. Available at: <http://www.ifsw.org/definition> (accessed 1 August 2009).