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Social Work and the United Nations

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Summary

The practice of social work has a long established tradition of internationalism. Where in this increasingly global world, in which we live, stands the profession of social work? Just as advocacy and lobbying for change at local and national levels are part of the role of all social workers, it is the responsibility of social workers operating within the international arena to identify regional and global aspects of social need and injustice. The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) has been granted consultative status by the United Nations (UN) ECOSOC and by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This chapter will define social advocacy within the organizational framework of the UN system. Examples from New York, Geneva and Nairobi will illustrate these efforts on current issues at the UN and the impact on social workers worldwide.



UN historical background

The United Nations, from its inception, has served as the primary international arena for governments to come together, discuss common concerns, and make decisions on collective actions to take in response. As the Second World War was drawing to a close, the United Nations came into being with the signing of its charter in San Francisco in 1945. At that time 51 nations belonged to the organization. Over the years the membership has grown to more than three times that number, with 191 member states in 2006.

Nearly every government in the world is now a UN member state, and can offer its voice on subjects from poverty to peace and security, from disputed borders, to women's rights, to the protection of our precious resources such as water. Member states work together to reach consensus decisions in the belief that strong collective support can help transform written agreements into effective action.

Only governments actually negotiate to make decisions at the UN, in the form of agreements, resolutions, decisions, treaties, conventions, protocols, declarations and plans of action. The decision-making process itself has increasingly opened to an array of other players, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), usually referred to as 'civil society'.

NGOs and civil society at the UN

There were representatives of 1,200 voluntary organizations present at the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945. They played a significant role in writing the first seven words of the charter: 'We the peoples of the United Nations . . .' (United Nations, 2003) and also in the inclusion of Article 71, providing that ' . . . the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations' (United Nations, 2003). They also fought for the inclusion of individual human rights, which was mentioned seven times in the charter, and educational cooperation in the pursuit of friendly relations among nations in Article 55.

Building on Article 71, focusing NGO relations with ECOSOC, NGOs continue to emerge throughout the UN system. This has led to the need for changes in formal procedures for UN-NGO relations. ECOSOC established a roster of NGOs with consultative status. The number of this roster has grown from 40 in 1948 to over 2,700 in 2005 (United Nations, 2005). Consultative status is granted by ECOSOC upon recommendation of the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs, which is comprised of 19 member states.

Article 71 of the UN Charter opened the door providing for suitable arrangements for consultation with NGOs. This consultative relationship is governed today by ECOSOC resolution 1996/31, which outlines the eligibility requirements for consultative status, rights and obligations of NGOs in consultative status, procedures for withdrawal or suspension of status, the role and functions of the ECOSOC Committee on NGOs, and the responsibilities of the UN Secretariat in supporting the consultative relationship.

From the earliest days many NGOs that became accredited to the UN consisted largely of membership and service organizations which monitored activities at major cities in the UN system (Alger, 2002). Several social work organizations have been granted consultative status, such as the International Federation of Social Workers in 1959, the International Association of Schools of Social Work in 1947 and the International Council on Social Welfare in 1972.

In the 1990s, many references began to appear in UN documents being in 'social partnership' with governments. Because the UN is an institution where many people are highly concerned with questions of status, the new language is significant. The term *consultative status* was chosen deliberately to indicate a secondary role – being available to give advice but not part of the decision-making process. When non-member states or the secretariats of other intergovernmental organizations take part in the work of the UN, they are referred to as observers, sometimes on an ad hoc basis for a particular meeting and sometimes on a permanent basis. ECOSOC has emphasized that '... a clear distinction is drawn in the UN Charter between participation without vote in the deliberations of the council and the arrangements for consultation' (United Nations, 2003).

Social work advocacy at the United Nations

From the very first days of the UN, the distinction on NGO participation has been blurred in practice: NGOs have obtained some participation rights that go beyond consultation, whereas governments have usually prevented NGOs from gaining the same rights as observers. Use of the word partnership suggests we have now reached equality between NGOs and governments, while still recognizing they are different and separate from each other. The question arises as to whether the label corresponds to a significant long-term change in the legal status of NGOs and in their ability to exercise political influence (Willetts, 2000).

While most NGOs acknowledge publicly their 'consultative status' with the United Nations, many will also acknowledge that this work in practice is more like advocacy than consultation. Consultation has more of a passive status – you wait

to be called upon for your advice or expertise. Advocacy is active, purposeful, and directed at specific issues. It reflects the actual work that NGOs undertake at the United Nations.

Advocacy is defined in a number of ways, either as a process or a skill in social work practice. The *Social Work Dictionary* defines advocacy as '... the act of directly representing or defending others' (Barker, 1995:11). The *Encyclopedia of Social Work* defines advocacy as '... the act of directly representing, defending, intervening, supporting or recommending a course of action on behalf of one or more individuals, groups, or communities with the goal of retaining or securing social justice' (Mickelson, 1995:95). Hofer (2006:8) describes advocacy practice as '... that part of social work practice where the social worker takes action in a systemic and purposeful way to defend, represent, or otherwise advance the cause of one of more clients at the individual, group, organizational, or community level, in order to promote social justice'.

At the United Nations, advocacy is practiced on behalf of individuals, groups and communities worldwide. The IFSW teams are advocating for both the organization, and its members in 80 countries around the world. Consequently, all work must be culturally appropriate and team members must continually seek to understand the cultural elements of each issue they work on. We also have to understand the system the UN works in and the reality of working in the international arena.

Social work advocacy at the United Nations takes many forms, as will be shown later in this chapter. It is also particular to the region of the world where the teams are based. In general, however, the advocacy that the International Federation of Social Workers teams undertake has a direct bearing on the work that IFSW undertakes as an organization. The teams cover issues and events that help promote the IFSW agenda or that would help the organization develop new policies or statements that would benefit its members. This can involve active participation at NGO briefings, working in coalition with NGO Committees on various UN issues, presenting workshops at the UN during Commissions, preparing written statements, and networking with UN and Mission staff on issues of interest, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The United Nations system

The six principal organs of the United Nations are the: General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice and Secretariat. The United Nations family, however, is much larger, encompassing 15 agencies and several programs and bodies.

The General Assembly is the main deliberative organ of the United Nations. It is composed of representatives of all member states, each of which has one vote. Decisions on important questions, such as those on peace and security, admission of new members and budgetary matters, require a two-thirds majority. Decisions on other questions are by simple majority.

The Security Council has primary responsibility, under the Charter, for the maintenance of international peace and security. It is so organized as to be able to function continuously, and a representative of each of its members must be present at all times at United Nations Headquarters. The Presidency of the Council rotates monthly, according to the English alphabetical listing of its member states.

The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) has the job of bringing the UN system together to consider important problems that affect social welfare and to work collectively on key economic, social, humanitarian, and human rights issues. It coordinates the work of dozens of UN organizations from the UN programs to the specialized agencies. The Council holds meetings and public events throughout the year, but its main annual four-week session takes place in July. The site of the annual meeting alternates between UN headquarters in New York and the UN office at Geneva.

ECOSOC also has the power to assist the preparations and organization of major international conferences in the economic, social and related fields and to facilitate a coordinated follow-up to these conferences. With its broad mandate the Council's purview extends to over 70% of the human and financial resources of the entire UN system. ECOSOC consults with civil society groups – non-governmental organizations and the private sector – in its deliberations, and is the main body accrediting NGOs for participation in UN affairs.

The Trusteeship Council is assigned to it the task of supervising the administration of trust territories placed under the system. The aims of the Trusteeship System have been fulfilled to such an extent that all territories have attained self-government or independence. The Council has suspended operation in 1994, with the independence of Palau, the last remaining United Nations trust territory.

The International Court of Justice is the principal judicial organ of the UN with its seat in The Hague, Netherlands. It began work in 1946, and has a dual role: to settle in accordance with international law the legal disputes submitted to it by States, and to give advisory opinions on legal questions referred to it by duly authorized international organs and agencies.

The Secretariat is comprised of international staff working in duty stations around the world and carries out the diverse day-to-day work of the UN. It services the other principal organs of the United Nations and administers the programs and policies laid down by them. At its head is the Secretary-General, who is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council for a five-year, renewable term.

The duties carried out by the Secretariat are as varied as the problems dealt with by the United Nations. These range from administering peacekeeping operations to mediating international disputes, from surveying economic and social trends and problems to preparing studies on human rights and sustainable development. The Secretariat has a staff of about 8,900 under the regular budget drawn from some 170 countries. As international civil servants, staff members and the Secretary General answer to the United Nations alone for their activities, and take an oath not to seek or receive instructions from any government or outside authority.

The United Nations, while headquartered in New York, maintains a significant presence in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beirut, Geneva, Nairobi, Santiago and Vienna, and has offices all over the world.

IFSW representation at the UN New York

All UN Member States are represented in the General Assembly (GA) – an ‘international club of governments’ which meets to consider the world’s most pressing problems. The GA holds its annual regular session from September to December in New York. When necessary, it may resume its session or hold a special or emergency session on subjects of particular concern. When the GA is not meeting, its work is carried out by its six main committees, other subsidiary bodies and the UN Secretariat.

Most questions are discussed in its six main committees: First Committee – Disarmament and International Security; Second Committee – Economic and Financial; Third Committee – Social, Humanitarian and Cultural; Fourth Committee – Special Political and Decolonization; Fifth Committee – Administrative and Budgetary; and the Sixth Committee – Legal. Of concern to social workers is the work of the Third Committee, which is closely followed by the IFSW Representation team in New York.

Three UN agencies are located in New York, the United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). New York is also home to several annual Commissions, specifically the Commission on Social Development, the Commission on the Status of Women, and the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

Representation at the UN in New York is carried out in conjunction with five team members, all of whom are accredited under ECOSOC. Team members in New York divide their time between attending to, and representing the IFSW, at the annual Commissions, and joining NGO Committees on substantive issues related to the work of IFSW. For example, team members represent IFSW on the NGO

Committee on the Family, the NGO Committee on Ageing, the NGO Committee on Mental Health, the NGO Committee on the Status of Women, the NGO Committee on Indigenous Peoples, and the NGO Committee on Child Rights.

The work of team members on these committees has been very important for IFSW. For example, in 1994 the Ambassador of Benin believed that the UN was not addressing the myriad of issues that related to families. A proposal was made, through the General Assembly, to organize an International Year of the Family. The observance of the International Year of the Family in 1994 drew worldwide attention to the issue as a fundamental issue of policy. Governments and actors at all levels – local, national, regional and global – were encouraged to support the well-being of families through a range of policies, programs and strategies. With the development of the Family Unit in the Division of Social Policy and Social Development at the UN, the NGO Committee of the Family worked closely with the UN to continue the work that was begun in 1994. At the 10-year observance of the International Year of the Family, five main substantive themes were addressed: approaches to family policy development; technology and its impact on the family; parental roles and intra-familial support systems; statistics and indicators for family well-being; and HIV/AIDS and its impact on families. Several publications and research studies were undertaken that provided valuable information to anyone working with families.

Another example of the NY team's work for IFSW has been with the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. Dr Elaine Congress, a NY team member, became involved with the NGO Committee on Indigenous Issues early in their inception. Through her work with that Committee, and her attendance at the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, Dr Congress drafted the IFSW International Policy on Indigenous Peoples that has now been ratified and accepted by IFSW member organizations. For the last two years at the Permanent Forum, IFSW has sponsored a side-event workshop, presenting information to a wide range of NGO representatives and UN staff.

More recently, the NY Team has drafted an International Policy on Poverty Alleviation and the Role for Social Workers that will be reviewed by IFSW members at the 2006 General Meeting in Munich, Germany. Current team members in New York include Dr Michael Cronin, main representative, Dr Robin Mama, Dr Elaine Congress, Marcia Wallace and social work pioneer David Roth, who also represents the Child Welfare League of America. The NY Team is also fortunate to supervise social work interns every year. These interns represent the team on various NGO committees, help prepare team reports and also assist with organizing Social Work Day at the UN.

Social Work Day at the UN has been an annual event sponsored by the UN Team for the last 23 years. IFSW, along with its sister organization, the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) work for six months to plan and

implement this event. Social Work Day at the UN is attended by social work faculty, students, social work practitioners, NGO representatives and UN staff. The day has a two-pronged purpose. The first is to educate social workers about the work of the UN and how social work can help further the work of the UN. The second purpose is to educate UN staff on the role of social workers in the international arena and how social work skills and knowledge can benefit the United Nations. Work continues...

IFSW representation at the UN Geneva

Representation at the UN in Geneva is somewhat different from that carried out at Headquarters in New York due to the emphasis on human rights, as well as humanitarian and technical issues that characterize UN activities on the European side of the Atlantic. Geneva houses two major UN Specialized Agencies: the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) as well as the offices of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and of the High Commissioner for Refugees. Furthermore, Geneva also plays host to two of UNICEF's Regional Offices: one for Europe and the other for Central and Eastern Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States and Baltic States.

While there are also other UN programs or agencies in Geneva with whom NGOs could interact, it is the above that attract most of the attention and collaboration of the non-State sector.

Starting with the ILO who admitted IFSW to its Special List in the 1980's, the Federation has been following the work of this organization which predates the UN, and attended its yearly assemblies, conferences and meetings, especially where the latter concerned matters such as employment, safety in the workplace and others of interest to social workers. A special effort was made by the Federation at the time of the drafting of ILO's Convention N° 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. The Convention, which was adopted in 1999, recognizes four especially harmful forms of child labor: slavery or slavery-like practices, prostitution and pornography, illicit activities (e.g. drug trafficking) and any activity harmful to the health, safety and morals of children. The Federation fought long and hard to have the lack of access to education included as a harmful form of child labor inasmuch as it jeopardizes a child's future, but it unfortunately lost that battle.

Despite its great interest in many areas of the World Health Organization's work, IFSW has been unable to obtain accreditation to that Specialized Agency, and was told repeatedly over the years that the organization could not see a direct link between health and social work. Having waited in vain for long-promised new accreditation guidelines, the Federation has given up on the matter temporarily in the hope of a

more propitious climate in the future. However, this in no way kept its representatives from collaborating closely for the last nine years with WHO's 'Aging and Life Course' section, and from attending meetings of special interest to the profession.

IFSW's main focus in Geneva has always been on human rights. Since 1976, the Federation participated regularly in the yearly session of the Commission on Human Rights, a now defunct body replaced by the Human Rights Council as of 19 June 2006.

The Commission as well as one of its subsidiary bodies, the Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, were always more open to NGO involvement than any other component of the UN system. Within the past few years, however, NGO participation grew exponentially, and many governments objected to that and felt that NGOs should restrict their oral and written interventions to a few collective ones under each agenda item. This is hard, mainly for NGOs from developing nations whose participation was much encouraged and also funded since the time of the Millennium meetings, and who, as national NGOs, had been granted consultative status formerly reserved only for international NGOs. It must be recognized, however, that government delegates hardly listen to NGOs anymore since their interventions have grown so numerous, but also that quite a few governments are outraged when NGOs denounce human rights violations that occur in their countries. Thus, it can be foreseen that within the Human Rights Council, NGOs will lose quite a few of their prerogatives, and more is the pity, since they often called attention to injustices and important concerns.

Over the years, IFSW usually presented either a written statement or a short declaration at many of the CHR annual sessions, and has been active at the Sub-Commission as well as at the Social Forum, which preceded it during the last two years.

One of the International Federation's major contributions in the human rights field was, however, its drafting, in collaboration with the former Center for Human Rights, of the training manual on Human Rights and Social Work that was first published by the Center in September 1992, and sold out by the end of that year. A second revised edition followed in 1994, and while that has not been re-published, it still sells in a photocopy version. The Social Work manual gave rise to a series of other UN training manuals – six in all to date – to which others will be added, e.g. one on Conscientious Objection to Military Service.

With the agreement of the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Federation's Human Rights Commission is envisaging an update of the 1994 manual, and it is hoped that a short plan for this publication can be presented to the OHCHR within a reasonable timeframe.

Furthermore, in 2002 IFSW also published under its own name a professional training manual on Social Work and the Rights of the Child that can be obtained from the IFSW Secretariat in Berne.

A large proportion of the Federation's human rights work in Geneva has been centered on children's rights ever since its participation in the NGO Drafting Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the 1980's. Those were times of hard work and much excitement during which the Group was constantly interacting with the governmental drafting group. Following the adoption of the Convention in 1989, the Drafting Group transformed itself into the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which over the years has become an important and recognized child rights actor.

IFSW has been involved in various child rights initiatives and conferences, such as the world congresses against the sexual exploitation of children in 1996 and 2001, and more recently also in the UN Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children and in an initiative for possible UN guidelines on the protection of children without parental care.

Refugees constitute a much-neglected field by IFSW representatives in Geneva, although one excellent Swiss social worker covered this topic for about one year.

Team building in Geneva and in Europe is in general much more difficult than in North America, and has become increasingly so over the past ten years. When Andrew Mouravieff-Apostol, the late Secretary General of the Federation, started his work in 1975, a Swiss/British social worker, Ms Miriam Brassloff, was the much-appreciated IFSW representative at the United Nations in Geneva. She unfortunately left Geneva two years later to follow her husband to Zurich for their retirement. Some of her work was taken over by the Deputy General Secretary, together with a series of volunteers of various nationalities who rarely stayed long in their positions.

Over the past ten years, volunteer NGO representatives at the UN have aged while their younger colleagues are now mostly professionals employed by NGOs who perform these tasks as part of their workload. While this is an excellent solution as such persons bring much knowledge and valuable contacts to the representational work, it can only be afforded by large and/or affluent organizations. At present only one volunteer helps the main (and often only) IFSW representative. It is Ms Waltraut Kerber-Ganse, a recently retired psychology professor from Berlin, who accompanies her husband and member of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child to the Committee's three yearly meetings in Geneva, and writes reports on them for the IFSW Secretariat.

Sporadic candidates interested in this representational work are mainly social workers from Switzerland or neighboring France. For them, distance from Geneva is a handicap, which can make their task less easy and fulfilling than they might wish. However, there have been good volunteers before, and there will good ones again. Meanwhile, the work proceeds...

IFSW representation at the UN Nairobi

The informal collaboration between UN-HABITAT and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) started in 2000. This relationship was then formalized by way of accreditation in 2004 after the change of the UN's *Rules of Procedure*, a change which was effected by UN-HABITAT Governing Council as a result of agitation by NGOs and civil society organizations and in which process, IFSW made a significant and notable contribution.

UN-HABITAT has its headquarters in Nairobi; regional offices in Fukuoka-Japan, Rio de Janeiro-Brazil; liaison offices in New York, Geneva, Brussels; and information offices in Budapest, Chennai-India, Beijing-China and in Moscow.

The overall mission of UN-HABITAT is to promote socially and environmentally sustainable human settlements developments and the achievement of adequate shelter for all, within the objective of reducing urban poverty and social exclusion. This mandate today has been strengthened by the Millennium Development Goal on environmental sustainability, focusing on biodiversity; water sanitation and slum upgrading.

UN-HABITAT is currently implementing various programs in Africa, Asia and Latin America, one major program being the Slum Upgrading Facility (SUF) through which UN mobilizes resources for the improvement of slums in the developing world. The idea is to unlock capital for pro-poor investment, and to promote and coordinate a new set of partnerships to raise domestic and international funding for affordable low-income housing and urban infrastructure in developing countries.

The historical working relationship between IFSW and UN since 1959, and the particular role played by social workers globally in addressing the root causes of poverty, access to healthcare, education, employment and human development was recognized and highly applauded by UN-HABITAT during the 6th Pan African Social Work Conference held in Nairobi in April 2005. The event, which was also attended, by the IFSW President and Secretary General, was honored to have Mr Daniel Biau, the Deputy Director UN-HABITAT as the chief guest. The presence of UN-HABITAT at the conference strengthened the emerging collaboration and working relationship between UN-HABITAT and IFSW, and was a clear indication of the importance attached to the Federation's representation at the UN.

IFSW has been co-opted to a sub-committee of the membership of the Cities Alliance Consultative Group, which is charged with the responsibility of formulation of the 'Cities Without Slums Action Plan'. Contributions so far made by the sub-committee have facilitated the inclusion of social work concerns into both the slums upgrading programs and in the urban management initiatives in general. At a meeting held in November 2004 at the UN Complex Nairobi, the sub-committee prepared a report which went into this Action Plan and which provided a

structured set of arguments, which were used extensively by delegations and partners to contribute effectively to the MDGs Review during the Twentieth Session of the Governing Council of UN-HABITAT held a week prior to the social work regional conference.

The UN team suggestion to review and expand on a country-by-country basis the methodology of estimating slums in order to adapt to the various local needs and situations was accepted by the sub-committee. This will in the long run enable individual countries to determine their share and pace in meeting the MDGs target, and especially in Africa where rates of urbanization are highest in the world.

World Habitat Day is celebrated on the first Monday in October. In addition to the activities set for this day, the team takes the opportunity of demystifying and grounding the MDGs to the urban residents and slum dwellers in particular. Five years now into the implementation process, not everyone – especially the urban poor – know enough about the goals. This is partly so because the changes advocated by the goals are still not reaching the people in the slums and inner cities. The goals have to be implemented at street and neighborhood level and in collaborative partnership with the local communities. The social work multidisciplinary approach for example; working hand in hand with land surveyors, architects, economists, water, roads, sanitation, electrical engineers and funding agencies, among others, is a reflection of such partnership and has helped in reducing tensions in the slum upgrading initiatives and provided a new angle to urban development.

Another major concern and involvement for the UN team has focused on advocacy issues on inclusiveness, policy change, gender mainstreaming in urban development and HIV/AIDS management. Policies designed over the last 30 years to curb migration into urban areas in the developing world have failed. Urbanization in developing countries is increasingly becoming inevitable, and even in rural areas where living conditions have slightly improved, the population carrying capacity is reaching its limits. Sustainable development is therefore calling first and foremost for urbanization policies designed to facilitate and not to curb the current urban transition.

The urban poor need to be seen as a resource rather than a problem, and the policies and actions must focus on fixing the problem rather than fixing the poor people themselves by way of forced evictions and demolitions of their dwellings. Forced evictions and demolitions do not reduce poverty, nor do they increase decent urban dwellings, they simply render the poor homeless, violate their human rights and help to shift the slums from one position to another at an enormous cost and untold inconvenience to the urban poor. Slum residents' capacity to participate and to agitate for their rightful positions and citizenry is critical to any urban development effort. This is so because participatory development stands for partnership, which is built upon the basis of constructive dialogue rather than the dominance of

an externally set project agenda. It is clearer now that urban problems are intrinsically linked and cannot be addressed in isolation. The capacity to deal with this calls for innovation and continuous capacity building for the entire social work team working in the slums.

IFSW representation remains cautiously aware of the need for policies which are a true reflection of democracy and respect for the worth and dignity of all people regardless of their social status, as funding, good housing and infrastructural plans without participation of the targeted slum populations is not by itself sufficient. The urban poor have their own knowledge and ideas, which must be respected and taken into consideration. The funding agencies come with their ability and know-how of the funding sources, while the urban poor contribute their 'feel-how' and 'know-how' of their poor situation – an element which is very important to the process.

IFSW representation is currently liaising with the recently formed United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) in partnership with UN systems to ensure that social workers within local authorities globally are incorporated in urban development policy formulation. Indeed, a forum that would bring all actors together in active participation and dialogue with citizens will be in place soon under UN initiative.

The team has actively participated in the Great Lakes Region Initiative (GLRI). This is a UN initiative aimed at restoring peace and stability in Africa, and has a membership of 28 African countries, 10 international organizations and various specialized UN agencies. The initiative is co-chaired by Canada and Netherlands with the special Representative of the UN Secretary General acting as the Secretary to the group. The initiative aims at translating into concrete actions a commitment made by African Heads of State and Governments in what is now commonly referred to as the Dar-es-Salaam Declaration. The Declaration has accorded much attention to humanitarian and social issues in the African region and stressed the fact that sustainable peace, security and economic development cannot be achieved in the Great Lakes Region without finding lasting solution to the problems of forced population displacement, sexual violence, HIV/AIDS and other social concerns which have plagued the region for a number of decades. Conflicts in the region have strained the already inadequate and fragile infrastructure resulting in the breakdown of basic social services, causing an exponential increase in morbidity and mortality rates.

The initiative has developed projects and protocols, which are expected to be endorsed by African Heads of State and Governments at a Summit to be held in Nairobi in September 2006, after which the protocols and the projects will be implemented. Durable solutions to the humanitarian, social and environmental issues in the Great Lakes Region are expected to dominate the 7th Pan Africa Social Work Conference to be held in 2007, an event at which the Special Envoy of the UN Secretary General Ambassador Ibrahim Fall is expected to be a key speaker.

Participation in the World Urban Forum has also been a key element of IFSW

representation. This is a UN biannual event, which facilitates the exchange of experiences and the advancement of collective knowledge among cities and their development partners. The meetings of the World Urban Forum also places strong emphasis on the participation of HABITAT Agenda Partners, like IFSW and other relevant international programs, funds and agencies, thus ensuring their inclusion in the identification of new issues, the sharing of lessons learned, the exchange of best practices and good policies. The First Session of the World Urban Forum was held in 2002 in Nairobi; the Second Session was held in Barcelona in 2004; and the Third Session will be held in Vancouver on 19-23 June 2006. It is expected that IFSW will organize a Side Event at the World Urban Forum III and Charles Mbugua has been requested to provide a lead to the IFSW team composed of seven participants from Asia, Latin America and Africa. The members of the UN team in Nairobi are Charles Mbugua, Roselyn Okumu, Simon Kinyanjui and Linnnet Ouna; meanwhile work continues...

Implications for social work

What implications can be drawn for social work practice from the advocacy work that is carried out in UN headquarters around the world? First and foremost, it is clear that social work has a direct part to play in the work of the United Nations. The issues and deliberations of the UN are issues that social workers have been concerned about since the profession's inception.

Historical implications

IFSW's work with the United Nations has historical implications, since the organization has been an NGO affiliated with the UN since 1959. This history is not something to take for granted. This history is rich and dynamic and has paved the way for a working relationship with the United Nations that has garnered IFSW a position of credibility and respect, both as a profession and as an NGO partner.

Policy implications

IFSW is often called upon to be a primary drafter of NGO statements for various Commissions that are held in New York or Geneva. The IFSW teams are seen as valuable resources amongst the NGO community. Our social work values, knowledge, skills, and global perspective are sought after as policy statements are made to the UN. These become permanent records in UN history and have a long lasting effect.

Practice implications

From the UN perspective, social work is seen as a profession that could be very helpful to the UN in helping to achieve its goals. Because of our history, and the policy implications of our work, we are being called upon for our expertise, our networks of resources and our knowledge generally. The UN has come to realize that we have skills at all levels of practice to assess, intervene, implement and evaluate.

We are also natural leaders for the NGO community and our team members all over the world have become leaders of other NGO Committees.

From the social work perspective, the IFSW teams have influenced the social work profession in infusing more of the international perspective into the profession's work. The world's reality has become more of a priority for our professional organizations. A good example of this is the Millennium Development Goals. The MDGs are applicable to social work practitioners all over the world, in both developing and developed countries. Several of IFSW's member organizations have made the MDGs an educational priority for their members and many social work organizations have joined the 'One Campaign to Make Poverty History'.

Education implications

The IFSW teams have had a direct influence on the development of courses in international social work in social work programs, and the development of specialized concentrations in international social work in graduate programs. For example, we have influenced the development of International Committees in NASW Chapters in the United States, while Social Work Day at the UN has inspired social workers to look beyond their own borders, and to become more familiar with the UN and its programs and goals.

Conclusion

The Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, is often quoted with this passage:

The United Nations once dealt only with Governments. By now we know that peace and prosperity cannot be achieved without partnerships involving Governments, international organizations, the business community and civil society. In today's world, we depend on each other.

We cannot take our responsibility as a member of civil society for granted. IFSW's work with the UN is valued and necessary. Our advocacy has had a direct impact on our students, our profession and the United Nations.

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