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**Social Work Issues  
and Human Rights**



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# Human rights are fundamental to social work

"Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work" (International Definition of Social Work 2001).

This is perhaps the most important statement that lies behind social work practice. Standards of practice should flow from the principles we hold as a profession and it is therefore important that these principles form a distinct part of any curriculum.

# Murder of former PASWI President and Philippine Welfare Attaché



***“IFSW and the Philippine Association of Social Workers have been shocked by the murder of former PASWI President, Finardo G. Cabilao, who was working as a social welfare attaché based in the Philippine embassy in Malaysia since 2008.” (IFSW Statement)***

- On 7 August 2009, the body of Finardo Cabilao was found in his residence in Malaysia. He appears to have been tortured and bludgeoned to death. The circumstances of his death indicate that he was targeted because of his work against human traffickers.
- Mr. Cabilao worked tirelessly on behalf of Filipino victims of trafficking. As a result of his work combating trafficking, which included testifying against them in legal proceedings in Malaysia, he received death threats from traffickers – death threats that ultimately appear to have been acted upon.

# Jack and how his human rights were violated and his road to recovery

- 26 year old released from MH detention after 6 months to supported accommodation using talking interventions
- Mute
- Traumatized
- Emotional abuse from parents divorce
- Lack of contact with father, lack of social skills
- Transition from home to university catalyst to MH problems
- Became a hermit, finally assaulted his mother
- BUT .....

# **Birth registration an issue in the developing world ... but a growing issue in the developed world**

- UNICEF – 2006,
  - 51 million children not registered
  - 26 million in SE Asia
- USA – Jaycee Lee Dugard
- Austria – Josef Fritzel
- UK – trafficked women, unregistered home births

# International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)

- IFSW is a global organisation striving for social justice, human rights and social development through the development of social work, best practices and international cooperation between social workers and their professional organisations.
- IFSW started up in 1956 (Golden Jubilee in 2006), originally with a Secretariat in New York, now based in Berne, Switzerland.



## IFSW Human Rights activities:

- IFSW has adopted an International Policy on Human Rights describing its commitment and giving guidance to social workers and social work organizations on human rights policy matters. To implement the human rights agenda of IFSW in 1998 a special commission was set up – the Human Rights Commission.
- Manual on Human Rights and Social Work with the UN Centre for Human Rights and IASSW produced in 1995.
- Manual on the Rights of the Child (2002)
- HR incorporated in policy papers
- Campaigns for social workers globally.



# International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW)

IASSW was founded in 1928 (80<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2008) at the First International Conference of Social Work, held in Paris. It was initially comprised of 51 schools, mostly in Europe, and was known as the International Committee. Revitalized after World War II, the organization expanded its membership to include a wider range of countries and was renamed the International Association of Schools of Social Work. The association has member schools in all parts of the world.



## **IASSW Human Rights activities:**

- A collaboration of schools in Kenya, the Philippines and England to develop a module on disaster management;
- 10 country project on international social work and political conflict resolution that is setting up a network to enhance social work education and research in conflict and post-conflict situations.



# Joint HR activities (IASSW & IFSW)

- Joint Human Rights Commission
- 'Ethics in Social Work – Statement of Principles'
- International Definition of the Social Work Profession
- Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession

(A core concern is to ensure that key policy statements are up-to-date and relevant. In this context both IFSW and IASSW have agreed a four-year process for the review of the international definition of social work and the international statement of ethical principles, leading to the 2010 joint conference in Hong Kong. Thereafter these core statements will be reviewed every 10 years.)

# Global definition of social work

(IFSW & IASSW, 2001)

The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environments. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.

(see ISW, 2004)

# Human Rights Instruments

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- The International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention

(recognised by IFSW and IASSW)

# Human Rights Instruments

## 3 major “generations” of human rights:

- **First generation** – civil and political rights
  - **Second generation** – social, economic and cultural rights
  - **Third generation** – participatory, collective, developmental and environmental rights
- 
- Very important – the “discursive” approach to human rights. Human rights have to emerge from an abstract universal domain to engage with the situated voices and needs of human beings (Ife, 2001).

# IFSW/IASSW Ethical Statement

## **Human Rights and Human Dignity**

1. Respecting the right to self-determination
2. Promoting the right to participation
3. Treating each person as a whole
4. Identifying and developing strengths

## **Social Justice**

1. Challenging negative discrimination
2. Recognising diversity
3. Distributing resources equitably
4. Challenging unjust policies and practices
5. Working in solidarity

from IFSW/IASSW (2004)

# **BASW Code of Ethics**

## **Human Dignity and Worth**

- Respect for human dignity and for individual and cultural diversity
- Value for every human being, their beliefs, goals, preferences and needs
- Respect for human rights and self-determination
- Partnership and empowerment with users of services and with carers
- Ensuring protection for vulnerable people

## **Social Justice**

- Promoting fair access to resources
- Equal treatment without prejudice or discrimination
- Reducing disadvantage and exclusion
- Challenging the abuse of power

# Human rights means challenging discrimination and exclusion



“Social workers have a responsibility to challenge negative discrimination on the basis of characteristics such as ability, age, culture, gender or sex, marital status, socio-economic status, political opinions, skin colour, racial or other physical characteristics, sexual orientation, or spiritual beliefs”

*(IFSW/IASSW Code of Ethics)*

## Protesting discrimination...



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## **IFSW/IASSW Statement of Ethics**

By maintaining general principles rather than a code of ethics, the joint IASSW and IFSW statement aims to encourage social workers across the world to reflect on the challenges and dilemmas that face them and make ethically informed decisions about how to act in each particular case. Some of these problem areas include:

## Ethical challenges & dilemmas

- The fact that the loyalty of social workers is often in the middle of conflicting interests (e.g employer demands vs service user interest).
- The fact that social workers function as both helpers and controllers.
- The conflicts between the duty of social workers to protect the interests of the people with whom they work and societal demands for efficiency and utility.
- The fact that resources in society are limited.

from IFSW/IASSW (2004)

# Value dilemmas

In essence social workers should be sensitised to the wider implications involved in their work – eg example from the UN publication *Human Rights and Social Work*:

“Your government has to service a large international debt and chooses to cut expenditure on social services, including the services you are working with for disadvantaged people.

**How do you respond to this?”**

# Cuts in public spending are happening in this country – what should we be doing to help protect people's rights?

- On a local level – in the local community?
- At a medium level – with the local authority?
- At a central government level?
- At European level?
- At global level?

## **Ethical duty on social workers**

“Codes of ethics remind social workers that because they possess particular knowledge and skills, and work on a daily basis with people living in poverty and suffering crises and problems, they have a duty to inform governments and agencies of inequity, lack of resources or the need for policy changes”

Banks, S. (2006, p.99)

# Global standards with regard to core curricula

“In respect of core curricula, schools should aspire toward certain core curricula that may be seen to be universally applicable, including – a critical understanding of how socio-structural inadequacies, discrimination, oppression, and social, political and economic injustices impact human functioning and development at all levels, including the global.”

*From: Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession (agreed in Adelaide, IFSW/IASSW, 2004)*

# What do students need to know about regarding human rights?

- Humanitarian law and international and regional human rights instruments
- Self awareness of own prejudices and assumptions
- Strategies for service user participation and empowerment
- An understanding of cultural competence and ethnic-sensitive practice
- How to work alongside and advocate on behalf of disadvantaged groups.

# References

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