

News and Views..from ICSW: On the road to the Joint World Conference, 2016

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Representatives of the three partner organizations – International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW), International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW) and International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) – got together on 20-22 January 2015 in Vancouver, Canada, to discuss the preparatory process for the Joint World Conference on Social Work, Education and Social Development scheduled to take place in Seoul, Republic of Korea, in June 2016. The priority theme of the Conference is “Promoting the Dignity and Worth of People”.

The agenda of the Vancouver meeting included the progress reports submitted by the Local Organizing Committee (LOC) and the International Program Committee (IPC), both established by the partner organizations in cooperation with the hosts of the conference. It also included a discussion on the implementation of the Global Agenda, the existing priorities and organizational developments. The meeting was attended by all three Presidents of IASSW, ICSW and IFSW – Vimla Nadkarni, Michael Cichon and Ruth Stark respectively, who all took an active part in the frank and productive discussions.

The participants of the meeting discussed the list of speakers selected by the IPC and proposed pertinent changes aimed at better geographical distribution as well as gender balance among the invited speakers. The participants also discussed the issue of conference finances, including the proposed level of registration fees. It was noted that the proposed budget is based on the assumption of a relatively high attendance (3,000+ conference participants), including at least projected one-third domestic attendees.

It was agreed that there is a need to develop a local and international promotional strategy for the conference, including closer cooperation between the three partners at the national and regional levels. The need to have an agreed outcome document of the conference was also underscored.

It was noted that there is a plan to open the call for abstracts one year ahead of the conference. It was agreed that the participation of practitioners in the Joint World Conference is as important as the participation of academics, and every effort should be made to facilitate such participation. If the submission of an abstract is a condition of scholarship applications, then the need to give time to practitioners to submit abstracts as part of their funding application is essential. That might pose a challenge, given the proposed early deadline for abstracts.

The meeting of the Global Agenda Coordination Group, which was part of the Vancouver meeting, focused on the implementation of the Global Agenda, including the specifics of the preparation of the next report on the priority theme to be presented in Seoul in 2016.

The Global Agenda, adopted by the IFSW, IASSW and ICSW, aims at combining the efforts of social workers, educators and social development practitioners in the quest for improvement of the human condition. There is a broadly shared agreement among all stakeholders that societies should be founded on the principles of social justice; that the promotion and protection of human rights is vital for a civilized modern society and should be seen as empowerment of individuals and

communities; and that poverty, unemployment, discrimination and social exclusion remain significant challenges for most countries. The lofty principles of social justice and human rights are the foundation of the United Nations, and are salient in the declarations and policy statements emerging from the major international conferences and United Nations Summits.¹ In putting forward the Global Agenda, the three partner organizations strive to promote inclusive development and the creation of a “society for all” where every individual has an active role to play – this was one of the key objectives of national policy action as recognized by the World Summit for Social Development and re-emphasized by the member states during the commemoration of the WSSD at the most recent 53rd session of the UN Commission for Social Development in February 2015.²

The Global Agenda, in line with the efforts of the various stakeholders, including our three global organizations, as well as other national and international organizations of civil society and the UN-system agencies, seeks to promote social change on the ground in order to empower people and enhance human and community well-being. While our efforts are guided by the commitments expressed in the Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals, the three partner organizations also aim to provide meaningful contributions to the post-2015 development agenda that is being shaped now. As was noted at the Vancouver meeting, the Synthesis Report of the UN Secretary-General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda – released in December 2014 and called “The Road to Dignity by 2030: Ending Poverty, Transforming All Lives and Protecting the Planet” – presents a clear vision for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and also implies a participatory approach in achieving the SDGs, envisioning an active role of the civil society organizations in the implementation process.

The three partner organizations fully support the Social Protection Floor Initiative as a universal rights-based development goal and call for a social protection floor to be established in all countries. IASSW, ICSW and IFSW are active participants of the Global Coalition for Social Protection Floors³ and consider social protection as one of the foundations for inclusive, equitable and sustainable development. It is essential that welfare provision and reform of social protection schemes in developed countries and the expansion of such systems in developing countries have ensuring economic security for all as one of the ultimate goals.

Social work everywhere is becoming more complex, and is being called upon to deal with numerous emerging issues as well as various aspects of the human condition in increasingly difficult situations. We harbour no illusions about major obstacles for development and the concerns that people, families and communities are facing in their daily lives, particularly in poor developing countries. In many countries the enabling environment for poverty eradication and employment promotion has worsened because of the impact of the food, energy and financial crises on social development. In other countries, communities and families are forced to cope with war or the consequences of conflicts, frequent natural disasters and the lack of essential goods and services. Some of the existing obstacles, particularly at the micro level, could be tackled through a remedial approach to social work but concerns of a more developmental nature, such as the lack of decent jobs, the lack of secure income or the existence of persistent social exclusion, cannot and should not be overlooked as an important policy goal at the national and regional levels. In this sense, the political dimensions of our efforts are also very important. Indeed, social problems are political problems.

The Global Agenda Observatory, established by IASSW, ICSW and IFSW, is a process and a structure which is evolving. Consisting of regional networks composed of institutions of higher education and professional/practice based organizations, the Observatory is aimed at joint research, analysis and reporting on priority themes of the Agenda. It is essential to see the commitments made in the Global Agenda in a holistic manner, using the vision and experience of the partner organizations. In a nutshell the Global Agenda represents our organizations’ effort to put people at

the centre of social development, enhancing the quality of life through the design and delivery of effective and innovative social services, social work and social work education.

Sergei Zelenev

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Notes

1. Report of the World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen, 6-12 March 1995, United Nations publication, Sales No.E.96.IV.8.
2. <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/soc4829.doc.htm>
3. For more details, please go to: <http://www.socialprotectionfloorscoalition.org/>