

## **Some memories of my time in the International Council on Social Welfare**

When, in early 1979, I joined the German Association for Public and Private Welfare as head of its International Department I was, to my great surprise, immediately appointed secretary general of the German National Committee of the International Council on Social Welfare. Frankly, I had never before heard about this organisation with such an impressive and promising name and was thus very curious to learn more about it. Even though I had a very strong interest in social welfare matters and in international cooperation on social policy issues, I could not yet imagine how much ICSW would influence and shape my professional and even private life over the next two decades.

My very first contact with the organisation started with a rather amusing misunderstanding. Right at the beginning of my work in the German Association I was told by my assistant that it was very urgent to deal with two dossiers: first the nomination for the prestigious René Sand Award and second the list of those who would be sponsored for Christian Sand (as I understood it). At this point in time I seriously thought that René and Kristian were brothers who played a somewhat very important role in the ICSW. Only later, when really dealing with these dossiers, I understood that René Sand was the enlightened founder of ICSW and that Kristiansand is a very nice town in the South of Norway where the next conference of the European Region of ICSW was to take place in autumn of 1979. This discovery made me blush – especially after having studied, in quite some detail, the mission statement, the objectives, the history and the statutes of the organisation. I was fascinated by what I learned about ICSW and immediately decided to find ways and means to become very active in this organisation. My employer, the German Association for Public and Private Welfare, agreed and solidly backed this decision.

Fortunately, I had the privilege and the pleasure of being able to attend this European Regional conference in Kristiansand and the connected statutory meetings of ICSW where the regional Committee of Representatives (CoRep) elected me right away as member of the Regional Executive Committee (ExCo). In this position I learned more and more about the practical work of ICSW - in particular about its European Region - and came to the conclusion that some new orientation lines were called for in order to enable ICSW to play an even more significant role in Europe. In brief, ICSW Europe should become more political, address current changes in society, take a multi-faceted approach to burning social problems and intensely cooperate with public decision-makers as well as with other civil society organisations.

After intense discussions, my European colleagues in the CoRep and in the ExCo very much agreed with these ideas and created a new position in the Regional Executive Committee – the one of a Programme Officer – to implement this concept. This led to the fact that the region chose more and more “hot” issues for its further regional conferences – ranging from population development to the need of enhanced participation of disadvantaged groups in political decision-making – and that more and more high-level politicians became eager to share their ideas and listen to the debates in regional ICSW conferences. During the following years of my service as Programme Officer and the 8 years’ time as president of the European Region (from 1984 to 1992) cooperation with the United Nations affiliated European Centre for Social Welfare Training and Research (nowadays the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research) and especially with the Council of Europe in Strasbourg was intensified. Thus, I had the privilege to become the official ICSW and

NGO representative in the important (governmental) Committee on Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe and chaired for two mandate periods the Conference of (the more than 350) International Non-Governmental Organisations in consultative status with the Council of Europe. This was also the time when I founded, together with highly motivated colleagues from various countries, the European Social Action Network (ESAN) and the Comité Européen des Associations d'Intérêt Général (CEDAG), in order to enlarge and intensify the influence specifically in the European Union. Later ICSW Europe became a founding member of the Platform of European NGOs of the Social Sector, which - with today more than 45 European networks and platforms - has developed into the largest, most diverse and highly recognised civil society dialoguing partner of the European Commission on social matters and policies.

When I attended ICSW's world conferences in the early 80ies I learned how important the work of the International Council on Social welfare was in a global perspective, and I was struck by the diversity and relevance of the central topics and the profound discussions of the issues covered. This fascination came, in particular, from the 20<sup>th</sup> conference in Hong Kong on "Social Development in Times of Economic Uncertainties", the 21<sup>st</sup> conference in Brighton on "Action for Social Progress: The Responsibilities of Governmental and Voluntary Organizations", the 22<sup>nd</sup> conference in Montreal on "Social Welfare in a World in Crisis: Perceptions and Responsibilities" to the 23<sup>rd</sup> conference in Tokyo on "Strengthening the Family and the Community: a Significant Contribution to Social Welfare".

Especially the Tokyo conference in 1986 impressed me deeply by the fact that our Japanese colleagues had decided to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first preparatory meeting in 1926 which resulted in the foundation of ICSW at the Paris "Fortnight for Social Welfare" in 1928. By the Tokyo conference they wanted to find out which kind of changes in Japanese political awareness and social policy-making had been triggered off by the work of ICSW over the last five decades, since already at the very first conference of ICSW in Paris in 1928 a surprisingly strong delegation from Japan had been among the participants. Now just imagine that at this time one had to take a boat from Japan to France and the total voyage by sea and land took several weeks. The motivation to go on this "adventure" was that high-level Japanese politicians realized that the just started industrial revolution in their country would change the whole society and increasingly alter the traditional patterns of solidarity in the family and community in Japan. Consequently, they wanted to learn how Europe had anticipated the problem, discussed the issue and conceived options to address the negative social aspects of industrialization in its various countries. The high esteem ICSW enjoyed in Japan in 1986 became evident when members of the ICSW Executive Committee were invited by the son of the Tenno – and his later successor – to a traditional tea afternoon with his wife in the palace during which impressive cultural presentations were offered to the guests.

Starting in the mid-80s, I had the responsibility to prepare and organise the 24<sup>th</sup> International Conference of ICSW to take place in Berlin in 1988, having as its main topic "Legislation. Social Welfare. Development". This conference - held in 4 languages and with an extended visiting program of social institutions, also in the then still separate East Berlin - attracted some 2.000 participants from all over the world. It was honoured by personal contributions from the two highest political personalities of the hosting country: The President of the Federal Republic and the Chancellor of the German Government – a very exceptional recognition of the event. The Madres de la Plaza de Mayo from Argentina then received the René Sand Award, celebrating their outstanding civic courage and political action for justice and the memory of the victims of a brutal regime. Just to mention it, the Berlin conference was the last international conference that generated a rather high financial contribution to the world budget of ICSW.

In preparation of this Berlin International Conference I very much wished to get a deeper understanding of the history and the “soul” of the International Council on Social Welfare and decided to ask one of the most important contemporary witnesses to grant me the favour to interview her. It was the “Grande dame” of ICSW, Kate Katzki, a German Jew who had fled Nazi Germany just in time to seek safety in New York City for the rest of her life. Right after World War II she had come back to her country of birth with the US army to map the destruction, disasters and the difficult socio-economic and psychological situation of the German population after the war. With these personal experiences she then engaged in ICSW, became its Secretary General for more than a decade, from 1968 to 1978, and still served the Council as its main representative at the United Nations headquarters, even at advanced age and almost until she passed away.

To my great delight, Kate and her husband received me, the young German man, most warmly in their NYC apartment and - after some explanation from my side and quite a hesitation from her side – she agreed to be interviewed about her life and her work in and for ICSW. After all I finally spent a whole week with her, asking and listening, having lunch together in her favourite small restaurants in Manhattan, drinking a glass of wine and eating cookies with her husband in the evening and being enormously impressed by the deepness of her thinking, her enormous life experience, her great wisdom, her excellent advice and her overwhelming kindness. The recorded interviews with her then served colleagues in the Berlin based German Central Institute for Social Issues (Deutsches Zentralinstitut für soziale Fragen) to retrace the whole history of ICSW and write – for the Berlin International Conference – the publication in German “Internationale Wohlfahrt – Ursprünge und Entwicklung des ICSW” (International Welfare – Origins and Development of the ICSW). I was very happy that later, when I became president of the Council, my ICSW colleagues fully agreed with me to honour Kate Katzki for her outstanding services with the René Sand Award.

In 1990 the 25<sup>th</sup> International Conference took place in Marrakech, Morocco, with enormous political and preparatory problems. I only attended the meetings of the International Committee of Representatives and of the Executive Committee and left before the opening of the conference – protesting by this move against measures of the hosting countries which deliberately excluded citizens of one country from the participation in the conference. By the way, this conference did not generate a notable contribution to the budget of ICSW.

Two years later, in 1992, the International Council on Social Welfare could, unfortunately and very exceptionally, not enjoy an international conference. The national committee in the United States of America which had originally invited for the conference to take place in Washington D.C. had somewhat collapsed and could not provide the means for the necessary organization of such an event. But as the global statutory bodies had to meet anyway that year, according to the constitution of ICSW, a so-called “International Symposium on the Future of ICSW” was convened. The representatives of the national committees were confronted with a highly problematic situation as the actual overall situation of the International Council was a rather worrying one: Many member organizations signalled serious financial difficulties, it would be hard to find host committees for future conferences, it would not be reasonable to expect any significant financial income for the ICSW budget from international conferences, the long-term secretary general in Vienna had resigned in June 1991, and a new location had to be found for the general secretariat. The reason for the necessary move of the ICSW general secretariat was that the City of Vienna had decided to stop its financial support and that the United Nations’ department for social affairs, to which ICSW had developed intense cooperation contacts, was to be relocated from Vienna to New York.

The hastily convened “International Symposium on the Future of ICSW” in Washington D.C., attended by many - but not all - representatives of the member organizations of ICSW and its

Executive Committee – thus proved to be a very, very difficult meeting in which all the burning problems of the Council were openly discussed and that almost led to the dissolution of the organization, due to the prevailing lack of adequate financial resources and missing proper support by influential personalities. At his point in time there was not even a team ready to take over the vacant leadership of the Council. Only one very important news kept members going on reflecting on a possible future of ICSW: The United Nations had just decided to organize a first ever World Summit for Social Development (WSSD) to take place in Copenhagen, Denmark, in March 1995. The UN Commission for Social Development would be happy to invite the International Council for Social Welfare not only to take part in this historical icebreaking event but be a key civil society co-operator in the 4-years preparatory phase of the WSSD.

During a rather controversial debate on the question whether this invitation would be a great opportunity or rather too big a challenge for ICSW that could easily lead to a final disaster, a group of energetic forward looking members argued that the UN World Summit for Social Development represented just the unique chance for ICSW to demonstrate its enormous potential and live fully up to the objectives of its own mission – a chance it had waited for during the last five decades. Finally, a new team volunteered to lead the Council into this demanding and exciting adventure. They presented a convincing policy and strategy to be implemented during the coming years and got immediately elected with the following mandates: Dirk Jarré (Germany) for global President and Pierre Dionne (Canada) for Treasurer General – supported by Julian Disney (Australia) as leader of the WSSD team and Sirpa Utriainen (Finland) as the new Secretary General.

It was evident that many difficult challenges had to be addressed immediately: the relocation of the general secretariat of ICSW, the search for new funding resources – including a complicated revision of the membership fees scale, a “modernization” of the Mission Statement of the Council, of its Statutes and By-Laws - but above all an intense, smart and diplomatic civil society preparation for and of the UN World Summit for Social Development, including direct advice to the Preparatory Committee of the UN Commission for Social Development and strong support of its chair, the former Chilean ambassador to the United Nations, Juan Somavía.

For the new base of the general secretariat New York would have been the logical place to be close to the UN Department for Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). But even though we were offered a great office in Wall Street, Manhattan, (at that time a bit run down!) I argued that “Big Apple” would not be the ideal location as the many, almost daily, diverse and certainly interesting meetings of the United Nations and of the accredited NGOs would dominate too much – or even monopolize - our own agenda and potentially distract from our core concerns and immediate strategy to be urgently implemented. Luckily the Treasurer General, Pierre Dionne, managed to get an offer from the City of Montreal that we were more than happy to accept: totally cost-free offices, two paid assistants, great administrative support and a tax-free regime – and in case of key events in our central interest, New York easily reachable, being just an hour flight away by a regular and not very expensive air shuttle.

During the next three years, the newly elected Executive Committee worked hard on the “remoulding” of the International Council on Social Welfare, often through pretty complicated ExCo meetings and “interesting” controversial mail exchanges between members and the regions of ICSW – which honoured its nature as a real NGO adapting with determination to new societal needs, aspirations and even dreams. But finally, in this modernisation process, acceptable solutions were offered for decision-making by the Committee of Representatives – where, after all, we began to miss exasperated shouted remarks to ICSW officers like, for example: “Sir, I get the impression that you just don’t understand the organisation!”, as we had heard it in earlier times.

The preparatory process for the UN World Summit for Social Development started immediately in late 1992 and the cooperation with the UN Commission for Social Development became a very close one. During the whole process ICSW played a leading role in bringing together interested and committed NGOs, creating many opportunities to exchange and learn from each other, and coordinating and voicing strong common positions of civil society on content and process vis-à-vis the UN Preparatory Committee. Even though not all our wishes and proposals were reflected in the final documents of the Social Summit, agreed by the largest assembly of heads of states ever, we were rather satisfied with the “Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action” – as these documents optimistically promised a much better, more just and socially fair future for all human beings and global society at large. A particular relationship of mutual trust and understanding developed over time with the chair of the PrepCom, Juan Somavía, who stated after the Summit in Copenhagen: “Without your interventions and support, my colleagues and friends, this conference would have been a totally different one with a much less significant outcome!”. We certainly appreciated this compliment to ICSW.

But it was not only the recognition of ICSW’s involvement in the UN World Summit for Social Development by Juan Somavía, who became later the Secretary General of the prestigious International Labour Organization (ILO) in Geneva, but also and in particular the appreciation of our work by various governments of UN member states. With a good number of them we had closely cooperated during the preparation of the Summit – exchanging ideas, information and arguments, building strategic coalitions and energizing political processes during the negotiations. Some of the countries found that the International Council was just the right civil society organization to be encouraged and materially supported to engage, in the aftermath of the Summit, in the promotion of the understanding and the implementation of the decisions taken during the Summit.

Indeed, the key aspect and main challenge was in which way, by which means and to which degree political, economic and social decision-makers worldwide would be willing and able to make the bright perspective of the Copenhagen Declaration and Programme of Action a reality. As ICSW had courageously decided to monitor and support the WSSD implementation process as much as possible, it immediately submitted corresponding programmes to interested governments and their development agencies. The negotiations and ensuing responses were definitely more positive than we had expected and, thus, ICSW found itself again in a very comfortable – but at the same time certainly challenging – financial situation where it had to deliver concrete action and to live up to the expectations of the grant givers.

The legitimate question was and is certainly still today: “Did we, in ICSW, together with all actors responsible, succeed in significantly promoting social development and thus making the grand promises of the World Summit for Social Development happen?”. It might be a good idea to somewhat imitate the Japanese analytical historical approach of the Tokyo conference in 1986 and focus one of the next global conferences of ICSW on this question and try to identify how much the commitments of the World Summit for Social Development have really been honoured, what the results have been and which were the difficulties encountered in the process of implementation. This could lead to a better understanding of the nature and the dynamics of social development policies and eventually help responsible parties to perform better in the future.

Among the events and opportunities that have marked and impressed me most during the four years of my term as global president of ICSW – from 1992 to 1996 - were definitely in the first instance the great enthusiasm for social justice and the acute sense of cooperation of my colleagues in the

Council. Only their continuous confidence and strong support allowed us, the determined new leadership team, to be successful during our term of office. Then I was proud and honoured when I was invited in 1994 to present the International Council on Social Welfare – for the first time ever – in the General Assembly of the United Nations in New York by making an official statement on the International Year of the Family. Another great moment was when I could address, in the ceremonial closing session, the high-ranking participants of the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen – right after the speech of the Swiss Confederation.

A great experience was also my round trip in South East Asia, initiated and organized by the regional ICSW president, during which I could visit almost all the member organisations of the Council with their institutions and various projects - and where I experienced absolutely overwhelming hospitality and friendship, combined with impressive cultural performances. Finally, I would like to mention the moving moment that happened in conjunction with the 27<sup>th</sup> International Conference of ICSW in 1996 in Hong Kong – on the topic “Societies in Transition. Development in a Political, Economic and Social Context” – when my 4-years’ time of service came to term. At the end of a session my ExCo colleagues from Hong Kong, Kay Ku, and from Norway, Bjørg Månun Andersson, came to the panel, carrying an enormous basket full of the most beautiful tropical fruit, declaring in a sort of charming East-West sing-song “Mr. President, it has been a very fruitful time with you, indeed. Many thanks from all of us!”. At this moment, a very emotional one for me, I could only state that exactly the same was true from my point of view concerning all of my ICSW friends. Right after, I started enjoying all the delicious fruits together with my team – the mandate of which had just ended.

To finish with I wish the International Council on Social Welfare, as a key civil society actor in social policy matters, and my colleagues and friends engaged in this important organisation a lot of success and “blooming times” – so that the fruits of their thinking and action can be enjoyed by all those who need social development most.

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Dirk Jarré