



SEAP ICSW SOUTHEAST ASIA PACIFIC REGIONAL

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World Social Work Day 2026 Message Regional President, International Council on Social Welfare-South East Asia and Pacific (ICSW-SEAP)

Warm greetings to colleagues, partners, and communities across the South East Asia and Pacific region as we celebrate World Social Work Day 2026.

This year's theme, "Co-Building Hope and Harmony: A Harambee Call to Unite a Divided Society," carries a spirit that resonates deeply with our region. The idea of pulling together – of sharing strength, lifting one another, and moving forward as one – reflects the long-standing traditions of cooperation found in our diverse cultures, from village solidarity to island community mutual aid.

Across our region, social welfare organizations, charities, community groups, and faith-based initiatives continue to play a vital role in supporting families and strengthening communities. They provide essential services, respond quickly in times of crisis, and stand close to the ground where needs are most deeply felt. Their contributions help weave the social fabric that holds our societies together.

Social workers stand alongside these organizations as trusted partners in service. They support individuals and families through hardship, uphold dignity and rights, and help communities navigate differences with respect and understanding. They also work to address the deeper structural issues that create inequality and exclusion, reflecting the global definition of social work, which calls us "to strengthen relationships, promote social change, and foster social cohesion."

Together, social welfare organizations and social workers form a powerful ecosystem for advancing social protection, a core priority of ICSW. Effective social protection systems – including income security, child and family support, disability inclusion, community-based care, and services for older persons – depend not only on strong policies but also on a well-supported and adequately staffed workforce.

Investing in the manpower that delivers these services is essential for ensuring quality, continuity, and equity.

On this World Social Work Day, I urge governments, regional bodies, and development partners to strengthen inclusive social protection, expand community-based services, and recognise the indispensable contributions of both social welfare organizations and social workers. This includes building and sustaining the human resources needed to meet the growing social needs of our region. Hope and harmony are nurtured when we pull together, lift together, and move forward together.

May this day renew our shared commitment to a more just, compassionate, and harmonious region for all.

Dr. Teoh Ai Hua
Regional President, ICSW-SEAP

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UN experts call for Malaysia to strengthen social work profession



Recently, Malaysia’s progress on meeting fundamental child rights was reviewed in Geneva by a UN panel of experts.

High on their list of key recommendations was to strengthen, without delay, professional social work in all sectors, especially in the public sector.

To those working with children, especially child protection, this is no surprise. It has long been recognised that as a country we have a long way to go to provide the skilled, child and family-sensitive interventions required to protect and nurture vulnerable children.

This is urgently needed not just at moments of crisis, but often long after, in addition to having programmes to prevent such crises occurring.

Core to such services are professionally trained social workers able not only to holistically assess the range of needs and causes but also to have the inter-personal skills to work with both those affected and others, so that collectively the best interests of the child are served.

This crucial role social workers play is integrated into Malaysian law. When a report of child abuse is made, it is expected that the child protection officer from the Social Welfare Department is a trained social worker, as case management and submission of a social report as well as recommending a fit person is part of the child protector's tasks.

Likewise, when a child has strayed into delinquent behaviour, the court will ask the department to provide a report on what, within the sentencing guidelines, is the most apt way of proceeding.

They will also ask the department to assess the suitability of people to adopt and whether such an adoption is in the child's best interests.

In addition, the department has powers to assess if private and non-profit organisations are providing adequate standards of care and running their own establishments (properly).

As often happens, the laws are there, but the implementation is weak. The key agencies lack resources both in the number of staff who are fully trained and the provision of regular supervision by more experienced colleagues.

The role of social workers and the complexities they address are not widely understood. So the public do not see the need for training as they do for those providing education or healthcare to children.

Rightly, there is a public outcry whenever children are abused... When scandals occur in services meant to be caring for children, such as the GISB closures, calls for a more professional response are few. Professional social work is little understood, as is the complexity of the task.

For its part, the government is aware of the important role social workers play. It also supports calls for more care in the community and for family-based care, so every child has a family rather than institutional care.

However, to meet these aspirations, as the UN experts had said, the service needs strengthening. The UN committee on the rights of the child was encouraged by the government's planned tabling of a social work profession bill but, like the Social Work Alliance Malaysia (Swam), it wants to see the public sector included from the start, and not left to some future, undetermined date.

Why is this so crucial? Public social workers are the ones who have mandatory powers. The government is also the major employer of social workers, and their services are expected to cover the whole country.

Back in 2010, it was estimated that only 10% of the Welfare Department's social work staff were qualified. When people are recruited for this department, there is no requirement for the Public Service Department to select qualified social workers. This would be unheard of for nurses, counsellors or medics.

Supply is not the issue. There are now seven public universities offering degrees in social work. Back in the late 1990s, the universities offering such degrees wanted a law to strengthen both entry to government posts and set mandatory hours of practice hours as part of the professional training.

In 2010, the cabinet approved a draft bill mandating social workers in all sectors to be qualified and regulated, but it did not make it to Parliament. Last year the long-awaited bill was revealed by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development.

But this new version, surprisingly, only focused on the non-public sector, which has a minuscule number of qualified social workers compared to the government sector.

Following feedback, it was withdrawn for further review. However, it is not yet clear whether the UN's call for inclusion of the public sector will be heeded.

On this World Social Work Day, Swam calls on the government to honour the UN committee's concluding observations by ensuring the upcoming bill is inclusive of the public sector.

The UN committee has been clear: statutory child protection requires a unified standard of professional regulation.

By including government social workers in this legislation, Malaysia will ultimately align with its ASEAN neighbours – the majority of whom already uphold inclusive legal frameworks that recognise social work as a regulated profession across both state and non-state sectors. – SWAM
(Source: Aliran Daily Newsletter 23March 2026)



INTERNATIONAL
DAY OF FAMILIES
15 MAY [2026]

International Day of Families 2026

The International Day of Families is observed each year on May 15. Established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1993, this day serves as a platform to recognize the value of families in society and to encourage policies that support family well-being, equality, and development. It brings attention to the ways families shape communities and influence progress across education, health, employment, and social inclusion.

The Significance of Families

Families are central to social structure, shaping the values, habits, and support systems of each generation. They provide the first foundation for learning, caregiving, and cooperation. Strong family systems are supported by effective public policies, which contribute to better outcomes across many areas of life.

Key roles of families include:

Support and Care: Families provide essential emotional, physical, and financial care across generations.

Education and Responsibility: Families help instill habits and values that influence civic behavior, health, and sustainability.

Resilience: Families often serve as the primary source of support during economic shifts, health challenges, or environmental stress.

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