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**Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and
the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:
priority theme: rethinking and strengthening social
development in the contemporary world**

Statement submitted by International Federation of Social Workers, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) supports and endorses the theme of the 54th session of the Commission for Social Development, “rethinking and strengthening social development in the contemporary world”. The IFSW promotes social work values and professional ethics across the globe, and represents professional associations in 116 countries.

The IFSW has been heavily involved in collaborative efforts with the International Association of Schools of Social Work, and the International Council on Social Welfare to create the IFSW Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. This Agenda represents a framework through which the skills, experiences, values and expertise of social work professionals integrate with global social development initiatives to promote suitable conditions for sustainable communities.

The Global Agenda exemplifies the Federation’s dedication to developing innovative ways to support all people in a changing world. Aligned with this year’s theme of the Commission for Social Development, the Agenda identifies four fields of action to be taken by global institutions, local communities and the three social work profession partner organizations; to promote social and economic equalities, to promote dignity and worth of peoples, to work towards environmental sustainability, and to strengthen human relationships.

Promoting Social and Economic Equalities

The IFSW is committed to collaborating with non-governmental and governmental groups to create a vibrant economy that serves people from all communities regardless of their social status or nationality. The realization of healthy economies is interdependent with healthy social development.

The establishment of socially just trade rules is critical. Trade is biased towards wealthy countries and current structures drive poverty and exploitation. A development approach in the context of the current trade structure can never create the more equal world we are all seeking. The current trade structure is poised to worsen through international trade agreements. More funds are lost to Africa through tax avoidance than the whole aid budget that Africa receives. People do not want aid; they want decent work and fair pay.

The Federation advocates for a regulated global economic system that is devoid of trade imbalances and which is rooted in concern for building social capital that includes protecting and enhancing social justice, human rights and sustainable development.

Global reality indicates that the full range of human rights, including social and economic well-being, is only available to a minority of the world’s population. Poorly regulated economic systems and a lack of realistic and ethical corporate social responsibility initiatives have contributed to high poverty levels and widened the gaps in inequality worldwide. Relative poverty is as significant as absolute poverty. The unending social and economic inequalities around the world have also restricted the intellectual, emotional and spiritual well-being of already marginalized groups, especially for indigenous people. Conflict, discrimination and labour abuses all continue to threaten the social and economic status of populations around the world.

In its 2012 Commitment to Action on the Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development, the IFSW and its partner organizations committed to combat inequalities through improving strategic social work interventions. Social and economic equality will be promoted not only through strategies such as the social protection system initiative, adequate international labour standards, and the World Health Organization initiative on the social determinants of health and education for all, but in engaging with individuals and communities in building their capacity to address these issues.

Promoting the Dignity and Worth of People

Social workers work daily with people whose citizenship rights have been compromised. Promoting the dignity and worth of all people is a universal principle of social work, and thus promoted by the IFSW. The Federation has relentlessly sought universal ratification of conventions on various groups such as rights of children, older people, women, and persons with disabilities, indigenous people and other vulnerable groups. The Federation has committed to ensuring the dignity and worth of all people are upheld by committing to involvement in elimination of human trafficking, promotion of safe migration, resolution of civil conflict, and reduction of disproportionately violent responses to people defending their human rights and personal freedoms.

Evidence from our work with displaced people like refugees or people affected by typhoons or earthquakes, revealed that sustainable development is possible only when the people who will be living in or are part of these rebuilt or new communities are involved in development from the beginning. Understanding people's needs, and helping fulfil their self-determination maintains dignity. Participation and collaboration with, as opposed to imposition on, communities will allow for building strength and sustainability.

Working toward Environmental Sustainability

The Commission's 54th session theme demands consideration of the dangers of climate change and the importance of sustainability as a social development tool. The IFSW supports the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which consider connecting social development with climate change mitigation, the creation of sustainable cities and communities, and the development of more responsible consumption and production practices.

Social workers work in partnership with the people who are at the centre of these disasters and other agencies promoting environmentally sensitive social development through community capacity building in responding to environmental challenges, including both human and natural disasters. This is an issue in every region of the world. In India and Africa these are critical issues that social workers have to work with daily. By ensuring environmentally sensitive practice in global social development efforts, long-term and sustainable social change can be possible.

Strengthening Human Relationships

Engaging with people, establishing trust so people can use social workers effectively to help them work through change is the catalyst to effecting long term development. The IFSW views human relationships as paramount to human existence. The Global Agenda for Social Work & Social Development addresses enhancing relationships in an inter-organizational manner, and through community

empowerment. The Federation believes that working with communities and individuals will enable the creation of sustainable changes that will benefit all. These changes should include policies that support social integration, cohesion and social welfare programs for all community members. The IFSW will promote social cohesion through education and practice.

One way practitioners can rethink and strengthen social development is through improving relations across cultures. The initiative taken by Caritas, working with people seeking safety and asylum in northern Europe, by employing social workers from within the refugee community, is an example of how much importance we place on engaging people in their change. The educational component should incorporate cultural humility and understanding as to promote relationship and community building. With migration, environmental, economic, and global crises that are ever present today, it is essential that new and creative ideas be employed in a practical way.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

The International Federation of Social Workers recognizes that communities are always changing. Old communities adapt to new members and new communities are built either through careful planning or as a result of the aftermath of unplanned disasters. From the experience of our indigenous communities and our knowledge about how individuals and their families work through change, sustained development is achieved when the people who live in these communities own the changes themselves — they cannot be imposed from outside. This requires people and agencies to work together. The IFSW continues to network with partner organizations to implement policy and practice that aligns with tenets of the Federation's Code of Ethics (<http://ifsw.org>). They support the social advancement of all people through facilitating engagement between civil society and the UN.

The Federation supports the Commission for Social Development's pursuit of innovative and strong social development programs that put the people at the centre of their ever-changing societal landscape. The following strategies are recommendations for achieving this goal:

Support sustainable social development initiatives at the governmental, organizational and community level by fostering civil service and governmental partnerships by requiring they engage with the people in these communities and use the skills of social workers appropriately in building that engagement.

Incorporate the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in all social development initiatives.

Focus on programs which mitigate social and economic inequalities in environmentally sensitive ways.

Promote community responsibility and cultural humility to foster and enhance human relationships through widespread initiatives with the population as a whole.

Remain involved in activities and conventions that promote dignity and worth of all people. This includes promoting ratification and working towards implementation of conventions, as well as implementation of the associated ideals at each organizational level starting with communities.