

## **PRELIMINARY DRAFT FOR THE WORKSHOP ON THE IFSW GLOBAL DEFINITION OF SOCIAL WORK<sup>1</sup>**

The current IFSW definition of Social Work was approved in the Montreal/Canada Meeting in the year 2000. This definition has been in force for ten years although it has not been supported by all member countries. The Latin American countries, for instance, do not feel they are represented. For this reason, the definition is now undergoing a revision and a broader and deeper debate about Social Work has been launched around the world. During the IFSW Conference in Montreal, the Latin American countries decided to further the debate in order to achieve a consensus. However its position was defeated and the definition was approved with a recommendation to be revised ten years later, in 2010.

As a result of the IFSW Assembly in 2000, the Mercosur Committee of Social Work Professional Associations wrote a document called *Declaración sobre la definición del Trabajo Social aprobada por la FITS* (Mar Del Plata/Argentina, December, 2000), expressing a critical review about the content and elaboration of IFSW's definition of Social Work.

In 2006, both IFSW and AIETS set up a global Working Group with the objective of revising the definition and presenting a new proposal at the 2010 IFSW Conference in Hong Kong. However, a new definition was not proposed.

During the 2010 IFSW World Conference and Assembly in Hong Kong, the Brazilian Board of Social Work – CFESS – presented a proposal to change the text of the existing definition, with the strategic purpose of fostering the debate. This action had the support of representatives from Latin American countries as well as other countries. As a result of this process, the General Assembly approved a *workshop* to take place in Brazil, with the Global Working Group, to discuss the current definition and find points of

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<sup>1</sup> Written by the Broadened WG – Global Definition of Social Work – CFESS (Ordinance no. 13, from 31 May 2011), meeting in Rio de Janeiro, on 13 August 2011, with the presence of the IFSW Regional Presidency for Latin America and the Caribbean.

convergence that are in agreement with the different professional projects of the IFSW member countries.

Brazil has engaged on a dialogue with other countries and with the IFSW Regional Presidency for Latin America and the Caribbean in order to organize the event to be carried out in the first half of 2012, before the Stockholm World Conference, which will be held around the middle of 2012.

Although the development of a universal definition of Social Work is a controversial matter, the revision of the current definition is a must, so it can contemplate the different possibilities, as well as theoretical, political and historical processes of the different IFSW member countries.

### **CFESS' (THE BRAZILIAN BOARD OF SOCIAL WORK) PROPOSAL**

The impacts of globalization, regarding the Social Work domain, reveal the increasing social and economic inequalities, which are a result of the international development patterns that have been allowing the coexistence of wealth accumulation and poverty. This has been manifested in many ways in different countries and regions. The inconsistencies originated from this process have furnished, in modern democracies, the struggle for advocating human and social rights and the development and execution of public policies and collective measures to fight inequities and discriminations of all sorts. Such processes redefine the Social Work, which lies in the social and technical labor division as profession and knowledge field recognized socially and institutionally.

**DEFINITION:** Social Workers act in the scope of the relations between social subjects, the State being one among many. They develop a set of socio-educational actions influencing the social and material reproduction of life with individuals, groups, families, communities and social movements, from the social transformation perspective. These actions aim at: a) strengthening autonomy; b) realizing citizenship and participation; c) building capacity; d) mobilizing and organizing subjects both individually and

collectively; e) ensuring access to social goods and services; f) advocating human rights; g) safeguarding socio-environmental conditions of existence; and h) enforcing democratic ideals and the respect to human diversity. The principles grounding human rights and social justice are key elements for the Social Work, so that such work can be performed to fight social inequalities as well as violence, oppression, poverty, and unemployment.

**NOTE:** A Social Worker's education is based on principles that respect differences and strengthen the subject's potentialities without any form of discrimination. Thus, the professional social workers must be ethical and have theoretical competence and technical skills to develop their competencies and roles linked to a set of values, theories and practice of human rights advocacy.

**VALUES:** The foundations of the professional actions are universal ethical principles and values, i.e. advocacy of freedom, equality, social justice and citizenship in order to overcome oppression, starvation, poverty, unemployment and social discrimination. Guided by such values and concerned with their quality, the practices aim at: a) the strengthening of democratic institutions, b) promotion of economic policies that foster growth, income distribution, and universal rights; c) compliance with international human rights norms concerning cultural diversity, race, generation, beliefs, identity and gender relations, sexual orientation, theoretical and methodological positions, and advocacy of a society free of war, violence and oppression; d) supporting global social action that protects socio-environmental conditions and environmental sustainability in order to contribute to the mitigation of poverty, starvation and unemployment; e) supporting populations experiencing difficulties caused by political, religious, and military conflicts.

**THEORY:** In order to understand the social relations and life conditions of its users the Social Work incorporates social and economic theories that enable its professionals to analyze and intervene in the reality to promote its transformation. Therefore, the Social Work methodology is based on a collection of theoretical knowledge and empirical

information generated by scientific research and the socialization of experiences. Such methodology enables a critical perception of the historical processes as a whole, i.e. it takes into consideration their movements and contradictions to promote a better understanding of how individuals, groups and families participate in the social process and prompts the comprehension of their modes of life and work, as well as their social demands.

**PRACTICE:** the professional exercise requires theoretical and methodological knowledge, an ethical stance, and the technical skills to develop competencies and operational abilities related to social work such as: a) devising and executing social policies in public administration bodies, companies and civil society organizations; b) devising, executing and assessing plans, projects and programs in the social field; c) contributing to the participation of users in institutional decision-making processes; d) planning, organizing and managing social benefits and services; e) doing research that support professional actions and policy making; f) providing advisory to public administration bodies, private companies and social movements related to social policies and collective social and human rights; g) helping the population identify resources to cater to their needs and protect their rights; h) performing socio-economic studies to identify social needs and demands; i) carrying out visits, writing technical reports, and providing information and statements on Social Work matters; j) having leadership roles in public and private organizations in the field; k) teaching Social Work subject matters and counseling students during practical training. For that, a social worker needs to be critical, constructive, have a sound academic and Professional training, contributing to the promotion, protection, and recovery of social rights as well as the means to have access to them.