

## **IASSW TEAM AT THE UNITED NATIONS NEW YORK**

### **REPORT: January-June, 2020**

The New York based team of representatives to the UN had a busy month of February, with active participation in the UN Commission for Social Development. We had also made preparations for active participation in the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) scheduled for mid-March and the annual Social Work Day at the UN on March 23. Just before the opening of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Covid-19 epidemic hit New York hard and the UN headquarters canceled all in-person meetings. This resulted in the cancellation of all NGO-sponsored side events at the CSW. Social Work Day, held every year since 1983, was also cancelled. The UN building is still closed to all non-essential personnel. This year's High Level Political Forum in July will be held on-line only. It is still unclear when more normal activities will resume.

#### **Work Continues Online**

NGO committees have continued to function and hold their regular meetings by Zoom. Our representatives are actively engaged in the work of the NGO Committees on Migration, Social Development, the Status of Women, Mental Health, the Family, and the Working Group on Girls. In addition, there are many formal UN sessions that are available by webcast from UNTV. The High Level Political Forum sessions will begin on July 7 and will be webcast.

#### **February 2020 Activities**

As reported in the UN newsletter sent to the membership in early March, IASSW co-sponsored two side events at the February 2020 session of the UN Commission for Social Development. The Commission focused on inadequate housing and homelessness. One of our side events, "Overcoming Inequality and Exclusion in Access to Housing," was co-sponsored with ICSW and also joined by the ILO, UNDESA (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) and the government of Costa Rica. Lynne Healy spoke on the panel for IASSW. As a member of the Grassroots Task Force of the NGO Committee on Social Development, IASSW was also a co-sponsor of the Committee session on Inequality and Homelessness: "The Links Between Inequalities, Inadequate Housing and Homelessness". The session was co-sponsored by the government of Madagascar and joined by UN Habitat and the DePaul Charities. Team members also spoke at two additional side events: Shirley Gatenio-Gabel presented on a panel on "Trauma and Challenges for Children in Temporary Housing," organized by team member Martha Bragin; and Lynne Healy served as invited moderator of a session on "Evidence-Based Policies" organized by UNESCO, with panelists from 5 UN agencies.

As noted, we had been looking forward to a similarly busy month of March. We thank Shirley Gatenio-Gabel and Rebecca Davis for their hard work in planning the 2020 Social Work Day at the UN and the accompanying student forum. Unfortunately, these events were cancelled due to the pandemic. Hopefully, the work can be carried over to 2021.

## **Other Updates:**

The UN and the related NGO committees have broadly addressed the Covid-19 pandemic in their work. This is a core component of almost every session and policy consideration, cutting across development, migration, mental health, human rights and vulnerable populations, and more. Other key topics include the marking of 75 years of the UN, assessing progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals, and gender equality in light of the 25<sup>th</sup> year since the Beijing Plan of Action for Women.

In April, Professor Joseph Wronka of Springfield College was given a temporary UN pass for IASSW with plans to help represent us on New York-based human rights issues and the UN's Third Committee. He was able to connect to some committee work on line, including efforts by the Committee on Indigenous Issues.

IASSW representation and regular reporting to the membership was somewhat limited by the lack of a graduate intern this year. With UN access uncertain, we do not know if an internship will be possible in 2020-2021.

## **Request for Input/Decision:**

We frequently get requests for our association to sign-on to statements regarding issues coming before the UN. These are statements drafted by other NGOs or coalitions to comment on policy issues or urge specific UN actions. The time line for deciding to sign or not is almost always very short—no more than a few days if that. My questions to the board:

\*how important is it for IASSW to sign on to statements and petitions?

\*if it is important, should we develop guidelines for what kind of statements we will support

\*what latitude is the board willing to give me as Main Representative to make the decisions? There is usually no time to consult the board.

Many years ago, the board did decide that IASSW would not take positions to comment on the actions of a specific country without consulting members in that country or region (eg: meaning that we would not sign on to a statement to condemn a human rights violation by a specific country without more process). I fairly rarely sign on to statements. When I do, I use the Global Agenda and Ethical Statement as guideposts.

Submitted by Lynne Healy, Ph.D.

Main Representative of IASSW to the UN in New York