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ASSWA Report – July 2015, IASSW Board Meeting, Medellin, Colombia

This report provides highlights of activities and achievements following the last report submitted in January 2015.

- 1) ASSWA's total institutional membership stands at 41 and is growing. In the last half of 2014 and the first half of 2015, 12 schools of social work have registered to be members under the dual membership arrangement. With the ongoing mobilization drive, we are hopeful that the membership will continue to grow.
- 2) The plans for the joint social work conference scheduled for 4-7 October 2015, under the theme: *Social Work and Developmental Social Welfare: Local Realities and Global Transformation*, are well underway. We are pleased to have Senator Dr Agnes Zani and Dr Venkat Pulla as the keynote speakers. Dr Pulla will also be conducting a post-conference workshop on Strengths-based Practice, kindly hosted by colleagues at the University of Fort Hare, East London. Professor Antoinette Lombard will be hosting a panel session on the Global Agenda, with representation from IFSW, IFSW, Africa, IASSW and ASSWA. Bringing together IFSW, Africa and ASSWA is a wonderful achievement in an attempt to transcend the practice-academia divide, and accords with the global pattern of hosting joint conferences. The Association of South Africa Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI) is a co-host.
- 3) ASSWA participated in the first ever conference held in Bujumbura, Burundi from 16-17 March 2015. World Social Work Day & Month was celebrated with a march through the city, an international conference, a PROSOWO2 workshop and the adoption of a Declaration. These were watershed events for Burundi, where social work is an emerging profession, and one that ASSWA was pleased to be a part of in collaboration with Helmut Spitzer from Carinthia University, Austria. Vishanthie Sewpaul and Janesitic Twikirize represented ASSWA.
- 4) Prof Vishanthie Sewpaul delivered the keynote address at a conference hosted by the Zimbabwean Council of Social Workers in April 2015. She spoke on: 'The registration of social workers and the regulation of the SW profession'
- 5) Several countries in Africa celebrated WSWD. An ASSWA brochure has been produced capturing the celebrations of different institutions. Of salience is popularising WSWD at the institutional level, with the active participation of students. The celebration of WSWD is certainly giving students the opportunity to appreciate the macro dimensions of social work, to see social work as a global profession and to appreciate their roles as social activists, as evidenced in the issues contained in the brochure (See attached). Unfortunately, the contributions of all institutions could not be included, as some shared their events on youtube.

- 6) The new social work programme was launched at the University of Swaziland with a first cohort of 36 students. ASSWA members, particularly in South Africa, have networked with staff from the University of Swaziland, and engaged in dialogue around curriculum development and future directions in relation to the registration of social workers and the regulation of the profession.
- 7) ASSWA continues its role in relation to advocacy initiatives. In relation to the brutal murder of 147 people, mainly students at the Garissa University College in Kenya, questions were raised about how we can respond to the issue. As President of ASSWA, rather than simply write a statement, which seemed inane in the face of such a catastrophe, I thought it prudent to demonstrate the power that each one of us has to make a difference. To this end, the first year students in my classroom were mobilised and within a day, a video – representing the voices of students – condemning the horrific acts by Al Shabaab and calling for peace, unity and non-violence, was produced. This was shared globally. The students also put together a statement for a global petition. 1860 signatures were obtained, consolidated and sent to relevant authorities. The positive feedback received from colleagues was fed back to the students. Their sense of achievement, and their pride in being engaged in global processes, is indescribable. More importantly, we hope that by using social media in spreading the messages of the students, terrorists groups like Boko Haram, Al Qaeda and Al Shabaab would stumble upon the video and listen to the voices of young people. If we can alter the thinking of even just one terrorist, we would have made a difference. Hope can lie in dispersed and small pockets of resistance. We understand that acts of terrorism are often rooted in deeply embedded structural injustices and ideology. We strive, continuously, to challenge and change such injustices and dominant ideologies, which as we all know is not easy. But terrorists too have agency, and at critical junctures, make the choices to hurt and kill people. We can continue to appeal to their sense of humanity to respect human dignity and diversities. Also, importantly to IASSW is the pedagogical strategy of linking education to social action, teaching about democracy and engaged citizenship by engaging students in democratic endeavours, and developing the links between the local and global, which are central to international social work.
- 8) ASSWA raised funds, and together with some of its own funds, contributed US \$ 2000 towards the Nepal School of Social Work to support its rebuilding efforts. Here again, students were sensitised to the global issues around climate change and environmental disasters, and in an effort to get them to appreciate their roles as engaged global citizens, they were requested to support the relief efforts. The amounts contributed in class are not important. They ranged from 80 cents to R100 (i.e. about 6 US cents to about US \$ 12), with the group collecting R600 (about US \$50). Given that the majority are poor students, their willingness to give is really appreciated. Donations were also obtained from family, friends and colleagues. I would like to thank the following who made contributions via ASSWA:

Anand Moodley (with a generous sum of R5000 - about \$ US 416); Students of the SW 113 Class; Antoinette Lombard; Vishanthie Sewpaul; Tessa Hochfeld; Tanusha Raniga; Madhu Kasiram; Jean Triegaardt; Shamela Naicker; Reshilla Govender; Ram Naidoo; Maheshlyn Naidoo; Kamantha & Shaun Peters; Lambert Engelbrecht;

Glynnis Dyke; Nerusha Thulsie; Carmel Matthias; Poloko N. Ntshwarang; Verona Goliath; Herna Hall; Lalita Vasant and Baritha Harilal.

- 9) Professor Antoinette Lombard continues to provide leadership on the Global Agenda processes and put together a proposal, which she will discuss in a separate report at the July 2015 Board meeting.
- 10) ASSWA takes this opportunity to congratulate Professor Abye Tasse who was made "Chevalier de l' Ordre du Mérite Nationale", the most prestigious award for a civilian in Mauritania, by the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research on behalf of the President of the country. Abye continues to make Africa proud!
- 11) Finally, this is my last board meeting. I thank my colleagues for the opportunity to serve on the Board of IASSW. I have learnt a great deal; it has been a rewarding and enriching experience. I also terminate my Presidency of ASSWA in October 2015. I am leaving the University of KwaZulu Natal and South Africa at the end of December 2015 to take up a professorship position in Dubai. I offer my sincere gratitude to my colleagues on the ASSWA EXCO for their unstinting support and wonderful collegiality. You have been amazing colleagues to work with. I know that ASSWA will grow in strength and numbers! I will continue to support IASSW and ASSWA in whatever ways I can.

Respectfully submitted by Vishanthie Sewpaul, President: ASSWA