

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS FOR SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY

WEDNESDAY, 18 MARCH 2020

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
CENTRE GENEVA (CICG)

NOTE
CONCEPT
CONCERN

Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (SDG 16) is integral to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Communities, in their diverse forms, sizes and locations, play a crucial role in the social, economic and political transformations necessary to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Social work and social workers seek to empower individuals, families and communities, in particular vulnerable or discriminated groups and individuals, to deal with their everyday challenges, to access services and programmes they are entitled to, to hold politicians to account, and to make their voices heard. They are not only implementers of social policy, but also agents and enablers of change in a world that has committed to finding alternatives to business as usual on a new pathway of sustainability for people and planet.

And alternatives are desperately necessary. Communities are increasingly facing challenges related to the fall-out of a global economy in disarray; to politics which are unable or unwilling to create inclusive institutions, effective regulations and transformative policies; and to environmental disasters, fragile livelihoods and conflicts which tear them apart. Power asymmetries between (and

within) civil society, business actors and states are looming large, with corporate power seeming to influence every sphere of human activity. The brunt of socially and environmentally unsustainable policies and practices is felt at the community level—from housing evictions, to smallholding farmers dispossessed of their land, to people displaced because of climate change, extractive industries and large-scale infrastructure projects. But also, worldwide, communities are rising to these challenges, reclaiming indigenous governance of land and resources, insisting on the right to co-decide on the environment they inhabit, and demanding the care and services they are entitled to. Such active, complex and multifaceted community engagement—seen in community-led opposition to the rising inequality, exclusion and environmental destruction that are results of financialization of the economy—is the leitmotif of World Social Work Day 2020.

Anchored within communities, social work professionals facilitate processes of deliberation and co-creation. They bridge between communities and policy-makers, and between social and environmental concerns. In this way social workers can both mediate and catalyze change, learning from grassroots mobilizations and transmitting these experiences and actions.

The theme of World Social Work Day 2020, Community Engagements for Social and Environmental Justice, is inspired by the spirit and claims of Jai Jagat. On the occa-

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sion of Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birthday, a global march for justice and peace began in New Delhi on 2 October 2019. The march, Jai Jagat 2020, will arrive in Geneva one year later, after covering a distance of 14,000 kilometers. Participants in the march will engage with communities along the way, sharing Gandhi's vision of individual transformation with collective change, and making connections with the four pillars of advocacy related to the SDGs at

the core of the Jai Jagat campaign: eradication of poverty, social inclusion, climate justice and the nonviolent resolution of conflicts.

On 18 March 2020, we will celebrate the day in Geneva with a series of speeches and workshops that draw attention to the relevance and impacts of community action around the globe to strengthen social justice and sustainable practices.

Global agenda for social work and social development

In 2012 the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Council of Social Welfare (ICSW) adopted a Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development. This initiative provides a common basis for joint action addressing the major challenges of our societies and identifying relevant social issues for our profession and beyond. The Global Agenda is a strong commitment to promote social and economic equality, the dignity and worth of people, and environmental and community sustainability.

Celebrated worldwide since 1983 at the United Nations in New York and since 2012 in Geneva, World Social Work Day aims to highlight the achievements of social work, to raise the visibility of social services for the future of societies, and to defend social justice and human rights. World Social Work Day at the UN was born from the initiative of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and the International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), which have special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). The Day has been celebrated since 2012 in Geneva by IASSW and IFSW with the collaboration of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland –Social Work, Geneva (HETS GE), since 2017 with the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD), and since 2018 with the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Western Switzerland–Social Work, Fribourg.

World Social Work Day has the following objectives:

Strengthen cooperation, partnership, existing contacts - or establish new ones - with United Nations organizations and international NGOs;

Spread knowledge about social work, its values, principles and methods (practical and theoretical) among UN organizations and allied international NGOs;

Highlight social work actions, policies and achievements in the pursuit of common goals;

Disseminate knowledge about UN activities, goals, programs and campaigns among social workers and social work organizations and schools.

International definition of social work

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledges, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

Definition of social work adopted in 2014 by IASSW and IFSW.

