

14.2.2025

A Response of the Israeli Union of Social Workers to the IFSW statement of 09.01.2025

The Israel Union of Social Workers is deeply troubled by the IFSW statement, published on 09.01.2025 under the highly misleading and inflammatory headline, "IFSW Executive Issues Censure against the Israeli Union of Social Workers **for not Acting to Promote Peace**".

Just to be clear, the IUSW has consistently called for a just peace based on a mutual recognition of rights and self-determination of both Israelis and Palestinians. In addition, the Palestinian Union of Social Workers and Psychologists have consistently rejected our attempts to open any dialogue to promote trust and understanding.

The IFSW censure is based on a relatively new clause in the IFSW adopted in 2018:

Clause 9.3 states: "Social workers support peace and nonviolence. Social workers may work alongside military personnel for humanitarian purposes and work toward peacebuilding and reconstruction. Social workers operating within a military peacekeeping context must always support the dignity and agency of people as their primary focus. Social workers must not allow their knowledge and skills to be used for inhumane purposes, such as torture, military surveillance, terrorism, or conversion therapy, and **they should not use weapons in their professional or personal capacities against people.**"¹

The IFSW statement further states that "IFSW called on its members in Israel and Palestine to confirm their compliance..." and that the Palestinian Union confirmed that their members are not engaged in combat...". There is no equivalence between the PUSWP and the IUSW. There is no Palestinian government in Gaza to approach for an exemption, the terrorist organization, Hamas rules and there is no standing army under civilian control. The PUSWP has no way of knowing if members are taking part in the fighting or not.

Since conscription (at the age of 18) and service in the army and the reserves is a legal requirement in Israel, the IFSW executive demanded that the IUSW call on the Israeli government to demand that social workers are exempt from military service. The fact that this is demanded only of Israel is one sided, discriminatory and applying a double standard. The statement of ethical principles applies to all the members and any "enforcement" needs to apply equally. In other words, if the executive interprets clause 9.3 to mean that members need to work to exempt social workers from combat roles, then the demand should apply to all members equally.

Many members' governments have similar reserve policies to Israel where soldiers are called to serve and train after completing their compulsory service. These members have not been asked to act upon the 9.3 clause of the federation's ethical principles and release these soldiers from their responsibility. For example, in Austria, Switzerland, and Norway, the reserve duty policy is like that of Israel. Additionally, social workers in the military exist, for example, in the US² and Canadian armies.³ The US reserves were called to serve in

¹ <https://www.ifsw.org/global-social-work-statement-of-ethical-principles/>

² <https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs/science-medicine/physical-mental-health/73a-social-worker1>

³ <https://forces.ca/en/career/social-work-officer/>

Afghanistan. IFSW did not demand an exemption of combat soldiers who were social workers during that conflict.

Secondly, clause 9.3 needs to be clarified and interpreted more clearly. For example, social workers were under attack in their homes in the kibbutzim on October 7, 2023. They fought back and were killed. Are social workers under attack allowed to use weapons against their attackers? Is the expectation that they do not protect themselves and their families. Furthermore, in relation to the last sentence of the clause (in bold), in countries where the public can access guns, social workers unions have not been asked to call on their governments to restrict their members from accessing weapons. A recent news article about a social worker in the US using a gun to threaten a client⁴ did not trigger a similar IFSW demand.

This demonstrates that IFSW action against IUSW in this matter is an antisemitic act of singling out the IUSW. This is antisemitism according to the definition accepted by most western governments. The fact that the Israel Union of Social Workers is the only member to be censured by the IFSW clearly meets the criteria for antisemitism.

There is a second clause that requires clarification and interpretation.

Clause 9.1 states: "It is the responsibility of national associations and organizations to develop and regularly update their own codes of ethics or ethical guidelines, to be consistent with this Statement, **considering local situations.**"

The local situation in Israel is that we are in a state of war with several terrorist organizations supported and directed by Iran as well as Iran itself. These include Hizballah in Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza and the West Bank, the Houthis in Yemen and Iran. All are calling for the genocide of the Jewish people living in Israel and all are indiscriminately firing missiles at the Israeli civilian population. The president of the Palestinian Authority has stated that Jews will not be welcome in Palestine. This situation is not conducive to asking for the exemption of social workers from military service at this time. The statement of the IFSW that such a request would have a positive effect in an ongoing, step by step process of building trust between the two sides of the conflict is one sided. IUSW has attempted to open a dialogue with our Palestinian colleagues ever since they entered IFSW.

The IFSW request for only IUSW to take action to "promote peace" is ironic. For the past 15 years, IFSW has failed to create a dialogue between our union and the Palestinian union, PUSWP, despite repeated attempts. Furthermore, IFSW has never intervened against the PUSWP for refusing to hold any conversation or collaboration with IUSW, which stands in contrast to the core values of social work and of IFSW ethical principles. In 2019, the IUSW offered to co-host a regional conference with PUSWP. In Tel Aviv and Bethlehem. This was rejected by our Palestinian colleagues and the IFSW executive subsequently refused to allow the Israeli Union to hold the conference.

We regret that our Palestinian colleagues find this time of mutual sorrow to attack us and demand our expulsion. We recognize that their social workers, too, are suffering since the launch of Hamas terror attacks on October 7. PUSWP's preoccupation with bashing IUSW

⁴ <https://lawandcrime.com/crime/he-was-trying-to-get-the-help-he-needed-judge-lectures-social-worker-who-repeatedly-sexually-abused-13-year-old-boy-in-her-care/>

instead of pursuing effective and constructive resolutions to support social workers in our region at a time of need is deeply saddening.

It is the role of the IFSW to find the common denominator between its members and promote discussions between all its members. As unions and associations, we have a significant role in achieving peace from the bottom-up. The decision on censuring IUSW does not bring us closer to peace. It only further alienates the two parties to this conflicts who are IFSW members. It is a testament to the failure of IFSW leadership to assume a real role in promoting peace.

On the 7th of October, the terror organization, Hamas, **broke the existing ceasefire** and launched a premeditated invasion on the entire state of Israel. This included firing thousands of missiles on civilians, kidnapping civilians from their homes, raping women, decapitating and torturing people in front of their family members, massacring participants in a music festival, burning babies in their beds, suffocating whole families in their home shelters, and looting. The indiscriminate violence that the thousands of Hamas terrorists launched brutally murdered and injured Israeli Jews and Muslims, as well as Palestinians and people of other nationalities. Over 1200 people were murdered in a single-day, 240 people were abducted to Gaza and thousands more seriously injured.

Despite these horrific events, IFSW did not offer one word of consolation or recognition for the despicable actions of this day. The thousands of missiles fired were aimed only at civilians. Hundreds of young people, including social workers, who were attending nearby music festival were massacred as they fled or taken hostage. Women were raped in front of their families, their genitals mutilated and then killed. Unarmed female soldiers who worked as observers were killed and taken hostage. Civilians were burned alive in their homes.

IFSW did not release one statement deploring these inhuman acts – not one. The war that followed is entirely the responsibility of Hamas. All the death and destruction, on both sides, would have been avoided if the pogrom of October 7 had not occurred. And, yet, only Israel is singled out for censure.

During and following this war the need for social work will only increase. **In this context, we conceive our work to heal society as the core to promoting peace.**

Healing our community is an essential step to transitioning from war to peace. As social workers, we have the professional tools to intervene and build social and emotional strength in our community, and we have been tirelessly dedicating ourselves to this goal.

We are deeply saddened that the IFSW leadership cannot see the value in our hard work. We are deeply saddened that a network built on social work values has not thought about lending us a supporting hand and instead is making demands and accusations that make our work even more difficult at our worst times.

To conclude, we are deeply disappointed by the IFSW leadership who chose to comply with PUSWP's aim to further alienate and polarize our global community of social workers. IUSW sees great importance in global dialogue and cooperation for promoting better outcomes for social workers worldwide. We further believe that our professional platform, based on social

work values, has the potential to promote peace, but in this case, our leaders chose to take another path.

Censuring the IUSW and considering expelling the IUSW from IFSW cannot lead to peace.

We urge our colleagues and friends, and the IFSW leadership to rethink this issue and consider which actions they can take to promote peace.

These are the names of the Social Workers murdered on October 7th 2023:

Sigal Levi was murdered while fulfilling her role as the head of a team of workers who came to assist young people at the Nova music festival.

Amichai Yisrael Vitzan and Yedidia Moshe Raziel were murdered while defending their community, Kerem Shalom.

Lilach Kipnis, a peace activist, was murdered in her home in Kibbutz Be'eri

Rinat Even-Segev was murdered along with her husband and two of her children in the yard of her house.

Additionally, Ditsa Heyman, an 84-year-old retired social worker, was kidnapped from her home in Nir Oz. Ditsa returned in the first hostage exchange with Hamas after 53 days.

Inbal Hermoni, MSW.

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