

The President's Report

This report is a summary of the more than twenty years I have been active in ICSW. During these years ICSW has been my passion and my over all commitment. ICSW is not a large organisation, never has been, and has never meant to be one. The uniqueness of ICSW is the build up of the organisation, with national councils as its core. As the council is comprised of several national organisations within the social sphere, it possesses a large and unique body of knowledge. This knowledge is disseminated to the authorities and decision makers in each country. In addition the knowledge is disseminated between the countries through expert seminars and conferences. Through my extensive experience I see this concept as very effective. To me, there is also a component of peace in our working model. We meet, we share experiences and build networks. Through this, we see that we all need each other as well as social protection.

Work on the Global level

I have visited the UN a couple of times in connection with The Commission for Social Affairs. It has been interesting to listen to the different nations presenting their work on each year's current theme. At the time of writing, work shops are arranged in cooperation between IASSW (International Association of Schools of Social Work) and IFSW (International Federation of Social Workers). This gives the opportunity for network building.

Cooperation with other social political organisations is very important. We have very close and satisfying cooperation with IASSW and IFSW. We have joint ownership of the international professional journal International Social Work Journal. Our really great common project, however, is the Global Agenda. We have just recently started work on the Agenda for the period 2020-2030. The first part of the Agenda has had varying importance for our organisations. The new Global Agenda, however, is incorporated in the ICSW program for 2020-2024. Through the Global Agenda, questions of importance for social development are raised, and our members can use the results in direct dialogue with their national authorities.

The presidents and the ED from the three organisations meet once a year to discuss their common development and plans for common activities

For ten years, the three organisations have shared the Global Conferences, which are arranged every second year. This with the exception of 2020, when it was decided to take a pause in the cooperation. IFSW then arranged their own conference while IASSW and ICSW decided to arrange one jointly.

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, both conferences were called off. This experience may lead to a discussion on whether such large conferences can or should be arranged at all. This discussion must contain several perspectives. The costs of a conference of such magnitude has increased markedly. This is turned to an increase in costs for the participants. The participants in the 2018 conference for instance, protested strongly against this. The pandemic which we now see, also reminds us that unforeseen events may happen, and indeed does. My final thought on this concerns the environmental stamp of such big conferences. This aspect should be part of the discussion. Virtual conferences may be an alternative. This may not be the preferred alternative, since they will never replace the physical meetings. Still, we must have this discussion.

Regional level

ICSW is composed of nine regions and nine regional presidents. The most important task for the presidents is to strengthen and develop their regions. During my time as president, I have visited several regions, f.i. Europe, Latin America, The United States and North East Asia. I also visited our office in Uganda.

The regional presidents also work on building alliances on regional level. In Africa we meet with MOU, with The African Union and Sadac, and have also established cooperation with the Lake Victoria Regional Local Authorities. In Europe, we are members of the Social Platform in the European Union and in Council of Europe`s INGO. In Asia, ICSW`s members participate in ASIAN NGO forum.

Of some of our nine regions, a few have only one or two members – too little for a region. This regional division also leads to a democratic imbalance within the organisation. We have started working on this regional division, trying to find a more rational organizational model for these small regions.

National level

On the national level, the amount of activity varies. Most of our members are active in different ways; participating in national seminars and national debates. Our members have also established cooperation across borders with their neighboring countries, arranging expert seminars and developmental cooperation. On the national level, the cooperation with our sister organisations IASSW and IFSW is also appropriate and well developed. In several countries within Europe there is ongoing cooperation with other organizations in the social sector, such as EAPN (European Anti Poverty Network). The national members are the motor of ICSW, therefore it is of vital importance that they work on a broad base. This is important also because it assures that information about the national social systems is shared. The national councils also work on increasing the number of members under their umbrellas.

ICSW Internal

Finances

The number of members in Africa decreased between 2012 and 2014. One of the reasons may be that economic support for ICSW stopped, with the consequence that ICSW no longer could support the members economically. After these changes, the membership number has been reasonably constant. A few members have left us, but we also regularly have applications for membership from new organisations.

The financial problems of ICSW do not stem mainly from the loss of members, but because rich countries change from A to C membership. It is a difficult to solve the problem of rich countries with poor organisations. The main reason for the change from A to C membership is that the organisations lack both own resources and financial support from the governments.

Another reason is that we have lost the large income from the world conferences. The conference in Ireland in 2018 brought 3200 Euroes in comparison with the around 30000 Euroes which a conference usually brings. Due to the Covid-19 situation, the conference in Rimini this year was called off. Instead, IASSW and ICSW must cover the costs of the planning for the conference. Negotiations on the sum of these costs are in progress. In passing, let me mention that IFSW is struck by the same problem for the planned conference in Calgary.

The third reason for our financial situation is lack of funds for projects. Around 2012, several donors switched the direction of their donations from social to health issues. This may be the reason for the the failing means for projects. Still another reason may be the lack of energy in applying for funding.

ICSW has been in financial trouble before, but has always managed to pull through. This will hopefully happen this time also, especially as donors` interests again seem to be directed towards social issues. As a new risk factor, however, the Covid-19 pandemic has struck the world. This may affect the economy of the member organisations, making it more difficult for them to pay their membership dues. As long as the pandemic lasts, it will also be difficult to start new projects. We cannot do much more about this than awaiting the developments, and be prepared to apply for funding once it is over.

Administration

Since Sida (Swedish International Development Agency) withdrew its funding in 2011, the administrative staff has been composed of one ED on voluntary half time and one full time employed administrator stationed in Africa. The voluntary half time ED has ben paid a small yearly compensation. In order to have a functioning administration, I myself have worked at least half time, taking care of administrative issues. The president should not really have to function in this way. This however, is how it came to be. In order to function fully as a global organisation, we need one full time ED. In addition we need one person working half time or more with the media. For this, we need economic resources.

Other issues

When I was elected by the members to be your President I expected good cooperation in taking ICSW forward. Unfortunately the former Executive Director, 2016 to 2019, did not show cooperation or willingness to work cooperatively with the President. Not only was I not given cooperation, he was sending emails about me suggesting I was impossible to work with, that I am a dictator and that I decide everything. I only became aware of this situation when a member who had received one of these mails called me and asked what is wrong with the ED.

As I am finishing my term as President now I wish to convey my concern for ICSW. We are going through tough times due to the world crisis and the lack of many governments' commitment to social justice, social protection and social welfare. It saddens me that within one of the longest surviving organization's attempts to improve society we are plagued internally by lack of loyalty and commitment to work together. I have done my best and despite my attempts to root out the disruptive executive director, I was hindered for reasons I do not understand.

Further, I am at loss to understand why a few members and the vice president have continued to attempt to destroy all that ICSW has achieved over nearly a century.

We have a really good structure that was designed by world class leaders and adopted by our members. It is important to follow the rules if we are to achieve our mission.

In my experience I have learned it is not unusual in international NGOs to have the power of the elected officials taken over by the CEO. You, as my successors, must guard against further erosion of the power of the elected leadership by an appointed staff member. Remember, ICSW belongs to the members who in turn appoint the board and management committee to represent their interests.

The failing economy is a threat to our organization's future. This, however, is not the biggest threat. The most serious threat comes from certain members of the board who do not adhere to our rules, who do not seem able to cooperate, and instead undermines and prevents decisions made.

Do not think that the end of my term as President ends the problems I have outlined very briefly.

ICSW has been my passion for more than twenty years and I am very proud to have served as its President.

I wish ICSW all the best in the future.