Human Rights and Social Work

- Published by the Centre for Human Rights, United Nations
- Published in 1994
Human Rights and Social Work

19. The profession’s focus on human needs shapes its conviction that the fundamental nature of these needs requires that they be met not as a matter of choice but as an imperative of basic justice.

20. It follows that the search for and realization of positive rights and entitlements is an inseparable twin to the meeting of needs.

Human Rights and Social Work

24. Human rights are inseparable from social work theory, values and ethics, and practice. ... Advocacy for such rights must therefore be an integral part of social work.
Human Rights and Social Work

- Themes:
  - Poverty
  - Gender discrimination
  - Racism
  - Religion
  - Environment and development
  - Children
  - Women
  - Elderly persons
  - Disabled persons
  - Prisoners, including restricted persons
  - Refugees
  - Migrants

Int’l Definition of Social Work

*(Endorsed by the International Federation of Social Workers, 2000)*

- The social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being. Utilising theories of human behaviour and social systems, social work intervenes at the points where people interact with their environment. Principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work.
Int’l Definition of Social Work

- **Values**
  - Human rights and social justice serve as the motivation and justification for social work action.
  - In solidarity with those who are disadvantaged, the profession strives to alleviate poverty and to liberate vulnerable and oppressed people in order to promote social inclusion.
  - Social work values are embodied in the profession’s national and international codes of ethics.

Social Work and the Rights of the Child

Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles

(Endorsed by IFSW and International Association of Schools of Social Work, 2004)

○ Principles
  ● Human Rights and Human Dignity - Social work is based on respect for the inherent worth and dignity of all people, and the rights that follow from this. Social workers should uphold and defend each person's physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual integrity and well-being.
    ○ Right to self-determination & participation
    ○ Treating each person as a whole
    ○ Identifying & developing strength

Ethics in Social Work, Statement of Principles

○ Principles
  ● Social justice - Social workers have a responsibility to promote social justice, in relation to society generally, and in relation to the people with whom they work.
    ○ Challenging negative discrimination
    ○ Recognising diversity
    ○ Distributing resources equitably
    ○ Challenging unjust policies and practices
    ○ Working in solidarity
Issues

- Popularity of various international standards / manuals
- Evolving concepts
  - Civil and political rights →
  - Economic, social and cultural rights →
  - Rights to peace, development and a clean environment protected from destruction

(Elisabeth Reichert)

- Actual knowledge of human rights among social work educators and professionals appears limited
- The focus of much social work literature today remains on social justice, a concept linked to human rights but in no way explanatory of human rights
- A far greater emphasis on human rights education is needed – Council on Social Work Education intends to mandate the teaching of human rights as part of the social work curricula.
Issues

(Silvia Staub-Bernasconi)

○ Where neoliberalism began to spread all over the world in social work, ... these approaches attribute resources, autonomy and strengths to clients without any question about what makes them suffer, dependent and powerless.

○ Social work has a double mandate of helping and control – help as the mandate of the client, control as the mandate of society represented by the social agency. Third mandate – an ethical base oriented on human rights and social justice.

Future development

○ New International definition of Social Work

○ Updated Human Rights and Social Work Manual

○ Interested social workers could join the workshops of IFSW Human Rights Commission in 2010 Joint World Conference