

Social Work & International Issues

General Background

Professional social workers are on the frontline addressing some of today's most pressing international issues. They organize relief programs for displaced populations in Afghanistan, coordinate community health services for people affected by HIV/AIDS in Southern Africa, resettle Somali refugees across America, and provide mental health services and psycho-social support. Social workers witness firsthand the effect of policy on the populations around the world. The recommendations outlined below are set forth to promote economic stability, fair treatment, and equal access to services.

Recommendations

Support global health solutions and strengthen health systems while maintaining commitments to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS and access to reproductive health.

- Increase access to a full range of health and psycho-social health services within communities, both for prevention and treatment, utilizing social work expertise to maximize impact.
- Work towards creating universal access to family planning and reproductive health services. Provide funding for school-based, age-appropriate, culturally informed education programs on sexuality and reproductive health, prevention of STIs, and introduction to skills for making healthy personal choices about sexuality and reproduction. Advance reproductive health rights and access to family planning.
- Increase funding for HIV/AIDS prevention and comprehensive systems of care for people affected by HIV/AIDS, particularly vulnerable children.
- Fund research to accurately assess the effectiveness of primary and secondary prevention and educational strategies, service delivery models and the effect of related policies. Research protocols should include bio-psycho-social issues as well as spiritual issues when relevant of people living with and affected by HIV and AIDS and the unique needs of groups at high risk, (e.g. women, children and adolescents, marginalized communities).

Work to eradicate modern-day slavery and the growing incidence of human trafficking

- Strengthen immigration policy to eliminate employers' use of forced labor.
- Carefully craft international trade agreements to adequately protect workers, especially groups of foreign workers traveling to unfamiliar countries, from exploitation and restrictive work agreements and environments.

Replace the current patchwork of immigration laws with an equitable and comprehensive national plan.

- Ensure US policies uphold and support equity and human rights for immigrants. Recognize immigrants as a valuable resource and improve treatment and due process for those in detention or facing deportation.
- Develop national policy that allows for immigration at a measured pace such that resources are not overwhelmed and immigrants can join U.S. communities as productive members.

Promote the role of the UN by ratifying the following UN conventions:

- Convention on the Rights of the Child – Failure to ratify this convention diminishes our potential and credibility as a human rights leader.
- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) – Ratifying this convention, would demonstrate U.S. support for ensuring equal opportunities in public and personal life for men and women.

Eliminate the practice of torture

- The United States must not condone or permit torture, nor deny due process to victims. The international conventions against torture cannot be ignored without further damage to the international standing of the United States. Detentions must be conducted with transparent and legal processes. Perpetrators of prisoner abuse must be held accountable.

Bring coherence, clarity and new commitment to the U.S. foreign assistance strategy.

- Bring development to a level equivalent to defense and diplomacy, putting it in its rightful place and recognizing it as a moral obligation as well as a method of achieving national security.
- Enhance U.S. government overseas civilian response capacity and support hiring of new civil service employees with strong social work backgrounds.

Additional Resources

Hokenstad, M.C., & Midgley, J. (Eds.). (2004). *Lessons from abroad: Adapting international social welfare innovations*. Washington, DC: NASW Press.

National Association of Social Workers. (2009). *HIV and AIDS. Social work speaks: National Association of Social Workers policy statement, 2009-2012* (8th ed., pp. 171-176). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

National Association of Social Workers. (2009). *Immigrants and Refugees. Social work speaks: National Association of Social Workers policy statement, 2009-2012* (8th ed., pp. 196-201). Washington, DC: NASW Press.

National Association of Social Workers. (2009). *International Policy on Human Rights. Social work speaks: National Association of Social Workers policy statement, 2009-2012* (8th ed., pp. 202-207). Washington, DC: NASW Press.