



The Human Rights Perspective in Health Social Work

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‘ ‘A World Out Of Balance - Working For A New Social
Equilibrium’ ’

- The United Nations (1987) defined human rights as

‘ ‘ rights which are inherent in our nature and without which we cannot live as human beings. Human rights and fundamental freedoms allow us to fully develop and use our human qualities, our intelligence, our talents and our conscience and to satisfy our spiritual and other needs’ ’ .

Universality and Indivisibility

- Rights cover all individuals and nations and hence are universal (Reichert 2003).
- Rights are indivisible - hence all are important. There is no hierarchy of rights.

Human Rights are Discursive

- Evolve out of interaction and continuous dialogue on what constitutes a common humanity (Howard 1995).
- Need to understand them in differing political and cultural contexts (Ife 2001)

Human Rights Instruments

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
- The International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Racial Discrimination
- The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
- The Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (ILO convention 169)

(recognised by IFSW and IASSW)

Human Rights and Social Work

Policy on Human Rights by IFSW (1996)

The social work profession, through historical and empirical evidence, is convinced that the achievement of human rights for all people is a fundamental prerequisite for a caring world and the survival of the human race.

Integration with Social Work Practice

- The UDHR - code of conduct for the professional social worker
- Unique insights and guidelines for practice
- Apply to problem identification, analysis and interventions

Foundation for Human Rights Practice in Social Work

- Participatory democracy
- Cultural competence and ethnic-sensitive practice
- Feminist practice
- Challenging violent structures and processes

Social Work Strategies and Tools

- Anti-oppressive practice
- Empowerment
- Strengths perspective

Challenging Dualisms (Ife 2001)

- personal and political
- private and public
- cultural relativism
- micro and macro practice
- global and local

Health Rights

- Health rights have been viewed as secondary to civil and political rights
- False dichotomy
- Right to health integrally linked to other rights to development, equity and social justice.

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

- Article 7 addresses the right against torture, or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Also, without free consent, no one should be subjected to medical or scientific experimentation.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Civil Rights

- Article 25 clearly outlines the right to health as well as focus on special care for motherhood and childhood (UDHR)

Article 12

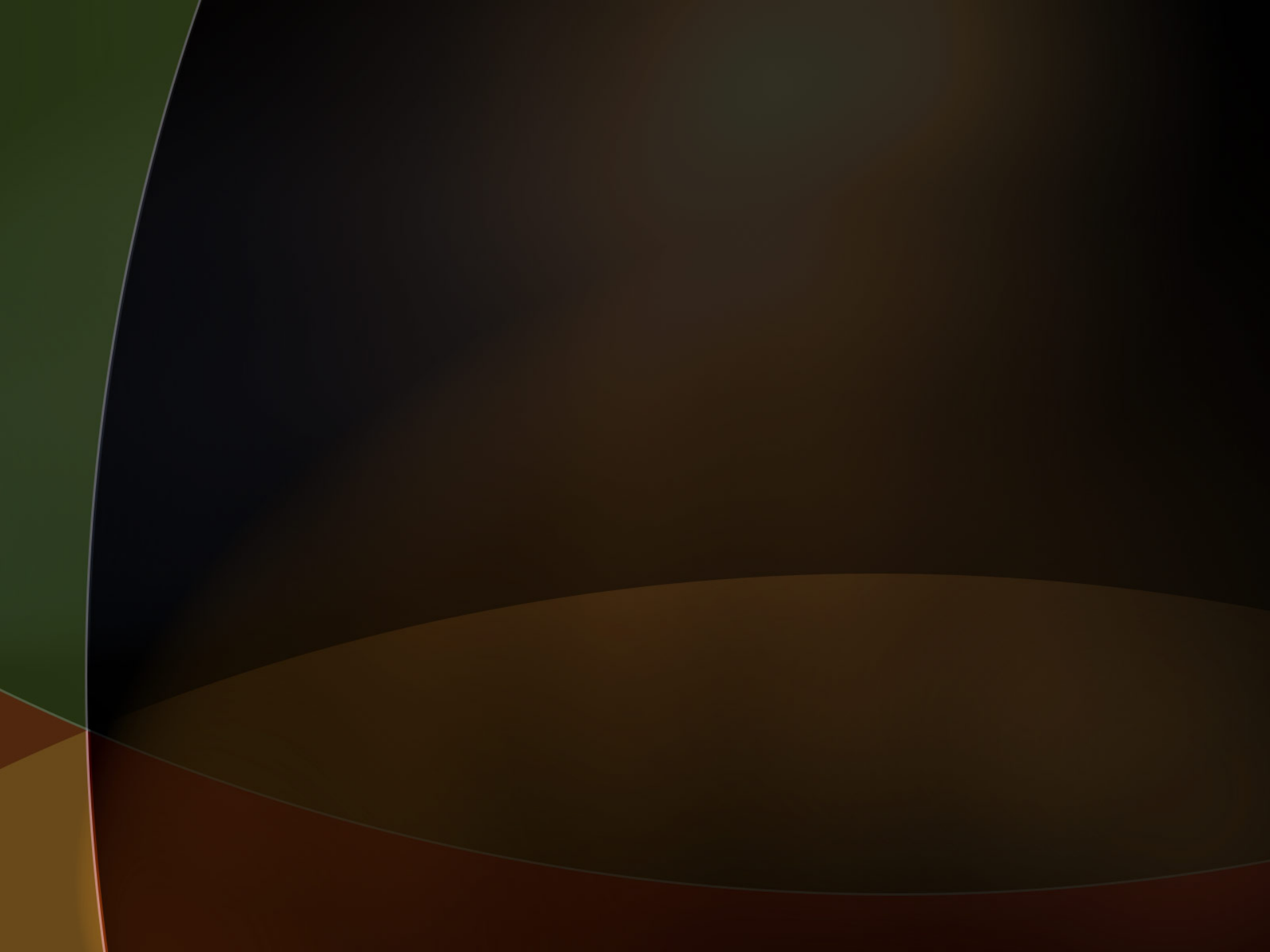
- Reduction of still-birth rate and infant mortality
- Environmental and industrial hygiene
- Prevention, treatment, and control of diseases (epidemic, endemic, occupational, etc.)
- Medical services and medical attention in event of sickness

Integration: Initiatives from the field

- Issues of health inequalities affecting the poor, marginalised and disadvantaged people
- Work within the clinical settings conflict of interest ?
- Availability, access, participation in decision-making in public health, mental health, HIV/AIDS systems

Other Illustrations

- Lobbying and Public interest litigations: sex determination and female feticide
- Consumer Protection Act
- Accreditation and accountability of the private sector
- People's and NGO networks in HIV/AIDS, Disability
- Ethics and human rights in clinical trials and research



Conclusion

- Passion and rage
- Respecting indigenous traditions
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- Reflect, dialogue and act from a political and ideological stance

- Human rights perspective in social work education
- Collaborating and joining the people's health movements

"It is my aspiration that health will finally be seen not as a blessing to be wished for; but as a human right to be fought for."

(United Nations Secretary General, Kofi Annan)

Millennium Development Goals

- Reduce by half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty and hunger by 2015.
 - Achieve Universal Primary Education by 2015.
 - Make progress towards gender equality and empowering women by eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005.
 - Reduce infant and child mortality rates by two-thirds by 2015.
 - Reduce maternal mortality ratios by three-quarters by 2015.
 - Halt and begin to reverse the spread of HIV / AIDS, malaria and other major diseases.
 - Implement national strategies for sustainable development by 2005, so as to reverse the loss of environmental resources by 2015.
 - Develop a global partnership for development, with targets for aid, trade and debt relief.
 - Reduce by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Thanks

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- IFSW organisers
- My colleagues Brinelle and Lata

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