

19 February 2026

The President
IASSW
antoINETTE@iASSW-aiETS.org

Dear Prof Antoinette Lombard,

The Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI) acknowledges receipt of your letter dated 2 February 2026, following the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) Board Meeting held in January 2026. We further acknowledge that the IASSW Board had ratified the Terms of Reference that the newly constituted Global Committee on Human Rights, Social Justice, and Global Solidarity will work from.

We appreciate your affirmation of IASSW's commitment to the principles of social work as contained in the global definition of social work. We also welcome the stated intention to create spaces for open dialogue and collaborative solutions that equip social work educators and students to advance peaceful, just, and sustainable societies. This resonates with our own commitment, as outlined in our correspondence, to constructive engagement, solidarity within the global social work community, and to pursuing urgent and meaningful dialogue with the IASSW Executive on this matter. Nonetheless, the actions and timelines that have been proposed in your letter to respond to instability, war, and genocide in Palestine (and elsewhere in the world) appear to be unnecessarily delayed. This, specifically after we agreed in a meeting held on the 13th of November 2025 between ASASWEI EXCO and IASSW representation, that by 31 December 2025, a formal position statement on the genocide in Gaza will be issued by IASSW

You note that IASSW remains committed to developing position statements that demonstrate solidarity and enable transformative action, to strengthen social work education and prepare graduates to work across national borders in solidarity, peacebuilding, and action-oriented responses to genocide, conflict, and other injustices. In this context, however, we remain concerned that nearly three years after the onset of the atrocities in Gaza, a formal position statement has yet to be issued. We would appreciate clarification on how this delay should be understood by ASASWEI, particularly considering the commitments outlined above.

While we value the considered and diplomatic nature of your response, we note that it does not directly address the specific form and substance of the four points of demand we previously raised. We would therefore like to revisit these points below for focused and substantive engagement.

1. Demand accountability and solidarity:

Request that the Israeli Association of Schools and Departments of Social Work publicly denounce the genocide and atrocities committed against Palestinians, and demonstrate a commitment to justice, human rights, and peace for both Palestine and Israel, within a clearly defined timeframe established by IASSW.

Point 1 above calls for IASSW to request accountability from the Israeli Association of Schools and Departments of Social Work in respect of adhering to the global definition and principles of social work. Should the Israeli Association of Schools and Departments of Social Work request assistance to this then it would be IASSW's role to facilitate such. This request was intended as a straightforward and reasonable step to encourage schools of social work in Israel, through their association, to acknowledge the grave humanitarian crisis in Palestine, including the systemic dehumanisation and loss of innocent lives, among them social work academics and students.

Through our representation on the IASSW Board, we observed that colleagues from the Israeli Association, who are similarly represented on the Board, did not offer a response on this matter. Their silence, coupled with the absence of an invitation from the Board for them to share their perspective, left the issue unaddressed and did little to inform the Board's deliberations. We recognise that colleagues may face complex personal, professional, or political constraints in speaking openly. In such circumstances, even a brief and carefully framed statement outlining the challenges they face in taking a public position would have been helpful and constructive. The absence of any such communication has, unfortunately, created uncertainty regarding the position of our Israeli colleagues on the ongoing atrocities perpetrated by both the Israeli government and Hamas.

2. Institute suspension for non-compliance:

Should the Israeli Association fail to comply with the above, IASSW must immediately suspend its membership until it can demonstrate adherence to the ethical principles of social work.

The second demand was conditional and dependent on the response to the first demand concerning accountability. In your reply, you suggest that seeking accountability from the Israeli Association of Schools of Social Work may be perceived as punitive or divisive (para. 9). We believe this interpretation does not accurately reflect the spirit in which the request was made, which was grounded in professional responsibility, ethical reflection, and solidarity rather than sanction. We note, instead, the constitution of a committee with comprehensive, generic terms of reference but without clearly defined actions pertaining to the matter at hand nor any timelines. While we recognise the value of consultative processes, this approach appears inconsistent with the more immediate and decisive action taken by IASSW in other contexts, such as the situation in Ukraine, where a public statement was issued promptly. This contrast may give the impression of uneven responsiveness in comparable humanitarian crises.

Our concern is that an overly procedural or protracted process may inadvertently delay meaningful action at a time when urgency is critical. The scale and immediacy of the suffering call for timely and visible leadership through advocacy, engagement, and principled action. Extended deliberations, without clear outcomes or timelines, risk limiting the Association's capacity to respond effectively to rapidly unfolding injustices. Given that the first demand was not substantively addressed, the conditional second demand consequently became moot.

3. Issue a public declaration:

IASSW must make a public declaration in support of the people of Palestine, just as it did in response to the invasion of Ukraine. Neutrality in the face of genocide is not an ethical stance; it is complicity.

We note that, rather than issuing a clear and dedicated public statement expressing support for the victims and explicitly condemning the atrocities in Gaza, these concerns were incorporated within broader communications, including the 2026 New Year's message and your response to us. While we acknowledge these references, their placement within more general messaging lessens the visibility and impact of IASSW's position. A formal position statement would have provided a more explicit and focused articulation of the International Association's stance, whilst also outlining the scope of actions it subsequently intends to pursue. Such actions could have included advocacy initiatives, pedagogical strategies, research priorities, and community engagement efforts. We believe that a dedicated statement would have effectively communicated global social work leadership, clarity of purpose, and solidarity with advocacy initiatives and organisations in attempting to address the crisis.

4. Recognize consequences for inaction:

Should IASSW fail to act upon these resolutions within four weeks of receipt of this letter, ASASWEI will be compelled to reconsider its membership and participation in IASSW until such time as the Association demonstrates its commitment to human rights and social justice.

In your response, you invite ASASWEI to reconsider its position regarding withdrawal from IASSW. However, this invitation appears to overlook that our position is conditional and dependent on the adequacy of your response to the concerns and demands we have raised. It was not presented as a definitive or predetermined course of action, but rather as a step contingent on meaningful engagement and accountability.

You also highlight that IASSW is a growing body. While we recognise and value the Association's expansion, this point may inadvertently suggest that the withdrawal of any single member organisation would have limited consequence. We respectfully submit that such framing poses the risk of minimising

the principled nature of our concerns. ASASWEI's principled position, on this matter, is grounded in its commitment to the core values and ethical principles of the social work profession. For us, the issue is not one of institutional membership size, but of remaining faithful to these principles in both word and action.

Way forward

Considering the continued delay to act with the urgency and moral clarity demanded by the realities in Palestine, ASASWEI can no longer justify passive engagement with an international body that prioritises procedural and bureaucratic comfort over human life. We posit that social work cannot claim itself as a profession principled on human rights while remaining silent in the face of genocide, nor can it hide behind bureaucratic processes when populations, communities and livelihoods are being destroyed.

We therefore reiterate that ASASWEI's position to exercise point 4 of the ASASWEI's letter to IASSW dated 31 October 2025 is not motivated by hostility, but by social work conscience, professional ethics, and our long-term commitment to solidarity with the oppressed. History judges institutions, not by the complexity of their procedures for responding to daily realities, but by whether they stood on the side of justice when it mattered most, and when it was unfashionable or unpopular. ASASWEI chooses to stand with humanity, dignity, and liberation, and calls on IASSW to do the same.

Therefore, while ASASWEI will continue to engage constructively with ASSWA and other global social work academic associations and remains supportive of the International Federation of Social Workers' (IFSW) call for accountability from the Israeli Union of Social Workers (IUSW), the current stance adopted by IASSW has compelled us to withdraw our membership at this time. This decision is not taken lightly but reflects our commitment to the core values and principles of the profession. We will remain open to re-engagement and reconsideration of our membership when it is evident that IASSW's direction and actions on this and related matters align more closely with active demonstration of social work values and principles during times of humanitarian crises. It is therefore imperative for IASSW to demonstrate a timely action-oriented willingness to lead with bold courage when it comes to protecting and promoting the humanity, dignity, and liberation of vulnerable populations.

Sincerely,

Prof Mpumelelo E. Ncube

President: Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions

For and on behalf of the Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions (ASASWEI)

ASASWEI (Association of South African Social Work Education Institutions)

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