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# Introduction to the Global Local Link at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work

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# INTRODUCTION TO THE GLOBAL LOCAL LINK AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

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The papers that follow are plenary papers given at the inaugural conference for the Center for International Social Work Studies at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work. The Center for International Social Work Studies was established by vote of the faculty of the School of Social Work. The vote followed several years of work among faculty to explore the increasing impact of international issues and concerns on social work practice and the profession.

The impact of global interdependence on economics has been widely recognized; increasingly, it is obvious that interdependence is also a key factor in social problems and their solutions. More and more social workers deal with individual, family and institutional cases and problems with an international dimension. Key among these are issues related to the movement of peoples. Immigration to the United States is at the highest level since pre World War I days, and similar movements of people are occurring worldwide. Many social workers will deal directly and indirectly with resettlement. Others will assist families dealing with family separation, including new challenges in international child custody, divorce, adoption, and other family issues.

Movement of peoples has led to globalization of other problems. AIDS, for example, has now spread to all countries. Restrictive laws have proven ineffective in

keeping social and health problems from crossing borders; environmental problems, more obviously, have no regard for borders. These issues underscore that countries can no longer hope to solve social problems without international cooperation and utilization of knowledge only available through international contacts.

Global interdependence also brings the hope of using international contacts to gain new knowledge. More than ever, we have new opportunities to learn from other countries and to consider policy and practice innovations adapted from abroad.

The Center for International Social Work Studies at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work was established to promote knowledge building and professional competence in the field of international social work. While broadly focused on international knowledge related to social work and social development, the Center's work will emphasize the applicability of international knowledge to social work practice and to expanding social work's contributions to international policy and problem solving on key social issues. The Center will focus on the following goals and activities: curriculum development; facilitating faculty research on international issues; encouraging student and practitioner participation in internationally related courses, seminars, exchanges and other activities; and participating in exchanges with social work programs in other

countries. To date, exchange activities have been developed with Jamaica, Armenia, Mauritius and Denmark.

The theme of our inaugural conference reflects the goals and philosophy of the International Center: "The Global-Local Link: International Challenges to Social Work Practice." Held on October 26, 1994, the conference featured a keynote address by Dr. Katherine Kendall giving both a historical overview and a future vision for internationalism within social work. Dr. Kendall's address was followed by a plenary panel on social work around the world. Chaired by Dr. Charles Guzzetta of Hunter College, the panel featured prominent social work educators from Europe (Antonin Wagner), Asia (Kasumi Hirayama), Africa (Yvonne Asamoah) and the Caribbean (John Maxwell).

The conference concluded with a series of practice focused workshops, each of which demonstrated the impact of international events on domestic practice and the utility of knowledge from international organizations and/or innovations in other countries. The workshop topics were: 1) Children's Rights in International Perspective; 2) Working with Immigrants and Refugees; 3) Policies and Practice in Aging; 4) Family Law and Social Work Practice: Cross National Challenges; and 5) AIDS: the Global Local Challenge.

Included in this monograph are the plenary papers from the conference. These include the keynote address by Dr. Katherine Kendall, and four regional perspectives on the challenges facing social work and social work education. A copy of the conference program is also included.