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MEDIA RELEASE / Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers

Social Workers taking steps to strengthen their voice on social issues

Members of the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW) have identified the profound social impacts of the current recession as one of several issues that they will be taking steps to speak out more about in 2009, on behalf of the often “voiceless communities” they work within.

At the conclusion of their annual national Congress, held in Wellington over the weekend (Saturday 17 April), ANZASW members collectively identified those areas of social work they expect will carry the brunt of harder economic times and lead to more pressure at the ‘frontline’ of social work.

These included the social issues that arise from any form of increase in poverty, and the likelihood that needs in specific areas of social work such as domestic violence and mental health services, that are already under pressure, may increase even further. This may mean extra resources will be needed for social work education, for recruitment and retention of Social Workers, and for more specific workforce development support for Māori and Pasifika Social Workers.

A key point of discussion at the ANZASW Congress was how to strengthen and develop the social work profession’s ability to influence and inform more positive and balanced responses to social issues. A consensus view was expressed that the diverse work of Social Workers is not well understood in the wider public arena and that more effort is required to demonstrate positive examples of social work in action, including the ways in which Social Workers work in many different sectors and in collaboration with other professions.

Another specific issue raised during the Congress was a question about the failure of the New Zealand Government to indicate whether it may yet become a signatory to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, as the Australian Government recently decided to, or not.

During the Congress ANZASW members learnt from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade that the New Zealand Government has finalised a new report on New Zealand’s human rights record to the United Nations, which ANZASW had sought to be consulted on.

The Congress noted two changes in the “key human rights priorities” section of the final report. A new priority now reads that the New Zealand Government intends to improve its consultation process with civil society for future human rights reporting and follow-up. The existing priority for continuing to support Māori to realise their potential, was changed by adding the words: “Strengthening the partnership between the Government and Māori”.

ANZASW members attending the Congress represented roopu, branches and interest groups from all regions of the country. ANZASW has been the professional association for Social Workers in Aotearoa New Zealand since 1964 and has a current membership of approximately 4000 members. All actions of ANZASW and its members are founded on principles of social justice and human rights in accordance with Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

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