



**PSI statement at the
Joint informal consultative meeting with Member States and Major Groups convened by the
Co-Chairs of the Preparatory Committee for the
Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction
Friday, 19 September 2014
(International Labour Organization, Geneva)**

Esteemed Co-Chairs and Member States,

Thank you for the opportunity of this joint consultative meeting. I am very pleased to address you on behalf of the Trade Union and Workers' Major Group, and specifically Public Services International. As you know, Public Services International is a global trade union federation representing 20 million working women and men who deliver vital public services in 160 countries.

And I am pleased to inform you that our statement made at yesterday's consultations is now on record.

At the risk of repeating some things already heard, I shall recall two points that we raised yesterday, and introduce a further point that we feel is relevant to those points raised yesterday.

Yesterday we expressed dismay at the absence of reference to policy and action that addresses the important role of public service workers in the immediate aftermath of emergencies of all types as well as in reconstruction, and we do look forward to their eventual inclusion.

I also take the liberty to recall that in order to strengthen governance for disaster risk management, the labour rights of frontline responders in all emergencies must be prioritized so that their employment conditions and working conditions can help to ensure that the public sector can address emergencies as effectively as possible.

At present, public service workers who are the frontline responders in all emergencies have inadequate employment and working conditions. Their employment conditions are most frequently limited by their definition as "essential services" and by critical barriers to improving their conditions, such as denial of the right to strike.

Their working conditions are defined by the level of danger of the emergency, the adequacy of their numbers and their labour rights. Most frequently they intervene for very long periods of time without pause, and experience severe hardship alongside the populations they serve, including exposure to injury and loss of life.

I would like to emphasize today that the numbers of public service workers who can intervene in emergencies have been severely limited in recent years under austerity budgets, so-called public sector "reform" (which has largely entailed outsourcing and privatization...) and the continuing sway of structural adjustment policies. Consequently, their numbers are largely inadequate in many Member States, and they even more often suffer from inadequate training and inadequate equipment (I recall here that well trained public sector health workers fighting the Ebola outbreak in

West Africa are dying for lack of personal protective equipment, which we all know is an intolerable state of affairs...).

In this regard, it is important to recall also that whereas IMF conditionalities included capping of the public sector wage bill in all structural adjustment programmes, this policy was reversed in September 2007. Yet most countries do not take account of this fact, and the results for public sector wage bills appear to have remained largely unchanged.

Yesterday, a statement from Japan, a country that has recently dealt with a major disaster, called for greater investments in public sector infrastructure and stressed that these investments were essential for disaster risk reduction.

We would add that within the language of paragraph 15 on *Strengthening Governance to Manage Disaster Risk*, reference to “guiding the public sector” that is stated in subparagraph g) should make specific reference to the need to invest in the public sector, and, most specifically, to the need to strengthen the public services, with specific reference to improving the employment and working conditions of public service workers, who are the frontline response to disasters.

Finally, in reference to the heading of this section *Strengthening Governance to Manage Disaster Risk*, we would like to underscore that the World Bank’s approach to Disaster Risk Management has substantial relevance to the post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction of the UN system.

Yesterday, I called on the Preparatory Committee to consider the relevance of pandemic preparedness for the post-2015 framework, which has been highly developed by the World Health Organization.

Today, I wish to stress that indeed the richness of the entire UN system, its programmes and specialized agencies and the Bretton Woods Institutions must be called on to develop a truly forward-looking framework on disaster risk reduction for the post-2015 era.

The governments of the UN have contributed extensively to the entire range of issues in a wide number of fora and over many years, and the output of this Committee should credit this vast contribution of Member States by formulating it into a substantial, unified framework based on a comprehensive vision of disaster risk reduction.

Thank you.