



## **TEXT OF THE MEDIA BRIEFING OF SISTER ROSAMARIA PAVANELLI, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE PUBLIC SERVICES INTERNATIONAL (PSI), AT THE END OF HER 4-DAY OFFICIAL VISIT TO NIGERIA ON JULY 2-5, 2013, HELD AT THE MHWUN HOUSE ON FRIDAY JULY 5, 2013**

It is with great pleasure that I welcome you all to this media briefing. I must start by saying that the last four days that I have spent in Nigeria, which is my first visit to this great country has been a very inspiring one. I am touched by the warmth and vibrancy of the kind people of this country and I am particularly impressed by the commitment of public service workers to quality public services and a better society.

Public Services International is a Global Union Federation with affiliates representing more than 20 million public service workers in over 150 countries and territories across the world. In Nigeria, nine leading public sector unions are affiliates of PSI. These are: Medical and Health Workers' Union of Nigeria (MHWUN); Nigeria Union of Local Government Employees (NULGE); Nigeria Civil Service Union (NCSU); Non-Academic Staff Union of Educational Research Institutions and allied Institutes (NASU); Amalgamated Union of Public Corporations, Civil Service Technical and Recreational Services Employees (AUPCTRE); National Association of Nigeria Nurses and Midwives (NANNM); National Union of Electricity Employees (NUEE); Agriculture and Allied Employees Union of Nigeria (AAEUN) and the National Union of Civil Service Secretarial and Stenographic Workers (NUCSSASW).

In the course of the past four days, I have visited the National Secretariats of each of these affiliates in both Lagos and Abuja. Brother Abdulwahed Omar, President of the Nigeria Labour Congress also hosted us, pointing out the importance and dedication of PSI affiliates in the Nigerian trade union movement. I have been overwhelmed by the love and solidarity that they have showered me with, and with a delightful heart, I say, thank you.

I also had the opportunity to meet with Chief Emeka Wogu, the Honourable Minister of Labour and Productivity. We had frank and mutually beneficial discussions in the interest of public sector workers, and for the cause of building the public service to play a transformative role for the development of Nigeria.

Public sector workers in Nigeria are however beset by a number of problems. Poor funding, privatisation, and outsourcing are some of the policies that have created or deepened problems not only for the workers, but also for the task of delivering quality public services. This rather questionable neoliberal approach to "development" is a universal paradigm which was foisted on society through attacks on the poor and working people over the last three decades.

While the multilateral economic institutions and governments that advanced this global "consensus" have claimed that it is for the betterment of humankind, reality has shown that

neoliberalism *does not work*. The current global economic crisis is a vivid testament to this. Unfortunately, rather than learn from the catastrophe that we have all been thrown into by deregulated capitalism, we are being told that the way forward is to give more of the medicine that caused the ailment!

PSI and its affiliates posit that improved funding of public services under democratic control that includes the inputs of workers is the best way to building strong, prosperous and inclusive societies. Public-public-partnerships (PUPs) have been shown to be more effective than Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in societies where these have been practiced. We thus appeal to the Federal Government of Nigeria and other governments at the state and local government levels to look critically at the ideology of neoliberalism and put the interests of the Nigerian masses over and above those of big business through enhanced public services delivery and a halt to privatisation in general.

One of the consequences of the neoliberal model of development is the erosion of workers remuneration, working conditions, and trade union rights. With rising unemployment, the employers feel stronger to give low *real* wages and discountenance taking adequate steps to safeguard occupational safety and health (OHS). This is reflected in Nigeria where the take home pay of most public sector workers can hardly take them home and OHS policies are not well spelt out and implemented at the workplace level. It also accounts for increasing industrial unrest. PSI considers it necessary for workers to be adequately compensated for them to give in their best, with all their hearts.

Another major reason for the spate of strikes and other forms of industrial conflict in the country appears to be the non-implementation of agreements reached between employers/governments and the trade unions. Examples of these as it affects public sector workers abounds. To mention a few: NUEE/FGN/PHCN December 2012 agreement on severance packages for electricity workers; the May 2010 agreement between the Federal Ministry of Health and the Joint Health Sector Unions and; the NASU/FGN agreement of 2009 that has not been fully implemented.

I must appreciate the efforts of the Honourable Minister of Labour towards resolving these. But a lot more has to be done. Harmonious industrial relations rooted in social dialogue and pluralism can only flourish when each party, and particularly the workers who do not have the institutional powers of coercion which government has, can trust the other to implement agreements reached. This is one of the reasons why PSI will urge the Federal Republic of Nigeria to ratify the ILO Conventions 151 and 154 which are geared at promoting collective bargaining in the public sector.

Finally, I wish to point out that workers' rights are at the heart of democratic rights. The working class fought tenaciously and continues to fight for the expansion of democratic political, social, and economic rights of all citizens, across the world. Thus, PSI frowns at practices which could in anyway short change workers, particularly members of its affiliates. It is in this sense that we are very much bothered by reports that in some states of the federation, workers are made to retire prematurely, because of their attainment of higher heights in the service. This, we gather is particularly so in some local governments. We would advise that such discriminatory practice stops, please.

We also hasten to condemn the victimisation of workers in private health facilities that join the trade union. This is against all ethics of human rights and the laws of the land, as well as international conventions. We call on the Federal Government to help ensure that workers rights to belong to trade unions are duly upheld. It is pertinent to point out that even when delivered

through privately-owned establishments, social services such as health, education and utilities *are public services*. The rights of unions in these sectors to organise willing would-be members should thus be respected, always.

On a final note, I wish to thank the leaderships and members of all the affiliates of PSI in Nigeria that have made this visit a memorable one for me. I will always remember and cherish these few days I have spent here. Thank you so very, very much, and I thank you all comrades and colleagues of the press for listening.

***Long live the Public Services International!***

***Long live the Nigerian trade union movement!!***

***Long live international working class solidarity!!!***