



Opening Statement Rosa Pavanelli – WOC 2014

Dear Sisters,

It is my pleasure and honour to welcome you to the PSI World Women's Committee, as your General Secretary, for the second time.

The last year has been a real rollercoaster, but I think we can honestly say that we have made progress.

In Durban, PSI adopted a comprehensive five year plan. In the context of very difficult times for public services unions, our delegates laid plans to work for alternatives to privatisation, promote quality public services, fight inequality, and strengthen the trade union movement.

In short, we recognised that it's up to us! Other than in the education sector, PSI is the only global union focused solely on public services. We have a unique role in the labour movement. For workers in public services, we are their only voice in international forums and the only body coordinating public sector union action. If we don't do it, nobody will!

A majority of our members are women and PSI has a strong legacy to promote and defend women workers' rights as well as defending and strengthening quality public services for all working women and men. Gender equality is at the core of our programme – it is part and parcel of all of our strategic goals and objectives.

We have worked to make PSI more effective at projecting union power into the powerful international organisations and financial institutions which threaten our members' rights and interests, and indeed, the rights and interests of ordinary people in every nation.

We are working to make sure that trade unions and workers' voices are heard at all levels which is increasingly complex when a total corporatization of the international arena is taking place, for example through so-called private-public partnerships – even at the level of the United Nations and the ILO.

We have strengthened our relationships with civil society organisations, making common cause on the need for quality public services, tax justice and other issues, but also through putting employment and social policy at the core of the development agenda.

We have begun to coordinate our influence in cities, where most people access public services on a daily basis, and reached out to global organisations of mayors and municipalities.

We have increased our focus on influencing global policy, and put new pressure on international financial institutions, development banks and other groups that use public money to privatise and inject the profit motive into public services. We cannot accept that trade and profits have priority over workers' rights. This is why we have joined the battle against dangerous trade agreements that facilitate privatisation and threaten democratic governance.

The protection of workers' and trade union rights is one of PSI's core activities. Public sector workers rights are under severe attack through austerity and privatization programmes, but also due to on-going labour reforms that lower standards and reduce protection mechanisms.

Public Services International is a global trade union federation representing 20 million working women and men who deliver vital public services in 150 countries. PSI champions human rights, advocates for social justice and promotes universal access to quality public services. PSI works with the United Nations system and in partnership with labour, civil society and other organisations.

In many parts of the world, trade union rights for public service workers continue to be violated. In the last year PSI has supported its affiliates in more than 30 countries through targeted actions and solidarity campaigns.

We have strengthened our cooperation with other global unions for our actions in priority countries and PSI's work at the International Labour conference has gained momentum, both in 2013 and this year.

So much more remains to be done and the stakes are high. The ILO's supervisory mechanism is under attack as the employers' group continues to challenge the right to strike.

In too many countries legislation has been passed or is being discussed to limit or prohibit strikes in "essential services" or even for all public sector workers. In addition, the criminalization of social conflicts and increasing violence against protesters is a reality from North to South.

The right to strike, to form trade unions and collectively bargain on wages and conditions are fundamental freedoms and human rights. These rights are enshrined in the ILO Constitution, ILO Conventions 87 and 98, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

At the International Labour Conference (ILC) in June 2014, during the discussions in the Committee on Application of Standards (CAS), the Employers' Group persisted to deny that the right to strike forms part of ILO Convention 87, thus undermining decades of jurisprudence and the application of international law. The Workers' Group unanimously rejected the demands of the Employers' group. The conflict over the right to strike has been referred to ILO's Governing Body, which could call on the International Court of Justice to produce an advisory opinion and put an end to the dispute. A decision is expected in November 2014.

This is why we will present an emergency resolution to PSI EB, calling for a global campaign to defend and promote the right to strike.

This is a battle we have to fight together, for our and future generations!

Our strength is in our numbers! We must help all unions grow, in both size and capacity, to strengthen our movement. We adopted an ambitious and realistic plan to increase our membership, and our strength, by at least one million new members over the next five years.

We need more women members and women trade union leaders so that they can define the agenda of the future. We need more young women and migrant women in our ranks. And we need to break free from the idea that gender equality is an issue that concerns women only. A more equitable and just society will benefit all.

Finally, allow me to congratulate you on the occasion of World Public Services Day today. We have chosen the theme of tax justice this year.

Tax justice is about redistributing wealth by funding the vital public services such as health and education that help end poverty and inequality. Reforming national, regional and international tax systems and removing counter-productive tax incentives will lead to substantially increased budgets for countries to finance the post-2015 agenda and pay for improved public services including education, healthcare, clean water and sanitation, energy, housing, transportation, and development initiatives.

Let's keep on fighting together for quality public services!

Thank you!