

**CONCEPTUAL NOTE FOR WAHSUN AND PSI MOBILIZATION OF GLOBAL SUPPORT AGAINST THE SPREAD OF THE EBOLA VIRUS DISEASE, WITH FOCUS ON FAMILY MEMBERS OF HEALTH-CARE WORKERS KILLED BY THE DISEASE**

***Introduction***

The current Ebola Virus Disease outbreak has been disastrous for the health systems and peoples living in the West African sub-region. It is the worst outbreak of EVD ever and has thus far resulted in 2,615 confirmed cases of infection with a fatality of 1,427 persons in Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Nigeria.

Healthcare workers have been particularly affected, being the first line of defence against the disease. In what can be considered as one of the most dangerous situations of occupational hazards, they have kept up the fight, even as 120 health-care workers have lost their lives, out of 240 that became infected in the course of their work, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

The West African Health Services Unions' Network (WAHSUN) has been at the fore of raising concerns internationally on the matter, with institutional support from the Public Services International (PSI) which all its member-unions are affiliated to.

WAHSUN and PSI have also given one thousand dollars (US\$ 1,000.00) to support the widows of the first two health-care workers known to have died from the disease in Liberia, earlier in the year.

As the situation worsens despite concerted efforts by governments across the sub-region, and the international community, there is a dire need for

much greater and systematized support for victims of EVD and their family members on one hand, and for beefing up the health system in affected countries on the other hand. This is particularly so as the World Health Organization has pointed out the possibility of the number of infected persons rising to 20,000.

An injury to one, as an old trade union axiom goes, is an injury to all. It is high time for the international trade union movement as well as women, men and organizations of goodwill across the world to stand up united in helping our sisters and brothers facing this herculean battle against EVD.

### **Proposal of Action**

The sheer impact of the current outbreak has placed it firmly on the front burner of public discourse across the world. The need for awareness raising campaigns, however, still remains palpable.

It is our view that a major thrust of the awareness campaign required now should be tied to concrete actions to prevent and control the spread of infection. In this light, there is the need to produce the WHO *Interim Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for the Care of Patients with Suspected or Confirmed Filovirus Hemorrhagic Fever in Health-care Settings, with Focus on Ebola*, in massive quantities, for distribution in countries across the West African Sub-region.

This is also the time to call for the institutionalization of Occupational Safety and Health measures in workplaces, particularly in health-care facilities. Support for fragile health systems like those of post-conflict societies which Liberia and Sierra Leone are, have to be consolidated upon by the

international community. WAHSUN and PSI must be critical voices in calling for this and thus mobilizing global opinion for the needed action.

A very fundamental step that WAHSUN and PSI can directly take is to provide material and moral support for the families of health-care workers that have lost their lives by establishing an Ebola Victims Solidarity Trust Fund.

This is essential when we consider the poor wages of health-care workers in most of the affected countries and the total absence of life insurance policies for them. The consequence of this, as we observed earlier in the year, which led to the US\$1,000.00 donation we made, is that the spouses (especially when these are women) and children they leave behind are condemned to painful lives of penury.

WAHSUN and PSI cannot do this alone, we have to mobilize the goodwill of trade unions and other organizations from across the world.

It is thus being proposed that an international conference in support of Ebola Virus Disease victims be summoned by WAHSUN and PSI for mid-October, in Accra.

The Global Union Federations, national trade union centres and health workers' unions from across all regions in the world should be invited. International organizations, particularly those within the United Nations system as well as International NGO's like *Medecins San Frontiers*, and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung should also be invited.

It is our candid opinion that taking this bold step would go a long way in assuaging the fears of healthcare workers in the course of duty.

In taking this bold humanitarian step of establishing an Ebola Victims Solidarity Trust Fund, we would also ginger governments and the international community to paying greater attention to this crucial dimension of the diseases' impact on workers.

As we take this step, we will also continue to demand the institutionalization of adequate Occupational Safety and Health measures and life insurances for health-care workers.

Our voice matters, our actions are necessary. United we stand, divided we fall.

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