

1. ADDRESS BY PSI GENERAL SECRETARY

Dear comrades, I want to thank you for inviting and giving me the opportunity to bring you the solidarity message of more than 20 millions public services workers affiliated to PSI in more than 150 countries.

Let me tell you that the happiness for being in South Africa is just veiled by the concerns for President Mandela's health conditions. Yes, he is an old man who fully lived his life, but he remains a symbol, a hero, an example to follow not only for you, for South Africa, but for the entire world. A man whose contribution to enhance the principles of equality, justice and democracy is worldwide recognised. A man that you and we all must be able to honour, continuing our fight against injustice and inequality that are increasing around the world.

I'm back to South Africa for the first time after PSI congress in Durban last November where I was elected General Secretary. Let me take the opportunity of your congress to thank NEHAWU and all the South African affiliates for the extraordinary work you all did to make PSI Congress a world success, despite the difficult relationship with the Head Office.

I will not be just if I wouldn't apologize on behalf of PSI for those misbehaviours that during the preparation of the congress threatened the necessary harmony for a good cooperation. But PSI has now started a new phase, and I am sure you will appreciate how differently we will work together to make next year Afrecon in Botswana a success.

NEHAWU and the other South African affiliates played a very important role at the World Congress of PSI in November last year. Bold resolutions on Palestinian solidarity, on labour brokers, and on many other issues were successfully carried by the Congress. PSI Congress approved an ambitious Plan of Action that commits all of us to strengthen our fight against privatization of public services and common goods, against precariousness of work, and to defend and extend workers and trade unions rights.

Our world still suffers from war, xenophobia, racism and discrimination, inequality and deprivation. And the values we believe in are continuously put at stake by the neo liberal forces which are imposing an agenda of privatization and marketisation of the common goods. We are often told that conflicts have a political or sometimes religious origin. But we know that it's often a lie, that more and more frequently conflicts are originated by economic reasons, for the control of the land, for the ownership of natural resources, mainly energy and water.

And we must be aware that public services are the new border of the labour exploitation, where competition and social dumping are brought within our cities by unscrupulous brokers - or we should call them human being traffickers - where the precariousness of jobs and the unacceptable reduction of wages and working conditions are a threat that impacts on the rights of workers that our unions fought many years to conquest. And these situations always bring more injustice and inequalities.

We know that the financial crisis and the consequent policy of austerity have put on the shoulders of workers the burden of the disaster produced by the bankers and the privateers. We are well aware that the financial crisis has been used to force the rules and impose a global neo-liberal model of the society, with less rights for workers and ordinary people. IFIs, starting from the WB and the IMF are admitting that austerity is not the solution, but they are not changing strategy and their auto-criticism is only the fig leaf on the shame of the neo-liberal policy disaster if they continue to impose the same measures.

At the same time, the global institutions are now starting a discussion on the Sustainable Development Goals post 2015. Apart from the semantic shift from the previous MDGs (that hardly hides the failure of that strategy), the approach seems to indicate that the global institutions are preparing to do what is possible, better compatible with the market hegemony. We must be able to influence this discussion, to pretend that the SPF coverage is provided by public services, to avoid that the market becomes even more aggressive and to put solidarity and justice on top of the agenda.

We work for a world of peace and democracy. We work for equality and justice. We know that, as the unions and workers who deliver public services, we are actually the key to making such a world possible. Too many PSI affiliates exist in countries where union membership is not the norm, where union membership density is measured in single digit. In many countries violence against trade unionists is common. Only in the recent months we had several members arrested in many countries, one for all our Turkish affiliates. And in some countries being a trade unionist still means to risk the life, like our affiliates in Guatemala.

It's increasing the number of countries where trade union rights are violated or circumscribed, where gender discrimination denies women access to decision making structures or involvement in the activities of unions themselves. PSI's response must be one which links building power with quality public services, working to fight the neo-liberal forces that are coordinating the attack to impose a unique model of global capitalism.

PSI's response is organising to strengthen unions and workers around the world, to fight against corruption and for tax justice. Those are the right responses to the liberal policy of the financial institutions, and the true alternative to privatization and marketisation of common goods. I know NEHAWU was particularly pleased that the resolution, sponsored by your sister Union SAMWU, on the question of relations with WFTU was approved in PSI congress. I know that NEHAWU values its relations to the Trade Union International of the WFTU that organises public sector workers, and also values relations to the PSI.

The resolution called for the PSI to be at the forefront of reaching out a hand of friendship to the WFTU, and trying to find ways of encouraging a positive interaction between the WFTU and the ITUC. Given the state of the world, and the unity of the ruling class as seen at the recent G8, if not on Syria, then definitely on strengthening the neo-liberal World Economy, it is now vitally important for the trade union movement to move beyond the Cold War politics that once divided us, and to work together on behalf of the working people of our entire world. To do otherwise would be highly irresponsible. How can we allow ourselves to be divided in the face of the biggest capitalist onslaught that many of us have ever experienced?

As someone who has believed in progressive politics all of my life, I believe that actions speak louder than words. That is why I am not surprised, and I am not scared at all, by the fact that many of our affiliates are members of both PSI and WFTU. That is why, unlike my predecessors, I welcome the fact that in Latin America PSI is developing activities with affiliates where WFTU is invited. And, for instance, a dialogue is open between the two organisations also in Asia.

It is a pragmatic but realistic way to start knowing one another, to start working together and let the experience speak so that we can identify how we can undertake joint action to defend public sector workers. Let us put ourselves to the test! I am confident that NEHAWU would appreciate that approach and will contribute with its own experience to look forward for a global united trade union movement.

There are also many other issues that we will be processing over the next period, including on Palestine, and I am sure your able representative on the Executive Board, and PSI Vice President Comrade Thozama, will be able to report progress to you.

It is well known that NEHAWU highly values the tripartite alliance that includes, COSATU, the ANC and the SACP. Indeed, the Alliance is closely watched all over the world to see if it might represent a positive example of how consensus can be built on the way forward.

If I may be so bold as to say that within the membership of PSI and its 20 millions of members in 150 of countries around the world, there is a very rich treasury of ideas and approaches that have been tried to ensure that Governments and social partners work together around common aspirations. That is what we are fighting for in those years, when trade unions and workers' rights are under attack in so many countries.

But one thing that is absolutely clear from the global experience is that partnerships like the Alliance are more effective when the trade union movement is strong, and gaining in strength, and when it is united, and when it is independent and it can speak with absolute authority about the working class interests it claims to represent.

For these reasons, I believe that NEHAWU and the South African Trade Union Movement are absolutely right to focus on building workers power at the base, to encourage agitation and education amongst rank and file leaders, emphasise the need for transparency and accountability. That is what we work for in PSI, what we ask all PSI affiliates to do.

Comrades, you have a brave history to teach to the rest of the world: the history of men and women who were denied even the status of human beings. You suffered, you died, but you fought and won and you have been able to make South Africa the miracle that the world has known.

Comrades, on behalf of PSI, for its more than centennial history, for its 20 millions member, I ask you, please, do not give up, do not allow that the contradictions of the globalisation would pollute the value of the freed South Africa, be autonomous, be independent and continue fighting to abolish any form of discrimination, poverty and inequality that still affect your country as the rest of the world.

Comrades, Let the world continue to learn from the courage of South African workers movement.