

WEST AFRICAN HEALTH SECTOR UNIONS NETWORK (WAHSUN)

**COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF THE 11th PLENARY SESSION HELD AT
SPLENDID HOTEL, OUAGADOUGOU, BURKINA FASO ON DECEMBER 3-4, 2013**

Introduction

The West African Health Sector Unions' Network held its 11th Plenary Session on December 3-4, 2013 at the Splendid Hotel, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso. Present at the session were unions from Burkina Faso, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone as well as Rwanda from East Africa. Committed to developing healthcare delivery in the region and the defence of the interests of the members of health unions, extensive deliberations were held.

We recognised among other things, that:

- Patient safety concerns should continue to engage the attention of Governments, Employers and Trade Unions. Further, issues related to quality Health care and welfare of workers must be central to all deliberations
- Building partnership among international labour workforce and international organisations through social dialogue, lobbying and information sharing will promote industrial harmony and enhance productivity within African countries.
- Working together with ECOWAS, WAHO, our Governments and other international organisations will constitute a driving force for the possible attainment of the health-related Millennium Development Goals among member countries.
- Insecurity in Nigeria with regards to the operation of sectarian groups has hardly abated despite a state of emergency in three states in the north eastern region. This situation puts health workers and working people in general at risk, and has to be curtailed.
- The non-implementation of the Abuja declaration for 15% of budgetary provisions to be set aside for healthcare delivery is having dire consequences on the quest for universal health coverage.

In the light of the foregoing, the 11th Plenary Session resolved, thus:

1. All governments, employers and Affiliate Unions/Associations, must formulate/implement requisite policies, and intensify education on Occupational Health and Safety at all levels in the health sector to create awareness and reduce the incidence of work place injuries;
2. Towards ensuring the financial independence of all health unions, affiliates of WAHSUN in countries where automatic check-off systems have not been instituted should advocate for the institution of this generally accepted system for the collection of membership subscription;
3. The endemic presence of corruption undermines the potentialities for development of the productive forces on the continent. WAHSUN-in-session calls for more concerted efforts at combating corruption by non-state actors as well as genuinely so by state institutions established for such purposes;
4. Growth without development has led to increased unemployment rates across the region, particularly of young people, even as many national economies continue to grow, in a period of global economic crisis. WAHSUN-in-session calls for people-centred development where growth would be jobs-driven and not based on neoliberal paradigms;
5. The attainment of Universal Health Coverage in Africa is very distant largely because of the qualitative and quantitative shortage of human resources for health. WAHSUN-in-session thus calls for the training/re-training, employment and retention of more health workers towards meeting universally accepted standards of health professionals/patients ratios;
6. WAHSUN-in-session observed that the Liberian government has consistently shunned voices of reason and International Labour Standards that guarantee the rights of all workers to organise, in its decent work bill. WAHSUNN thus calls on the Liberian government to address this legitimate concerns;
7. Public healthcare delivery is suffering greatly in Nigeria with the outsourcing of services which is crippling effectiveness as well as leading to increasing precarious work. Further, the National Health Bill remains an attempt to emasculate the roles of several health professionals, protecting just the interests of medical practitioners. WAHSUN-in-session realises that these developments are detrimental to the health system as a whole and calls for their reversal. As alternatives, WAHSUN calls for the initiative of Public-Public Partnerships (PUPs) as credible alternatives to privatisation, while a National Health Bill which balances the interests of all the stakeholders in the health sector and is thus best equipped to deliver quality services to the public should be passed;

8. National Minimum Wage legislation remains a very important instrument for protecting the income security of workers and has thus been universally utilised. It equally fosters mutually beneficial employers-employees relations, necessary for harmonious industrial relations. WAHSUN-in-session thus welcomes the upward review of National Minimum Wage in Sierra Leone, and the efforts of the Rwandan government at instituting a National Minimum Wage. The sliding scale of the National Minimum Wage with cost of living in Ghana is also quite commendable. In contradistinction to this WAHSUN observed the worrisome case in Nigeria where there are attempts by the Senate to remove the National Minimum Wage from the exclusive legislative list and calls on it status quo.

Conclusion

The representatives of member-unions of WAHSUN appreciated the hospitality of the health workers union in Burkina Faso and the leadership of the Burkina Faso labour centre for providing a convivial atmosphere for the plenary Session's successful deliberation.

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