



## **Solidarity message of the Public Services International to the 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress of the Movement for the Right to Health in Argentina in defence of universal health care and against the commodification of health on 1 – 2 December 2017 at Buenos Aires.**

Esteemed sisters and brothers of the Federación Sindical de Profesionales de la Salud de la República Argentina (FESPROSA), and the entire constituent organisations of the Movement for the Right to Health in Argentina, I extend solidarity greetings on behalf of the Public Services International (PSI), on the occasion of this historic 1<sup>st</sup> International Congress for universal health care and against the commodification of health.

This is part of the PSI's global Human Right to Health campaign, which brings our struggles across different countries and regions together, like massive rivers into a huge ocean of struggle for a better world, where every woman, man and child accesses quality healthcare and social services as a matter of right.

With the worldwide spread of the 700 affiliates representing over 20 million workers across 154 countries and territories which are united under the PSI banner, we can bring together the needed solidarity of working-class people to bear, working together with committed civil society organisations, in this important struggle.

The World Health Organization recognised "the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health," as a cardinal responsibility of governments and states over 70 years ago. In the 1978 *Alma Ata Declaration*, health was explicitly defined as a fundamental human right. Several international treaties uphold this right which is recognised in the constitutions of not less than 115 countries.

So, why does a significant proportion of humankind lack access to quality healthcare? Why is it that 2.6 billion people have no access to sanitation, making them susceptible to ill health? Why are over 150 million people pushed into poverty and destitution as a result of healthcare expenditure **every year** according to the World Health Organization? What exactly does universal health *coverage* mean, in the scheme of things?

To find answers to this myriad of questions, we must realise that health, for the bosses and multinational corporations, is first and foremost, as with virtually everything, about profit. Health and social services constitute one of the biggest sectors and fastest growing sectors of the world economy, estimated at 5.8trillion US\$ per annum. Thus, for-profit private interests are more concerned with grabbing pieces of this huge pie than about the welfare and wellbeing of human beings.

Big pharmaceutical corporations enjoy super profits through monopoly distortions maintained with patent rights. And insurance firms who are increasingly playing a central role in providing health coverage, help to pool resources together, including from employees' deductions, to salve the insatiable thirst of the bosses for capital accumulation, furthering the conceptualisation of healthcare delivery as business.

Meanwhile, public health is continually battered with cuts in funding and undemocratic practices on the part of governments which limit the roles of health workers and patients in the governance of public health institutions and facilities. Austerity measures have fast become the norm, with gains made in many countries by the third quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in achieving or at least striving to achieve health for all, rolled back with neoliberal vengeance.

This despicable situation has to change. We have to change it, by mobilising public opinion nationally, regionally and internationally, and thus building the power of the people for transformative change, with which we can place people over profit. We must be very clear with our message: **OUR HEALTH IS NOT FOR SALE!**

The struggle for the right to health and social protection is and must be a challenge to the neoliberal assumptions that inform social and economic policies of states and the international financial institutions. The argument of inadequate resources is a ruse. There is more than enough money for attaining health for all. The problem is that the 1% have everything while working-class people in the cities, slums, and rural areas are left to bear the burden of pauperisation.

For example, credible sources put the amount of money stashed away in tax havens at 30 trillion US\$. This is more than 170 times the amount needed to end extreme poverty worldwide, according to Jeffrey Sachs. That is why amongst other mechanisms, PSI consistently demands tax justice for resource mobilisation to fund public healthcare.

We are against privatisation of health and social care services in all forms. Only the bosses benefit from it, expanding their profits. Public-Private Partnerships are no exception. These merely amount to subsidising private profits with public wealth, in the long run.

Healthcare workers are the backbone for health services delivery. PSI welcomes the renewed commitment of the international community to *Working for Health* with a five-year action plan of the World Health Organization (and International Labour Organisation) for improving employment and working conditions in the health sector towards promoting inclusive development.

We will however not rest on our oars with the formal endorsement of this plan by governments, just as we have come to see that inclusion of the right to health in constitutions of states has not led to health for all. We will stand together with comrades, colleagues, communities, patients and the civil society writ large, in defiance against the neoliberal rot undermining the goal of health for all.

The Movement for the Right to Health in Argentina is an inspiring example of this thrust of actions which we must take in speaking truth to power and challenging the system which formally recognises the right to health but in actuality undermines it. We, the people alone can and must fight to ensure **People Over Profit**. United and determined, we will win, for the people united can never be defeated.

Viva Movimiento por el Derecho a la Salud de Argentina!

Viva Servicios Públicos Internacionales!!

Power to the people!!!

**Baba Aye**

*Health and Social Services Officer*