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Public Services International: Condolences for tragic deaths of Arizona firefighters

Members of the global union federation Public Services International are saddened to learn of the death of 19 members of the Granite Mountain Hotshots, a specialist team of wildfire fighters, killed while fighting a fire in Yarnell, Arizona. It appears that a sudden wind change pushed the wildfire back onto their position.

PSI General Secretary Rosa Pavanelli, speaking from a meeting with health and social services unions in South Africa, said: “This tragedy points out yet again the risks that public workers are willing to assume to protect the lives and properties of others. I send heartfelt condolences on behalf of our members – 20 million women and men working in public services in 150 countries, to the families of the 19 fallen fighters and to their comrades who are still battling the blaze.”

Whether fighting fires in Arizona, battling floods in Uttarakhand, India or Alberta, Canada, or recovering from hurricanes, typhoons, tsunamis and earthquakes, public service workers are always called on to put themselves in the path of danger.

With climate change increasing the frequency and severity of extreme weather events, PSI is calling on all governments, local and national, as well as the United Nations, to ensure that their emergency response workers have all the tools and training to do the difficult jobs that are asked of them. PSI is lobbying the UN agencies, including the UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, to put the health and safety of emergency workers at the forefront, and to ensure that our cities and towns are appropriately protected against extreme weather events and disasters.