



## **Statement by Rosa Pavanelli, PSI General Secretary, ComHEEG second meeting, 19 September 2016, UN HQ**

Ministers, esteemed colleagues,

Public Services International welcomes the work of the Commission and its report which is very timely since humanitarian crises around the world have exposed urgent public health concerns and the scarcity of healthcare workers. In particular, we appreciate the recognition of the fundamental role of health workers for the provision of quality health services and public health, the strong focus on the need to foster quality education for health workers, to ensure their fundamental rights, such as freedom of association, collective bargaining, safe working conditions and protection, as well as decent work and adequate wages.

We commend the vision that addressing those issues will reduce discrimination of working women and youth and contribute to economic growth. We agree with the balanced recommendations the report delivers, its attention to socially sustainable solutions for the migration of health workers, and the need to regulate both private and public health services according to the same rules. We need stronger public governance, best practices and models to be rolled out globally. However, we think the report should have been more explicit in warning against promoting investment models that have led to systemic deficiencies that negatively impact on access, quality and equity of health services.

Health is a fundamental human right, beyond being an economic issue and governments have the ultimate responsibility and accountability for public health. This is why we firmly believe that the public sector plays a role that private actors cannot replace, but complement.

The objectives of SDG 3 will not be achieved without public investment. Reducing poverty is a matter of equity, justice and social stability that requires public resources. Indeed, we cannot continue business as usual but must recognize the need to restructure the international taxation system to capture immense revenues that are avoided and evaded. The implementation of global tax reforms could provide significant gains for government budgets, both in the developed and developing world, needed to fund robust public health systems.

The Ebola Virus Disease (EVD) outbreak revealed the structural weaknesses of the health systems in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone caused by decades of lack of investment. Deplorable working conditions, lack of occupational health and safety for health workers, a refusal by the government to recognize the health workers' unions and listen to their calls for help on the ground, all led to catastrophic results and global calamity.

Collective bargaining and social dialogue can be important tools to improve working conditions and even save lives in such dramatic situations, as our experience shows in

Nigeria and DRC. The report mentions that health workers are the “Everyday Heroes” and cornerstones of resilient health systems. We do not claim that they are heroes, but workers who deserve dignity and the right to organize. Today, we call for your commitment to reinstate those “heroes” who were sacked after risking their lives fighting Ebola in Liberia for demanding the payment of their wages and protective equipment.

PSI will work with its affiliates around the world to disseminate the report of the Commission, build strong coalitions with other civil society organizations and work with governments and all other actors towards the implementation of its recommendations and future action plan. In parallel, PSI will launch a global campaign for the recognition of health as a fundamental human right accessible to all in December 2016. We remain concerned with the growing role of multinationals and insurance companies in healthcare delivery. Identifying all global players and making them fully accountable could be another area of joint work. Together, we can strengthen global governance and the regulatory framework that makes workplaces safer, to ultimately improve the lives of workers and communities at large.

Finally, we want to thank the experts for their excellent report that provides extremely valuable insights and will be a useful tool in the follow-up of this process. Taking part in the work of this Commission has been a positive experience for PSI, making sure the voice of health workers is heard. We also want to thank France and South Africa for their leadership and look forward to our continued cooperation with all of you.