

## Public Services International at the World Social Forum, Tunis 2013

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Public Services International had the strongest global union presence at the World Social Forum 26-30 March 2013 in Tunis, Tunisia. PSI hosted and co-sponsored numerous events on trade union rights, youth, water, women's issues, tax justice, energy and climate change. This forum was of particular significance given the political challenges facing our members in the Middle East and North Africa two years after the Arab Spring. Tens of thousands of participants from civil society organisations, trade unions and progressive political groups attended this gathering.

Please see PSI's Flickr page for more photos of these events:

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi\\_isp\\_iska/collections/72157633251386374/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi_isp_iska/collections/72157633251386374/)

### PSI AT WSF WORKSHOPS – SEE DETAILS [HERE](#)

#### PSI members blocked by Algerian government

A delegation of some 100 SNAPAP trade unionists and human rights activists was prevented by their Algerian government from crossing the border into Tunisia to attend the World Social Forum. SNAPAP organised protests outside of the Algerian consulate and embassy in Tunis during WSF, and had high visibility in the opening WSF march. PSI continues to press the Algerian government to respect our members' rights. <http://www.world-psi.org/en/algeria-no-wsf>

#### THE RISE OF ARAB TRADE UNION WOMEN LEADERS

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi\\_isp\\_iska/sets/72157633159303514/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi_isp_iska/sets/72157633159303514/)



They continue to live with the realities of ongoing wars and revolutions, discrimination and abuse, but Arab women are finding ways to organise for a better future through sisterhood and trade union solidarity across borders.

Through an initiative made possible by PSI affiliates [Kommunal](#), ST and VISION and sponsored by the Swedish trade union development organisation [LO/TCO](#), 33 women trade unionists from across the Middle East and North Africa participated in a regional women's leadership conference in Tunis on 23-24 March 2013, in advance of the World Social Forum.

Union activists from Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia, Kuwait, Palestine, Canada, Belgium and Sweden shared experiences and brainstormed on ways to advance women's equality in their workplaces and respective countries.



Tunisian lawyer and women's rights activist Basma Khalfaoui (*photo, left*) said she made a special effort to speak to this gathering of PSI women trade unionists "because women must lead the way for peace and equality in the MENA region." Khalfaoui's husband, Tunisian opposition leader and trade union supporter [Chokri Belaïd](#), was assassinated by gunmen on 6 February in Tunis.

Meeting chair Anan Qadri, general secretary of the Palestine Health Services Union - West Bank, said, "We don't see really serious commitment from executive councils in the Arab region to advance representation of women at top levels in unions. We call on these leaders to make a firm commitment to do this, or we must confront them."

"Women are powerful, especially women in the Arab region who are part of these revolutions. We are fully aware of our potential and capacity, and we will move forward with the support of PSI and each other," Qadri said.

At the end of two full days of discussion and presentations, participants set a shortlist of action priorities for the region.



Please see these links for the full report on the MENA women's leadership conference, and related media coverage:

[http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/14798/labor\\_women\\_of\\_the\\_arab\\_spring/](http://inthesetimes.com/working/entry/14798/labor_women_of_the_arab_spring/)  
[www.world-psi.org/sites/default/files/attachment/news/mena\\_women\\_leadership\\_story\\_0.pdf](http://www.world-psi.org/sites/default/files/attachment/news/mena_women_leadership_story_0.pdf)  
[www.radiolabour.net/wsf-2013.htm](http://www.radiolabour.net/wsf-2013.htm)

## PSI UTILITIES

The PSI utilities delegation included members from the following countries: Tunisia, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal, Palestine, Algeria, South Africa. Many other unions participated in WSF as part of their national delegations. Our UGTT affiliates arranged for PSI to have a tent in the trade union village; we presented many documents and posters which were well received. PSI and UGTT banners on the right to water and to energy adorned the main entryway of the World Social Forum.

### Water

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi\\_isp\\_iska/sets/72157633159917972/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi_isp_iska/sets/72157633159917972/)

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi\\_isp\\_iska/sets/72157633160027026/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi_isp_iska/sets/72157633160027026/)



The network of water justice advocates gathered in Tunis to further international collaboration and to support local activists. A six-hour meeting was organised prior to the launch of the world social forum on 25 March, and there were a number of meetings within the official WSF agenda. The water justice movement continues to try to integrate new issues and tendencies, such as:

- land and water grabbing
- pollution, including by extractive industries (mining, oil, shale gas fracking, etc.)
- water for agriculture (agro-industry versus smallholder farming)

- financialisation of nature, including water
- climate change, green economy
- massive infrastructure, including dams and river linking
- the UN system, the Sustainable Development Goals, etc.

Activists shared examples of challenges, campaigns and victories. The movement in India to resist mega-dams and river linking has used many tactics of non-violent resistance. The current incursion of the privateers in India has prompted new resistance models, including legal challenges, convening tribunals headed by eminent (retired) persons, etc.

A number of recommendations from these meetings:

- Establish a stronger theoretical basis for placing water under the Commons, using experience from the activists as opposed to solely legal and/or academic. The UN Right to Water resolution of July 2010 is not sufficient, is being co-opted by some corporations, and is being undermined by a number of governments (Canada, US, Australia, Japan, etc.). Activists need to adjust to this reality – even while advocating national implementation programmes.
- Assess an appropriate approach to the UN, which is increasingly being captured by corporations. A proposal is floated to create a separate global water authority with enforcement authority, but there is no consensus, and many pitfalls. A related proposal is to look at the UN Committee on Food Security of the FAO as a more participatory mechanism.
- Support strategies to protect water sources such as used by New York (protecting the reservoir area) or Paris (working with farmers to reduce fertilizers and pesticides and encouraging organic farming).
- Seek to establish an international water fund, possibly using crowdfunding<sup>1</sup> (proposal made by the Greek movement which is seeking to raise funds to buy the water utility of Thessaloniki under Troika-imposed privatisation). Find other financing mechanisms as alternatives to private sector.
- Support specific campaigns which have larger implications, such as water in Palestine; Greece and Tunisia privatisation; Chile remunicipalisation (and countering the neoliberal use of Chile as a model for the sector), etc.
- Expanding beyond privatisation to include financialisation (green economy proposals about ecosystem services, etc.). This relates to the UN system and the Sustainable Development Goals which will be heavily influenced by UNEP, promoting ecosystem services approach.
- Expanding beyond supportive public utility operators into the cities and their elected and appointed officials.

Ongoing issues:

- privatisation, including under recent austerity measures
- public-public partnerships as an alternative policy
- re-municipalisation of private concessions.

The work on privatisation is well anchored, but needs constant vigilance in reaching out to new partners, as the dynamics are changing. National austerity programmes in many countries provide the perfect pretext for the privateers, especially as municipal budgets are under increasing pressure. In addition to Suez and Veolia, we are seeing a number of new corporate actors, mainly national and local construction companies, for example in Brazil. Private equity owners are not expanding greatly, but they still need watching. The Chinese company Beijing Enterprises Water Group<sup>2</sup> recently bought Veolia's Portuguese subsidiary, the first

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<sup>1</sup> collective effort of individuals who network and pool their money, usually via the Internet, to support efforts initiated by other people or organisations.

<sup>2</sup> Beijing Enterprises Water Group Limited is an investment holding company. The Company, along with its subsidiaries, is engaged in the construction of sewage and reclaimed water treatment and seawater desalination plants; provision of construction services for comprehensive

incursion of the Chinese into the global water market. Within PSI, we need to heighten our ability to provide early warning of privatisation policies.

Ridha Fourti from the Tunisian affiliate UGTT representing workers in the public utility SONEDE explained the challenges they face, including attempts by the French to privatise (successfully blocked), and recent proposals to build a desalination plant under public ownership and management - as opposed to giving it over to the privateers from the start. Tunisia suffers from water stress, and even with the most modern management, will soon be unable to provide for all the needs in water.

Fourti also outlined political dynamics in the two years since the revolution, and the challenges that these pose for trade unions and civil society activists. The current government is clearly espousing neoliberal policies. Civil society organisations have suffered under the previous administration, which severely restricted political activity. Trade unions were similarly compromised, although they were able to maintain their existence based on the presence in the workplace. The political party Ennahda is now trying to place its people in all administrative positions that it can occupy, which means that the directors of the public utilities are political appointees. It is even trying to place its people to stand for union elections, forcing the UGTT into defensive postures.

One meeting focused on the collaboration between trade unions and civil society activists. Various experiences, good and bad, were outlined, demonstrating the important differences of national political history and culture. All agreed that the alliance between trade unions and civil society has delivered many important results and is one of the keys to work in the future.

## Energy

PSI organised one meeting within the WSF to focus on three key issues:

- the €600 billion Desertec project, to generate solar electricity from the Maghreb for export to Europe
- hydraulic fracturing of shale gas (aka fracking)
- energy and development policies.



The content of discussions was quite technical, given the presence of trade unionists from the sector and university professors, as well as a couple of sharp environmental NGOs. No one in the group is opposed to the Desertec project, but it needs to be approached differently, there needs to be much more social inclusion, more debate before legislation is passed. All in the group oppose fracking, given the massive amounts of water needed, the dangers of pollution and the seismic instability caused by the exploration. It was agreed to coordinate a Tunisian group to work on Desertec and another one on fracking).

Unions from Nigeria, Ghana and Rwanda commented on the very difficult environments for increasing access to electricity, including corruption, externally-driven

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renovation projects in Mainland China and Malaysia; provision of sewage treatment services in Mainland China; provision of reclaimed water treatment services, and distribution and sale of piped water in Mainland China; provision of technical services that are related to sewage treatment and construction of comprehensive renovation projects in Mainland China, as well as licensing of technical know-how that is related to sewage treatment. It also provides consultancy services that are related to sewage treatment and construction.

privatisation and the lack of finance. The Tunisian public utility of electricity and gas STEG has a long track record of capacity building and mutual assistance with other African utilities. It is currently working on a project in Rwanda, and our trade union colleague from Rwanda indicated that it was well received. Our colleague from UGTT will acquire more information from management about these practices, which could fit into the public-public partnership model.

A second meeting attended by a number of PSI delegates was organised by a German NGO called GermanWatch. This meeting appeared to be aimed at getting together groups critical of the Desertec project, but it turned out to be a promotion of Desertec, with speakers from Dii (Desertec industrial initiative) and the Desertec Foundation. In the audience, was a staff member of the German development and aid branch of the government GIZ. Mansour Cherni from the electricity and gas union of UGTT commented on the way that Dii and the Desertec Foundation operate in Tunisia, with no response to the trade union requests for engagement. The rest of the participants in the meeting were also highly critical of the arrogant way in which the projects were being implemented. After the meeting, the representatives approached Mansour to seek a meeting.

#### **Evaluation of PSI Utilities participation in the World Social Forum**

This is normally quite difficult to do, given the amorphous nature of the network building, alliance and movement strengthening. For water, it is easier to see benefit from such a meeting, as many of the allies with whom we work over the years are in attendance, and it allows us to deepen the links between labour and civil society.

For energy, both trade unions and civil society are divided along a number of lines, such as pro or anti: coal, oil and gas, nuclear, big dams, big infrastructure, wind and solar, biomass, etc. In Tunis, we engaged in two issues which were extremely relevant to our hosts: the massive Desertec solar project and the hydraulic fracturing of shale gas.

The WSF always provides opportunities to broaden one's horizons, to connect with other issues and movements, and to expose the unions to the most diverse collection of social movements on the planet. PSI has a strong image as a socially oriented trade union federation. Participating affiliates are generally pleased with the new exposure afforded them, and often implement lessons upon their return.

## TAX JUSTICE AND FINANCIAL TRANSACTIONS TAX FORUMS

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi\\_isp\\_iska/sets/72157633155157453/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi_isp_iska/sets/72157633155157453/)

### International FTT strategy session

PSI affiliate members from Tunisia, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania and the United States participated in the global financial transactions tax campaign strategy meeting hosted by PSI in Tunis on 26 March. FTT will continue to be a pillar of the broader tax justice campaign, and campaigners are looking to collaborate on EU FTT, post-2015 MDG Summit, G20, World Public Services Day-23 June, and other upcoming advocacy opportunities. The meeting was co-organised by PSI affiliate National Nurses United.

### The World Needs Tax Justice and an FTT



PSI unions were among the groups from South and North who were represented by the 200 people who joined together in this dynamic public forum on 28 March at the World Social Forum. Participants spoke passionately about the need to promote progressive taxation and progressive spending on public services and sustainable development to end poverty and inequality, supported by participatory democratic processes. Co-organisers with PSI included: Attac Norway; CIDSE; CNCD-11.11.11; Europeans for Financial Reform; ETUC-CES; Belgian Trade Union Confederation/FGTB; Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung; Global Progressive Forum; Jubilee South Asia/Pacific Movement on Debt and Development; National Nurses United; Oxfam Great Britain; Robin Hood Tax campaign; SOLIDAR; Tax Justice Network-Africa; Trades Union Congress-GB; UBUNTU Forum; War on Want.

## WSF tax justice statement

The outcome of the final WSF Tax Justice assembly was a succinct one page statement – a call for united global action. The new Global Alliance for Tax Justice is cited as a potential network for sharing information and coordinating various activities.

<http://www.world-psi.org/en/tax-justice-social-justice>

**Austerity helps tax dodging** according to the new study released by PSI's European branch EPSU. This paper was shared with WSF participants: "Impact of austerity on jobs in tax services and the fight against tax fraud and avoidance in EU-27 + Norway."

[http://www.epsu.org/IMG/pdf/LayoutTax\\_collection\\_services\\_report\\_Final\\_-\\_EN.pdf](http://www.epsu.org/IMG/pdf/LayoutTax_collection_services_report_Final_-_EN.pdf)

Just days after the World Social Forum concluded, a major wikileaks-style exposé on tax havens broke worldwide.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2013/apr/03/offshore-secrets-offshore-tax-haven>

Related video: <http://www.commondreams.org/video/2013/03/29-0>





## NO SOCIAL PROGRESS WITHOUT INDEPENDENT UNIONS WORKSHOP

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi\\_isp\\_iska/sets/72157633159860530/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi_isp_iska/sets/72157633159860530/)

PSI organised this workshop that examined how a fundamental human right, ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association is given effect in different countries. Speakers explored and debated the roles trade unions must continue to play in the coming years to anchor democracy within the MENA and other regions and the challenges they are facing. Kamal Abu Eitta (RETA), Rachid Malaoui (SNAPAP), Anan Qadri (HSU-PGFTU), Jueia Batista (CUT), Daniel Van Daele (FGTB), Guiseppe Valentino (CGIL Calabria) and others made a strong plea for powerful unions that can defend workers' rights.



Kamal Abu Eitta (RETA) (*photo, left*) spoke about the continued restrictions of union members' rights and the right to protest in Egypt. Still, he contends, the independent unions are the main venue for achieving the just goals of the revolution. "We consider that workers' fundamental right to freedom of association is also linked to freedom of women and all other members of society. The authoritarian regime persists, and no real revolutionaries have come to positions of power. We must all struggle together for a new type of globalisation built on a foundation of human rights."

Rachid Malaoui (SNAPAP), Algeria, recounted the challenges SNAPAP faces as an independent union which refuses to identify with government, military or religious interests. Instead, SNAPAP focuses on building a network by supporting civil society, women, youth and unemployed workers. Malaoui credits Public Services International for its strong support for the establishment of independent unions across the MENA region. However, he notes, after SNAPAP expressed support for RETA, SNAPAP union representatives have been barred from entering Egypt. Malaoui advises trade union colleagues in Tunisia, Egypt and elsewhere to look for political solutions, and not to the army, to support progressive change.

Several speakers drew attention to the urgent need for unions to work together, both within countries and across borders. The Italian and Congolese representatives hoped for a more unified trade union movement. Some speakers referred to the historical context in which the trade union movement was born and the need to cooperate with other civil society organisations to lobby more effectively when social dialogue does not lead to desired outcomes.

## EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN WORKSHOP

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi\\_isp\\_iska/sets/72157633159374812/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi_isp_iska/sets/72157633159374812/)



This PSI workshop explored how trade unions around the world are supporting the empowerment of women and making gender issues and women more visible and effective in their organisations and in society. Special attention was given to pay equity policies and actions to end violence against women. Best practices from the MENA and other regions were shared by Anan Qadri (HSU-PGFTU) (*photo, left*), Anne Demelenne (FGTB) (*photo, right*), Touriya Lachrech (CDT), Juneia Batista (CUT), Mercedes Gandolfi (CGIL), Jean Pierre Kimbuya (COSSEP/UFF), Rand Khaldi (Health Workers Jordan), Sahar Dessouki (Health Workers Egypt), Virginia Setshedi (PSI) (*photo, centre*) and others.

Anne Demelenne, Secretary General of FGTB (Belgium) spoke about how discrimination is still gendered in language, giving the example of someone is titled “a cleaning woman, but the man is called a cleaning manager. Or, a man is called a director of a department, while a woman is called a coordinator.” In Belgium there is still a 22% wage gap between women and men. FGTB fights for the inclusion of women on executive boards, and for better work/life balance so that women can include family needs. At the same time, the union is fighting austerity measures which are cutting public services that employ and support women.

Juneia Batista, CUT, noted that the current leader of Brazil is a woman, who used to be a guerrilla fighter. “Women are interested in working in public services, and this work should also provide decent work at a decent wage. Housing rights are given to poor women, along with electricity and agricultural subsidies, and access to post-secondary education. A new law has been introduced in Brazil to allow a man to be charged with domestic abuse, without requiring his wife to denounce him.”

Mercedes Landolfi, of FILLEA CGIL (Italy), said: “I’ve been travelling around the world and talking with women and the conclusion is that we share the same issues. We must work together across our cultures to fight discrimination against women. Everyone has the right to live in peace in their own country, following their own religion and culture, but no religion or culture can deny their economic and social rights.”

Ms. Kabaso, from the Zambia Social Forum, spoke on behalf of the women’s movement in Zambia. “We face a lot of challenges in terms of lack of representation of women in law and parliament. Rural women face many problems, such as lack of access to clean water and basic social services. Most families prefer to educate the boy child, because the male is supposed to be a leader. There are many instances of girls being forced into marriage. We have forced the government to enact legislation on gender-based violence, but the law is not fully implemented. We want a constitution that includes women’s rights in the Bill of Rights. We want this constitution to be enacted by a referendum of the people. For the first time last week we have a woman elected as a tribal chief, and she is a good advocate for women’s rights. In the past, girls who’d had children were not allowed to return to school, but this practice has changed.”

Jeane-Pierre Kimbuya, Secretary General of COSSEP/UFF (Congo/RDC) said, "It is essential that women have their full social and economic rights and be able to engage fully in democratic processes. Women are now working in the public sector and have better access to education, but there has been a huge increase in violence against women because of rape and war. Most real formal jobs go to men, while women are working in the informal workforce and the markets, even to the degrading level of poor women hiring themselves as beasts of burden. Until recently women could not get a job without permission from their husbands. Our trade union is developing strong policies working with Canadian unions to increase women's education and participation in the labour market. Also now 28% of our union leadership is female. We must work on equality together."

Yamina Maghraoui from the independent union SNAPAP (Algeria) said, "It is thanks to the work of our union SNAPAP that 30,000 women now have permanent jobs in education. In 2011, women threw themselves under police buses to prevent police from hauling away peaceful protestors in the middle of the night. Women in precarious work have no way to protect themselves."

## YOUTH EMPLOYMENT IS THE WAY OUT OF CRISIS WORKSHOP

Young workers, policy-makers, public authorities and trade unions build a platform for more decent jobs.

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi\\_isp\\_iska/sets/72157633155343141/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi_isp_iska/sets/72157633155343141/)

The world is facing a worsening youth employment crisis: young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults and over 75 million youth worldwide are looking for work. Trade unions play an important role in providing a voice for young workers.

During the workshop, participants from several continents shared their views on youth policies and initiatives that are being developed. While some underlined the need to increase the employability of young people, others contended that it the only way out is by creating more jobs.

There was a general feeling that employers should contribute more to training young people on the job, that employment schemes that reduce social costs in case of hiring young workers are unjustified subsidies to employers, and that austerity measures contribute to exploitative situations.

Participants from the MENA region also reflected on the role that young people played in the Arab spring, with clear demands for more and better jobs. Most of the promises made have not been carried out yet and representation of young people in government is close to zero.



## GLOBAL TRADE STRATEGY MEETING

[http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi\\_isp\\_iska/sets/72157633155728043/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/psi_isp_iska/sets/72157633155728043/)

PSI attended the Our World Is Not For Sale (OWNFS) global strategy meeting in Tunis in the days leading up to the WSF and co-facilitated the workshop on the International Services Agreement (ISA). The meeting was called to analyse developments in the WTO's agenda in the lead up to the 9th Ministerial Meeting of the WTO in Bali on 3-6 December. The main issues on the table at the Bali meeting include agriculture, trade facilitation and addressing least developed country issues. There is pressure to conclude the Doha round and end the impasse between the north and south so that more aggressive market access agreements can be progressed. A major tension in the summit will be between proposals put by developing countries (especially around agriculture and development) and the rich countries' desire for trade measures that reduce red tape and harmonise regulatory issues. Complicating this process is the upcoming selection of a new WTO Director General who will take office a few months before the Ministerial meeting.

For PSI, the Bali Ministerial will be as important for what is set up post-Bali, should the Doha round of negotiations finally be concluded. This includes the proposed International Services Agreement (ISA) which is being championed by the most aggressively pro-trade countries as a plurilateral Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The ISA aims to shift the main objective of the provision of public services (currently provided by both public and private entities) away from serving the public interest to serving the profit interests of private foreign companies. The measures include liberalisation of investment in services, forcing governments to allow foreign competitive access to domestic public services and restricting governments' ability to regulate services. The combination of these and other provisions will make privatisation almost non-reversible, promote deregulation and normalise the profit motive in many areas of public services beyond the current General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) provisions.

The proposed agreement on environmental goods is also of concern as it includes in its scope liberalisation of both environmental 'goods' and environmental 'bads'.

Speakers at the OWNFS meeting acknowledged that the slow progress of the Doha round and the fragmenting of the trade agenda into bilateral FTAs has diluted civil society's capacity for mobilising opposition; many NGOs have stopped trade work as it has become increasingly complex. The meeting recognised the need to rebuild momentum if we are to stop or slow the one-sided push to free trade in the interests of the corporations of the richest countries. The meeting:

- Shared information about WTO progress and country positions on various agreements
- Further defined the joint demands of the campaign
- Developed an action strategy for each of the proposed agreements or elements
- Organised on-the-ground activity around the Bali meeting and heard from the key Indonesian activist groups

PSI is also reviewing our engagement with the trade agenda; the meeting was a useful opportunity to make connections with civil society and country activists in the areas of most concern to us, particularly the ISA.