



**PSI Americas**  
**The elimination of violence against women at the**  
**workplace in the public sector**  
**9-10 October 2014**  
**Santiago, Chile**

## **Introduction**

Violence against women exists in all countries and in all societies. It happens in public and private places, and in physical as well as virtual online spaces. Violence is often driven by a deep-seated belief that devalues women and that assumes that a woman is not equal to a man.

Stopping violence against women and girls is a major challenge facing world public health, gender equality and human rights. It is a challenge faced by all countries in the world and every type of society. Research by UN Women and other organisations shows that physical and sexual violence is a public health problem that affects more than a third of all women in the world.

The ILO and UN Women have also expressed concern about the continuing seriousness of this scourge and have called on governments to use a range of mechanisms to stop violence against women. They emphasise the seriousness of violence at work and call on public authorities to take more decisive action to combat this problem. The ILO is working on a convention, to be ready in 2016, that would require participating countries to develop and implement public policies to stop violence at work, especially gender-based violence.

The PSI and its affiliates are ready to respond to this challenge and are working with civil society organisations to break the silence and take action against discrimination and violence at the workplace and everywhere it occurs in society. Wherever violence takes place and whatever form it takes, it has an impact on women's capacity to exercise their rights and live a dignified and free life.

The PSI, as a member of the family of global trade union organisations, has decided to work with them to eradicate gender-based violence at work and is

therefore promoting a series of measures, programmes and campaigns through their affiliates in all countries to highlight and quantify the extent of the problem and to put forward tripartite proposals to eradicate it.

### **The role of the PSI and its affiliates**

At its world congress in 2012, the PSI launched a major campaign to eliminate violence against women and gender-based violence. Each region of the PSI began pilot projects, formed alliances with other civil society organisations and took strenuous measures to eradicate this form of violence. Radical change requires a multi-sectoral approach and affiliates in the Americas can play a key role in this process.

For years now, American affiliates have been accumulating experience in combatting violence against women through initiatives and alliances with social movements that fight discrimination and sexism. They have constantly denounced the deep-seated sexism that prevails in our society, especially in the labour market, where women workers are subjected to ill-treatment, sexual harassment and, in many cases, are exposed to violence and even killed.

This is why the recent IAMREMUI and IAMREC of the Americas, in the USA and Guatemala, decided to intensify work on this trade union task and improve coordination between countries in order to generate a joint strategy that will facilitate progress towards the eradication of violence against women at work and in public employment. This move was ratified at the WOC meeting in Geneva in 2014, in accordance with the PSI's action guidelines on gender policies.

The international meeting on the eradication of violence against women at the workplace and in public employment, in Santiago, Chile, on 9-10 October, brought together around 150 women PSI delegates from all continents, and was addressed by President Michelle Bachelet. After two days of discussions and sharing experiences, delegates formulated a joint strategy in the following terms:

1. Violence at work, which is usually and clearly sexist in nature, has long been a feature of working life and affects all categories of worker in both the public and private sectors.

2. Flexibilisation, flexicurity, high turnover, informal work, precarious work and job insecurity are features of gender-based labour relations in globalised capitalist society and are manifested in inequitable and unequal labour inter-actions that particularly affect women and that irradiate into society as a whole.
3. Such labour relations facilitate an increase in the frequency and extent of practices such as mobbing, ill-treatment and other forms of labour violence against which there is insufficient protection and which have become the norm in working environments and labour relations, and for which the perpetrators are almost always unpunished and which subject an ever increasing number of women workers to mental health disorders, stress, depression and loss of employment.
4. The incidence of bad practice is tending to increase in public services despite the introduction of regulations and procedures to prevent and eradicate it. These measures to tackle ill-treatment have proved to be inadequate and violence in the public sector continues to affect women the most.
5. We must develop public policies to stop violence at work. These policies must be clear and precise, applied at the global, national and local levels and establish international instruments that require governments to promote and comply with these policies.
6. Alongside these policies to stop violence at work, we must make progress with our overall planning and with legislative measures to:
  - Tackle discrimination against women and girls;
  - Support women and help them become financially autonomous;
  - Promote gender equality and equity;
  - Promote non-sexist cultural standards that respect diversity and promote peace.
7. Trade unions are indispensable actors in the fight to eradicate violence against women in public sector employment because of the training they provide on how to detect and prevent violence and provide support for victims.

This involves strengthening PSI-affiliated trade unions in the Americas, developing skills, knowledge and tools with which to combat violence against women at work and protect and defend the rights of victims.

8. Strengthen regional and subregional networks and structures, to share experiences, adopt innovative initiatives and formulate clear messages to the media.
9. Implement strategies to form alliances with other organisations, including NGOs, study centres, universities, media and territorially-defined organisations that are engaged in combatting violence.

### **Aspects of a strategy for PSI Americas**

- Develop specific policies and clear guidelines to tackle violence at work for PSI affiliates throughout the continent.
- Produce materials and tools on violence at work with which to train affiliates and produce leaders who are experts on this issue who can support the work of trade unions and care for people damaged by violence at work.
- Build strong alliances with the global unions and continental confederations in order to develop joint action strategies against violence at work and influence international organisations that have a presence in the Americas, such as the ILO, OAS, ECLAC, etc.
- Urge affiliates to train women activists to organise and lead campaigns and activities to eliminate violence against women and gender-based violence at work and everywhere it occurs.
- Involve and integrate young activists in campaigns and activities to promote the elimination of violence against women and gender-based violence and implement activities that strengthen alliances between women's committees and youth committees.
- Actively participate in global and regional forums, conferences and campaigns to tackle violence against women and gender-based violence.

- Develop strategies for dealing with and influencing public and private sector employers to make arrangements and introduce procedures that protect victims and punish the perpetrators of violence.
- Develop legislative proposals to punish violence at work that are consistent with international standards on human and labour rights.

### **Action Plan**

1. Prepare a training plan for 2015 on violence at work for each subregion with a view to sharing experiences from each country that could be copied in other places.
2. Generate a range of experiences and good practices in different countries and different services that could be copied by affiliates in their own countries.
3. Organise a campaign for the ratification of international conventions that combat discrimination and promote women's rights in countries that have so far failed to ratify them.
4. Gather information, research findings, studies and statistics in every country on violence at work for use in assessing the extent of the problem and making it more visible at the national, continental and global levels.
5. Work with affiliates throughout the world to encourage the ILO to produce a convention on violence at work with a gender perspective in 2016.
6. The PSI should urge trade unions and especially their members to develop policies and strategies to tackle sexual harassment.
7. Create tools with which to guide discussions in the unions on violence in general and that teach them how to identify and highlight harassment at work and how to help, protect and defend victims.
8. Improve the information on violence at work available through the PSI's virtual and digital media.
9. Prepare an E-learning training tutorial on this issue and make it available on the PSI website on a permanent basis.

National and continental affiliates and women's committees and the WOC shall be responsible for implementing this programme.