



**PSI statement to the Co-Chairs of the Preparatory Committee for the  
Third United Nations World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction at their  
Consultations with Major Groups on  
Thursday, 18 September 2014  
(United Nations, Geneva)**

Esteemed Co-chairs, I am very pleased to address these consultations on behalf of the Trade Union Major Group, and specifically Public Services International. Public Services International is a global trade union federation representing 20 million working women and men who deliver vital public services in 160 countries.

At the outset, I wish to state that we are dismayed that the workers who are the frontline responders in emergencies of every type do not appear in the Post-2015 framework for disaster risk reduction.

Specifically I would like to say the following:

In any emergency, there are large numbers of workers who continue to provide the services that are publically provided to the population and to come to the aid of the population, exposing themselves to injury and, as we know, to loss of life. These workers are in the frontline of services such as firefighters, emergency medical services - ambulance workers and health workers of every type. But they also include workers in the fields of:

1. administration at all levels - including the judicial system and law enforcement
2. municipal services
3. education and social services
4. transportation, and
5. critically, utilities - that include water, sanitation, electricity and energy.

Frequently, immediate and urgent repairs of systems giving access to water and electricity are needed before any other consequences of an emergency can be addressed, and before genuine reconstruction of access to utilities can be envisaged. Similarly, the range of health workers and other health emergency frontline workers are called upon to enter into the heart of the emergency on an urgent basis to save lives long before any accommodation can be made to facilitate access to the injured.

In many Member States of the United Nations, public service workers who are the frontline responders in all emergencies have inadequate employment and working conditions. Their employment conditions are most frequently limited by their definition as “essential services” and by critical barriers to improving their conditions, such as denial of the right to collective bargaining, or the right to strike. Their working conditions are defined by the level of danger of the emergency, the adequacy of their numbers – which are severely limited under austerity budgets, public sector “reform” and structural adjustment policies - and their labour rights. During emergencies, they intervene for long periods of time without pause, and experience severe hardship alongside the populations they serve.

The role of these public service workers and frontline responders is critical to recovery from emergencies and is later fundamental to reconstruction in the post-emergency rebuilding. In order to strengthen governance for disaster risk management, the labour rights of frontline responders in all emergencies must be prioritized so that their employment conditions and working conditions can help to ensure that the public sector can address emergencies as effectively as possible.

It is the actions of the public sector in the immediate aftermath of an emergency that makes the difference with respect to the ultimate consequences and impact on the population of emergencies and disasters from all sources.

I wish to add a point that has not been raised so far: Ebola...the EVD outbreak in West Africa demonstrates that health emergencies are related to the existing capacity to respond to risk just as much as disasters from other sources depend on that capacity. The paucity of infrastructure and weak economies prior to the event, and the resulting damage to the economy, society and polity that follows this emergency signals clearly that this type of emergency must benefit from policies and actions aligned with disaster risk reduction at national and international level just as should emergencies from other sources, notably conflicts and climate change.

Global guidance on national policy on disaster risk reduction in the Post-2015 era must include health emergencies such as epidemics.