

Working for Health for All in East Africa

EAST AFRICAN PSI HEALTH SECTOR AFFILIATES MEETING ON 9-10 MAY 2018 AT NAIROBI, KENYA

I. Introduction

PSI health sector affiliates across East Africa will be meeting on 9 -10 May 2018 at Nairobi, Kenya. In line with the **People Over Profit** PSI Programme of Action (2018 – 2022), this will be aimed at building union power for the defence of members and the public health system.

The meeting would mark the constitution of a network of health sector unions in East Africa. It would also include the sub-regional launch of the PSI Right to Health campaign.

II. Contextual background

Health is a fundamental human right. A state of physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing is of the essence for the fullest realisation of any and every right. Thus, the right to health has been appropriately recognised as the enabler of all other rights.

The health workforce is the backbone of the healthcare delivery system. Attaining health for all as envisaged in Sustainable Development Goal 3.8 requires adequate universal access to motivated and adequately trained health workers.

Health workers' trade unions are the organised bodies of health workers which defend their rights and advance their interests. Doing this requires we build our collective *organising* power, on one hand and consolidate on our institutional leverage for policy influence. It is also of the essence to note the inseparability of our interests as workers and the quest for universal health care of the people and their communities which we serve.

PSI has always placed great emphasis on organising, realising that we are stronger with larger numbers of our different unions and closer interactions between these. This led to the establishment of the Health and Social Services Task Force at the end of the last century. Subsequent to this, health sector unions' networks have been established in all the PSI regions. And in the Africa and Arab countries region, sub-regional networks have been established in West Africa, southern Africa and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) sub-region.

The institutional influence of PSI within international health has equally soared in the past few years. The United Nations High-Level Commission on Health Employment and Economic Growth in 2016 declared expenditure on the health workforce as investment and not mere costs. The PSI General Secretary, Rosa Pavanelli served on the commission.

The PSI General Secretary equally served as Spokesperson of the Workers group to the 24 – 28 April 2017 ILO Tripartite Meeting on Improving Employment and Working Conditions in the Health Services. The recommendations of the meeting were subsequently endorsed by the ILO Governing Body.

Rooted in the recommendations of the High-Level Commission, the 70th World Health Assembly adopted the Working for Health Five-Year Action Plan for Health Employment and Inclusive Economic Growth, last May. Subsequent to WHO entering into official relations with PSI in January 2018, we will be collaborating with the WHO in implementing this Action Plan.

To wield the organising and institutional dimensions of our struggle for improving employment and working conditions in the health services together within the necessary context of a struggle for health for all, PSI launched a Right to Health global campaign on 12 December 2016. After

this international launch, the campaign has been taken forward in different regions, sub-regions and countries, drawing on the strengths of affiliates to engage with the key obstacles to achieving health for all, in different climates.

Commonalities including privatisation in its different guises, inadequate funding of public health, and staffing levels have equally been taken up with the campaign, in different regions and sub-regions. In Africa for example, strong sub-regional networks in West Africa, southern Africa and East Africa would be able to carry out policy advocacy with ECOWAS, SADCC and EAC respectively – both directly and through their specialized institutions for health. These could further coalesce into a continental network (without dissolving each sub-regional network) which could engage with the AU.

Establishing the East African network and launching the right to health campaign in East Africa would thus be of significance both sub-regionally and regionally as a key dimension of the PSI health and social services sectoral work

III. Purpose and objectives

The overarching purpose of the meeting is to establish the East African health sector unions network, as a strong platform which will strengthen PSI health affiliates organising and adequately influence policy.

Towards achieving this purpose, the objectives of the meeting are to:

- Initiate systematic collaboration between PSI health affiliates in East Africa and between them and relevant civil society organisations;
- Establish collective relations with the World Health Organization and International Labour Office in the sub-region;
- Launch the Right to Health campaign in East Africa

IV. Outline of draft agenda

Day 1:

- Setting the context: panel discussions on the state of health sector unions vis-à-vis the state of the health sector: aimed at identifying and meeting organising needs;
- Discussion on the PSI Programme of Action and priorities;
- Financing health in East Africa; concerns of health workers
- Combatting privatization of health; introducing the PoP platform

Day 2:

- The Working for Health programme and recommendations of the ILO Tripartite Meeting on Improving Employment and Working Conditions in the Health Services: what role for health workers in East Africa?
- Occupational safety and health of health workers;
- Health worker migration: trends, problems and prospects;
- Launching the Right to Health campaign

V. Conclusion

In the course of the meeting, the new network would agree on a work-plan for the campaign and general network activities. This would include identifying key civil society organisations for collaboration.

The meeting's conclusions would equally be shared with sister networks in the region towards deepening regional networking.