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Public services help deliver human rights

Public services are at the core of democratic societies founded on human rights, the rule of law and social solidarity. Public services provide equitable redistribution of wealth and in their delivery should ensure that people are treated with equal respect, provided equal protection, and live free of discrimination without regard to age, gender, religion, national identity, race or ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation.

On 10 December 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) was adopted and this date has served to mark Human Rights Day ever since. Sixty-four years later, the UDHR is as relevant and necessary as ever. In unprecedented actions in recent years, millions of workers around the globe have risen against their governments and demanded to be heard. Exercising the rights to freedom of opinion and expression, to peaceful assembly and association, and to take part in government (articles 19, 20 and 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) have been at the centre of these changes. In many regions of the world the struggle for these basic human rights continues and PSI supports its affiliates in their demand for freedom and the realisation of their economic and social rights.

At the Public Services International's recent World Congress in Durban, South Africa, PSI members delivered a strong mandate to defend and extend workers' and trade union rights. PSI's Programme of Action for the coming five years emphasises that trade union rights are human rights and that public sector workers have the right to organise and bargain collectively and express themselves freely, regardless of the sector in which they work. It is the collective action of workers that secures and maintains their rights, and ensures they are maintained in practice.

All people, including women, youth, minorities, persons with disabilities, indigenous people, the poor and marginalised, have the right to have their voices heard in public life and be included in political decision-making. This is the main theme for this year's Human Rights Day, which is inherently connected to PSI's mandate and objectives.

Newly elected PSI General Secretary, Rosa Pavanelli, says: "Public sector workers provide support for all members of society to be heard and are united in their demand for the effective implementation of human rights. Basic and fundamental rights, such as the right to life, liberty, and personal security, the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to freedom of expression remain unfulfilled in too many parts of the world and for too many people. The commitments enshrined in the Universal Declaration are as much in need of realisation today as they were 64 years ago. Governments must act and they must act now. Tolerance, respect and dignity for all!"