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PSI delegates bring solidarity message to United Nations staff unions

Members of Public Services International's delegation to the United Nations High Level Dialogue on Migration and Development met with representatives of the UN staff unions in New York to deliver a strong message of solidarity and support for the unions' demands that the UN re-instate their collective bargaining rights. The UN staff unions are calling on UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon to re-open talks, particularly to negotiate for the safety, welfare and conditions of service of UN workers. In the last ten years, 555 UN staff members have been attacked, and over 200 killed, in the line of duty.

The PSI delegation includes members of the AFT (USA), PSLINK (Philippines), Akademikerforbundet SSR (Sweden), Tehy (Finland), DENOSA (South Africa), GRNA and HSWU (Ghana), PSMBTU (Georgia), GPSU (Guyana), along with ITUC and PSI staff. PSI Vice-President Annie Geron, head of delegation, presented the solidarity letter from PSI General Secretary Rosa Pavanelli, on behalf of all PSI affiliates worldwide.

The letter emphasizes that: "UN employees are a special category of public employees, often exposed to particular risks to their health and physical integrity and with a strong sense of duty to promote world peace and human dignity in a global context, above and beyond national administrations. The highest quality of public services can only be delivered by workers whose rights are fully respected. To this end, PSI defends and advances the fundamental rights and conditions for all workers across the globe regardless of status."

"Public service workers' rights are under attack everywhere. We come to the United Nations to fight for and re-affirm our rights. But seeing the rights of workers being violated by these very same UN institutions is troubling and alarming," says Annie Geron.

PSI delegates and leaders of the UN Staff Unions discussed how PSI and its affiliates can best support the plight of the UN workers and their unions nationally and globally. This meeting is only the start of a series of joint strategizing sessions.

"We are surprised and inspired at the overwhelming support we are receiving from our trade union sisters and brothers from all over the world. For a long time, we kept our silence," says Barbara Tavora-Jainchill, President of the UN Staff Union.

"We have been pushing to resume talks with UN management but no progress is happening. We realise that our campaign is needed more than ever," says Ian Richards, Vice-President representing the unions in the Staff-Management Committee.

The ILO Staff Union is a current affiliate of PSI, and is covered under a separate agreement in the UN system. ILO Staff Union representative Christopher Land-Kazlauskas told UN colleagues that, "Being affiliated to PSI connects us to a broader labour movement that shares our struggles as public service workers. We appreciate the solidarity shown by PSI General Secretary Rosa Pavanelli and all the PSI affiliates in our campaigns."