

Rosa Pavanelli
PSI General Secretary
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NATIONAL CONGRESS FOR SOCIAL SECURITY

A very good day to you, colleagues. I greet you, in solidarity, on behalf of 20 million members of Public Services International in 150 countries around the world.

I am very honoured this morning to have been asked by our Guatemalan affiliate, the National Health Workers' Union, to inaugurate this momentous event.

Guatemala remains one of the most dangerous countries in the world to be a trade unionist. That is why one of PSI's top priorities is to organise a series of actions to promote freedom of association, collective bargaining and respect for life, all of which are continuously violated with impunity.

I will take advantage of this occasion to inform you all about our second visit to this beautiful but long-suffering country.

In August 2013, the PSI organised an international mission composed of trade union leaders representing our affiliates in Europe, the United States and Latin America. Our aim was to hold a series of meetings to verify the alarming reports received by our Guatemalan affiliates about the killing of 58 human rights defenders in this country in the last five years, including the health union leaders **Ovideo Ortiz, Santa Alvarado and Carlos Hernández**.

Despite pressure from the PSI on the President of the Republic, Mr Otto Pérez Molina, the cases of a further 20 murders of trade union leaders from this same union have still not been resolved by government authorities and their investigative agencies. Sadly, the perpetrators remain UNPUNISHED by the justice system and the Guatemalan people.

For the second time in less than one year, PSI organised an international mission, composed of members of its Inter-American committee, to investigate compliance with agreements made last August with the president and the health, labour and interior ministers. Meanwhile, at the ILO's International Labour Conference in 2013, representatives of the government, workers and the ILO formulated a Road Map based on the Guatemalan government's commitments to the ILO, undertaken with a view to avoiding an ILO Commission of Inquiry into Freedom of Association in the country and

sanctions consequent on the labour chapters of the free trade agreements between Guatemala, the United States and the European Union.

With regard to the latter issue, the PSI organised a visit by our colleagues Luis Lara and Dora Regina Ruano of the health workers' union to the European Parliament at the end of November 2013, with the aim of meeting members of parliament to denounce the atrocities against trade union leaders in Guatemala, specifically in the health sector.

On Thursday, we met President Otto Pérez Molina, and had the opportunity to again express our profound concern about the meagre efforts made by the government to comply with its commitment to end legal impunity in this country and end the physical and psychological repression suffered by our colleagues and their families.

The PSI recognises, as did the 2013 report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in Guatemala, that enjoyment of the right to life continues to be significantly affected by very high levels of violence and food insecurity in this country.

We also recognise that outside the public sector, there are many other problems that remain invisible because of a lack of attention by state institutions, especially in the agricultural sector, and that continue to aggravate the extreme poverty suffered by indigenous peoples and people of mixed race in this country.

One example is the lack of protection for the rights of indigenous peoples, which are largely restricted by inadequate legislation and ineffective state institutions.

Although Guatemala has ratified ILO Convention 169 on indigenous and tribal peoples, the convention is not adequately implemented, which is certainly both reprehensible and deplorable, given that the indigenous peoples and peasants of Guatemala, who account for 71% of the population living in extreme poverty, are the main victims of violence, discrimination and social injustice.

The PSI therefore adds its voice to international calls for amendments to the Mining Law and changes to institutional arrangements for projects exploiting natural resources, in consultation with indigenous peoples, in order to strengthen social and environmental safeguards.

We are also concerned that unemployment continues to have a major effect on the poorest women. More than 60% of domestic workers are paid less than the minimum wage, 98% have no employment contract and only 1% are registered with the social security system.

We are also alarmed that 198 cases of femicide and 31,836 other cases of violence against women were brought before the public prosecutor in 2013, of which 93% remain unpunished because of a lack of evidence, according to reports issued by the public prosecutor, a situation that greatly increases our concern.

We have brought to the government's notice that, given the lack of effective mechanisms for ensuring freedom of association, it is imperative to observe and implement ILO Conventions 87, 98, 151 and 154.

The lack of an employment policy for the public sector in Guatemala has intensified problems associated with precarious employment in recent years, which led us to urge the government to instruct the Ministry of Labour to improve regulation of recruitment in the public sector, end unfair pay levels and promote respect for the basic rights of the thousands of public sector workers who are swelling the ranks of the poor in Guatemala.

We have also urged the government to make greater efforts to increase the national budget in order to ensure quality public services and decent work, specifically in the health, social security, education, drinking water and power sectors.

In order to finance public services, the Guatemalan government should introduce new legislation, within the framework of social dialogue with the trade unions, to establish a fairer taxation system, so that rich people in Guatemala are no longer able to avoid their duty to pay tax.

We are very happy that the *Frente Nacional de Lucha* has joined our campaign in Guatemala for quality public services and the global campaign for a tax on international financial transactions, the so-called "Robin Hood Tax", which has had a lot of success here in Guatemala.

Finally, colleagues, trade union and popular unity is absolutely essential if we are to overcome all the barriers and obstacles that allow impunity in Guatemala to continue to promote violence, which is an international DISGRACE.

A true democracy is one that promotes basic workers' rights and respects freedom of association and collective bargaining.

Without trade unions and without the struggle being waged by indigenous peoples and peasants, there will be no democracy and no social justice.

"Because a United People... Will Never Be Defeated"

Viva the *Frente Nacional de Lucha*!!!!

Viva the Health Workers' Union!!!!

Viva Guatemala!!!!

THANKYOU VERY MUCH