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Internationale des Services Publics
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World Bank Safeguards Committee
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Dear Colleagues,

Public Services International
Requests Consultation on the Proposed World Bank Labour Safeguard and
Public Health Programs in West Africa in the Face of the Ebola Pandemic

Public Services International represents health sector and public services worker unions in West Africa and is committed to strengthening the public health care delivery system that is now challenged by the Ebola pandemic, as well as the absence of appropriate World Bank safeguards to protect the human and labour rights of those workers responsible for prevention and treatment.

First and foremost, the World Bank and other international development lenders have not effectively responded to the Abuja Declaration of 2001 and today African Union members have not reached the spending target of fifteen (15) percent of national government budgets to be devoted to health care. For example, in Guinea the government spends only 6.8 percent of its budget on health. The World Bank must do more to assist West African governments, especially those vulnerable to such pandemics as the Ebola (EVD) in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone, and to scale up funding to achieve the health spending targets of Abuja.

Secondly, months into the EVD pandemic, the World Bank is slow to carry out its pledge of US\$200 million to prevent and contain EVD and treat its victims, many of whom are health and ancillary workers. Of course, one of the obstacles to scaling up funding is the lack of prior investment in the public health service infrastructure, including professional development, of the countries now confronting the pandemic or threatened by it.

EVD has revealed the consequences of poor funding for the health sector in West Africa and threatens to further undermine this essential public service as increasing numbers of health workers and public services employees contract the infection. More needs to be done now to protect these frontline workers, including direct consultations and recognition of their human and labour rights. Had the World Bank instituted a practical labour safeguard in the past, in line with the ILO core labour standards and the WHO recommendations, those most responsible for delivering vital health services to very poor West African populations would have been in a better position to advocate for greater and more effective health care spending.

Unfortunately, the World Bank has not yet recognized that labour rights are a necessary, but insufficient, condition for improving public services generally and health care specifically.

Public Services International (PSI) is a global trade union federation representing 20 million working women and men who deliver vital public services in 150 countries. PSI champions human rights, advocates for social justice and promotes universal access to quality public services. PSI works with the United Nations system and in partnership with labour, civil society and other organisations.

Therefore, Public Services International (PSI) has joined with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) to take part in World Bank consultations related to the revision of the Bank's social and environmental safeguards policies over the past several years. PSI welcomes the World Bank evaluation of current policies and revisions to these critical social and environmental safeguards while also including a new labour safeguard, referred to as "[Environmental and Social Standard 2: Labour and Working Conditions](#)" in the draft text now under discussion.

However, PSI is disappointed that this initial draft text does not reflect the World Bank's expressed support since 2002 of the [International Labour Organization's core labour standards \(CLS\)](#), nor does it come close to matching the operable content of the International Finance Corporation's (IFC) own "[Performance Standard 2: Labour and Working Conditions \(ESS-2\)](#)." PSI strongly encourages the World Bank to extend and expand its current consultation process in order to fully assess the very tangible need for strengthening the proposed "labour and working conditions" safeguard and make the necessary modifications to the draft text to reflect and effectively advance the CLS.

The absence of a labour standards safeguard at the World Bank, or the adoption of the ESS-2 in its current draft form, means that borrowers from the World Bank's public sector divisions, the IBRD and IDA, as well as managers of projects and other activities funded by those divisions, have not been required, nor will they be required, to comply with the basic labour standards adopted at other multilateral development banks (MDBs). MDBs that have adopted rigorous labour standards include the World Bank's private sector division, IFC, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the African Development Bank (AfDB). All of the preceding labour standards, safeguards or requirements have included obligations to comply with the International Labour Organization's (ILO) core labour standards, present written information to workers about their conditions of employment, provide a safe and healthy work environment and ensure that sub-contracted workers' rights and working conditions are also protected.

The fact that the World Bank has not adopted such standards has created confusion and inconsistency as to the labour conditions that must be applied in development projects, depending on which MDB or which division of the World Bank provides the financing.

Aside from falling short of the CLS and the tested labour safeguards now implemented at other MDBs as well as the IFC, the current draft text would fail to protect the most vulnerable World Bank project-related workers from threats to their health and safety, because it appears to exempt those workers employed by World Bank project contractors, thereby too narrowly delineating the scope of workers covered by such a safeguard. Moreover, the draft text does not offer any rationale for excluding such contract workers, even though in some cases they might constitute the largest workforce carrying out a World Bank funded project. In its current draft text form, "[Environmental and Social Standard 2: Labour and Working Conditions](#)," unnecessarily discriminates against contracted and subcontracted workers, but other existing and proposed social and environmental safeguards would apply to such project related workers and contractors.

PSI strongly recommends that the World Bank rectify this weakness in the draft text of the proposed ESS-2 by guaranteeing that all project-related workers, those contracted or not, are effectively covered by all safeguards, especially ESS-2.

Without an effective labour safeguard, comparable to the IFC, EBRD and AfDB, the World Bank runs the risk of endangering the lives of workers responsible for the successful implementation of the Bank's loan projects and programs. For example, the current loan program "[Reproductive and Child Health Project-Phase 2, Second Additional Financing \(P132753\)](#)" awarded to Sierra Leone intends to:

"Help finance the costs associated with the implementation of additional activities that scale up the impact and development effectiveness of the ongoing Reproductive and Child Health Project."

This project seeks to support the existing primary health care performance-based financing (PBF) by extending such support to private primary health care (PHU) providers. While PSI is not privy to the details of the project, nor its administration by local authorities or supervision by the World Bank, it does appear that under current safeguard policies as well as the proposed ESS-2, employees or providers associated with the PHUs would not be protected. According to the Project Information Document, the only Bank safeguard triggered by this project is the Environmental Assessment, especially as it relates to the generation of biomedical waste. Ironically, while the project includes an updated Medical Waste Management Plan, those carrying out the plan in the face of the Ebola pandemic in Sierra Leone are not protected under current Bank safeguard policies or those contemplated in the draft text of ESS-2.

It appears as if PSI's affiliates in Sierra Leone, including the Sierra Leone Health Services Workers' Union (SLEHSWU), the National Union of Civil Servants (NUCS) and the Municipal and Local Government Employees Union (MALGEU), cannot count on World Bank safeguard policies to protect their members' core labour rights, their health and safety, or whistle-blower status in those cases where employees might wish to file complaints regarding the legal and World Bank conditions regarding this loan project and others. Nor would the proposed ESS-2 seem to protect all health and support staff workers labouring at the front lines of the Ebola pandemic in Sierra Leone and throughout the region, where the World Bank should be active in strengthening and reforming health delivery systems.

It is essential that all project-related workers, whether directly employed as civil servants or contracted employees, be protected and be able to effectively exercise their freedom of association and collective bargaining rights in order to strengthen the health care delivery systems of such countries as Sierra Leone, among many others. An effective and comprehensive labour safeguard promises to set several important conditions so that workers can play a responsible role in policy making that strengthens and improves health care systems without reprisal or discrimination.

We respectfully request a consultation to further discuss the proposed ESS-2 in light of the evident challenges to our members, including a discussion on current programs in those West African nations now threatened by the Ebola pandemic. In this way we can assist with the elaboration of a new draft text and work together to insure that our West African affiliate members are fully protected as they confront the pandemic and are extended an opportunity to engage in consultations on this critical matter.

Thank you for your fullest consideration.

Yours sincerely,



Rosa Pavanelli
PSI General Secretary