



**The Honourable Carrie Lam  
Chief Executive of Hong Kong  
Office of the Chief Executive  
Hong Kong Special Administrative Region  
People's Republic of China  
Email: ceo@ceo.gov.hk**

**HTUR/MW**

**7 February 2020**

Dear Ms Lam,

Public Services International (PSI) and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) are jointly writing to you to express our solidarity with the healthcare workers in Hong Kong. PSI is the global union federation which brings together 30 million women and men delivering public services in 158 countries and territories. The ITUC represents 207 million workers globally in 163 countries, including the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions and the Hong Kong and Kowloon Trade Union Council in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.

Our members globally, in particular the healthcare workers, are on the front line of global response to the novel coronavirus outbreak, which has been declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHIEC). They thus face the occupational hazard of exposure to the 2019-nCoV. In line with international labour standards of the International Labour Organization (i.e., C155, R194, C187, R197 and C161, R171, P155), employers are duty-bound to safeguard the occupational health and safety of workers.

In Hong Kong, healthcare workers organised as the Hong Kong Health Employees Alliance (HKHEA) have reluctantly chosen to take industrial action after having determined the gravity and seriousness of the occupational health and safety risks, and the consequences of inaction.

Given the proximity of Hong Kong to mainland China, where the epidemic started, and the fact that Hong Kong was accepting arrivals from mainland China as recently as the 5<sup>th</sup> of February, the occupational health and safety standards applied need to be amongst the highest standards globally.

The HKHEA reports that workers have not received appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), nor have workers in public spaces been issued adequate face masks. Hong Kong should be applying the standards developed following the SARS outbreak – standards which set a much higher bar for health safety than those applied to date. Occupational health and safety for health-sector workers, and international guidelines established by International Labour Organisation and the World Health Organization in relation to contagious epidemics, stipulate that workers have the right to remove themselves from a work situation when they have reasonable justification to believe it presents an imminent and serious danger to their life or health. Furthermore, the guidelines state that if a staff member exercises this right, he or she shall be protected from any undue consequences.

PSI and the ITUC fully support the strike action and condemn attempts at repressing the legitimate withdrawal of the services of HKHEA members with warning letters aimed at deterring them.

We urge you to respect their right to take industrial action, and their right to collective bargaining, which are fundamental rights and a principle of work. The HKSAR government and HKHA must uphold

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international labour standards and resolve the situation with practical steps for implementing necessary infection protection and control measures.

We look forward to your expedited action.

Yours sincerely,



Ms Sharan Burrow  
ITUC General Secretary



Ms Rosa Pavanelli  
PSI General Secretary

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