

WCDRR Workers and Trade Unions Main statement

15/07/2014

Excellencies, co-chairs and working group members, colleagues, major groups,

It is my honour to share with you some concerns and aspirations of workers and trade unions when it comes to disaster risk reduction

Let me start out by clearly stating where we stand on risk reduction :

Many risks are assumed by our members, those workers who are called out during disasters to save lives and protect property.

These are the first responders : the firefighters, emergency medical workers, police... They are often the heroes we see in the media, willing to risk their own lives to save others.

But there are many others, not so visible, but often equally at risk : workers in health and social services, in education, in energy; in public transport; in water and sanitation, and many others.

All of these workers willingly assume enormous risks as part of their duties.

But, we don't want to assume the risks without **employers assuming their responsibilities.**

This is a key concept which we need **all levels of government to** understand.

Because, whether local or national government, odds are you are the main employers of disaster response workers.

So we need you to pay close attention to the needs of these workers.

We need you to implement ILO core labour standards and to adhere to the ILO's Decent Work agenda.

For first responders, workers and trade unions need to see targets/indicators which assess our preparedness, one of the key ways to reduce the risks... which we are called on to assume for the welfare of all.

Our members need the tools and training to do their jobs.

To do their jobs safely.

Such tools and training will not only reduce the risks which the workers assume, but will also reduce the risks of all members of society.

I must admit, I am a little taken aback by how little mention there is in the documents for this meeting about the needs of our members, the workers who will actually implement all of the good policies decided here.

We know that the UN has very many issues to address

We ask that the representatives of missions here in the room move messages back to your governments about the role of workers in this whole process.

And acknowledge the sacrifices of these workers, the health workers who are dying as we speak in dealing with the Ebola disaster, the firefighters killed in the line of duty, even the UN staff, who are sent to the most troubled parts of the world, to help people when most of our institutions have failed. 200 of these workers have been killed on the job over the past ten years.

In following the guiding questions and trying to understand the vocabulary and the assumptions in this framework.

Resilience is possibly the key term

We draw attention here to the proposal moving through the UN system to build real social protection systems, including in the post-2015 agenda.

Social protection is generally understood as a set of public actions that serve as social and economic stabilizers, providing residents with the means to manage major risks, preventing the worsening of poverty, inequality and social exclusion.

Granting universal access to basic social services, such as education, health and social services, energy and water, is sound economic policy, as these services enhance individual opportunity and collective productivity, support economic growth and limit the risk and the greater costs of excessive inequality.

In disasters, the number of casualties, displaced people, separated families and splintered communities depends largely on the extent to which communities are supported by quality public, sustained and predictable support.

Strong social protection systems can provide this support, whereas private insurance mechanisms are too fragmented and sparse, intended for individual rather than communities suffering systemic disasters.

In 2012, the International Labour Organization unanimously adopted Recommendation 2012 to promote national floors of social protection.

Member States are asked to establish basic social security guarantees by law and to mobilize the resources to ensure financial, fiscal and economic sustainability of their national protection floors.

The post-2015 framework for Disaster Risk Reduction must include the promotion of a rights-based approach to the economic and social resilience on which the framework is founded. This implies the creation and strengthening of social protection systems, and achieving the basic social security guarantees of Social Protection Floors (SPF) as the requisite first step.

In this age of austerity, governments need to focus on tax justice, to agree a global system to bring an end to aggressive tax planning, tax evasion and tax dodging.

The for-profit sector is sitting on mountains of financial resources, yet is resisting to pay the taxes which are due.

To pay for the public infrastructure and services upon which they depend.

We heard the Swiss delegate using the adage that Prevention Pays.

But, one of the key problems is that Prevention doesn't necessarily pay the profits which the private sector requires.

We ask that you governments, not pin your hopes on public-private partnerships to provide key investments for this work.

Even though DRR is the responsibility of all, and all must step up and take action, governments must urgently assume their leadership responsibilities, including to finance the key services and infrastructure which will protect our communities.

Governments must not abdicate their responsibilities, whether in finance or management.

It is our job, as workers and trade unions, and with other major groups, to apply the pressure needed to create the political will among our elected officials.

We have heard in the sessions here a solid call for real participation.

Perhaps we need some targets/indicators about participation, to structure what can be one of the most difficult issues for gov.ts:

- To structure participation (which means to share power with) more segments of society
- to create specific spaces for these groups
- to structure decision-making so that participation is mandatory, and not whimsical or politically comfortable and convenient

This would apply to most of the major groups... We know that in many countries, business and industry have privileged access, and so we call on them to exercise with care their privilege... as we understand that profit maximisation is a very tricky basis for decision-making.