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A MILITANT VOICE OF NURSES; UNITED FOR DIGNIFIED WORK, FOR OUR VISSION FOR A FREE AND UNIVERSAL PUBLIC HEALTHCARE FOR ALL

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“Workers of the world unite you have nothing to lose but your chains”

The class oriented WFTU Trade Union International for Public Service and Allied (WFTU TUI-PS&A) salutes the millions of nurses and other health professionals spread throughout all corners of the world. You are struggling against great odds to preserve the health of your societies with limited support.

Like Florence Nightingale, nurses today find themselves at the centre of a history making event that has claimed a large number of lives; and history has bestowed a special mission for the present generation to decommodify healthcare provision for the benefit of humanity.

The ability of nurses and other health professionals to provide satisfactory care to their patients is today being compromised by business oriented healthcare funding and governance models under the capitalist neoliberal dispensation. The privatisation of healthcare and the ever increasing austerity measures that public health institutions were subjected to prior the outbreak of the COVID19 pandemic cannot be understood outside the context of the unholy relationship between capital and the state. The challenge of the healthcare system under capitalism today is that the state has abdicated its responsibility of ensuring the health of society to private interest groups who see the sick and vulnerable in society as economic opportunities from which to profit.

Equally, the growing inequalities, poverty and unemployment that is spawned by capitalism also has a direct bearing on the health of those on the margins of society as they find it difficult to afford nutritious food, decent shelter, good education and quality health; the overall result of this, combined with the unsafe working conditions that those most vulnerable are often subjected to is the disproportionate disease burden they carry. This reality points to the social origins of disease and illness that is often ascribed to the individual rather than the social factors that precipitate it. It is not a coincidence that the COVID19 pandemic affects marginalised communities and groups the most, because it is among these neglected groups that one finds the most underlying illnesses that exacerbates the impact of COVID19 on the human body.

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The COVID19 pandemic has not only called into question how healthcare systems are organised under capitalism and our general attitude towards healthcare provision; it has also called into question the existing patent regimes on essential pharmaceutical drugs whose research and development is often funded by governments; and yet the profits derived from these drugs accrues exclusively to private interest groups. The current global shortages of vaccines to fight the COVID19 pandemic point to the inadequacy of the existing profit oriented Intellectual Property Rights regime of the World Trade Organisation (WHO). The current controversy around COVID19 vaccine patent rights is the cause of the world crisis in vaccine production and supply lines. Vaccine shortages are also worsened by actions expressed through vaccine nationalism and private interests expressed through the refusal to relax patent rights on COVID19 vaccine to allow countries to produce the vaccines they need for themselves.

While the long standing struggle of the progressive trade union movement against the commercialisation of free public healthcare through privatisation is still continuing, this struggle has now been made urgent by the private interest groups that are colluding with certain governments to profit from the pandemic at the expense of human life. The urgent task of every progressive nurse and healthcare worker today is to support the WHO COVAX program to ensure vaccine access for all peoples of the world by:

1. Calling upon those countries that have stockpiled more vaccines than they need, to release their surpluses for distribution amongst poor countries. Vaccines are use-values, not commodities, but public goods. We say yes to “no to profits before people” and indeed “no profits at all before health, lives and livelihoods”.
2. Supporting the WHO’s “Fair allocation Mechanism” for COVID-19 vaccine distribution through the COVAX facility, and the distribution of all vaccines through this facility. At the same time we must also call for the building of vaccine manufacturing capacity in poorer countries.
3. Standing side-by-side with governments and international organisations that are calling for the waiving of patent rights on health products that can aid in the fight against the pandemic thus enabling more countries to cheaply produce these pharmaceutical products to alleviate the current constraints related to vaccine supply.
4. Urging all nations to promote and engage in solidarity and cooperation in the global fight against COVID-19 as exemplified by the Republic of Cuba.
5. Condemning the geopolitical manoeuvres aimed at conquering the COVID-19 vaccine world market by imperialist countries through the slanderous scepticism over the scientific work undertaken by countries such as Cuba, China and Russia. Instead, we call on the politicians to give way to maximum collaboration and cooperation within the scientific community.
6. Ensuring that vaccination roll-out in every country prioritises the frontline workers, the poor who live in crowded conditions and the elderly. All governments must be compelled to be transparent and accountable to ensure that the distribution and

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administration of the vaccines is not biased in favour of the elites. The rich must not be allowed to buy their way to the front.

7. Closely monitoring the plight of vulnerable groups such as the homeless, immigrants, sex-workers and others during the roll-out of vaccination programmes so that these groups are not excluded or left behind in the fight against COVID-19.

The increasing role of private capital in health institutions through private health providers, private medical aid schemes, and pharmaceutical companies and in collaboration with the state has only served the purpose of driving up the costs of healthcare and medicines and thus making healthcare inaccessible to the majority of people in the world who have been impoverished by neoliberal pro-business policies. The challenge in the health sector today is not only about the commitment of the nurses or how hard they work, it is also about the design, organisation, funding and accessibility of healthcare to citizens in need, without these the work of nurses is undermined.

Revolutionary Nurses Day to ALL Nurses Across the World!!!

Forward With the Struggle Against the Commodification of Healthcare!!!

Free Quality Public Healthcare for All Now!!!

Issued by Zola Saphetha: General Secretary (WFTU-TUI-PS&A)

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