



Workers and Trade Unions Statement

UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction

Sendai, Japan
16 March 2015

Major Group Workers and Trade Unions respectfully submit our views to the UN World Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction (WCDRR), to national and local governments and to other stakeholders, our partners in our communities.

Congratulations to the Governments and peoples of Japan and Sendai and to the hundreds of workers who ensure us a safe and risk-free conference.

Here at Sendai, we see much good work, lots of enthusiasm and dedication for protecting people and the planet. Poverty alleviation and sustainable development are the goals. It seems as if we are trying to decide what tools we will use to build the World We Want.

We generally agree on where we want to go, the questions are how do we get there. What we know is that you won't get the World We Want without a lot of workers.

In DRR, you need a range of skilled, dedicated and motivated workers, women and men daily risking their lives to protect families and communities. Without these many thousands of workers, your intentions and our needs remain unrealized. Volunteers are great, but you cannot expect them to develop the levels of expertise needed to manage the many complex elements of response and recovery. But you still need a skilled and trained workforce.

We are very concerned that your texts, your proposals, your policies largely ignore the realities of workers, whether they be our first responders: the valiant firefighters and emergency medical technicians; the police and other uniformed services, or the frontline workers in hospitals and health clinics; in the schools; in the energy and water utilities; in public transport; in civil administration and in a range of other areas.

All of these workers are called upon in times of danger, to leave their families and risk their own health and safety to protect us. All of these workers deserve to be treated with respect and dignity.

Governments have ratified the core ILO Conventions. These are obligatory. They are no longer the subject of negotiation, rather a matter of implementation. Working in essential services is not an excuse for violating our human and labour rights.

Workers and trade unions commit to working with our employers, with different levels of government and other stakeholders to ensure that all disaster workers have the tools and training they need.

With our employers, we commit to use our knowledge and expertise in collaboration with management to improve Disaster Reduction Mechanisms, to practice and train, to adapt the tools to our realities and to ensure a constant feedback loop, such that labour and management can jointly improve the services to our communities.

But we say to all of our employers, we can only do this when our rights are respected, including freedom of expression and freedom of association. We cannot collaborate, we cannot perform to our potential when our rights are violated.

Under such circumstances, we are unable to provide the protections that your families need and deserve.

As you all know, local authorities carry a huge burden in DRR. But, too often, they are subjected to unfunded mandates, where national governments devolve responsibilities but not financial means. Local governments thus find themselves cutting all sorts of corners, including on training and materiel for first responders. It means our members get killed or injured doing an already dangerous job.

We are active in the Global Alliance on Tax Justice – we need a global agreement that will put an end to tax havens, to tax dodging, aggressive tax planning and other tricks by which governments are being starved of much-needed revenues. This is entirely relevant to DRR, as the largest burden falls on the public sector.

We also want to be clear about government responsibilities: we reject the notion that families should turn to insurance companies to provide their risk reduction. Most families are too poor for those tools. And governments cannot absolve themselves of responsibility to us through this type of approach.

Governments have to invest in resilience. It cannot be outsourced. And when you invest, don't forget to train the workers, to plan for operations and maintenance of the infrastructure and services that we all depend on.

The millions of women and men who implement your policies stand ready and willing to assume the risks, to stand guard over our families and communities.

Decent Work is a key pillar of resilience and sustainable development.

Please extend your hands to us as full and equal partners in building the World We Want.
