



Children's Sector STATEMENT ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS in the midst of PUBLIC SECTOR WORKER STRIKES

Our country is in a turmoil that pushes us all to address immediate and long-term issues that are fundamentally about rights.

Children's rights are not possible without the realisation of human rights. Conversely human rights cannot be fulfilled without the realisation and protection of children's rights.

Workers' rights are essential human rights, and as children's sector organisation, we support the demands for decent working conditions including remuneration. We believe that the ability of adults to fulfil their duties to children in terms of health and education are deeply affected by their own personal circumstances. Quality health care and education also require other fundamental conditions which need to be seriously and consistently addressed. As a society we have historically undervalued the people who are essential to the realisation of all of our rights, in particular those of children. We need to ensure that we bring pride to those who are dedicated and bring to account those who may bring their professions into disrepute by not performing their duties.

We support and advocate for fair use of the nation's resources that address inequities in our society and enable the full realisation of children's and all peoples rights. We believe that the present wage, housing and medical aid demands of the public sector workers are reasonable. While they demand an increase that is higher than the rate of inflation, there is a backlog that needs to be caught up, and justice also demands that their increase is in line with other increases such as those gained by municipal workers, for example.

In considering the present wave of strike action by public sector workers, children's rights are paramount in all decisions made by all adults. Children's rights to family and adult care require health services to be available to their parents and caregivers without obstacle including to uninterrupted medical treatment for TB, HIV and other chronic illness. Children's rights to survival require that pregnancy, birth and neonatal services are provided without obstacle. Children's rights require that children's education be enabled without obstacle.

We support the right of workers to strike. This right means that there must be a choice and protection for those who chose not to strike. Therefore we appeal to the union membership and leadership to stand up for all rights by desisting from closing or hampering access to schools or to health services.

We appeal to government to rapidly, seriously and in good faith negotiate a fair dispensation for public sector workers.

We appeal to all parties to respect and vociferously protect the rights of others including the right to health care, to education – the right to choose to work or not – and for all the right to peace and to freedom from violence and intimidation. Anyone using violence or intimidation, in any form, hurts all of our rights and freedoms and undermines their own cause. Any one not acting decisively against violence or intimidation is complicit. In the current heated climate, leadership must publically and within structures ensure that everyone is clear on this message and what it means in practice. We must all stand up for PEACE, JUSTICE and FREEDOM!

While tempers are heated, even where anger is justifiable, it is never justifiable to turn anger into actions that deny human rights to others including children and other members of society especially when they are vulnerable through illness. We therefore do not support

- The action that blocks access to health care, puts the lives and physical wellbeing of children and adults at risk

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- The closure and intimidation at schools, it puts the educational future of many children – again particularly the most vulnerable – in jeopardy.

What can you do?

1. **Be informed:** Understand the issues, know the facts so that in conversation you can help counter untruths and emotive statements that fuel fear, anger and resentment.
2. **Clarify your 'demand':** What is your message to those in 'power' on both sides: What do you require of them based on your analysis of the above facts? Try and formulate an organisational statement and use this for advocacy – letters to the press, Facebook, Twitter and websites.
3. Re-visit, understand and **promote strategies of non-violent direct action** to bring about social change. Promote peace actions. Speak out and act against intimidation and violence. Facilitate discussion and debate that peacefully airs different viewpoints, try to build consensus. Call meetings with family, friends, at work and in your community.
4. Can your **organisation extend services** in this time of trouble? For example:
 - Support working parents with **childcare arrangements** while they are not at school. This could include extending school after-care services, sports, recreation and play programmes and mobilising parents forming support groups to care for children.
 - Ensure children on school feeding schemes are **being fed**.
 - Provide **study space** for children to work.
 - Recruit **volunteer tutors** to support children in key subjects.
 - Organise **'talk' forums** especially for children on education matters so that they can debrief experiences, share fears and concerns about their right to education. Keep this conversation going and mediate children's 'voice' to duty bearers concerned.
 - **Volunteer at health facilities.** For Gauteng call 082 338 1170, 082 551 9892, 082 773 9013, 082 331 0786. For KZN call 0800 005133
5. **Monitoring** - Report to your local police where there is danger, harm and need for intervention to happen.
6. Ensure **emergency plans are operational** in institutions and your own organisations. This concerns especially safety and security of children in schools and home communities and the immediate health needs of children. Know where help can be found as the usual networks might not be operational.
7. **Regaining normality after strike action**, especially if protracted and socially damaging:
 - Facilitation between health workers and educators, and children, parents and community to enable restoration of rapport and good relations.
 - Holding duty bearers accountable: Teachers must be in school, on time, teaching. Health workers must be caring and fully engaged in their duties. Professional conduct is required.

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Statement endorsed by:

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