

Introduction...

Honoured representatives from the Region of Puglia, members of the migrant community, respected delegates and colleagues, it is a great honour to be here.

I bring greetings to you on behalf of the 20 million women and men who are members of our global union federation, Public Services International. Or, as you know us in Italian – Internazionale dei Servizi Pubblici!

Public Services International is extremely proud to be working in cooperation with our Euro-Mediterranean affiliates and the European Federation of Public Service Unions, to organise this year's first Euromed conference in Bari.

This first conference provides the public opportunity to address migration issues from the international, European and regional perspective.

I look forward to talking with more of you here who are from the participating countries including: Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Cyprus, Malta, Greece, Israel, Tunisia, and Algeria.

We also look forward to our affiliate representatives beginning work on the research survey of public sector workers in migration services.

And, to discussing the work plan for the final conference which will be held on 20-21 October this year, in Malaga, Spain.

As humans, we've been moving across our world – driven by needs and circumstances – since time immemorial.

So you can say that migration is a natural survival feature of humankind.

Migration has made positive contributions to the development of our societies, but has also brought negative consequences.

Today migration is linked to the developmental crisis that we face.

As long as socio-economic imbalances remain unaddressed between developed and developing countries, forced economic migration will continue to be a challenging issue for us.

Something we must always remember is that migration is not a single issue, it has many faces.

And each face has a different story to tell – of hardship, sacrifice, and occasional triumph against the odds.

Consider the story of Baba, who wanted to put on public record his experiences as a migrant making the dangerous trek from Africa to Europe.

His story has yet to reach a “happily ever after” conclusion.

Baba was an orphan in Niger.

He had been kept as a slave all his life.

He was often beaten by his master.

Baba finally escaped from his village on a donkey and made his way to the Ivory Coast and from there to the UK.

Baba made a friend in London who gave him somewhere to stay and found a job for him.

But Baba was eventually arrested and taken to the police station.

The police asked why he had not gone to his own embassy for assistance, but he pointed out there is no embassy for Niger in London.

The police fingerprinted him and he was jailed in a detention centre for five months.

Baba claims that, even then, the detention centre was better than the place he had come from.

He threw all his effort into learning English.

He does not want to go back to Niger and to his life as a slave.

At the same time, Baba notes that in the new country he has no rights to do anything.

He has to ask for help, but he doesn't want to beg.

His hope for the future is to stay. He wants to work and to pay taxes, he says.

But every day, Baba says he is just waiting to hear something from the authorities, and so he remains in limbo.

It is the story of each unique migrant, like Baba, that we must bear witness to, as we struggle to uphold human rights and dignity across our world.

Let me say something about the concept of 'bearing witness'.

We know it most often as a legal concept – as when you have someone act as a witness for you in court.

As a witness you are required to stand up for a person and represent the truth of their story.

What does this have to do with migrants?

Well, here in Italy, as most of you know well – the Berlusconi government has tried to force many Public Services International affiliate members to report undocumented migrants under the so-called "Security Package" legislation.

With this law, I believe the government has perverted the most ethical element of witnessing – and that is to honour the truth of a person's story, and, in doing so, to uphold their humanity.

Last spring, sister Rosa Pavanelli from FP CGIL Nazionale, wrote an urgent email to me and other PSI representatives, asking if we had heard what was happening to hundreds of migrants in the Mediterranean area.

In May 2009, you may recall, the Berlusconi government decided to reject all undocumented migrants coming from Libya, barring their way to Sicily, and disembarking them in

Tripoli without determining either their identity or their status as asylum seekers.

This could be a direct consequence of an economic agreement between Berlusconi and Gaddafi that is worth five billion Euros.

Rosa and her union raised their alarm over what they saw as the Italian government's serious violation of human rights, and the Geneva Convention on Refugees.

"It's a real humanitarian emergency," Rosa said.

She and our affiliates moved into action, and asked for our support.

Rosa told us that one of the greatest concerns is over the introduction of the "crime of clandestinity" in the Italian Code.

Public sector workers are required to report undocumented migrants, with the only exception of doctors who may or may not report undocumented migrants, at their discretion.

Other regressive measures include:

- the requirement to report undocumented migrant women delivering a child in Italy;
- a six month jail sentence for any person renting a flat to undocumented migrants;
- faster trials and expulsions of undocumented migrants;
- six years of jail time for undocumented migrants declaring a false identity to a public officer.

I applaud the Italian regions – Puglia being a leader among them – which have since adopted laws which forbid public workers to report undocumented migrants.

I understand the other regions which have taken a similar stand include Toscana, Emilia Romagna and Campania...

However, I also hear that the Berlusconi's government has applied to have the High Court overturn the law of Puglia.

Also worthy of mention on the issue of concealed and bonded labour is the law providing employment rights that was passed by Puglia in 2006 – after Polish undocumented migrants had been found tortured and killed in the fields in the province of Foggia.

And for its progressive action in dealing with these issues, Puglia was also recognised with the "European Regional Champions Award" in 2008.

Our public service affiliates in Italy have been leading important fightback campaigns, and are driving much of this important law reform.

One of the most significant campaigns has been the "*io curo, non denuncio*" or "*I provide care, I don't report*" campaign in the health care sector that has been widely covered in the media.

But FP CGIL has gone a step further, and has decided to defend all public workers who may be reported for not having fulfilled the law according to the "Security Package."

FP CGIL has also stated that they will refuse to allow union affiliation to public workers who report undocumented migrants.

And solidarity work is continuing with the Confederation and NGOs.

Funzione Pubblica supported and participated in the national strike of migrants on March 1st as part of the international initiative "*A day without us*".

Public Services International supports the courageous efforts of our affiliates who are working to protect the rights of migrants.

The financial and economic crisis clearly has an effect on the level of desperation of migrants who are seeking work and better lives.

Even in times of crisis, migrants continue to send money back home to their families and communities.

But, as we see in Italy, more restrictive immigration policies are being adopted to protect local labour markets and in response to a lower demand for foreign workers.

These migrants become vulnerable to exploitation and bonded labour.

Rather than return home, where the economic conditions may be harsher, they choose to take up any form of employment in order to see out the crisis.

Irregular migration may increase through the growth of informal labour markets, as employers seek cost savings, as unemployed migrants seek work without legal authorization, and as opportunities for regular labour migration decrease.

An increase in the incidence of human trafficking into forced labour is forecast.

Women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, trafficking and forced labour under these crisis conditions.

So these are major concerns today.

At the same time, we are deeply disturbed by the trend where richer countries – rather than investing in quality public services and a sustainable workforce that build a strong domestic economy – are turning to short-term solutions such as ‘poaching’ the much-needed skills of citizens from developing countries.

In fact, the absence of adequately-funded quality public services and the employment opportunities they create is a strong factor that drives people to migrate in search of decent work and life elsewhere.

Lori de Vera, who shared her story with Public Services International, is living this reality.

Lori migrated first from the Philippines to Hong Kong where she worked as a domestic.

She has had many different employers over the years, many of which have treated her as a second-class citizen.

This has been very difficult for her to accept because she is a trained professional who was working towards her Master's degree in education in the Philippines.

But she earned low wages as a school teacher, and in order to contribute to her family's household income, she migrated to Hong Kong and then to Canada.

Lori's story illustrates the tremendous personal costs that she has had to bear as a migrant.

Even after almost two decades of living overseas, Lori is still working in a demanding low-wage job, earning just enough as domestic caregiver to send money home and to rent a small apartment.

But Lori cannot return to the Philippines because her whole family continues to depend on her.

And Lori's story as an in-home caregiver in a northern country is becoming all too common.

The population of industrialised countries is ageing.

While many countries in Europe, for example, have among the highest life expectancy worldwide – they also suffer from the lowest fertility rates, resulting in a shrinking native workforce.

The combination of these trends places Europe in a demographic crisis, which is fast becoming a “care crisis.”

At the same time, we are seeing a policy shift whereby industrialised countries are using temporary or circular migration to address labour market shortages.

Migrants may only be allowed to stay in the employer country for six months or several years, and pathways to citizenship and integration in host societies are not guaranteed, or may be prohibited altogether.

It does not need to be this way.

Public Services International and our affiliates are committed to upholding migrant workers’ rights and strengthening the quality public services that should provide us with stable jobs and services in our own countries.

In promoting quality public services, we promote the rights of all workers, including migrant workers.

We believe quality public services are the foundation for decent work and sustainable development.

Health and social care workers clearly need the solidarity and support that only trade unions can offer in defending their trade union rights.

And we are committed to promoting trade union rights for all migrant workers, particularly women.

Again, we are very proud to be working with all of you in these Euromed conferences and related activities.

We are intent on enhancing the knowledge and capacity of public service workers in dealing with migration from a rights-based perspective through information sharing and exchange of best practices.

We are committed to promoting cooperation and union solidarity through a plan of action that defends migrant workers' rights at the various stages of migration, including arrival, employment, integration in the host country, and return and reintegration in their home countries.

The important work of this Euromed project includes identifying the level of involvement of public sector workers who are engaged in migration services.

We want to assess the level of capacity and delivery of these services.

We will identify the distribution and proportion of migrant workers who are themselves involved in the delivery of public services.

We will identify and map out the body of existing national, local and European laws relating to migration, refugees and employment services.

And, as the Euro-Mediterranean region is the 'gateway to Europe,' we will work to collect data on arrival, flow and movement of migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

Such information will be useful in understanding the volume, needs and challenges in the delivery of services for migrants and refugees.

We appreciate being able to facilitate, through these Euromed conferences and research activities, bringing together unions from the origin and destination countries of migrants.

Working together, across our trade unions, and with our allies in progressive governments and organisations – we seek solidarity and success.

Our shared future depends on it.

Thank you.