

Online Public Meeting: Sri Lankan doctors' protests and the fight to defend free public health

The Health Workers Action Committee (Sri Lanka)
12 February 2026

The Health Workers Action Committee (HWAC) will hold a public online meeting at 8 p.m. on February 20 entitled "Sri Lankan Doctors' Protests and the Fight to Defend Free Public Health."

Since January 23, around 20,000 Sri Lankan government doctors have been involved in widespread protest actions, including a two-day token strike on January 23–24, to demand an increase in their legitimate allowances. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People's Power (JVP/NPP) government has responded with rejections and threats against the protesting doctors.

President Anura Kumara Dissanayake publicly declared on February 6 that "no allowances or salary increases will be made... no matter how many street protests or strikes take place." He directed this threat at the protesting doctors and all state employees, insisting that the government will adhere only to the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) directives to curtail public spending.

While the doctors' demands over allowances and working conditions are legitimate and urgent, they cannot be separated from the broader assault on the free public health system carried out by successive governments and intensified by the current JVP/NPP government.

Marking a decisive step toward privatising healthcare, the cabinet decided on January 6 to legalise a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) system to obtain essential medical tests from private institutions.

The public healthcare system is on the brink. Hospitals are crippled by shortages of doctors, nurses and support staff. Vital equipment is lacking, medicine shortages are widespread, and infrastructure is

decaying.

The struggle for better conditions for health employees is inseparably bound up with defending free healthcare, which was won through the bitter struggles of the working class and supported by the poor.

The trade union bureaucracies are the main barrier to organising this struggle. The outright rejection of the doctors' demands has once again shattered the illusions spread by trade union leaders—including the Government Medical Officers' Association, which called the current protests—that the government can be pressured into granting health workers' demands.

We call for the building of action committees independent of the union bureaucracies in all public hospitals and health institutions and urge employees in private health institutions to do the same. These committees must turn to other workers and the poor in the struggle to defend free public healthcare.

Our meeting will also discuss the strategic need to connect this struggle to international working-class solidarity and to the broader socialist perspective necessary to defend and rebuild public health.

We call upon you to join the meeting and participate in this important discussion.

Date and time: Friday, February 20, 8 p.m.
Register for the meeting [here](#).



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