

At meeting to defend public health, Sri Lanka's health workers express solidarity with counterparts in US

Health Workers Action Committee (HWAC) –Sri Lanka
25 February 2026

A February 20 the Health Workers Action Committee (HWAC) in Sri Lanka held a an online meeting titled, “Sri Lankan doctors’ protests and the fight to defend free public health.” Participants in the meeting unanimously adopted two resolutions: one pledging to defend Sri Lanka’s free public health service, and the other expressing solidarity with striking health care workers in the United States.

The meeting was organised as part of HWAC’s campaign to advance a socialist strategy to defend the country’s collapsing public health system and oppose the government’s austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF). It was held against the backdrop of more than a month of protests by 20,000 doctors demanding the restoration of allowances and the resolution of long-standing grievances.

Around 90 participants attended the meeting, including doctors, nurses and other health workers, as well as youth and workers from several other sectors. The broad composition of the audience underscored growing concern over the deepening crisis in the public health sector amid sweeping budget cuts, staff shortages and deteriorating hospital conditions.

Speakers addressed the mounting pressures faced by health workers and the crisis in public health system, linking them to the IMF austerity program being implemented by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/ National People’s Power (JVP/NPP) government. Government austerity, the speakers explain, threatens to dismantle the island’s free public health system, which has long been regarded as a major social gain of the working class.

By Tuesday, the meeting’s video recording had been viewed more than 2,700 times, reflecting wider interest in the issues raised and the call for a unified struggle of the working class to defend free public health.

Resolution to Defend Sri Lanka’s Free Public Health Service

The meeting adopted the following resolution concerning the defense of the public health care system:

The Health Workers’ Action Committee warns that Sri Lanka’s free public health system—won through historic working-class struggles led by early socialist movements such as the Bolshevik-Leninist Party of India and the Lanka Sama Samaja Party under the international impact of the October Revolution—is now facing a sharp assault of privatization through austerity measures dictated by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

We fight for the immediate halt to all privatization measures currently being carried out by the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna/National People’s Power (JVP/NPP) government; the full restoration of state funding for health services; urgent recruitment to fill staff vacancies; a wage system adjusted in line with inflation; and the provision of all services—including essential medicines and laboratory tests—free of charge to patients.

To achieve this, we emphasize the necessity of repudiating foreign debt payments for which working people are not responsible, so that social resources can be directed toward free education and health services, and of placing banks and major corporations under democratic workers’ control.

We state that the struggle to defend free public health care is inseparably linked to a united struggle with other sections of the working class against the IMF austerity program being implemented by the JVP/NPP government. The Health Workers’ Action

Committee stresses the need for political independence of the working class from capitalist parties and for a socialist program that places social needs above profit.

Recognizing the betrayals of trade union officials, strikes, protests, mass meetings and pickets must be organized as independent working-class struggles in order to advance this program.

We call for the immediate establishment of networked action committees in every hospital and clinic, nationally and internationally, to carry forward and coordinate this struggle. The Health Workers' Action Committee pledges its full support for this initiative.

Speakers at the meeting explained that the struggle in Sri Lanka was part of a global movement by health care workers against the destruction of public health through the subordination of medical care to profit. In every country, health care workers are confronting chronic understaffing, impossibly high patient-to-nurse ratios and dangerous working conditions.

The attack on public health is taking a particularly reactionary form in the United States, where the Trump administration is promoting pseudo-science to undermine confidence in public health and vaccines even as COVID continues to spread and measles, which had previously been eliminated, returns with deadly effect.

These are the conditions which provoked the strike by 15,000 nurses in New York City and 35,000 health care workers at Kaiser Permanente in California and Hawaii.

Resolution Expressing Full Solidarity with Striking Health Workers in the United States

The meeting adopted the following resolution regarding the struggle of US health care workers:

The Health Workers' Action Committee of Sri Lanka expresses its full solidarity with the nurses, pharmacists, laboratory technicians and other health workers at New York-Presbyterian Hospital, Kaiser Permanente in California, and in other parts of the United States who are currently engaged in strikes and protests.

These strikes are struggles against longstanding

staff shortages, deteriorating health and safety conditions, and the prioritization of profit over patient care. All health workers and the broader working class must defend the struggles of US health workers.

We condemn the leadership of the New York State Nurses Association for attempting to impose agreements that betray the demands of nurses and other health workers. To prevent the breaking of picket lines and to expand and defend the strikes, mutually supportive actions must be mobilized, including picketing, protests, marches and joint mass meetings.

The Health Workers' Action Committee of Sri Lanka, which expresses full solidarity with the New York Health Workers' Action Committee, calls on health workers and other workers nationally and internationally to urgently come forward to form independent workers' action committees in their workplaces and unite with the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees initiated by the International Committee of the Fourth International.

The warnings against the treachery of the union bureaucracies were prescient. On February 21, NYSNA officials pushed through an agreement to shut down the last strike by New York-Presbyterian nurses. Two days later officials from the United Nurses Associations of California/Union of Health Care Professionals (UNAC/UHCP) abruptly ordered an end to the four-week strike of 31,000 Kaiser Permanente workers without securing a contract agreement.

This betrayal underscores the importance of the call by the Health Workers' Action Committee in Sri Lanka for the building of the rank-and-file committees in every country. The struggle of doctors, nurses and other health care workers must be united and coordinated across national borders under the direction of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC).



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