



WMA Condemns Bid to Ban Industrial Action by Health Professionals

(14.05.2013) A proposal to outlaw all industrial action by health professionals in Slovakia has prompted the World Medical Association to make a direct plea to the Slovak Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Slovak Parliament to reject the idea.

The proposal from a member of the ruling party in Slovakia is to change the country's legislation so that all industrial action by physicians and other health professionals is made a criminal offence.

But in a strongly worded letter to the Slovakian Prime Minister Robert Fico and Speaker Pavol Paška, the WMA's President Dr. Cecil Wilson and Chair of Council Dr. Mukesh Haikerwal say such a move would deprive health professionals of their basic right to fight for their working conditions. It would also send out to the world the wrong signal about the democratic status of the Slovak Republic.

Dr. Wilson said: 'The Slovakian Chamber of Medicine has urged us to intervene because of the seriousness of this proposal. The World Medical Association deplores any attempt to criminalise physicians who are pursuing their basic civil rights. We also seriously question whether such a move would be legal under international law.'

In their letter the WMA leaders declare: 'We acknowledge that there are situations where an unlawful act of a member of the profession is incompatible with exercising the profession of a physician. However, this must be a serious offence or it must directly demonstrate that person's inability to serve medical responsibilities.'

The letter adds: 'As physicians we abide by strict ethical codes and the health and wellbeing of our patients is paramount. Nevertheless physicians and other health professionals must not be deprived of their basic human rights. They must not be criminalised for pursuing their basic civil rights in a free, just and democratic society.'

'If these proposed changes come into effect, we seriously question whether the amended law(s) will comply with Article 1 of the International Labour Organization Convention Against Forced Labour. They will certainly adversely affect the rights and

welfare of the medical and health professional communities in the Slovak Republic with unmeasured consequences for others in Slovak society.

'On behalf of the World Medical Association we urge you to reject this proposal completely. This proposal would send a wrong signal about the democratic status of the Slovak Republic and be subjected to intense international scrutiny.'

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