



The National Human Defense Network (RNDDH)



Strike in public hospitals: RNDDH demands full satisfaction of strikers' demands

April 1, 2022

I. INTRODUCTION

1. On February 21, 2022, the National Federation of Health Workers (FENATRAS) launched a call for a strike in the country's public hospitals to demand better working conditions and a salary review, granting a basic salary of sixty thousand (60.000) gourdes to staff of hospitals and health centers.
2. At least five (5) major public hospital experienced a near-total work stoppage. And on March 31, 2022, thirty-eight (38) days after its launch, the strike is lifted in one (1) of these centers. However, the hospital situation remains very alarming and the population's access to health care remains as uncertain as it is hypothetical.
3. Concerned by this situation, the National Human Rights Defense Network (RNDDH) visited several hospitals in the country during the month of March 2022 and intends to share with the public, its many observations.

I. SITUATION IN HOSPITALS ON STRIKES

4. As mentioned above at least five (5) major public hospitals had decided to observe the slogan of strike launched by FENATRAS. These are the University Hospital La Paix, the Hospital of the State University of Haiti (HUEH), the Justinien University Hospital of Cap Haitien, the Maternity Hospital of Carrefour and the Isaïe Jeanty Maternity Hospital. Apart from HUEH, the other four (4) centers are still on strike and their situation deserves to be reported.

a) La Paix University Hospital

5. At the La Paix University Hospital, residents assigned to the maternity ward are on strike. This work stoppage began on March 8, 2022, for an unlimited date. Their demands are multiple.

Among other things, they are calling for better working conditions, energy, more staff and suitable work equipment.

6. Some of the strikers interviewed for this monitoring work told the RNDDH that part of the building is in poor condition. In addition, the necessary equipment is not generally available. However, they believe that the situation is worse in the maternity block. The beds, insufficient, are not suitable for deliveries. No curtain preserves the intimacy of patients, and they live in the hospital, in a totally inappropriate promiscuity.
7. A cramped room next to the delivery room is used to accommodate premature newborns. However, it is not equipped and does not have suitable incubators. In this sense, it should be recalled that in October 2018, twenty-five (25) incubators belonging to the hospital were stolen. Even today, staff are waiting for the results of the investigation into this spectacular theft.
8. According to the strikers, they are required to keep the placentas for at least a week for possible tests if the health of the baby or mother becomes more complicated. However, there is no refrigerator available. Therefore, they keep the placentas for one (1) or two (2) days. Unrefrigerated, these placentas emit foul odors.
9. In addition, the equipment used in the maternity block is not treated on time. Laundry is only done once a week and often, doctors' gowns, bed covers, and aprons remain for days without being washed, also giving off nauseous smells.
10. The operating room is often dirty and unclean. Interventional equipment and surgical tool trays are never ready on time. Sometimes, when doctors can't intervene, it's the patients' relatives who propose to clean the operating room.
11. Power cuts surprise doctors while they are in the operating room, in the middle of surgery. The allowance for fuel to power the generator does not allow the hospital to operate for only two (2) weeks. As a result, when power outages are recorded in the operating room, doctors continue to operate in the dark with the flashlights on their phones, posing many risks for both themselves and patients.
12. The strikers also complain of a shortage of staff. Some employees have been transferred to other hospitals. They were never replaced. In addition, at the level of the hospital archives, the archivist is often absent, which blocks the downgrading of patient files who are then invited to open another file at the price of one hundred (100) gourdes. This is a practice that is not without consequences on the follow-up of the treatment of patients and can also put their lives in danger during emergency interventions. This catastrophic record management also wastes time for doctors, who are often forced to collect information that was previously taken.
13. It should be recalled that the University Hospital La Paix was rehabilitated in 2011 in order to revitalize the Haitian health system. The Hospital mainly serves the community of Delmas, where it provides surgical, emergency, internal medicine, pediatrics, orthopedics and maternity services.

b) Hospital of the State University of Haiti (HUEH)

14. On February 5, 2022, a first work stoppage was observed at the Hospital of the State University of Haiti (HUEH). As the demands of the HUEH staff were not considered, the latter decided to subscribe to the slogan of strike of FENATRAS. Since February 21, 2022, the country's largest hospital has been on strike.

15. The strikers demand better working conditions, adequate work equipment, a basic salary of sixty thousand (60,000) gourdes, payment of salary arrears, reactivation of the debit card, the transfer to the debit card of the amount equivalent to the eighteen (18) months during which this card was not fed, a cafeteria and the granting of other health insurance coverage because the insurance card offered by the Office of Insurance Accidents du Travail, Diseases and Maternity (OFATMA) has no value.

16. All services are affected by the strike except dialysis.

17. The HUEH union told the RNDDH that it had met several times with officials of the Ministry of Public Health and Population (MSPP) who promised a salary adjustment in October 2022 as well as the transfer of three (3) of the eighteen (18) months due on the debit card. These conditions are considered unsatisfactory.

18. It should be emphasized that the HUEH is called to serve the population of Port-au-Prince in particular, but it also serves several geographical departments in general. It offers services in internal medicine, pediatrics, urology, obstetrics/gynecology, ophthalmology, radiology, orthopedics, physiotherapy, community medicine, dialysis, surgery, dermatology, emergency department, management of people living with HIV/AIDS and Oto-Rhinolaryngology/Cervical-Facial Surgery (ENT/CCF).

19. On March 31, 2022, after twenty-eight (28) days of near-complete work stoppage, FENATRAS temporarily ended the HUEH strike.

c) Justinien University Hospital of Cap Haitien

20. The Justinien University Hospital of Cap-Haitien went on strike on March 7, 2022. Since then, the patients have been sent home. Employees rarely take up positions but do not work. Detritus was also noticed at the entrance of the various departments of this hospital.

21. In addition to the general demands of FENATRAS, the strikers of the University Hospital Justinien of Cap Haitien demand the availability of inputs, a morgue equipped, fair treatment to employees and good management of the Hospital.

22. The University Hospital Justinien of Cap-Haitien serves the population of the North in particular, but is also solicited by other neighboring departments. It offers services in internal medicine, pediatrics, urology, orthopedics, emergency, family medicine and obstetrics/gynecology.

d) Carrefour Maternity Hospital

23. At the Carrefour Maternity Hospital, the strike began on February 28, 2022, one week after its launch by FENATRAS. Since then, only the clinic and the service for the treatment of people living with HIV/AIDS have been functioning.

24. It should be recalled that this health center, which was refurbished in 2013, provides childcare to the population of Carrefour in particular. In normal times, several services are offered including daily vaccination, neonatology, sonography, radiology, outpatient clinic and a support service for people living with HIV/AIDS. Carrefour's maternity hospital also has a medical laboratory.

e) Maternity Isaïe Jeanty

25. For several years, the Isaïe Jeanty Maternity Hospital, located in the Chancerelles district, an area controlled by armed bandits, has been facing huge security problems. This situation leads the staff to work irregularly, considering the clashes in the area between armed bandits.

26. In addition to the above-mentioned safety issues, Maternity Isaïe Jeanty does not have adequate medication or work equipment. General working conditions are also not acceptable. Modern comfort toilets being dysfunctional, the staff as well as the patients-es use latrines whose cleanliness is extremely doubtful.

27. Members of the staff of this hospital have told the RNDDH that they observe the strike launched by FENATRAS because not only do they operate in a dangerous environment and moreover, but the various alerts also issued to the authorities and relative to their security situation, were never taken seriously.

28. It should be noted that the Isaïe Jeanty Maternity Hospital specializes in obstetric and gynecological care.

II. SITUATION IN HOSPITALS NOT ON STRIKE

29. Other hospitals are not on strike; however, this does not mean that the working conditions of the personnel assigned to them are acceptable. Here are some examples:

- The Providence Hospital of Morne Blanche des Gonaïves operates without a director. The latest, Dr. Jude RENELIQUE was indexed in 2020 in a theft record of sixteen (16) solar panels, batteries, drugs and other equipment that belonged to the hospital. He has been removed from his position. Since then, he has never been replaced. The employees say they have not received their salary for two (2) months. The hospital therefore operates in a general disorder. Pregnant women, for example, pay between thirty thousand (30,000) and fifty thousand (50,000) gourdes for a caesarean section whose price is fixed at seven thousand five hundred (7,500) gourdes.
- The situation at the Aquin Community Referral Hospital is worrying. Water is not available. In the absence of energy, hospital doctors and nurses use flashlights to operate. The delivery room is not adequate. The hospital ambulance is down which leads the patients to use other means of locomotion. In addition, since the August 14, 2021, earthquake, the emergency room has been temporarily relocated to the hospital's outpatient clinic.
- At the Hospital Saint Antoine de Jérémie, the situation worsened after the passage of the earthquake of August 14, 2021. The building is in very bad condition, the materials are insufficient and unsuitable. This situation leads patients to go preferably to Les Cayes, in order to receive the care, they deserve.
- In the North-East department, the public hospitals of Fort-Liberté, Trou-du-Nord and the Ouanaminthe Community Center do not have adequate work equipment or inputs. In addition, the employees of these hospitals claim four (4) months of salary arrears.

III. PARTIAL LIFT OF STRIKE

30. As mentioned above, on March 31, 2022, FENATRAS, according to what it reported to the RNDDH, agreed to lift the strike temporarily at the HUEH level in order to show its willingness to find a solution to the crisis in the country's public hospitals and health centers. This decision was taken against the health authority's promise to sign on April 4, 2022, a convention whose terms can be grouped as follows:

31. In the short term, health authorities must:

- Pay to the debit card the eighteen (18) months that has been withheld and misappropriated by the State authorities;
- Provide all public hospitals across the country with the work equipment and inputs they need;
- Regularize the situation of pawned employees.

32. In the medium term, health authorities must:

- Reform the human resources of the Western Health Department (DSO).
- Adjust staff salaries;
- Promote employees based on their skills and competencies;
- Reform public retirement.

33. In the long term, the authorities must, together with FENATRAS, choose another company in order to guarantee the health insurance coverage of the staff.

34. It should be noted that many employees feel that FENATRAS should not have already lifted the strike at HUEH because, they do not trust the state authorities. In this regard, they recalled that in recent discussions with the present State authorities, they told FENATRAS that they did not want to follow up on the agreement of February 23, 2017¹, because President Jovenel MOÏSE died and the members of the commission who signed it with FENATRAS are not part of the current government.

35. Do we need to call him back? It is an agreement that was signed after two (2) long months of strike recorded then in all public hospital centers of the country, between FENATRAS and the members of a presidential commission that had been created by Jovenel MOÏSE. This commission was composed of Guichard DORE, Max Rudolph SAINT ALBIN and Roody HERIVAUX. The agreement was structured around three (3) main points:

- The wage adjustment;
- The appointment of contract employees;
- The regularization of pawned employees.

IV. COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

36. The entire staff, assigned to the country's public hospitals, work in an environment that continually puts them at risk. It operates in health infrastructures on the verge of collapse, located in unsanitary buildings, not curated. The centers are not supplied with alternative electric power to the city current. Power cuts are recorded while patients are in the operating room. Operations are done with the flashlight. Work equipment is neither adequate nor sufficient. Patients must purchase the inputs themselves to receive the care they need. Cleaning used tools and washing gowns, sheets, aprons, etc. are not done regularly. Added to all this, these staff receive a miserable salary and are covered by a totally ineffective insurance policy.

37. These are the conditions of all public hospitals in the country, denounced by strikers for several years already and whose just demands for improvement are systematically ignored by the state authorities.

38. The RNDDH considers it unacceptable that the alarming situation in which the country's public hospitals operate, does not seem to worry the state authorities unduly. Even worse, temporary work stoppages and long-term strikes do not encourage them to intervene.

39. The RNDDH recalls that the right to health and access to health care are enshrined and guaranteed by the Haitian Constitution of 1987 amended and by the International Covenant on Social and Cultural Economic Rights ratified by Haiti. The right to health constitutes a fundamental human right for the enjoyment of which, the Haitian State has the obligation to make available to the population, hospitals and functional health centers. It must also offer the staff assigned to these centers all the means and conditions for effective work.

40. The RNDDH finally stresses that in a country such as Haiti where the cost of private health care is excessively high and where a good part of the population lives below the poverty line, the first victims of the conditions in which the hospitals of the country are maintained, remain the poorest.

41. Based on all the above, the RNDDH recommends that health authorities:

- Give full satisfaction to the fair demands of strikers;
- Improve the general working conditions of staff as soon as possible;
- Provide public hospitals with all the means to offer a good quality service to patients.

Work Cited

¹

¹ <https://lenouvelliste.com/article/168741/la-greve-des-travailleurs-de-la-sante-est-leve>