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Healthcare in Crisis: Standing with JOHESU for Justice and Survival

The ongoing strike by the Joint Health Sector Unions (JOHESU) is not only justified but urgently necessary. For years, health workers have endured neglect, broken promises, and unfair treatment from successive governments. Their demands — ranging from the adjustment of the Consolidated Health Salary Structure (COHESS), payment of promotion arrears, settlement of COVID-19 allowances, and release of professional allowances, are basic entitlements owed to those who form the backbone of our healthcare system.

Nigeria's health sector is already in crisis. Hospitals are underfunded, equipment is outdated, and patients often face long waits for inadequate services. Yet, despite these challenges, health workers continue to serve with dedication. It is unacceptable that those who keep our hospitals running — laboratory staff, pharmacists, record officers, mortuary attendants, and administrative workers are denied fair compensation and recognition. The JOHESU strike is a collective cry against this injustice.

Poor funding of the healthcare system has already cost countless lives. Many people cannot afford private hospitals, where fees are beyond the reach of ordinary families. Government hospitals, meanwhile, have become death traps — lacking drugs, equipment, and staff morale. Patients die not because their conditions are untreatable, but because the system itself is broken. Unless the government improves its budgetary allocation to healthcare, many more will die needlessly. This is not an abstract warning; it is the daily reality faced by millions of people.

Critics may argue that strikes disrupt services and harm patients. But the real harm lies in government's refusal to honour agreements and invest in healthcare. When workers are underpaid, demoralised, and denied their rights, the quality of care inevitably suffers. The strike is therefore not a selfish act; it is a demand for a healthcare system that values its workforce and, by extension, its patients.

To be victorious the strike will need to gain more public attention. JOHESU officials should issue press releases at least once a week. Locally health unions need to organise town hall meetings and to be sending speakers to local trade union and NLC/TUC meetings. JOHESU officials at both national and state level need to be offering regular interviews with newspapers, radio and TV stations.

Supporting the strike is also about defending the principle of equity. Doctors often receive attention when they protest, yet allied health workers are sidelined. JOHESU represents those voices that are too often ignored, and their struggle highlights the need for a more inclusive approach to healthcare policy.

We must stand in solidarity with JOHESU. Trade unions, civil society organisations, and ordinary citizens should send messages of support and pressure the government to act. The strike is not only about wages and allowances; it is about justice, dignity, and the survival of our healthcare system.

The JOHESU strike deserves our full backing. By supporting it, we affirm that workers' rights are non-negotiable, and that a society which neglects its health workers cannot hope to build a healthy future.

In addition to the ongoing strike, JOHESU health workers could also stage peaceful protests to further press their demands. Such demonstrations would not only draw public attention to the dire state of healthcare system but also highlight the commitment of workers to non-violent action in pursuit of justice. Peaceful protests would serve as a visible reminder that their struggle is not just about wages and allowances, but about saving lives and ensuring that hospitals are no longer death traps for ordinary people.

In solidarity!

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