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**TO the ETUC Confederal Secretariat
Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 5 Bruxelles**

We are writing to You in relation to the serious humanitarian crisis, which has broken out as a result of the great social upheavals underway in Northern Africa, in the Maghreb region and particularly in Tunisia and Libya.

The right demands for freedom voiced by those peoples clashed with the stubbornness of authoritarian regimes, ready to reject any legitimate claim for democracy. This has inevitably led to strong social conflicts in those countries, characterized by situations of open civil war, revolutions and a general economic and social crisis.

While we follow this new spring of democracy in Northern Africa with great interest and hope, we are worried about the impact that this epochal conflict is having and may have in terms of migrants' and refugees' massive exodus to Europe.

Every day thousands of people fall in the trap of unscrupulous traffickers and embark on an extremely dangerous journey, by often dying at sea to make their dream to reach Europe come true.

Since last January the arrival of thousands of people in the small Island of Lampedusa has also caused serious problems for Italy, especially due to the uncertainty regarding the possible status to be given to these people: a small percentage of them are potential asylum-seekers, but most of them are economic migrants. This uncertainty has prevented them from reaching their relatives or families living in various European countries.

Italian trade unions have recalled their Government that, in exceptional situations such as the current one, we can and must use Directive 2001/55/EC on stay permit for temporary protection, an instrument which grants a humanitarian status to people fleeing from their countries for exceptional reasons. It is a one-year permit, which can be extended for an additional year, a period of time that we hope will be sufficient for the situation in their countries of origin to be brought back to normalcy. Finally, the Italian Government has decided to follow this path and is about to issue a temporary protection decree for the people who are coming from Northern Africa and are not entitled to apply for asylum.

However, it is extremely important for this instrument to be adopted not only by Italy, but also by all the countries belonging to the Schengen area. In so doing, we would enable the people fleeing from Northern Africa, who have families or relatives living in other European countries, to reach them without any impediment at borders.

We know that, upon Italian request, on April 4 last, the European Parliament pronounced itself in favour of this measure and invited all Member States to follow suit. Hence, there are the conditions for this measure to be adopted in the whole Schengen area.

Considering the urgency of this situation, however, we ask ETUC and its members to call for an urgent initiative by the European Commission and the member States' governments to start the temporary protection procedure, thus enabling the requesting people to live and work in all the countries of the area.

We are certain, Mr. Monks, that you agree on the importance and urgency of this initiative which does not regard the rights of migrants who arrive in Italy only, but rather regard the idea of a Europe with common ideals and rules for a universal protection of human rights and a joint cooperation policy to support the human and democratic development of peoples from countries so close to us.

Fraternal greetings

The Confederal Secretaries of

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Rome, April 8, 2011