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International Centre for Trade Union Rights

*Centro Internacional para los Derechos Sindicales
Centre International pour les Droits Syndicaux*

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ICTUR was founded to
defend and extend trade union rights and
to raise awareness of these rights and their violations
around the world

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Attn:

Luigi Di Maio
Ministry of Labour and Social Policy
Via Veneto 56 - 00187 Rome

CC:

Unione Sindacale di Base

July 2018

Dear Minister Di Maio,

The International Centre for Trade Union Rights is writing to express serious concerns about the recent murder of a trade unionist in Italy.

ICTUR understands that Soumayla Sacko, an active member of the Unione Sindacale di Base (USB) trade union, was shot dead on 2 June 2018 near to San Calogero. A Malian migrant and agricultural worker, Sacko was murdered while collecting discarded materials for use in the construction in the "tendopoli", the tent city in which he and other migrant workers are forced to live. The circumstances of his death shine a light on the appalling living conditions endured by migrant agricultural workers in the region.

Soumayla Sacko's murder is the latest in a series of serious cases that ICTUR has recorded against trade unionists in Italy in recent years:

- Abd Elsalam Ahmed Eldanf, another active member of the USB, was killed on a picket line outside a GLS plant in Piacenza on 14 September 2016. An Egyptian migrant worker, he was killed when a lorry struck him. Witnesses claimed to have heard management instruct the truck driver to drive through the picket. It is understood that the Prosecutor's office classified the incident as a 'traffic accident' and that no further investigation was undertaken.
- In January 2017, the national coordinator of the SI Cobas trade union, Aldo Milani, was arrested and detained on charges of extortion after the union ran a campaign for the reinstatement of union members sacked for organising a strike at the Levoni food processing company in Modena. Both the union and Milani – whose trial is understood to be currently ongoing – have always maintained that these charges are fabricated and in retaliation for their legitimate union activities.

ICTUR is deeply concerned that the Italian authorities take

appropriate action to protect the rights of these unions and their members. In particular, the second murder of a migrant trade unionist in three years is a cause for grave concern.

ICTUR notes that the ILO's Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations (CEACR) has for several years called on the Italian authorities to address the abusive conditions faced by migrant workers. Under Article 10 of the Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention No. 143 (1975), States undertake inter alia to pursue a national policy designed to promote and to guarantee the trade union rights of migrant workers.

The Committee has specifically emphasised the prevalence of abusive conditions in Italy's agricultural sector (See Observations adopted by the CEACR in 2012 and 2018, 101st and 107th sessions of the ILC). In its 2018 Observation, the CEACR cited data provided both by national unions and the government, demonstrating that migrant workers are highly concentrated in the lowest income range and that "the remuneration gap between national and migrant workers has increased considerably in the past years". A May 2018 report by the Italian NGO, Medici per i Diritti Umani (MEDU, Doctors for Human Rights) characterised the agricultural sector in Calabria as "severely exploitative" and lacking in respect for the fundamental rights of workers, whose precarious employment and living conditions are "highly unstable and unsafe". MEDU note that policies designed to address the precarious, exploitative and unsafe conditions of migrant workers have not delivered.

According to the ILO's Committee on Freedom of Association the rights of workers can only be 'exercised in a climate that is free from violence, pressure or threats of any kind against the leaders and members of these organizations, and it is for governments to ensure that this principle is respected' (*Digest of decisions and principles of the Freedom of Association Committee of the Governing Body of the ILO*, Fifth Edition, 2006, paras. 42-45). An independent judicial inquiry should be instituted immediately to investigate assaults on the physical or moral integrity of individuals, in order to determine responsibility, punish those responsible and prevent repetition (*ILO Digest*, paras. 46, 50, 184, 191). Failure to hold guilty parties to account creates a culture of impunity, 'which reinforces the climate of violence and insecurity, and which is extremely damaging to the exercise of trade union rights' (*ILO Digest*, para. 52).

ICTUR calls on the government to promptly investigate the murder of Soumayla Sacko and the circumstances surrounding the violent death of Abd Elsalam Ahmed Eldanf. ICTUR further calls on the authorities to undertake all necessary measures to ensure the fundamental freedoms of workers to join and form unions and to take action in defence of their interests.

Yours Faithfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'D. Blackburn', followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Daniel Blackburn, Director