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DGS/AM-AF

Brussels, 29 August 2011

Dear Mr Secretary-General:

Re: Famine in the Horn of Africa

I am writing to express the utmost concern of the international trade union movement over the unprecedented drought and famine in the Horn of Africa, which today affects more than 12.4 million people in Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. This is the most severe food crisis of its type in the world for some two decades. Reports we have received following a recent trade union mission by our affiliates in Kenya (COTU) and Somalia (FESTU) to the regions affected by the drought have reinforced our concerns about the deteriorating situation. Our affiliates have also stressed the major implications for peace and development in the region in the short and long terms. We strongly believe that the international community, under the leadership of the United Nations, needs to dramatically scale up action to deal with this ongoing human tragedy

Current efforts are substantial, but not sufficient, and a major increase in humanitarian aid is urgently required. Food, water, tents, blankets, first-aid supplies, clothing, medical supplies and protection are desperately needed to save lives. New emergency camps need to be opened, as the capacity of the existing camps is no longer sufficient.

We also wish to emphasise the need for the UN to ensure a proper focus on and support of the national capacity of public services in the countries concerned, in order to deliver their vital functions, particularly health services. The recent trade union mission discovered that in Somalia, which is the epicenter of the famine, some hospital workers have not received their salaries for more than eight months, as is the case at the Baidoa hospital some 250 km from Mogadishu, where there are more than 10,000 sick people waiting for medical care. The global community must help to provide assistance to local public health institutions, whose role is crucially important. This means the promotion and creation of decent jobs, which are desperately lacking and would help people to save lives, by making the best use of their skills and improving their working conditions and thus their capacity to treat those affected by the famine. The urgent development of a national health policy and reinforcement of the national labour policy, particularly in the public sector, is fundamental, as is the provision of the necessary medical supplies and equipment.

The United Nations, along with the African Union, also need to urgently strengthen efforts to bring peace and security to the region. In particular the ITUC follows with deep concern the acts of violence perpetrated by Al-Shabaab fundamentalists. Besides blocking humanitarian aid, violence is being perpetrated against innocent, unarmed civilians, including widespread rape of women. The ITUC has also received reports that Al-Shabaab has denied people access to water from the Shabelle and Juba Rivers with a view to commercialising water resources by selling them to rich farm owners. In addition, reports indicate that pirates are buying up the farms of hungry and impoverished peasants.

Urgent humanitarian assistance is essential. However, in response to the famine and drought, medium- and long-term measures must also be implemented without delay, to address the root causes of the famine and drought and prevent re-occurrence. Over past years, the ITUC along with the IUF (International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations) has launched many warning signals and has put forward concrete and workable proposals which have unfortunately not been implemented. In particular, the following need to be given priority attention:

1. The link between food security, production, investment and decent work has been missing in most analysis and policy proposals over many years. The food crisis is seen mainly in terms of the rapid escalation in food prices over the past three years. This is indeed an important factor, and clear progress is urgently needed in this regard. Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food, and global trade union organisations have for a long time called for measures to limit food commodity speculation. A halt in the rise in prices is urgently needed.
2. However, the increase in food prices is only one manifestation of a persistent, longer-term problem in which the right to adequate food is denied to millions of people, including those who work in agriculture. The United Nations must give further impetus to this discussion, in full coordination with the ILO and the social partners. This debate should tackle reversing the trend of dismantling public agricultural services and should return to encouraging strong public policies in support of rural workers (including ensuring the application of ILO core conventions and standards covering agricultural workers, as well as research, technical support and access to credit).
3. The current situation is also the result of climate change. The green jobs agenda offers enormous possibilities for the development of rural areas: access to green technologies to improve working and living conditions and scope for decent jobs for large numbers of people. However, as mentioned earlier, working conditions for rural workers and peasants clearly must be improved. Green jobs also mean decent jobs. The current crisis, although deeply regrettable, is also a moment for deep changes in global policies. The Rio+20 process should be an important vehicle for these changes.

Trade unions in the countries concerned need to be fully involved in all the relevant discussions and initiatives. ITUC affiliates in the region have launched major campaigns of solidarity with their members and beyond in the provinces concerned and are decisive

actors to integrate and be considered in any initiative. In other crises, the involvement and consultation of trade unions has proved to be a powerful tool to reach short- and long-term sustainable decisions. Trade unions are the most representative actors in civil society and are present in most sectors of activity. They are essential actors for solidarity, development and peace.

The ITUC is convinced that stepping up global efforts and implementing the most appropriate solution in consultation with all relevant actors will save lives today and ensure better conditions for development and peace in the region in the coming years.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. R.' followed by a stylized flourish.

General Secretary