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Situation of incitement to hate and racist violence against migrants, refugees and Roma minorities – an appeal by Italian civil society organisations (CSOs).

The undersigned organizations are seriously concerned about the widespread public expression of hate and related violence recorded in Italy since the beginning of this year. The first six months of 2018 have witnessed an unprecedented number of violent and lethal attacks against Black African migrants, refugees and asylum seekers. The Roma populations and other third country nationals have also been targets of similar aggressions on various occasions. These attacks have been preceded by a year-long political and social media campaign inciting to hatred and criminalizing these groups, in the context of the so-called 'migration crisis' and for purposes of building political consensus.

On 3 February 2018, in the city of Macerata in Central Italy, a far right extremist shot and seriously wounded in ten different locations in the city, six asylum seekers (five men and a woman) from five African countries. The gunman drove around the city shooting at sight all the Blacks he came across. He handed himself over to the Police in front of the Monument of the Unknown Soldier (*Monumento dei Caduti*), shrouded in the Italian national flag and making the Fascist salute. This was in the run-up to national elections that took place characterized by massive use of anti-migrant and xenophobic rhetoric by far-right politicians, notably among them, the current minister of Internal Affairs. The shooter has repeatedly said through his lawyer that he has no regrets for his act and has received expressions of support from many on social media.

On 5 March 2018, a day after the national elections recalled above, a legally resident Senegalese migrant, Idy Diene, was murdered by multiple gunshots on a bridge in Florence on his way to work. The killer, a 63-year old Italian man, declared soon after arrest that he had decided to commit suicide that morning due to economic difficulties but had soon realized he could not muster the courage to shoot himself. So decided to shoot the first person he would meet on leaving his home, in order to be arrested by the Police. CCTV recordings featuring the killer from his home to the bridge where the Senegalese man was murdered show that the victim was the seventh and the only Black person he met on his way. Publicly available information so far indicate that the Public Prosecutor has not asked for the aggravating circumstance of racially motivated murder. A similar coldblooded murder of two Senegalese migrants and the injuring of three others occurred in Florence in December 2011 at the hands of a publicly known far-right extremist who later shot himself.

Another case of murder of a Black African migrant occurred on 2 June 2018 on the outskirts of the small agricultural town of San Calogero in Calabria, Southern Italy. A 29-year old legally resident Malian farm labourer and trade union activist, Soumaila Sacko was shot and killed and two of his friends wounded by gunshots around an abandoned bricks factory where they went to collect corrugated aluminium sheets for a makeshift shelter. The killer was an Italian from the area who collected various materials for personal use from the same abandoned factory without having any title to the property.

Beginning from early June until the end of August, this wave of violence against persons of African descent, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and the Roma took on a new dimension with 33 cases of aggression by

firearms or airguns and physical assault. In spite of this upsurge in violent attacks against these groups, the Government and in particular, the Internal Affairs minister continues to deny these attacks are racially motivated. This refusal to acknowledge the existence of the problem by the Government is particularly disturbing as it conveys a message of impunity to potential attackers and heightens the chances of other attacks, if only by emulation, as offenders may feel legitimized to attack people they perceive as migrants though some victims are Italians from immigrant backgrounds.

The latest such denial of the problem of racist violence by the Government occurred on 10 September 2018 following the mention, by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Michelle Bachelet, in her address to the 39th Session of the UN Human Rights Council, of reported cases of violence against migrants, persons of African descent and the Roma. The minister of External Affairs described the comment by the High Commissioner as 'hash and inappropriate' while the Internal Affairs lashed out against the UN as an institution describing it as 'prejudiced and misinformed' and went on to threaten to cut-off financial contributions to the body. These kinds of statements by institutional representatives and discourses by prominent politicians contribute to feeding the escalation of intolerance and hostility towards migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

We are particularly concerned about this situation of persistent incitement to hate against migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and the Roma not only for the danger it constitutes for potential victims of aggression but also for the threat it poses to cohesion in local communities. The Government's denial of the existence of the problem risks exacerbating an already bad situation.

For these reasons, we urge the international community, in particular, OSCE – ODIHR and European civil society organisations to join us in putting pressure on the Government of Italy to adopt urgent measures to counter these violations of the rights of affected groups. There is an urgent need for the Government to respect its obligations to protect the lives and property of all irrespective of their status as migrants or citizens and we urge all relevant actors to support our efforts to ensure protection under the law for the most vulnerable.

Rome, 12 September 2018.

Signatory organisations:

COSPE onlus, Lunaria, Rainbow4Africa NGO, LasciateCIE entrare, A Sud, Associazione K_Alma, AIDOS, ForumSaD - Forum Permanente per il Sostegno a Distanza, Progetto Diritti, Comitato Verità e Giustizia per i Nuovi Desaparecidos, Sea Watch, Yaku, INTERSOS, Agenzia Habesha, Associazione Laudato si', Osservatorio Solidarietà, ADIF-Associazione Diritti e Frontiere, A Buon Diritto, AOI, ARCI, Terra Nuova, Rete italiana di solidarietà Colombia Vive!, Un Ponte Per, Be free cooperativa, Associazione per gli Studi giuridici sulla Immigrazione (A.S.G.I), Proactiva Open Arms, Terre des Hommes, Amnesty International Italia, Greenpeace Italia, Antigone, Centro Astalli, Emergency, Rete della Pace, Concord Italia, Associazione Carta di Roma, Associazione Museo Migrante, Casa della carità di Milano, Jugend Rettet, Giuristi Democratici, Libera Associazioni Nomi e Numeri contro le mafie, CIPSI, Action Aid, Human Rights International Corner (HRIC).

