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STATEMENT BY EDUCATION INTERNATIONAL AND ETUCE ON THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT'S SCHOOL PLAN

Brussels, 20 October 2008

Education International and its EU organisation the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) wish to express their serious concerns over the ongoing attacks on teachers and the national education system which are being made currently by the Italian government.

The President of the Italian Council, Mr. Berlusconi, and the Italian Minister of Education, Ms Gelmini, have launched unilaterally a "reform" of the education system, without any consultation with the stakeholders in education and wittingly avoiding a necessary in-depth discussion in the parliament. The purpose of this "reform" has nothing to do with an improvement in the education system and all to do with major budget cuts which the Italian government wishes to make. The Government wishes to reduce the education budget by more than €8 billion and cut more than 100,000 jobs in the sector over four years. This will lead to a significant increase in the number of pupils in each classroom, and to the abandonment of programmes for pupils with special needs. Such a move is indefensible and will undermine the quality of public education in Italy. This decision by the Italian government is even more difficult to understand when Italy is ranked last of the OECD countries regarding national expenditure on education (OECD, 9 Sept. 08).

Choosing to undermine the quality of education for short-term budgetary reasons is a policy which cannot lead to any sort of good result, especially in a European context, in which a high-quality education system is widely seen as a top priority for a sustainable economy.

Instead of moving towards a modern high-quality and efficient education system as the European context requires, the Berlusconi School Plan will turn the clock back to a time when over-crowded classes were taught only in the morning by a single teacher. These budget cuts and school time changes will also severely undermine the teachers' working conditions and therefore the attractiveness and overall efficiency of the Italian education system.

Education International and ETUCE are also concerned with measures in the Italian government's plan regarding Higher Education and Research. The plan endangers the competitiveness and the attractiveness of Italian Higher Education and Research by making unwelcome budget cuts and by trying to install more political control of universities and research institutes. An independent Higher Education and Research sector functioning with sufficient resources is an essential element of the economic competitiveness and educational infrastructure of a country and an absolute pre-requisite in today's Europe.

Finally, willing to turn schools and universities into foundations managed by private boards under private control, is an assault by the Italian government against education as a public good, of un-precedented magnitude in Europe.

Education International and ETUCE wish express their full support to their Italian member organisations, who have jointly called for action against the Berlusconi School Plan and notably for national strikes on 30th of October and 14th on November 2008.

The teachers' trade-unions organisations, both at national and international level, will act together and use all possible remedies to stop this extraordinary and unwarranted attack on teachers and the entire education system currently in Italy.