



## *Mandatory Union membership: A violation of dignity and democracy*

### A Statement by Żgħażaġġ Ħaddiema Nsara

“Our trade union... organisations are like the apple of our eye”, exclaimed Cardinal Joseph Cardijn – the founder of the Young Christian Workers’ Movement – in 1919 in a piece written for the journal *Le Démocrate*. Thirty years earlier, “the most important of all are... unions” wrote Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Today, Żgħażaġġ Ħaddiema Nsara still holds strong to the same principles: unionisation is an empowering and liberating act, affirming the dignity of all work and workers.

However, ŻHN cannot but deplore the proposal to make union membership mandatory in our country.

First of all, ŻHN regards this as an infringement of the basic democratic right of freedom of association, concurring with the Maltese Constitutional Court and European Court of Human Rights.

Secondly, ŻHN is suspect of the effectiveness of this proposal. It has been claimed that this “would boost the fight against precarious employment and exploitation”. How would obligatory membership in unions that have not uttered but a whisper on the death of Jean Paul Sofia, or hundreds of other workers who have lost life or limb on construction sites, protect workers from precarity?

Thirdly, we have a situation where the leaders of the two main unions are on the Government payroll, eroding the faith of honest workers in the impartiality of union structures. To propose mandatory membership as a remedy is autocratic and absurd. It is a mature evaluation of the structure and operation of unions in Malta that is required, as well as a hard-nosed analysis of the slow erosion of workers’ rights and conditions that is creeping in.