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Registration Number
NG00476.356.013

Commissioner Vladimir Spidla
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
European Commission
Rue de la Loi 200
1040 Brussels
Belgium

Brussels, 17 November 2008

Concern: Amendment to Directive 2000/54/EC - Protection of workers from risks related to exposure to biological agents at work

Dear Commissioner Špidla,

I am writing to express my serious concern regarding the delay of more than 2 years in the publication of an amendment to the Directive 2000/54/EC, on the protection of workers from risks related to exposure to biological agents at work, to protect health care workers from potentially fatal needlestick injuries. This is a very serious occupational risk that has not been properly addressed. More than 1 million needlestick injuries occur in Europe every year and most are preventable. Europe's 6 million nurses have been exposed to more than 2 million unnecessary needlestick injuries during the time that the Commission has delayed taking action following the European Parliament's Resolution of July 2006 (2006/2015). This is totally unacceptable, I hope you will agree.

This is a topic where the EU has competence, and as a result of the positive comments made by the Commission and by yourself over the past year, expectations are high. Europe's nurses are waiting for the much needed legislative amendment. We have waited very patiently.

Below is an extract from a statement made by one of our members, when describing a needlestick injury. It is proven that these injuries are preventable and it is unacceptable that nurses continue to face this danger every day.

"This is not an isolated case. I was infected with the blood. That patient died six hours later. I knew she was HIV positive. ...it was necessary to wait for the test results... It was a period full of stigmatization, discrimination."

The EFN urges the European Commission to urgently and positively respond to the Parliament Resolution 2006/2015, which is intended to protect all of Europe's healthcare workers. These risks exist in all areas of the hospital, and also in other healthcare situations. As well as nurses, many other healthcare workers are at risk, including doctors, support staff, cleaners, laundry workers, emergency services and laboratory workers. It is generally acknowledged that the applicable worker safety directive has failed to protect healthcare workers and therefore it must be urgently improved. The lives and wellbeing of Europe's nurses are at stake.

Many member states suffer nursing shortages, and one of the reasons why nurses leave the profession early is the occupational safety risks that are faced every day. We must protect Europe's healthcare workers from these totally unacceptable and life-threatening risks. This small amendment to Directive 2000/54/EC can have a big impact on the safety and peace of mind of nurses and other healthcare workers across Europe, and can help make this a more attractive profession.

A very fast approval of the required needlestick amendment would also be of great relevance in view of the Commission's current focus on healthcare associated infections.

Commissioner, please do not let Europe's nurses down. This should be one of your great successes. We are depending on you. Don't let it become your biggest failure.

The European Federation of Nurses Associations (EFN) consists of National Nurses Associations from all EU Member States, and its work has an effect on the daily work of 6 million nurses throughout the European Union and Europe.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul De Raeve', with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the left.

Paul De Raeve
Secretary General
European Federation of Nurses Associations