



# *inform* **contact**

## **NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS**

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### **LET US TURN HUMAN RIGHTS INTO EVERYDAY REALITY!**

*Statement by the GCTU*

The 10<sup>th</sup> of December 2018 marks 70 years since the UN General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For the first time in history, this unique international legal instrument recorded a set of fundamental rights of every inhabitant of the Earth: political, civil, social, cultural and economic ones. Among them are the right to life, liberty, personal integrity, equality of all before the law, the right to freedom of speech, belief and information, and the right to hold peaceful assemblies and build associations.

The scale of the impact of the Declaration on the subsequent development of the world community can hardly be overestimated. The mere fact that it is published in 501 languages testifies to its universal nature. The basic rights it laid down are universally recognized in all UN

member states. Its principles underlie the constitutions of many democratic countries that emerged during the period of its existence. Finally, it triggered the development and adoption of more than 60 international instruments that now form a single global standard in the field of human rights.

World trade unions appreciate particularly the fact that the Declaration includes the social rights that are of special value to workers, i.e. the rights to work and recreation, free choice of employment, protection from unemployment, just and safe working surroundings, housing, education, healthcare, and social security, in other words all that is needed to support decent living standards for human beings. It is also important that the Declaration mentions the right of employees “to build trade unions for the protection of their interests”.

Today’s world is increasingly aware that political human rights cannot

be secured without the social and labour rights being guaranteed. It is encouraging that this understanding has been finding direct reflection in the activities of the UN which for the past few decades has literally turned round to face global social challenges. Suffice it to mention the documents adopted by the numerous summits on various aspects of social development, including the Millennium Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approved by the United Nations.

However, there is still a long way to go before the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are globally implemented in full. In the present-day world where corporate monopoly capital bosses the show, workers' rights and interests have been pushed away to the periphery of economic development. While the global GDP has more than tripled over the past 20 years, more than a billion people are still languishing in desperate poverty. Even in the prosperous Europe, one worker in six falls into the "working poor" category, while more than 70 per cent of the world's population lacks adequate social protection.

According to the *2018 Global Rights Index*, prepared by the International Trade Union Confederation, workers' democratic space continues shrinking. The number of countries practicing unlawful arrests and detentions of workers increased from 44 in 2017 to 59 in 2018. Freedom of

expression is limited in 54 countries. In 65 per cent of the 142 surveyed countries labour legislation does not apply to many categories of workers; in 87 per cent of countries the right to strike is restricted; in 81 per cent of countries several categories of workers are denied the right to collective bargaining, and in 54 countries freedom of speech and assembly is banned or restricted. The number of countries where workers are physically abused and bullied has increased from 59 to 65.

The situation in the countries where the GCTU has affiliates is also a far cry from satisfactory. The last congress of our Confederation noted that most of them were experiencing a protracted period of slowdown in economic growth. The regrettable result of this development is the widespread increase in inflation and unemployment rates, a decrease in the purchasing power of wages and social benefits, and a drop in the standards of living. All this creates a favourable climate for attacks on the rights of employees and trade unions, and aggravates labour relations.

On the eve of the 70th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the GCTU reaffirms its commitment to human rights activism, and calls on its affiliates to do their best to help realise fully the rights, ideals and principles of justice and equality enshrined in the Declaration itself, in the UN Charter and other legal instruments, and

in conventions of the International Labour Organisation.

Together, let us turn these rights into everyday reality!

### **GCTU SENDS MESSAGE TO ITUC CONGRESS**

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of December 2018, the General Confederation of Trade Unions sent a message of solidarity to participants in the 4th World Congress of the International Trade Union Confederation which, inter alia, says the following:

“The establishment of the ITUC in 2006 marked a crucial step towards the unity of action, to which the world trade union movement had aspired for decades. In a short time, the ITUC has successfully established itself as an influential body representing the common interests of a significant part of world workers, rallying around itself a powerful system of global trade unions. Today, it undoubtedly plays a leading role in mobilising the working people for organised opposition to the frontal offensive of transnational capital, for the fight to add a reliable social dimension to world development, preserve and expand democratic space, safeguard peace and international security, and secure sustainable development.

“The ITUC’s mobilisation potential is in particular demand now that the world of work is facing formidable

challenges generated by the global social crisis that came in the wake of the economic crisis. Across the Earth, hundreds of millions of able-bodied people found themselves behind the closed company gates, many without any hope of getting a new job, while those who do have a job are often unable to make ends meet. Social inequality is growing, and the gap between developed and developing countries keeps widening.

“It is significant that, in a context of rapidly advancing automation and digitalisation of the economy, your Congress will devote serious attention to various aspects of the institutional strengthening of the trade union movement, and increasing its role as a principal force in society protecting the rights of employees and, in particular, women, youth and migrants. Equally significant is the fact that Congress documents mention the protection of workers’ fundamental rights enshrined in ILO conventions as a top priority in the Confederation’s future activity.

“Within the frames of its own region, the GCTU pursues similar tasks. The permanent consultative status with the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and other intergovernmental bodies enables us to formulate and uphold our standpoint in the course of interstate decision-making wherever workers’ destinies are affected. We campaign for the implementation of decent work principles, adequate rates of wages and pensions, the

eradication of poverty and social injustice, and against attacks on workers' and trade union rights. Our Confederation is permanently monitoring the ratification and compliance with international labour standards in the region's countries. This community of purpose provides a sound basis for our further useful interaction with the ITUC, in particular, through its regional organisation, PERC.

“The main slogan of your Congress: “Building Workers’ Power: Change the Rules!” is today topical as never before. We express our solidarity with this call and will be ready to contribute to a joint trade union campaign aiming to radically change the nature of globalisation and build a new model of world economic development where the interests of working people will be in the foreground. We will insist that this new model should be based on the values the trade union movement has been fighting for, i.e. decent work and social justice, equal social dialogue, respect for internationally recognised labour standards and human rights, with strict international control over the activities of TNCs and monetary institutions.”

## **UZBEKISTAN TRADE UNIONS JOIN GCTU**

The Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) held a visiting session 24 December 2018 in Tashkent to consider the application of the

Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan (FPUz) for affiliation with the GCTU. Following the discussion of the documents presented by the Uzbek side, the Committee recommended the GCTU Council to grant the request. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of December the Council supported the proposal by means of online vote. From that day on, the FPUz became a full member of the GCTU.

The Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan currently includes 14 sectoral and 14 territorial trade union organisations, with a total number of members of 6.1 million.

The FPUz gives high priority to the development of social partnership, and participation in the Republican Tripartite Commission on Social Partnership and Regulation of Socio-Economic and Labour Relations. This work is carried out on the basis of the General Agreements concluded between the unions, the government and the employers. There are also 10 industrial and 14 territorial accords. Within their framework, over 171 thousand collective agreements have been signed in enterprises, organisations and institutions.

A whole set of measures are being taken to ensure trade union involvement in decision-making on employment, including the job placement of vocational college graduates. The trade union centre devotes special attention to the legalisation of labour relations in the informal sector, and

the prevention of industrial accidents and occupational diseases.

The Federation has established friendly ties with world trade unions, and is actively involved in the tripartite procedures of the International Labour Organisation.

The accession of FPUz to the GCTU will undoubtedly enhance the power and influence of trade unions in the region, and help increase the efficiency of measures being taken to protect workers' rights and interests in the countries of GCTU affiliates.

### **GCTU SUPPORTING ILO DECENT WORK AGENDA**

The GCTU Executive Committee met in Moscow 1 November 2018 to review, among other items, the progress of the campaign "Minimum Wages at Least Equal to the Subsistence Minimum" being conducted by trade unions of the region. Participants noted that the GCTU affiliates had been doing their utmost to achieve the goal, resorting to a wide range of means, from negotiations to collective protest actions. The Committee decided that the campaign should be stepped up as an important tool in the fight to eliminate poverty, and implement the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The Committee also considered the role to be played by trade unions in improving the pension systems

in the region. At the end of the debates, the meeting decided to proceed with the joint solidarity action currently waged by the trade unions to protect the elderly. In particular, the unions will insist on an earliest possible ratification by the region's countries of ILO Convention No. 102 Concerning Minimum Standards of Social Security and on its implementation in national legislations.

The meeting summed up the contributions made by the GCTU and its affiliates to this year's World Day for Decent Work. Participants noted that a large number of social and economic problems affecting working people had been raised in the course of the WDDW. Responding to the trade unions' call, hundreds of thousands of employees had taken part in rallies, meetings of work collectives, special sessions of tripartite commissions, conferences, round tables, signature collections, picket lines and other events. The Committee considers it necessary to continue promoting a successful implementation of the decent work country programmes in the region, and monitor the ratification and strict observance of international labour standards and other fundamental documents of the ILO.

### **GCTU COMMISSION: INFORMAL JOBS IMPAIRING PENSION FUNDS**

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2018, the GCTU Commission on Labour Safety

and Health, Environment Protection and Social Security held its regular meeting in Moscow's Palace of Labour.

Participants arrived at the opinion that the labour market situation and the wages directly affected the pension coverage of the population. In Russia, the pension fund deficits are constantly growing, as the amount of incoming social insurance contributions to the fund are not sufficient because over 14 million people are employed in the informal sector of the economy.

In 2017, 820 thousand citizens of member states of the Eurasian Economic Union came to Russia in search of jobs. However, according to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, only a little more than 383 thousand paid contributions to the Pension Fund of Russia. The conclusion was that most of the migrant workers were employed illegally.

Speakers gave an objective assessment of the situations evolving in the pension funds and suggested the ways how to improve it.

### **AZERBAIJAN: UNIONS' CONTRIBUTION TO DECENT WORK**

The Azerbaijan trade unions support the government's policy seeking to achieve the strategic goals

set in the ILO Decent Work Agenda. The issues of employment, gender equality and social dialogue are central to the Country's Decent Work Programme for 2016-2020 developed with the involvement of trade unions.

The social partners have also signed a decree on the establishment of a Tripartite Commission on Social and Economic Issues, whose task it is to look for the solutions to social problems. Earlier, in March 2017, the Commission for the Regulation and Coordination of Labour Relations was also set up with the task to promote a higher level of social protection for employees. Representatives of the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation (AHIK) participate in both commissions. Over the last year, the trade union centre has done a lot to improve legislation relating to minimum wages, occupational health and safety, strict observance of labour laws, protection against unemployment etc.

The Confederation and its affiliates, in solidarity with the international trade union movement and the ILO Decent Work Agenda, marked the eleventh World Day for Decent Work by holding, all over the country, meetings, seminars and round table workshops to discuss the issues of wages, employment, working conditions for young people and women, and the impact of inflation on the socio-economic situation in the country.

## **ARMENIA: PAST THAT CAN'T BE FORGOTTEN**

The people of Armenia will never forget the 7<sup>th</sup> of December 1988, the day when a devastating 10-magnitude earthquake occurred. On that day 30 years ago the disaster destroyed 41 per cent of the country's territory, 25,000 people were killed and over 500,000 were rendered homeless. The town of Gyumri alone lost 17,000 inhabitants.

Hundreds of rescue workers and doctors came to Armenia from 113 countries and 7 international organisations, all the republics of the former USSR immediately started to transport medical equipment and medications, construction machines, tents, and food. Immediately after, restoration work began on the entire territory ruined by the earthquake. All in all, more than 40,000 specialists and military personnel from the Soviet Union and the rest of the world worked in the disaster zone in 1989.

The trade unions of Armenia and other Soviet Republics rendered financial and moral support to the victims of the disaster. Thus, 120,000 affected children, women and elderly people were taken out to sanatoriums, rest homes and children's camps in different parts of the USSR. The All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions allocated 628 million rubbles to help the victims.

## **BELARUS: TOGETHER FOR DECENT WORK**

Sharing the principles of the ILO's Decent Work Agenda, the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) and its affiliates expressed solidarity with the international trade union movement as they contributed to the observance of this year's World Day for Decent Work.

Participants of seminars, round table debates, flash mobs and other events held on that Day in all regions of Belarus raised a whole range of problems, including workplace management, observance of collective agreements, compliance with labour laws etc.

To achieve respect of the decent work principles, regional trade union organisations carry out weekly checks of the employment schedules and monthly checks of the financial and economic situation of enterprises, essential goods prices, and the wage rates in the real sector of the economy.

At the initiative of trade unions, district (municipal) councils on labour and social issues held their meetings to discuss the issues of increasing wages and their timely payment.

In supporting the World Day for Decent Work, the FPU and its affiliates advocated for ensuring full employment for workers in Belarus and elsewhere in the world, safe working conditions, fair wages, social guarantees, and re-

liable protection of the socio-economic rights of their members.

### **BELARUS: GENERAL AGREEMENT SIGNED**

On the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 2018, the Government of Belarus and the national organisations of employers and trade unions signed a new General Agreement for 2019-2021. It covers all important issues discussed by social partners regularly at all levels, including wage raises, employment, prices of basic foods, and social guarantees.

On the initiative of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB), the social partners decided to jointly develop measures protecting the employees' material rights in case of the employer's bankruptcy. They agreed to increase the number of guarantees recommended for inclusion in collective agreements. Among them are measures to stimulate employees' skills upgrading and training, the development of job mentoring, the protection of workers against dismissal in enterprises undergoing reorganisation. Besides, young people, disabled persons and women with minor children will get more employment opportunities.

### **KYRGYZSTAN: UNIONS WARN AGAINST SACKING OF LOCAL WORKERS**

President of the Kyrgyzstan Mining and Metallurgical Workers' Union

Eldar Tajibaev insists that if the Canadian Centerra Gold Inc., presently operating in Kyrgyzstan, decides to sell its share to China's Shadong Gold company the jobs should be saved for local residents.

The union intends to take the necessary steps to prevent the reduction of the number of Kyrgyz workers or their replacement by foreigners, as well as deterioration of their working conditions. The Trade Union appealed to the Government to bear that in mind during the negotiations.

### **RUSSIA OBSERVES DECENT WORK DAY**

From 1-7 October 2018, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) marked the eleventh World Day for Decent Work established by the International Trade Union Confederation as a response to the global attack on workers' rights.

For trade unions, decent work means first of all sustainable economic growth providing everyone with a job, decent pay and a fair level of social protection. However, the FNPR believes the social and economic policy of the Russian government to be at variance with the ideas of social justice and the priorities of the social state. The Federation had taken the decision that the collective actions to be organised on this year's WDDW



would mainly take the form of sessions of tripartite commissions on regulation of social and labour relations, workers' rallies and workplace meetings.

Preliminary data show that about 860 thousand people participated in actions held all over the country.

### **RUSSIA: PRESIDENT MEETS WITH FNPR LEADER**

President Vladimir Putin held a working meeting with Mikhail Shmakov, the leader of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) 9 November 2018.

The conversation dwelt on issues of social insurance and the implementation of decisions concerning the minimum wages.

Mikhail Shmakov pointed to the need of measures improving the system of compulsory social insurance. In his opinion, the financial bloc of the government ignores the specific needs of the Social Insurance Fund in drafting the budget code. They intend to scatter the items related to the Social Insurance Fund across different chapters of the Code. This would allow them to manage the Fund resources at their own discretion.

The FNPR leader proposed that a special council for reforming compulsory social insurance be set up

under the Russian President to solve all problems emerging in the sphere. President Putin agreed with this proposal.

Mikhail Shmakov asked for Presidential support of the trade union proposal to introduce amendments to the Labour Code that would enhance the provision saying that the compensation and incentive payments must not be regarded as part of the minimum wage. The President said he was willing to consider the proposal.

### **RUSSIA: FNPR CRITICAL OF RETIREMENT AGE LAW**

The meeting of the FNPR General Council held in Moscow 31 October 2018 considered the tasks facing the unions as a result of the changes in the legislation of the Russian Federation.

Speakers criticised bitterly the package of papers on the country's development for the period up to 2024 developed and adopted by the Government of Russia. The trade unions believe that the implementation of the documents will only whip up inflation and reduce the purchasing power of the population. They provide neither for a steady increase in the real incomes of the population, nor for a twofold reduction of poverty, as scheduled in the presidential decree. Moreover, they do not contain any measures to upgrade pro-

duction, provide easy term credits to the real economy, and develop the human capital.

The FNPR General Council regards such a policy as serving the interests of Big Business, rather than the majority of citizens. The new law, which raises the retirement age of both men and women by five years, was adopted in October 2018 in disregard of the well-reasoned position of the FNPR against it. The unions are convinced that any attempt to improve the pension system should be based on serious comprehensive socio-economic transformations, labour market development, wage increases and production reforms.

Participants in the meeting stressed that the position of trade unions remains unchanged today, after the adoption of the federal law. In the course of collective actions, FNPR affiliates demanded that the authorities at all levels elaborate a set of measures that will help realise the rights of pensioners, persons of pre-retirement age, and the youth, with due regard for risks associated with the pension reform.

The General Council is particularly concerned with the fact that the increasing of the retirement age for employees in the Far North was carried out without a thorough analysis of the situation. Meanwhile, the sickness rate in those areas is higher than the average in Russia. The result is that the life expectancy of

men almost in all northern areas is below than the average level in the country. Given this, FNPR called upon the Government and the State Duma to cancel the increase in the pension age for people who work and live in the Far North.

## **RUSSIA: STRATEGIC RESERVE OF TRADE UNIONS**

About 300 young trade union activists from all over Russia took part in the All-Russia Youth Trade Union Forum organized by the FNPR from 6-9 December 2018 in the town of Pyatigorsk (North Caucasus).

In his video address to the participants, the FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov highlighted the great importance of such events in the training of trade unionists, as they give young activists employed in various industries and living in different places the opportunity to share experience and communicate.

The debates on the youth policy of trade unions were a major focus of interest at the forum. Among their participants were guests of honour, including young leaders of FNPR affiliates. The debates were followed by the so called “interactive platforms” where young trade unionists learnt how to negotiate competently with employers, integrate their trade union organisations into social networks, and defend the position of trade unions correctly and reason-

ably. The exchange of opinions turned out to be mutually useful and informative. The young people got the answers to many questions that were of concern to them.

### **RAILWAY WORKERS GET TOGETHER IN DUSHANBE**

On the invitation of the Railway Workers' Union of Tajikistan, the Council of the International Confederation of Railway Workers' Trade Unions (ICRWTU) held its 55<sup>th</sup> meeting 21 November 2018 in Dushanbe. Attending the event were delegations of Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Ukraine.

Delegates analysed in detail and discussed burning social and labour issues, with a special emphasis on the problems of collective bargaining. The meeting voted to set up a Coordination Council of the ICRWTU affiliates associated with the Russian Railway Company, and pointed to the need to launch the process of monitoring several transnational enterprises and, in particular, their relations with the trade unions. Participants also decided to build a commission on gender policy under the ICRWTU.

The meeting considered the outcome of the 44<sup>th</sup> Congress of the International (Global) Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) held in

October 2018 in Singapore, and discussed the problems of further co-operation between the ITF and the ICRWTU.

### **UKRAINE: FPU BRINGS THOUSANDS TO KYIV STREETS**

A massive march of trade union members took place in central Kyiv 17 October 2018, involving workers of key industries from all regions of Ukraine. Participants protested against the price rises and high fares, calling on the government and employers to pay off the wage arrears, and provide them with decent jobs and pay. They also demanded worthy funding for health care and education, and a stop to raider seizures of trade unions property.

Addressing the rally held at the end of the march, speakers told participants about the acute problems in their industries. As the rally was over, the workers' representatives met with the Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine and Chair of the National Tripartite Socio-Economic Council Pavlo Rozenko. President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine Grygorii Osovyi informed him of the demands put forward by the participants in the all-Ukraine protest action. The union leader warned that if the Government did not meet the demands the trade unions would hold mass protests throughout the country, including a nation-wide strike.

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THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS, GCTU, IS AN INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION ORGANISATION THAT WAS FOUNDED AT ITS FIRST CONGRESS ON 16 APRIL 1992.

ITS CONSTITUTION, WHICH WAS APPROVED BY THE FIRST CONGRESS, WAS AMENDED AND SUPPLEMENTED BY THE SECOND CONGRESS OF THE GCTU 22 SEPTEMBER 1993, THE THIRD CONGRESS OF THE GCTU 18 SEPTEMBER 1997, AND THE FIFTH (EXTRAORDINARY) CONGRESS OF THE GCTU 26 MARCH 2004.

THE BASIC OBJECTIVES OF THE GCTU ARE:

- CO-ORDINATION OF ITS AFFILIATES' ACTIVITIES ON THE PROTECTION OF SOCIAL RIGHTS OF WORKERS, STUDENTS AND PENSIONERS;
  - ASSISTANCE IN THEIR PROTECTION OF TRADE UNION RIGHTS AND GUARANTEES;
- AND
- ORGANISING TRADE UNION SOLIDARITY AND CO-ORDINATION OF ITS AFFILIATES' INTERNATIONAL POLICIES.

THE GCTU BUILDS ITS ACTIVITIES IN CONFORMITY WITH THE UNIVERSALLY RECOGNISED STANDARDS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, WITH FULL RESPECT FOR ITS AFFILIATES' COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE AND THE EQUALITY OF THEIR RIGHTS AND DUTIES.

THE GCTU AFFILIATES NATIONAL TRADE UNION CENTRES OF ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, BELARUS, GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA, TAJIKISTAN AND UKRAINE, AND ALSO 28 INDUSTRIAL TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS.

THE GCTU IS READY TO CO-OPERATE WITH ANY OTHER NATIONAL TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR AFFILIATION WITH OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS.

THE CONFEDERATION ENJOYS OBSERVER STATUS WITH THE CIS AND EURASEC INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLIES, THE CIS COUNCIL OF HEADS OF STATE, THE CIS COUNCIL OF HEADS OF GOVERNMENT, THE CIS INTERSTATE ECONOMIC COMMITTEE, ETC.

INTERNATIONALLY, IT IS IN CONSULTATIVE RELATIONS WITH THE ILO , THE UN DPI AND THE ECOSOC.

THE GCTU SUPREME BODIES ARE THE CONGRESS, CONVENED EVERY FIVE YEARS, AND, IN THE INTERVALS BETWEEN THE CONGRESSES, THE COUNCIL AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

CONTROL OVER FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES IS EXERCISED BY THE GCTU AUDITING COMMISSION.

PRESIDENT OF THE GCTU IS MIKHAIL SHMAKOV,  
GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE GCTU IS VLADIMIR SCHERBAKOV

## DEAR READERS

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