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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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DECENT WORK: THE WAY TO A SOCIALLY JUST ECONOMY!

Statement by the General Confederation of Trade Unions on the occasion of the World Decent Work Day October 7, 2019

On or around the 7th of October the international trade union movement will once again mark the World Day for Decent Work (WDDW).

Established in 2008 on the initiative of the International Confederation of Trade Unions, this Day provides a rare opportunity for unions in all countries to display global solidarity in supporting the Decent Work Agenda, which the International Labour Organisation has placed at the forefront of its policies for the foreseeable future. Simultaneously, it is an opportunity to jointly stand up for workers' rights by urging the world community to find the material and political resources neces-

sary to rid humanity of social evils such as poverty, hunger and malnutrition, disease, unemployment, social exclusion, and unhealthy working and natural environments.

The idea of an annual WDDW is now deeply rooted in the trade union movement of the world, including the countries of our region. On this day, workers' organisations draw the attention of their governments, employers, and policy-makers to the long-overdue need to implement the principles of decent work, namely: provide each worker with a quality job, a fair wage, reliable social protection, a safe working environment, and free enjoyment of their rights - subject to universally recognised international labour standards and principles of social dialogue, respect for the dignity of the working person.

Today, in the age of rapidly advancing information and communication technologies and the impend-

ing digitalised economy, the world is still dominated by transnational capital and financial markets that, in pursuit of super-profits, openly and cynically neglect the national interests of states, the needs of the real economy, and the aspirations of millions of people.

Based on corporate greed, the economic model imposed on the world has led to the unprecedented global inequality. Over the past twenty years, the world has become three times richer. However, according to estimates, the bulk of the wealth produced is appropriated by only one per cent of the global population. Unemployment is growing, informal employment is expanding, the earned incomes and social security are falling, while the basic rights of workers and social justice principles are being trampled upon.

These problems are largely characteristic of the situation in our region. Monitoring conducted by the GCTU shows that social stratification and inequality have been growing almost everywhere, and in several countries up to a third of the population live below or near the poverty line. In such conditions, there are increasingly frequent attempts to 'forget' comfortably about the social state principles proclaimed in the constitutions. All these challenges are kept in the limelight of GCTU affiliates. Each of them in their respective country

or industry is working for effective solution of the issues as part of the implementation of the Decent Work Agenda.

At its congress last December, the ITUC called for a global trade union campaign aiming to fundamentally change the nature of the global economy, and build a fundamentally new economic model that would be able take full account of workers' interests. As an important step towards this aim, the unions today are promoting the idea of developing a New Social Contract that would provide for a Universal Labour Guarantee.

The ITUC called on trade unions to mark this year's WDDW under common slogans of mobilising for the accomplishment of these tasks. Particular attention is to be devoted to the issue of increased investment in the care sector. The Confederation believes this should help improve women's employment and, accordingly, achieve gender equality in society.

The General Confederation of Trade Unions underpins these initiatives. We are confident that the global implementation of decent work principles and social justice, based on equal and constructive social dialogue, respect for human rights and compliance with international labour standards, are the only way to build a socially equitable economy.

Based on this, the GCTU encourages its affiliates to get actively involved in this year's World Day for Decent Work, and decide on the specific forms of activities they could organise, taking into account their real capabilities. These may be outdoor rallies, processions, meetings of work collectives, sittings of trade union statutory bodies, round table discussions, flash mobs, etc.

The main slogans and demands during the forthcoming actions should be put forward with due regard for the specific circumstances or topical problems 1919 prevailing in each of the countries or industries, and for the ongoing GCTU campaigns for a minimum wage at least equal to the subsistence minimum, and for ratification and compliance with the most important ILO conventions.

Trade unions must insist that any economic measures affecting workers' situation should be developed and taken on the basis of respect for decent work principles, in the spirit of constructive social dialogue, and coordination of efforts with social partners and all public forces that care for the well-being of workers in their countries.

Let us support decent work with specific joint actions!

Moscow, 9 September 2019

AZERBAIJAN: REST AND TREATMENT PAID BY UNIONS

Every year, more than 100,000 workers and their families get the opportunity to spend their leave at rest-homes or health resorts situated in picturesque corners of Azerbaijan, at the expense of trade unions.

They can enjoy a good rest either in the health resorts owned by the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation (AHIK) or in private recreation homes and sanatoria, paying only 15 per cent of the services provided. Besides, over eight thousand children can annually relax in children's health centres.

Further steps are being taken to increase the number of holidaymakers. The Government has reconstructed all recreation facilities on the AHIK balance, which has improved the conditions they provide for recreation.

BELARUS: FPB ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN ELECTION CAMPAIGN

On the 16th of August, 2019, the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) announced its intention to take an active part in the parliamentary election to be held this November. For that purpose, the FPB set up republican headquarters of its own and approved

a plan of actions to be taken by trade union organisations involved. By the 10th of September, 283 FPB representatives were members of the local and district election commissions. This means that almost a third of the total number of public organisation representatives are trade unionists. As for the observers, previous experience shows that the most knowledgeable and trained experts are nominated by trade unions.

Meanwhile, the nomination of candidates for deputies is in full swing. The FPB press service is positive that “there are trade union activists among them. We know these candidates; we see what they are doing in the field. They are experienced and knowledgeable people who are aware of the situations in labour collectives, and of workers’ problems. The programmes they take to the polls coincide with the principles and tasks of the unions. For this reason, we will support them at all stages of the election campaign.”

Starting from mid-October, the FPB will launch a campaign to support registered candidates, with union activists conducting workplace outreach to acquaint the work collectives with the profiles of the candidates, and help arrange their meetings with voters.

It is not for the first time that the country’s trade unions participate

in an election campaign. In 2016, more than six thousand FPB representatives were accredited to monitor the parliamentary election, and over nine thousand trade unionists were members of election commissions.

BELARUS: UNIONS TO MONITOR APPLICATION OF UPDATED LABOUR CODE

The FPB was directly involved in the development of the newly updated Labour Code of the Republic. It initiated about 40 amendments that were later added to 30 Articles. The most significant of them are the following: guarantee of long-term contracts for conscientious workers; limitation of liability for sanctions and fines imposed on legal entities; elimination of age discrimination regarding compensation payments, and a number of others.

The law amending the Labour Code, signed by President Alexander Lukashenko, will enter into force six months after its official publication, that is, as from 1 January 2020.

FPB President Mikhail Orda said the unions would keep the application of the updated Labour Code under strict control, both at the national level and locally. In the near future, they will conduct an extensive campaign to explain the details

of the Labour Code innovations to work collectives.

GEORGIA: LABOR SAFETY LAW COMES INTO FORCE

The Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) has repeatedly pointed to the need for radical labour protection measures to be taken at the state level. According to GTUC statistics, in 2018 alone, 39 people were killed at Georgian workplaces, with 37 severely injured.

Last March, Parliament adopted the Law “On Occupational Health and Safety”, which enters into force on September 1 and will be applicable to all sectors of economic activity, all companies, enterprises and organisations. The law expands the mandate of the Labour Inspectorate. From now on, safety and health inspectors are entitled to check out any company in the country at any time of the day without prior notice. Simultaneously, the employee receives the right to claim material compensation for the damage caused by an occupational disease.

All companies with 20 to 100 employees will be obliged to appoint or invite a certified labour and health specialist. If a company has more than 100 employees, the employer will have to create an ap-

propriate labour safety service of at least two persons. The law also provides fines for non-compliance with safety standards.

According to trade union estimates, the measures taken will certainly give a positive effect, but they do not solve all the problems, and, therefore, progress in this direction should be continued.

GEORGIA: RAILWAY LABOUR DISPUTE OVER

The collective labour dispute between the New Union of Railway Workers in Georgia and the managers of the Joint Stock Company “Georgian Railway”, which had lasted since early August, ended 4 September 2019 with a compromise deal.

Initially, railway workers demanded better work conditions and an increase in pay by 50 per cent, considering that their wages had not been raised since 2012. However, as a result of tough negotiations, agreement was reached to increase the wages by 10 per cent as from 1 December 2019. In October 2020, employees getting less than 1250 lari (about \$ 425) per month will receive a bonus of 200 lari (about \$ 70). The union leaders believe that the agreements signed will bring a tangible pay increase. In June 2021, the management and the union will hold additional ne-

gotiations to discuss further wage increases.

In accordance with labour legislation, experts of the railway workers union will take part in the investigation of occupational injuries, insisting on strict observance of the rights of victims and ensuring measures to improve work conditions, and labour and health safety.

The negotiators believe the terms of this agreement to be the maximum possible, taking into account the demands by employees and the state of today's resources of the company.

Throughout the entire labour conflict, the trade union received legal and organisational support from the Georgian Trade Union Confederation, which helped to achieve the acceptable result.

MOLDOVA: UNION LEADERS MEET WITH PRESIDENT DODON

On the 16th of July 2019, members of the Confederate Committee of the National Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova (CNSM) met with the President of Moldova Igor Dodon.

CNSM leader Oleg Budza informed the head of state of the Confederation's proposals to expand workers' social and economic

rights and guarantees, resume the National Commission for Collective Bargaining and Consultation, promote social partnership at all levels, improve the incentive mechanism for creating new jobs with decent pay, and combat the informal economy.

The union leaders said they underpinned the initiative by Prime Minister Maia Sandu to establish a Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in the country. The creation of such a ministry is provided for in ILO Convention No. 150 concerning labour administration ratified by Moldova, and the move will have several positive repercussions for Moldova, both nationally and internationally, and contribute to efficient promotion and protection of workers' rights and legitimate interests.

President Dodon underscored that he was open to dialogue with workers' representatives on pressing social and economic issues and said that regular meetings in this format helped develop effective cooperation between the government and the parliamentary majority.

RUSSIA: UNIONS SUPPORT FOUR-DAY WORKWEEK

Speaking to the 108th International Labour Conference in Geneva (June 2019), Russian Prime

Minister Dmitry Medvedev announced a possibility of Russia's switchover to a four-day workweek "in the near future ... in the situation of technological progress and production robotisation." He agreed there was the problem of system-wide fatigue and chronic stress resulting from overwork, and called on employers to look for new approaches to working time management.

In this regard, the FNPR sent a letter with proposals to the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection in August saying, in particular, that "the FNPR backs the idea of a shorter workweek as a means of optimising the time of work and rest, provided the wage rates remain the same. We propose that the issue be considered by the Russian Tripartite Commission for Regulation of Social and Labour Relations, with due regard for the current wage systems, differences in work hours, and other peculiar features of labour management in Russia. "

Investigation carried out by the Ministry of Labour in conjunction with the Head Hunter Research Service shows that shortening the work week ranks among the five most popular ideas for optimising labour laws. However, in today's Russia, enterprises are talking about a switchover to a four-day or even three-day workweek not from the best of motives, but due

to financial difficulties. This implies significant cuts in workers' wages.

RUSSIA: PRIME MINISTER AND UNION LEADER AGAINST DETERIORATION OF EMPLOYEES' SITUATION

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev met with the President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) Mikhail Shmakov 13 September 2019.

Among the issues discussed at the meeting was the idea of switching over to a four-day working week. Dmitry Medvedev noted that public debates should concentrate not only on shorter working hours, but also on the need of improving labour laws in general. "I believe it would only be right if our labour legislation were more flexible, more in line with the spirit of new economic relations that are developing in the 21st century, in a digital age," he said.

Mikhail Shmakov stressed that labour legislation should be developed only on the condition that this will not lead to deterioration of workers' conditions, regardless of whether they are employed in the traditional forms of the economy or in some of the new ones. Trade unions are engaged in dialogue with employers on this is-

sue, within the framework of the Russian Tripartite Commission for Regulating Social and Labour Relations and outside.

“The growth of productivity, the new technologies, the digitalisation, and the robotics,” he said, “all of these reduce the amount of human labour and increase the amount of machine labour that is not covered by legislation. But, in spite of this, people must be paid at least as much as they get for a 5-day work-week.”

The Prime Minister agreed with the FNPR leader. Both decided to continue the dialogue within the Russian Tripartite Commission and at government meetings.

RUSSIA: UNIONS DISCUSS PREPARATIONS FOR WDDW-2019

The regular meeting of the Executive Committee of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) held 10 July 2019 in Moscow summed up the results of the collective bargaining campaign. At present, there are almost five thousand active tripartite agreements in Russia at the Federal, regional and district levels, with 130,013 collective accords signed at workplaces. The Executive Committee recommended that in the upcoming collective bargaining campaign FNPR affiliates should

concentrate on the goals and tasks set forth in the FNPR Programme “For a Fair Economy”, as well as on decent work standards.

Participants approved in general the results of the national May Day action organised by trade unions in 2019 at the call of the FNPR, involving over four million people, among them 1.5 million young workers. The Committee considered it important to underpin the ITUC call concerning preparations for the World Day for Decent Work (WDDW) on the 7th of October.

The issue was discussed in more detail at a later session of the Executive Committee held on the 11th of September where a FNPR Vice-President, Alexander Shershukov, made a presentation on the WDDW-2019 in Russia. “Today, he said, the struggle for decent work is especially relevant, as the country’s economy has practically stalled, the wages remain low, the tax burden on the population increases, the loan debts grow, and the mortgage percentage is unprecedentedly high for a developed country, all of which whips up the growth of poverty in the country.”

In this light, the Executive Committee proposed that the WDDW-2019 be observed in Russia under the motto “For real wage growth!” The collective actions to be held by trade unions in the period from

1 to 7 October will take the forms of pickets, rallies, meetings of tripartite commissions on regulating social and labour relations.

The Committee decided to convene the FNPR General Council 30 October 2019. The agenda will include the discussion and adoption of a Plan of practical actions to implement the decisions of the 10th FNPR Congress, and several other issues.

RUSSIA: TRADE UNIONS' SOLIDARITY WITH NESTLE WORKERS

A press conference on "The trade union solidarity campaign to protect the dismissed employees of "Nestle Russia" and the demand of full-fledged negotiations" took place on 3 July 2019 at the Head Office of the FNPR.

Journalists were informed in detail about the gross violations of employees' labour and civil rights by the "Nestle Russia" managers. In particular, in May 300 workers of the company in different regions of Russia were locked in their workplaces in an attempt to illegally pressure them into signing documents on negotiated resignation. The detainees were not even allowed to use their phones in order to make calls, send short messages, or take photos and videos.

The Union of Workers in the Agro-Industrial Complex of the Russian Federation believes that the reduction of workers was committed in violation of both Russian and international legislation. What is happening is an attack aiming to curb trade union activity in "Nestle Russia". Therefore, the union lodged a protest with the company management and demanded immediate measures to stop all procedures initiated in May (staff reductions, redundancies, and branch closures), cancel all applications received under pressure, and start negotiations with the trade union on the alternatives to the restructuring. The trade union appealed to the Attorney-General with the request to check the legality of the actions taken by management.

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) and the International Union of Food Workers (IUF) supported the demands of the Russian Trade Union. As part of the ongoing international solidarity campaign, trade unionists from all over Russia and other countries have been sending collective appeals to the management of "Nestle Russia". More than 1500 people have already joined in the campaign. A series of pickets was organized outside the company's headquarters in support of the requirements of the dismissed workers.

RUSSIA: TRIPARTISM & DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

On the 18th of September, 2019, as part of the Trade Union Week, the Academy of Labour and Social Relations (ATiSO) held a traditional international scientific and practical conference “The World of Work in 21st Century: Tripartism in Digital Transformation”.

Attending the event were Russian and foreign scientists, as well as representatives of the ILO, the federal industrial trade unions, the employers' associations, and the state authorities of Russia.

Participants discussed topical issues of social and labour relations in the light of the digitalisation of the economy. In particular, they shared experience in areas, such cooperation of Russian trade unions with their social partners, development of social partnership in the present-day situation; labour law reforms; structural employment; wages and choice of occupations in the conditions of a new industrial revolution, and social responsibility of trade unions, business and government.

Many of the experts drew the attention of participants to the fact that the problem of protecting digitalised personal data is still not solved and pointed to the need to promote the system of life-long professional training to meet the challenges of today's world.

TAJIKISTAN INVITING CHILDREN TO SUMMER HEALTH CAMPS

Organising summer holidays for children and teenagers has always been a traditional task for Tajikistan's trade unions. Every year, the Government of the Republic takes a resolution that gives instructions on this matter to ministries, departments, agencies, and economic structures. The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of the Republic of Tajikistan (FITUT) has assumed the role of orchestrator of this large and complex activity.

There are 55 summer health camps for children and teenagers in the country. This year a lot has been done to prepare them for the summer season: repair and improvement, expansion of capacity, enhancing the comfort of living, and development of social infrastructure. Special attention has been paid to the selection of educators and service personnel. Safety and sanitation standards have been checked.

UZBEKISTAN: UNIONS PROMOTING ILO STANDARDS

A seminar on “Promoting social protection standards in Uzbekistan” was held by the country's trade unions in Tashkent, with the partici-

pation of the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

Participants noted that the Republic of Uzbekistan, as an ILO member, had so far ratified 15 labour conventions and step-by-step measures were presently taken to integrate international standards into national legislation and labour relation practice.

In the near future, the unions will concentrate on:

- raising the awareness of the population of national and international labour standards;
- holding seminars, round tables, conferences and other events with the involvement of foreign partners concerning the implementation of the ILO conventions ratified by the Republic;
- conducting nation-wide monitoring of the use of child and forced labour.

UZBEKISTAN: WORKSHOP ON LABOUR SAFETY & HEALTH

In conjunction with the Moscow ILO Office, the Federation of Trade Unions of Uzbekistan (FTUU) held a two-day workshop for trade union leaders and health and labour inspectors on “Making work safer and the working environment healthier”.

The lectures were delivered by local and international experts.

Workshop participants discussed, in particular, the following topics: “Safety and labour protection in Uzbekistan”, “Occupational health and safety are central to the Future of Work”, “ILO vision of occupational health and safety management”, “Labour Safety and Health in the European Union”, and “Reforming labour law in Uzbekistan”.

Uzbekistan trade unions have undertaken the task to build safe working surroundings and protect the environment. Experience shows that a high level of occupational safety is beneficial to employees, employers and the government.

Organising annual events to mark the World Day for Safety and Health at Work has become a tradition in the Republic. Trade unions hold round tables, training seminars, photo exhibitions, and organise industry exhibitions and campaigns to promote health and safety at work, etc.

One typical example of trade union involvement in the struggle for better working conditions are the annual review competitions held at enterprises of all sectors of the economy for the awards in the following nominations: “Best enterprise”, “Best trade union committee”, “Best health and safety representative”, “Best young specialist in labour protection”, and others.

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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.

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