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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU COUNCIL MEETS IN MOSCOW

A session of the Council of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) chaired by Mikhail Shmakov, President of the GCTU and the leader of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, was held in Moscow 2 April 2010.

Council heard and discussed the information presented by GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov on the work done by the GCTU Executive Committee since its previous session in April 2009, and considered the problem of trade union activity with regard to the current economic and social situation in the CIS countries.

The session recommended that the GCTU affiliates pay special attention to the implementation of anti-crisis measures in their respective countries and industries, compliance with the decent work principles, and consolidation of workers' unity and solidarity at the national and interstate levels. Special stress was laid on the need to spare no effort to have

the measures proposed in the GCTU Declaration of April 2009 carried out in the CIS countries, and get more actively involved in the formulation of post-crisis development strategies. The unions will insist on a stronger social component to be included in all modernisation projects and anti-crisis plans. They will also struggle to sustain employment, ensure real wage growth and a fair distribution of the national product, and enhance state control over prices and charges of goods and services.

When reviewing the progress of the trade union solidarity campaign "Minimum Pay Not Lower than the Subsistence Minimum" being waged in the CIS countries, participants noted that the consistent and energetic actions taken by the unions had resulted in increased minimum wages and brought them up closer to the subsistence minimum levels. However, the goal of the campaign was still to be reached in most Commonwealth states.

In the course of collective bargaining, the unions will insist on the in-

dexation of the minimum wages, and participate in the revision of the subsistence minimums. Their attention will also be focused on the ratification of ILO Convention No. 131 and Recommendation No.135 concerning minimum wage fixing, and Convention No. 117 concerning basic aims and standards of social policy.

The session adopted a GCTU Appeal in connection with the forthcoming May Day, a Statement on counteraction against terrorism, and a message of greetings to the veterans of the Great Patriotic War on the occasion of the 65th Anniversary of the Victory Day.

The Council expelled the Trade Union International of Shipbuilders "Korabel" from the GCTU for violations of Article 7 of the GCTU Constitution.

GCTU EXECUTIVE WORRIED AT LACK OF PROGRESS IN RATIFICATION OF ILO CONVENTIONS

Prior to the session of the GCTU Council, the Executive Committee of the Confederation met in Moscow 1 April 2010 to consider a number of topical issues.

On the eve of the 25th Anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster, the Executive approved a plan of joint actions by the GCTU and the International Organisation "Soyuz Chernobyl" for 2010-2012, aiming to raise the level of social protection of citizens who had been exposed to radiation following the breakdown at the Chernobyl Atomic Power Station. It was decided to send copies of the plan to the Inter-

Parliamentary Assemblies of the CIS and EURASEC, and other bodies of the Commonwealth.

When discussing the use of advanced technologies in information links within the GCTU, participants took note of the great amount of work done in this regard both in the headquarters of the GCTU and in its member organisations, particularly in Russia and Ukraine. However, the volume of information technologies used still did not meet the inner requirements of the GCTU and was not in keeping with the extent of their prevalence in the world. The Executive Committee considered it necessary that additional measures should be taken to introduce modern computer technologies in the daily proceedings of the GCTU and its affiliates.

As part of the trade union monitoring, the GCTU Executive reviewed the progress of ratification and observance of ILO conventions by CIS countries last year. Participants were worried that, in spite of all efforts by trade unions, no new convention had been ratified out of the 11 ones recommended for ratification in 2004 by the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on the initiative of the GCTU.

The Executive Committee recommended that the national trade union centres in the CIS countries should monitor more strictly the ratification and observance of the above 11 and other key ILO conventions, including the fundamental ones. Special attention should be paid to revealing and analysing cases of ratified conventions being violated, and taking measures to amend the situation.

The Executive adopted a statement strongly condemning the recent terrorist acts in Moscow and elsewhere in Russia.

DECENT WORK MEANS SAFE WORK!

In connection with the World Day for Safety and Health at Work universally observed 28 April, the GCTU issued a Statement sharing the deep concern of the world trade union movement over the increasingly heavy loss of human life at workplaces.

“In the context of the world economic crisis, the Statement reads, employers will often cut down their health and safety funds under the pretext of being forced to carry out economy measures, which is particularly typical of the developing countries and the so called emerging market economies, including the CIS states.

Trade unions in the countries of the Commonwealth must exercise their legitimate rights and keep the issues of workers’ safety and health in the focus of their daily attention, include them in the list of urgent demands they put forward before employers and authorities at all levels, and insist on their being incorporated in the tripartite agreements”.

While supporting the ILO motto that decent work must be safe work, the GCTU called on its affiliates to demand that the authority take additional steps to secure a safe and healthy work environment and respect for safety regulations at every workplace.

UNION ARGUMENTS HEARD

The development by the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (IPA) of a draft framework law “On the Activity of Private Employment Agencies” gave rise to a heated debate around its provision on paid employment services for job seekers. The GCTU representatives taking part in the discussion believe that the present wording of the draft law collides with ILO Convention No. 181 and infringes upon the conditions of job seekers.

Repeated discussions of the issue have not produced any agreement of opinion. In this situation, GCTU President Mikhail Shmakov sent a letter to the Chairman of the Council of the IPA CIS Sergey Mironov in late June asking him to prevent the provision allowing private employment agencies to render paid services to job seekers from being included in the framework law. Earlier, GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov sent a similar letter to General Secretary of the IPA CIS Mikhail Krotov.

Judging by the first replies received, the trade unions’ arguments are likely to meet understanding and support.

GCTU CALLS FOR A STOP TO ESCALATION OF CONFLICT IN KYRGYZSTAN

General Secretary of the GCTU, Vladimir Scherbakov, sent a letter to the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU) 15 June 2010 in connection with the tragic events in the south of the republic.

“It is with anguish and concern, the letter says, that the affiliated organisations of the General Confederation of Trade Unions follow the political and social developments in your country entailing heavy losses of human life and inflicting suffering on thousands of persons. The GCTU brings its sincere and deep condolences to the families and other relatives of those killed, and the entire people of Kyrgyzstan”.

The GCTU expressed the hope that the state authorities of the republic, together with the whole multi-ethnic people of Kyrgyzstan, would be able to curb the unbridled calamity of civil unrest and prevent further escalation of conflicts that may cause political and social instability in the country and the region, and endanger the peaceful work of millions of people.

The letter said the GCTU was confident that the trade unions of Kyrgyzstan would retain the unity of their Federation, and in doing so they could rely on the solidarity and support of the whole trade union movement in the Commonwealth.

GCTU CONDEMNS SEIZURE OF HUMANITARIAN CONVOY

The General Confederation of Trade Unions condemned strongly the actions by Israel’s armed forces who seized, in international waters of the Mediterranean, the Freedom Flotilla convoy bound for the Palestinian Sector of Gaza with a load of humanitarian aid on board.

“Whatever reasons Israeli authorities might give to justify this outrageous

raid, - says a special GCTU statement issued 1 June 2010, - it arouses righteous indignation among the United Nations, the world public, and the international trade union movement.

‘The General Confederation of Trade Unions, the Statement says in conclusion, calls for putting an end to violence in the region, lifting the Israeli blockade of Gaza on the conditions of full implementation of UN Resolutions 1850 and 1860, and enabling a free flow of humanitarian supplies to the local population. The world community must do its best to help a rapid peaceful settlement of the Israel-Palestine conflict, based on the principles of peaceful coexistence of the two sides, and securing the existence of an independent and sustainable Palestinian state”.

GCTU PROPOSES TO AMEND EURASEC LABOUR LEGISLATION

On the 8th of June 2010, the GCTU presented its comments and proposals concerning the draft concept of the Principles of Labour Legislation currently being worked out by the Permanent Commission for Social Policy of the EURASEC Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (IPA).

In a letter to EURASEC, the Confederation said it shared the general approach to the formulation of the structure and contents of the document, particularly in what concerns the legal regulation of labour relations, based on international law instruments, and conventions and recommendations of the ILO.

However, the GCTU proposed a number of amendments to articles concerning the issues of labour remuneration (including the definition of minimum wages), health and safety and gender equality.

The GCTU also suggested that the documents should provide for the right of trade unions to exercise public control over the observance by employers of labour legislation and other legal acts containing labour law standards, and over the fulfilment of collective agreements and accords.

GCTU HAILS ITUC CONGRESS

GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov and Deputy General Secretary Albert Potapov who took part in the 2nd World Congress of the International Trade Union Confederation (Vancouver, Canada, 21-25 June 2010) handed a GCTU message of solidarity to its participants.

“Less than four years have passed since the ITUC was founded, - the message says, - but even in this short period it has been universally recognized as the representative of workers’ interests on this planet, the heart of the global union family playing a crucial role in the endeavour to add a fair social dimension to the process of world development in an era of globalisation. On the eve of the G-8 and G-20 summits, trade union leaders from the same countries traditionally meet under the ITUC umbrella, and the documents they adopt are given consideration and taken into account by the leaders of these most influential world powers. The General

Confederation of Trade Unions welcomes these efforts, and reiterates its full support for the positions stated in those documents, first of all, in the Global Unions Washington, London and Pittsburgh Declarations.

“Equally significant is the fact that the international financial and trade institutions, such as the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation, pay increasingly closer heed to the voice of the International Trade Union Confederation. We express our solidarity with the ITUC line of enhancing the global role of the United Nations, strengthening the International Labour Organisation, promoting decent work all over the world, and implementing the Global Jobs Pact.

“Workers and trade unions in our region deeply appreciate the struggles waged by the ITUC to defend the interests of all categories of workers, first of all women, youth and migrants, protect human rights, the rights of employees and trade union freedoms, safeguard international peace and security, preserve the environment, and ensure sustainable development.

“Amidst the world financial and economic crisis, we express our solidarity with the ITUC in its efforts to bring about a radical change in the nature of globalisation, and establish international control over the activities of world financial institutions. Together with you, we reject the attempts to place the burden of economic recovery on workers who bear no responsibility either for the outbreak of the crisis or for its scope.

“Within the bounds of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the

GCTU pursues similar aims striving to strengthen the social component of national anti-crisis programmes being adopted in CIS countries. Through its involvement in the work of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly and other Commonwealth authorities, where it enjoys permanent consultative status, our Confederation seeks to help create the necessary conditions for the realisation of decent work in the region, elimination of poverty, protection of labour and trade union rights, and maximum satisfaction of workers' claims. We believe this to be a reliable foundation for our successful cooperation with the ITUC and its organisation in Europe, the Pan-European Regional Council.

We are positive this ITUC Congress will make a major contribution to the further development and consolidation of the world trade union movement”.

BELARUS: TRADE UNION CONTROL GETS LEGAL FOUNDATION

A presidential decree “On public control exercised by the trade unions” has been published in Belarus.

“The document has been issued with the wording that had been coordinated with the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus and provides sufficient rights for the trade unions to carry out control activity”, said Leonid Kozik, President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB).

The trade union technical and legal inspectorates can exercise control, as they did before, in the form of su-

pervising compliance with the labour legislation, laws on safety at work, laws on the trade unions, as well as the fulfilment of collective agreements. Grass-route trade union organisations are also empowered to monitor the implementation of such standards.

“This decree has been under development for half a year. Trade union activists and legal and technical inspectorates have taken part in its elaboration. The final outcome suits the FTUB completely. However, not a single proposal has come to us during this period from the trade unions not affiliated to the FTUB. As usually, they only confine themselves to comments on various web-sites”, said Leonid Kozik.

KAZAKHSTAN: TRADE UNIONS HOLD THEIR CONGRESS

The 22nd Congress of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTURK) was convened 3 June, 2010 in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan. It was attended by over 320 delegates as well MPs, senior officers of state bodies and General Secretary of the General Confederation of trade Unions (GCTU) Vladimir Shcherbakov.

Messages of greetings were received from President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, the leadership of the country's Parliament, CIS national trade union centres, industrial trade union internationals and others.

The Congress approved the programme document “Kazakhstan Trade

Union Strategies for 2010–2015”. Amendments and additions to the Statutes aimed at democratising the Federation and its organisational and financial strengthening were introduced. The General Council and other bodies of the Federation were elected. Siyazbek Mukashev was unanimously elected FTURK President for the next term.

Congress adopted various declarations and appeals on issues relating to decent pay, the provision of aid to the self-employed population, productivity raise, increase of the subsistence minimum, safety and health at work, pension scheme for workers whose working conditions are harmful, hard or dangerous. The documents adopted will be sent to the President, the Parliament and the Government of Kazakhstan, the heads of regional administrations, FTURK affiliates and employers’ organizations.

KYRGYZSTAN: XXI TRADE UNION CONGRESS

The XXI Congress of the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU) was held in Bishkek 24 June 2010. It was attended by 190 delegates representing all the KFTU affiliates.

Congress heard the KFTU Council’s report on the KFTU activity since the XX Congress and the report of the FTUK Auditing Commission, approved the Major Guidelines of the KFTU Activity for 2010-2015, introduced amendments and additions into the Federation’s Statutes and the Provisions on the Auditing Commission, and formed the Council of the Federation.

The delegates adopted an appeal to the Provisional Government and the people of Kyrgyzstan.

Kanatbek Osmonov was reelected President of the KFTU.

Temirbek Janaliyev, President of the Central Committee of Unions of Workers in Commerce, Restaurants, Consumers’ Co-operatives and Various Forms of Business of Kyrgyzstan, was elected KFTU First Vice-President and Ormon Zhailobayev, President of the Central Committee of the Mining and Metal Workers’ Union of Kyrgyzstan, was elected KFTU Vice-President.

The KFTU President and his Congress-elected deputies will perform their duties on a full-time basis.

MOLDOVA: FOR BETTER PROTECTION OF WORKERS’ INTERESTS

The General Council of the National Trade Union Confederation (CNSM) held its regular session in April 2010 to address urgent issues of the Republic’s trade union movement, the major one being the implementation of the Programme “Trade union movement in 2008–2012”.

The report presented by CNSM President Oleg Budza contained a comprehensive analysis of the Confederation’s activity in the past year. In particular, at the demand of the trade unions, the guaranteed minimum pay in the real sector was increased by 200 leus (\$ 16), while personal exemption from income tax was raised by 900 leus (\$ 71). At the same

time, the Confederation proposed to bring the unemployment benefit up to the subsistence minimum, recalculate the pensions of the working pensioners and introduce a reduced working day for mothers with two or more children.

The report made special emphasis on social dialogue. The CNSM President informed that within the framework of negotiations, which proceeded with difficulty in some sectors, certain problems of vital importance for the protection of workers' socio-economic rights had been or would be considered. These include the elaboration of a subsistence minimum act, inadmissibility of any changes to the Labour Code that undermine workers' guarantees, speeding up the development of mechanisms for the implementation of the Law on Safety and Health at Work, as well as the possibility of setting up a Socio-Economic Council, a standing tripartite structure responsible for social partnership and dialogue.

The General Council approved a number of amendments and additions to the Confederation's Statutes, adopted the budget of the Confederation for 2010 and discussed some other problems relating to the internal activity.

RUSSIA: FNPR EXECUTIVE MEETING

At its regular session held 26 May 2010 and chaired by Mikhail Shmakov, the Executive Committee of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) dis-

cussed topical issues of the trade union movement.

The Committee approved in general the results of the May Day action by trade unions in 2010, which brought together over 2.7 mln people country-wide following the FNPR appeal. The Executive found it expedient to support the initiative by the International Trade Union Confederation to organise the World Day for Decent Work on 7 October 2010.

The session also approved the efforts by the trade unions to stabilise and improve the situation at the labour market, preserve jobs and restore the purchasing power of wages and salaries.

The Executive stated a noticeable improvement in the FNPR human rights activity displayed in a constructive co-operation of the Federation and its affiliates with the state bodies responsible for supervising and controlling compliance with the labour legislation.

Out of 18 thousand cases reviewed in courts with the participation of legal labour inspectors or other trade union lawyers, over 14 thousand claims (78%) were fully or partially satisfied. The economic benefit from such work in 2009 exceeded 10 billion roubles (US\$ 330 mln) as compared to 5 billion roubles in the previous year.

The FNPR adopted a Statement in connection with the "Raspadskaya" coal mine tragedy.

The Executive decided to convene the next session of the FNPR General Council on 18 September 2010.

RUSSIA: FNPR LEADERS MEET WITH GOVERNMENT

Russian Prime-Minister Vladimir Putin met with a large group of FNPR representatives headed by the FNPR leader Mikhail Shmakov on 1 June 2010, to discuss the problems of wages and safety at workplaces, the need for establishing a Ministry of Labour as well as the problems of children recreation and other issues.

The trade union leaders drew the attention of the Prime-Minister to the fact that the minimum wage in the country had not been increased since 2009, while the real wages in the past year constituted about 97.2% of the 2008 level. Vladimir Putin confirmed the intention of the Government to carry out an indexation of wages in the budgetary sector in 2010.

The Prime-Minister agreed with the trade unions' idea of introducing compulsory insurance from unemployment. However, he thought its implementation feasible only when "we see that stability in the global and Russian economy has gained ground".

Mikhail Shmakov reopened the issue of restoring in the near future the Ministry of Labour which, he thought, should be responsible for all the issues concerned with the regulation of social and labour relations, securing safety and health at work, improvement of the living standards of workers and their families, and labour migration issues.

It was proposed to hold an All-Russia meeting on labour market and economic development issues with the participation of all the stockholders –

the trade unions, employers, government, expert community, economists and scientists. Its objective should be to jointly outline a reasonable and effective programme of the country's socio-economic development in future.

UKRAINE: NATIONAL TRADE UNION REPORT PROVISIONS TO BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT

During the meeting of Ukrainian President Victor Yanukovich with the leading representatives of national trade unions and federations that took place 19 March 2010, the President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FTUU) Vassil Khara handed over to the Head of State the text of the National Trade Union Report "Labour in the Ukraine: the need for qualitative changes for the sake of public effectiveness and decent life".

Judging by the official reply received by the FTUU from the President's Administration in May this year, the Report has been considered and examined. The FTUU proposals regarding social dialogue and priority steps in the socio-economic sphere have received a positive response and a high opinion from specialists.

In accordance with the instructions of Victor Yanukovich, the FTUU proposals and the National Report, apart from their use in the current activity, will be taken into account during the preparation of the President's annual message to the Supreme Rada (Parliament) of the Ukraine "On the Internal and External State of the Ukraine".

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**INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT AND
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**OF THE GCTU
42 LENINSKY PROSPEKT
117199 MOSCOW, RUSSIA
TELEFAX +7(095) 938-2155
PHONE +7(095)938-7215
+7(095)938-8274
TELEX 411 010**

Web site: www.vkp.ru; E-mail: inter@vkp.ru

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 ON 22 SEPTEMBER 1993, AND THE THIRD CONGRESS OF THE GCTU ON 18 SEPTEMBER 1997

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, BELARUS, GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGHYZSTAN, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA, TAJIKISTAN, UZBEKISTAN, AND UKRAINE, AS WELL AS 37 BRANCH TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS. BESIDES BILATERAL AGREEMENTS ON CO-OPERATION WAS SIGNED WITH THE TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION OF AZERBAIJAN .

THE GCTU IS READY TO CO-OPERATE WITH ANY OTHER NATIONAL TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR BEING MEMBERS OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEIR PARTICIPATION IN GCTU ACTIVITIES DOES NOT IN ANY WAY RESTRICT THE INDEPENDENCE OF ITS AFFILIATES.

THE CONFEDERATION ENJOYS OBSERVER STATUS WITH THE CIS INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY, 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 , UN DPI AND ECOSOC.

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

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

PRESIDENT OF THE GCTU IS VLADIMIR SCHERBAKOV

DEAR READERS

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