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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU ALARMED BY SITUATION AROUND GAZA STRIP

The General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) issued a Statement 20 November 2012 which, in particular, says:

«The trade union movement of the Commonwealth of Independent States is deeply alarmed by reports about the recent sharp escalation of the conflict in the Gaza Strip. As a result of bombing and shelling, many innocent civilians have been killed there, among them women and children, and a number of civilian facilities, including social institutions, have been destroyed.

The efforts to help achieve a peaceful settlement of the conflict made by the United Nations, particularly by its Secretary-General and Security Council, as well as by several interested states have so far produced no desired results.

The General Confederation of Trade Unions affiliating 10 national trade union centres and 28 industrial Trade Union Internationals, calls on the parties to the conflict around the Gaza Strip, to cease hostilities immediately and start peace negotiations based on the UN proposals in order to prevent a dangerous escalation of the conflict, restore, as soon as possible, a peaceful environment in the region, and help resolve the issues related to the Palestinian-Israeli settlement as a whole.»

WORLD DISCUSSES DECENT WORK IN MOSCOW

A delegation of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) led by its General Secretary, Vladimir Scherbakov, attended the International High-Level Conference on Decent Work held in Moscow from 11–12 December

2012. The conference, organised jointly by the Russian Government and the ILO, with the active involvement of the social partners, was the first international high-level event focusing on decent work.

The opening session of the Conference started with a welcome speech by Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Olga Golodets and a message from President Putin read out by Minister of Labour Maxim Topilin, followed by contributions of ILO Director-General Guy Ryder, the ITUC leader Sharan Burrow, and a number of other high-ranking international personalities.

Addressing participants, President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) Mikhail Shmakov said Russian trade unions supported the ILO decent work concept, which is central to social, economic and environmental development, and plays a leading role in ensuring social justice

For two days, over 900 participants discussed strategic approaches to overcoming the negative impact of the global economic crisis on employment, working conditions, social policies, and economic development through the implementation of the ILO Decent Work Agenda and the development of social dialogue. The discussion ended up with the adoption of a final document.

It should be noted that FNPR has actively participated in the preparation and holding of the forum. In the run-up to the event, eight tripartite scientific and action-oriented conferences were organised by the unions in various parts of the country to discuss «Decent work as a basis for social policy».

GCTU CALLS ON CIS PARLAMENTARIANS TO RATIFY MAJOR ILO CONVENTIONS

A GCTU delegation headed by General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov took part in the session of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the CIS Member States (IPA CIS), held in St. Petersburg 23 November 2012. The meeting considered approx. 30 questions, including 19 draft framework laws for the Commonwealth countries.

The day before, the Council of the IPA CIS had gathered for a regular meeting. At the initiative of the GCTU, its agenda included the item «On the ratification of ILO conventions by CIS member states», and Vladimir Scherbakov was given the chance to speak to participants on the topic. The Council agreed with the GCTU proposal that the CIS member states should pay increased attention to the ratification of ILO conventions. The resolution adopted by the meeting calls on the national parliaments to consider the issue at their sessions.

This decision came as a result of many years of sustained efforts by the GCTU to develop constructive dialogue with the IPA CIS. The unions hope that this decision will help the convergence of labour laws of the Commonwealth countries on the basis of international standards.

GCTU SUPPORTS EUROPEAN TRADE UNIONS

The GCTU Leader Vladimir Scherbakov sent ETUC General Secretary Bernadette Segol a message of solidarity expressing fraternal support for the November protest actions staged by European trade unions.

«The General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU), says the message, on behalf of its affiliates organising almost 50 million workers, expresses its fraternal solidarity with, and full support of, the protest actions that swept across Europe on the European Day of Action and Solidarity 14 November 2012.

Like the ETUC, we are deeply concerned that the austerity measures being imposed on the European countries generally result in economic stagnation and declining living standards, new layoffs, and cuts in social benefits, wages and pensions.

The challenges currently facing workers and countries in Europe are in many ways identical to

the problems that have to be addressed by countries and workers in our region. We believe that the best way to overcome them is primarily through the strengthening of social dialogue and the implementation of economic policies aiming to create new and decent jobs, and reduce social tensions.

Please, be assured that in its future struggles to get the protesters' demands met, the ETUC can always count on support and solidarity from the GCTU and its member organisations.»

GCTU AFFILIATES MARK WDDW

Activities related to the World Day for Decent Work were among the most important events for the GCTU and its affiliates in the post-Congress period.

Long before October 7, the GCTU released a special statement calling on its member organisations to mark this day on a large scale under the main slogan «Jobs for the youth.»

On the 7th of October or the days around it, the GCTU affiliates in the countries of the region organised massive collective actions that took the form of rallies, marches, meetings of work collectives, or picket lines. Their participants demanded that the employers and the govern-

ments create appropriate conditions for decent work. In particular, the unions and the workers they organize in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Moldova, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Ukraine and other countries insisted that specific mechanisms be developed to secure youth employment, and more attention be devoted to training and, whenever necessary, retraining young people.

Suffice it to say that in Russia alone over five million union members were involved in different events associated with the World Day for Decent Work.

The energetic actions taken by trade unions in the Commonwealth countries in support of decent work have forced the governments to be more attentive to the implementation of the ILO Decent Work Agenda and to the trade union demands for the creation of quality jobs.

WORLD TRADE UNION MOVEMENT HAILS RUSSIA'S G-20 PRESIDENCY

November 2012 saw the formal transfer of authority from Mexico to Russia, which will head the G-20 in 2013. Officially, the Russian presidency of the G-20 started already 1 December 2012.

The international trade union movement has welcomed Russia's presidency in the G20, including its

intention to prioritise employment and economic growth.

According to ITUC General Secretary Sharan Burrow, Russia's presidency of the G20 provides an opportunity to change course and steer the economic development towards job creation.

ARMENIA: UNIONS HOLD CONGRESS

One-hundred-and-nineteen delegates representing 24 affiliated industry trade unions took part in the 3rd Congress of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA) held in Yerevan 23 November 2012.

The congress was also attended by representatives of the government, the National Union of Employers and Entrepreneurs, and the regional ILO office. Messages of greeting were sent to the participants by Armenia's Prime Minister, the General Confederation of Trade Unions, etc.

As he presented the activity report, CTUA President Eduard Tumasian dwelt upon the main results of the work done, and on the challenges facing the Confederation in the period to come.

The Congress adopted an updated version of the CTUA Charter, amended and modified, and the activity programme for 2012–17. Delegates approved the new composition of the

Council, the Executive Committee, and the Auditing Commission of the Confederation.

Eduard Tumasian was re-elected CTUA President, and Boris Haratyan and Hachik Harakelyan Vice Presidents.

The work of the Congress received a wide coverage in the press, and on a number of national television and radio channels.

BELARUS: FPB STANDS FOR DECENT WORK

The Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) issued a statement on the occasion of the World Day for Decent Work–2012.

«The employment of young people, the statement says, is one of the main concerns for the world of labour in 2012.

Against the global background, the 10 per cent downward unemployment trend in Belarus, as compared with 2011, allows us to feel confident that the level of youth employment will also remain stable.

However, the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus shares the anxiety of the international community over the present-day situation. In many regions of the world, including several CIS countries, the employment of young people has

deteriorated, which can pose a serious threat to the social balance, and lead to the marginalisation of this vulnerable social group.

While supporting the World Day for Decent Work, the FPU and its affiliates stand for ensuring workers, including young workers in Belarus and elsewhere in the world, full and productive employment, healthy and safe working conditions, fair remuneration and social security, and reliable protection of, and respect for, the social and economic rights of union members.

Decent work is the basis of a decent life for all!»

BELARUS: UNION INTERVENTION REMEDIES SITUATION

Responding to the appeals by workers, FPB arranged monitoring of the wage payment and the remuneration system at the industrial enterprise «Granite» late last December.

A detailed investigation has revealed that there was practically no financial incentive system at the plant, while the management attempted to raise the output volumes through overtime abuse. A variety of professions were unacceptably low paid. For the last four months, the average wages were equivalent to \$437 a month. There was

also a significant pay gap between the enterprise managers and engineers, and ordinary workers.

Following consultation of FPB representatives with the enterprise managers, the local authorities and the ministries concerned, the work remuneration system in the enterprise «Granite» was substantially corrected.

GEORGIA: GENDER EQUALITY IN LABOUR RELATIONS

To mark the International Human Rights Day 10 September 2012, the Women's Committee of the Georgian Trade Union Confederation held a conference on «Gender Equality in the Labour Relations in Georgia.»

It was the last in a series of conferences held as part of the project implemented on the recommendation of the Women's Committee of the Pan-European Regional Council of the ITUC, with the assistance of the Confederation of Unions for the Professionals of Norway.

Conference approved the letter addressed to the Speaker of Parliament, the Minister of Labour, Health and Social Services, and the Commission on Health and Social Affairs of Georgia.

During the Conference, the booklet «Gender equality in the labour relations in Georgia» was launched, highlighting the situation in the sphere.

KYRGYZSTAN: NEW GENERAL AGREEMENT SIGNED

The Government, the Federation of Trade Unions, and the employers' associations of Kyrgyzstan signed a general agreement for 2013–15.

The parties undertook additional responsibilities for the steady development of the Kyrgyz economy, the expansion of the labour market, the protection of real wages, the provision of occupational safety and health, and higher living standards of the population.

One of the main goals is to raise the minimum wage to the subsistence minimum level meeting workers' vital needs – in line with ILO Convention 131 on the minimum wage ratified by Kyrgyzstan.

The agreement contains a number of conceptual provisions relating to the settlement of employment problems, the building of a safe working environment, the improvement of public health, and the maintenance of social guarantees.

MOLDOVA: UNIONS DEMAND END TO INFORMAL LABOUR

Members of the Building Workers' Union urge the Government of Moldova to take additional steps to combat informal employment and

the payment of undeclared «wages in envelopes.»

Statistics show that the highest levels of informal employment, i.e. 52 per cent, have been registered in construction. According to the Trade Union Federation of Workers in Construction and the Building Materials Industry «Sindicons», illegal labour adversely affects the health of workers.

«In October, we held a solidarity march against illegal labour and called on the Government and civil society to combat this phenomenon,» said the Sindicons president Victor Talamaci. He believes the problem can only be solved through joint efforts of the unions, the Government and the employers.

According to estimates by the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family, the number of illegal workers in the country equals about 145,000, with most of them being in the construction industry (52.5 per cent of those employed), agriculture (46.7 per cent), and hotels and restaurants (35.4 per cent). For this reason, the State Insurance Fund of Moldova is annually short of approximately 4.7 billion lei.

MOLDOVA: UNION LABOUR INSPECTION ACTIVE NOW

In late November, the trade union labour inspection started working

in Moldova, which will help the National Trade Union Confederation (CNSM) oversee the observance of labour laws.

The decision to establish the inspection was made by the CNSM Confederal Committee 1 October 2012. In the future, the organisation intends to cooperate with the state labour inspectorate.

«The need for a union labour inspection was apparent because the state service lacks staff to ensure proper enforcement of labour legislation. Today it employs a mere 90 inspectors, which is a far cry from being sufficient for this country », said the head of the newly created organisation Gheorghe Burbulea.

According to the Labour Inspectorate, 500 to 600 workplace accidents occur in the country annually, with 20 per cent of them ending in serious injury, and 10 per cent in the death of the victims.

RUSSIA: FNPR INSISTS ON ADJUSTING MINIMUM CONSUMER BASKET

In October, President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) Mikhail Shmakov sent a letter to Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev noting that in today's Russia, the

value of the minimum consumer basket of a law-abiding worker is three and a half times lower than the value of the government-proposed food basket for offenders sentenced to forced labour in settlement colonies (2,434 roubles and 9,000 roubles, respectively).

Meanwhile, the amount of the minimum wage due to be introduced as from 1 January 2013, will reach 5,205 roubles a month.

In this connection, the trade union leader asked the Prime Minister to give instructions to adjust the draft Federal Government laws on the consumer basket and the subsistence minimum, now pending in the State Duma, in order to eliminate the violations of the rights of law-abiding working Russians vis-a-vis criminals.

RUSSIA: FNPR OUTLINES ITS STAND ON PENSIONS

Amidst the national debates about the Development Strategy for the Pension System in Russia for the period of up to 2030, FNPR sent a letter to President Putin outlining its position on the matter.

«Approaches to pension insurance, the letter says, must be based on the recognition of the relevant ILO Conventions and Recommendations and, above

all, Convention 102, whose main criterion in what concerns pensions is to secure at least a 40 per cent income replacement rate for the average worker with an employment period of 30 years. The recognition and acceptance of the above mentioned Convention will also make it possible to strengthen the relationship of labour (including its terms and conditions) to the rate of the future pension (insurance) security of the employee through establishing interdependence between the amount of insurable earnings and the level of guaranteed payments.»

FNPR does not believe it possible to provide an acceptable standard of living for pensioners without the wage policy being changed, and its position is shared by many experts and specialists. The low pay most employees get, especially in the budgetary sector, poses significant challenges for the organisation and implementation of social insurance.

While considering it timely and necessary to continue the reform of the country's pension system, and supporting the idea of a multi-tier pension system with due regard for the needs and possibilities of different categories of workers, FNPR confirms its readiness for constructive cooperation to identify, develop and implement effective solutions.

RUSSIA: BRICS TRADE UNION FORUM ANNOUNCED IN MOSCOW

A declaration on establishing the Trade Union Forum of the BRICS countries was signed in Moscow during the International High Level Conference on Decent Work held from 11–12 December 2012.

The heads of leading trade union centres of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, who attended the Conference as delegates, announced the establishment of a Trade Union Forum for the BRICS countries as a tool for dialogue and cooperation between the peoples, and for adding a social dimension to the BRICS, based on the ILO Decent Work Agenda.

The idea of setting up the Forum met with unequivocal support already at the 2nd ITUC Congress in Vancouver in 2010, and had since that time been elaborated and specified in the course of consultations held during the statutory sessions of the ITUC and the ILO.

The new global trade union structure comprises the largest workers' organisations in the countries accounting for 30 per cent of the Earth's territory, which is home to 43 per cent of its population, produces 25 per cent of the global GDP, and is responsible for over 50 per cent of its growth. The unions see their task in giving a progressive

social dimension to the cooperation among the BRICS countries, and steer them to the protection of the interests and legitimate rights of working people.

RUSSIA: ILO DIRECTOR-GENERAL MEETS WITH UNION LEADERS

FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov and President of the Confederation of Labour of Russia Boris Kravchenko met with ILO Director-General Guy Ryder at the FNPR headquarters in Moscow 10 December 2012.

The participants exchanged views on the current trends in the social and labour relations in the context of ongoing global economic crisis, when the world economic and political instability generates increasingly new challenges.

Mikhail Shmakov was confident that the constant support from the ILO, as the legislator of international labour standards, would promote social partnership in Russia. In his opinion, step-by-step implementation of international decent work standards will prevent the deterioration of workers' conditions at a time of crisis in the global financial and economic situation.

Guy Ryder expressed the view that today's world was experiencing the most severe economic crisis

since the 30-ies of the last century. Meanwhile, he believes Russia has so far managed to overcome the effects of the recession with lower losses. However, it has no immunity from global calamities. In this regard, he noted that the Russian trade unions are a very powerful and well-organised force that can effectively oppose the crisis and fight successfully for the rights of employees.

After the meeting, ILO Director-General was awarded a Diploma and attributes of the title of Honorary Professor of the Academy of Labour and Social Relations (ALASR), in accordance with the decision taken by the ALASR Academic Board.

RUSSIA: FNPR CONCERNED ABOUT ATTACKS ON WORKERS, PENSIONERS

A meeting of the General Council of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) took place in Moscow 21 November 2012. The invited guests included the Minister of Labour and Social Protection, the head of the Pension Fund, members of parliament, leaders of the GCTU, and representatives of the media.

The report on the activities of trade unions in the current labour market conditions, and on the attitude of trade unions to the pension sys-

tem reform was made by FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov.

He said he was alarmed at the global offensive on the rights and interests of employees, and the attempts to shut the unions and the government out of the sphere of regulating the social and labour relations.

He also identified the necessary measures to reform the pension system. First and foremost, compulsory pension insurance should be introduced in line with ILO Convention 102 that implies a minimum replacement rate of 40 per cent of the lost income for the worker with an employment period of at least 30 years. However, the organisation and implementation of social insurance may be significantly hindered by the fact that most workers in Russia, especially in the public sector, get low wages.

The General Council elected Yevgeny Makarov a Vice President of FNPR. Before election he worked as an adviser to the President of FNPR.

TAJIKISTAN: UNIONS PROMOTING DECENT WORK

A conference on «Strengthening the role of Tajikistan trade unions in the promotion and implementation of the Decent Work Agenda» was held in Dushanbe from 15–16 November 2012.

The conference, organised by the ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team and Country Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, was attended by the leaders of member organisations of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan (FITUT).

FITUT President, Murodali Salikhov, delivered a report «On the contribution of Tajikistan trade unions to the implementation of the Cooperation Programme for 2011–13 between the ILO and its constituents in Tajikistan to promote decent work».

Vice President of FITUT, Karchi Karimov, told participants how trade unions protected and represented the interests of informally employed workers. He was, in particular, concerned over the expansion of informal employment in sectors such as trade, construction, agriculture, hotels, restaurants etc.

Today young people aged 15–29 account for 70 per cent of informally employed in Tajikistan.

UKRAINE: FPU WANTS SOCIALLY ORIENTED BUDGET

«Direct involvement of trade unions in the formation of the draft State Budget of Ukraine aims, first of all, to ensure the observance of social rights and guarantees of citizens», said the leader of the Federation

of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) Yury Kulyk.

According to him, the unions have managed to establish cooperation between the social partners as they worked together on the draft budget. Within this framework, the participants in social dialogue held active debates to advocate their proposals, made presentations of important budgetary and regulatory draft acts, and managed to come to mutually acceptable compromises on some budget issues.

A trade union representative takes part in the meetings of the Cabinet of Ministers to present and defend the viewpoint of the trade union side during the consideration of draft regulatory acts, particularly those relating to budgetary issues. «The work on these drafts will not stop even after they've been approved by the Cabinet. We submit our proposals and comments on the drafts that have not been addressed by the Government, but are crucial for the unions to the Committees of the Supreme Rada,» said Yury Kulyk.

If necessary, trade unions can, within a year, propose their amendments to the law on the state budget to the government. The main thing for the unions is to make country's main financial document socially oriented so that it can serve the interests of the people.

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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

The GCTU information bulletin "Inform-Contact" is also distributed by E-mail. Apart from that, the English and French versions of our publication are available on our web site: www.vkp.ru