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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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DECENT WORK MEANS DECENT LIFE!

*Appeal by the General Confederation
of Trade Unions in connection
with the World Day for Decent Work
(7 October 2015)*

Trade unions of the planet will mark the eighth World Day for Decent Work (WDDW) 7 October 2015.

The idea of holding an annual World Day for Decent Work, launched some time ago by the International Trade Union Confederation, is now deeply rooted in the trade union movement of the world, including the countries where the General Confederation of Trade Unions has its affiliates.

Trade unions have come to regard this Day as an opportunity to jointly and globally declare their support for the Decent Work Agenda adopted by the International Labour Organisation in 1999. By organising various activities and events, workers' organisations are drawing the attention of their governments and employers to the need for providing, in the not too distant future, every person with a quality

job, a fair wage, an adequate level of social protection, a safe working environment, and the possibility to freely exercise their rights. The accomplishment of this task would help eradicate worldwide poverty, and ensure decent lives for the working people.

This year's WDDW will be held in an atmosphere of international tensions generated by the deepening financial and economic crisis that is developing against a background of serious geopolitical controversies. This has brought about the business slowdown, the rise in unemployment, the drop in living standards, the devaluation of several national currencies, and the unprecedented "burst" of migration that threatens to undermine the very foundations of the European Union.

All this is happening against the backdrop of hostilities in the Middle East and armed confrontation in eastern Ukraine, accompanied by an aggravation of interstate relations unheard of since the end of the "Cold War". In this situation, governments feel tempted to put the solution of pressing social problems on

the back burner under the pretext of carrying out anti-crisis measures. Attempts are being made to freeze, if not slash, social benefits and wages, economise on the improvement of work conditions, and clamp down on the unions. Particularly aggressive are the multinational companies, which prompted the International Confederation of Trade Unions to encourage its affiliates to use the umbrella motto “End Corporate Greed!” in their WDDW campaigns to be organised this year.

The impact of the global economic crisis is to a greater or lesser extent evident in each state where the GCTU has member organisations. The war of sanctions and boycotts declared by the West on Russia has painfully affected the economies of other CIS states, by virtue of their close economic links with the Russian Federation. This was one of the main reasons for the decline in socio-economic performance, the inflationary surge, devaluation, tensions on the labour market, an increase in hidden unemployment, a drop in real wages, and rising prices of services and consumer goods.

The anti-crisis measures include the austerity policy, with an emphasis on cutting down the incomes of wage and salary earners. In a number of cases, either no provision has been made for wage indexation in 2015, or the sums of wage adjustment are not sufficient to compensate for the rise in consumer prices and utility rates. All this has led to the reduction of real incomes in some countries of the region, and, consequently, to lower living standards for the majority of the population.

While being aware of the gravity of the situation, the GCTU still keeps firmly to its view that ways out of the crisis should not be provided through deteriorating the population’s working and living conditions, and infringing on workers’ and trade unions’ rights. We are confident that during an economic crisis the decent work principles are not devalued, but rather become even more relevant.

The GCTU calls on its affiliates to mark, widely and publicly, this World Day for Decent Work, with due regard for all mentioned factors and trends, as well as specific conditions and pressing socio-economic problems in their countries or industries. We encourage them to insist that any measures to overcome the crisis should be developed and adopted on the basis of respect for the principles of decent work, in the spirit of constructive social dialogue and coordination of efforts with the social partners and all public forces that care about the well-being of working people of their countries.

We are positive that this year’s WDDW will provide new evidence of the commitment of our trade unions to the ideals of the struggle for workers’ rights and interests, against all forms of discrimination, inequality, and social injustice.

BRICS 4TH LABOUR FORUM

On the 9th of July, 2015, within the framework of the BRICS Summit that took place in Bashkortostan’s capital Ufa, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) hosted the 4th Labour Forum, involving trade union leaders from the BRICS

member states – Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

A delegation of Forum participants met with Russian President Vladimir Putin. On behalf of the international trade unionists present, the FNPR leader Mikhail Shmakov handed President Putin the Declaration adopted by the Forum.

The main points of the Declaration are:

1. The increasingly pervasive neoliberal globalisation destroys jobs and the ecosystem of the Earth. In 2014, one per cent of the world's population owned 48 per cent of the global wealth, and by 2016 this "golden percentage" will own more than half of it. Over the past two years, half of all working families have experienced unemployment or underemployment, with 1.2 billion people living in extreme poverty. According to an ILO report, in 2014 the world unemployment amounted to 207 million people. Such an economic model deepens inequalities, weakens democracy, and undermines justice for all.

2. We cannot accept that the austerity measures that have failed in Europe and the United States can still be regarded as the "way out of the crisis."

3. The fundamental rights to trade union representation and collective bargaining are under threat in some states, or subjected to direct attacks in others. Employers in several countries are trying to undermine the right to strike, thus challenging this basic gain of workers recognised by the ILO.

4. Trade unions are an effective force in the fight for democracy, justice and

an environmentally sustainable future. The BRICS trade unions declare they are ready to take their rightful place in this struggle, especially in what concerns creating decent jobs, improving occupational health and safety, protecting the interests of workers, including women and youth, and achieving social justice and sustainable development

ARMENIA: COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT SIGNED

Based on the country's Labour Code, the Government, the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA), and the Republican Employers' Union concluded a national collective agreement for the forthcoming three years 1 August 2015.

The signed document will be instrumental in solving social and economic problems, providing productive employment and decent work, developing social partnership, and maintaining social stability in the country. It envisages the creation of an appropriate institutional framework for social dialogue, and the development of a policy broadly involving the social partners in activities aimed at the social protection of workers.

To ensure its efficient functioning, the agreement stipulates the creation of a Tripartite Commission with equal representation of the parties.

BELARUS: UNIONS PREPARING FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

The leader of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) Mikhail Orda

headed an action group to nominate Alexander Lukashenko for President of the country.

In September, the FPB released a statement calling to support Lukashenko's candidacy in the presidential elections to be held 11 October 2015. The unions believe that it is thanks to him that the country has been enjoying peace, prosperity, and law and order.

“By supporting his candidacy, the statement says, we shall vote for a civic-minded person who never comes around, for an experienced and respected politician.”

Chair of the Executive Committee and Executive Secretary of the Commonwealth of Independent States Sergey Lebedev was appointed head of the CIS observation mission for the upcoming elections.

GEORGIA: UNIONS CRITICAL OF WORKPLACE HEALTH & SAFETY

The Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) and the Independent Union of Construction and Forest Workers issued 10 July 2015 a joint statement on the deplorable safety and health situation in construction and transport enterprises.

Last year, 14 people were killed and 11 seriously injured on construction and demolition work sites alone. All in all, 41 workers were killed, and 66 sustained injuries of varying severity at their jobs in 2014. The main cause of accidents is improper dismantling work or shoddy construction.

The OSH situation in transport is also unacceptable. In this context, the Union of Construction Workers and the GTUC urged the Government to take comprehensive preventive measures, and improve the work of the labour inspectorate.

The Georgian Railroad Company has set up a special commission for labour dispute settlement that will be responsible for control not only over safety and health, but also over pay delays, changes in the size of wages, the observance of work contract provisions, and other conflict situations that may arise in the sphere of labour relations.

KAZAKHSTAN: UNIONS INVOLVED IN DEVELOPMENT OF NEW LABOUR CODE

In early July, the Ministry of Health and Social Development sent the draft of the new Labour Code to the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FPRK), for consideration and comment. At its meetings held in the first decade of the month, the FPRK Working Group reviewed the document, and, following the debate, sent a letter to the Ministry as the key developer of the new Labour Code.

“We think it necessary to stress, the letter says, that the principles and regulations of the draft new Labour Code serve to enhance the position of the employer to the detriment of workers' rights. There are the reasons to assume that the adoption of this Labour Code will build up social tensions in work collectives, and even in entire industries.

“Given the extension of the list of grounds for the termination of work contracts by the employer, the FPRK suggests that a whole number of such grounds should either be specified or withdrawn from the draft new Labour Code.

“Of special concern are the “novel” provisions aiming to restrict the rights of trade unions. In particular, the powers and authority of trade unions will be seriously damaged by such innovations as:

- abolition of wage indexation through the conclusion of collective agreements providing the employer with the exclusive right to individual decision-making on such issues; and
- withdrawal of public control from the system of supervising over the compliance with labour legislation”.

The trade union proposals have been heeded. As she met with the FPRK Working Group, the Minister of Health and Social Development Tamara Duysenova said that 117 amendments and additions proposed by the FPRK had been introduced into the draft paper under consideration.

After it had undergone a series of adjustments, the new Labour Code was adopted by Parliament 3 September 2015.

KAZAKHSTAN: TRIPARTITE COMMISSION MEETS IN ASTANA

The Republican Tripartite Commission on Social Partnership and Regulation of Social and Labour Relations met in Astana 28 July 2015 to consider the

state of labour relations in the country’s regions. Speaking to participants, Deputy Minister of Health and Social Development Birjan Nurymbetov presented the monitoring chart of industrial disputes for July this year.

The results of the monitoring that embraced 227 enterprises indicate that high risks of destabilising the climate in work collectives were revealed in the city of Alma-Ata, and in the Kyzylorda and the East Kazakhstan districts. The oil industry, construction, and mining remain the economic sectors most exposed to the risk of protest actions. One of the main reasons for social discontent is low or delayed wages.

Vice President of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FPRK) Gulnara Zhumageldieva reported on the implementation of the recently adopted Law “On Trade Unions”. She said all FPRK affiliates had successfully completed re-registration with the judicial authorities, as prescribed by law.

The meeting also discussed issues pertaining to the celebration of Labour Day in Kazakhstan.

KYRGYZSTAN: UNIONS REJECT AMENDMENTS

President of the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU) Asylbek Toktogulov met 8 July 2015 with the Minister of the Economy Oleg Pankratov to discuss the amendments to the Kyrgyzstan Labour Code initiated by the Government. The Ministry proposes that a new chapter regulating the working terms for persons

employed by business entities should be added to the Labour Code. Today, this category of employees accounts for more than 90 per cent of the country's workforce.

According to the draft law, the employer will be entitled to dismiss workers at his/her own discretion and on any grounds beyond those stipulated by labour legislation. In addition to that, he/she will not be obliged to pay extra for holiday, weekend and overtime work.

The union leader made doubt that the proposed amendments could significantly improve the country's investment climate. On the 14th of July, the KFTU held a protest rally against the bill under the slogan "Hands off Labour Code!" The event gathered about 500 protesters outside the building of the Ministry of the Economy. Trade unions expressed strong disagreement with the opaque procedure for amending the Labour Code, and challenged the merits of the proposed innovations.

The trade union opinions were taken into account, and the final version of the draft law proposes that fixed-term employment contracts should be signed with this category of employees by mutual agreement and with the consent of the trade union organisation, for a period of not less than one year, and maximum three times in a row

MOLDOVA: UNIONS AGAINST HIGHER RATES

The National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM)

believes that the announced increases in gas and electricity rates will cause a sharp drop in the living standards and in the purchasing power of the population, which has already suffered from the devaluation of the national currency and growing inflation.

"The purchasing power of the population in this country is one of the lowest in the world, – says an FSPM Statement of 20 July 2015. – We occupy the 109th place among 118 countries, the average monthly income of the population is below 88 Euros per person, and 64.5 per cent of our citizens get the lowest and average wages, while 92 per cent of the retired people live on a pension less than 1,500 lei. On the whole, the pension covers only 74% of the subsistence minimum."

It was for this reason that the FSPM demanded that the state authorities reconsider their decision to raise gas and electricity rates, and in this way prevent a dramatic rise in prices. The trade union centre recommended that the Government should adopt a package of measures to render financial support to the population, and in particular, provide for cash compensation payments, and increase wages, pensions and social benefits.

"If the union demands are ignored the CNSM reserves the right to protests," warns the Statement in conclusion.

MOLDOVA: CNSM PRESSING FOR INDEXATION

The National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM) expressed its resentment at the re-

fusal of the Ministry of Labour, Social Protection and Family to develop, and submit to the Government, proposals to link wages, pensions, and personal bank deposits to the consumer price index. The trade union centre believes it should be done to avoid social unrest that may be provoked by raising the electricity and natural gas rates in a context of a continuous rise in consumer prices.

In a letter sent to Moldovan Prime Minister 25 August 2015, the CNSM insists that the state, as the guarantor of constitutional rights, should take action to ensure that every citizen could enjoy a decent living standard.

Based on the current situation in the country, the Ministry must work out recommendations aiming to help provide decent standards of living, social peace and security for the population.

Under current legislation Moldovans are entitled to compensation for the losses incurred by rising consumer prices and services rates. The law requires that all cash income of citizens, including pensions, scholarships, and social allowances should have a linkage with the consumer price index.

Meanwhile, according to trade union calculations, the Government debt in wage arrears has reached almost 150 million lei. In some areas wages have not been paid for a whole year. The Confederation invites the authorities to the negotiation table to consider pressing problems. If workers' demands are not heard, the unions will resort to protests.

CALL FOR ALL-RUSSIA DECENT WORK ACTION

The Executive Committee of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) decided to convene the FNPR General Council 28 October 2015, with two key items on the agenda: the 25th Anniversary of the FNPR and the 110th Anniversary of the Russian trade union movement.

As part of the World Day for Decent Work, the Committee decided to stage an all-Russia trade union event under the umbrella slogan "For Fair Budgetary Policy! Down with Tyranny of Financiers!" Street rallies and meetings in trade union organisations were chosen as the principal forms of activities.

In the meantime, at a meeting of the Russian Tripartite Commission held 24 July 2015, the FNPR bitterly criticised the proposals for the guidelines of fiscal policy made by the Ministry of Finance. The unions believe they actually violate the law, when recommending an indexation of social payments, benefits and pensions at the level of five per cent, which is well below the inflation rate. Wage indexation for civil servants and military personnel in 2016 is not foreseen at all. The minimum wage is planned to be raised to 6,380 roubles (by 7%) not earlier than from 1 October 2016. The Ministry also suggests that the retirement age be increased to 63 years for men and women alike, and the payment of pensions be stopped to working pensioners if their total income exceeds 2.5 subsistence minimums, etc.

The unions' strong opposition to the proposals was written down in a special

resolution on the subject, and FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov informed Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev of the fact during their personal meeting 30 July 2015.

RUSSIA: FNPR ALARMED AT FALLING STANDARDS OF LIVING

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) issued an appeal to President, the Government and Members of Parliament of the Russian Federation 16 September 2015.

“Today the Russian State and Russian society are going through difficult times, – the Appeal says. – And once again, the main burden of the economic crisis falls on the ordinary people, workers and their families. In a context of significant growth of inflation that has exceeded all forecasts the living standards and the quality of lives of the country’s population have dropped substantially. The economic policy pursued by the Government and the Bank of Russia runs contrary to the interests both of workers and domestic producers, and overall to the national interests of the Russian Federation.”

The FNPR demanded that the highest state representatives should:

- raise the minimum wage to the subsistence minimum level for able-bodied population before 2017;
- maintain the existing mechanism for indexing pensions, allowances and social payments – in line with actual inflation;
- ensure the unconditional implementation of the Presidential Decrees on wage raises for certain

categories of public sector employees;

- increase the size of unemployment benefits;
- preserve the Federal Service for Labour and Employment as part of the federal system of executive power bodies.

On the 17th of September, President Putin met with the FNPR leader Mikhail Shmakov. The latter informed him of the Appeal by the FNPR Executive Committee and of the demands put forward by the unions. President said that “despite all difficulties in the economy, the authorities must not forget about the need to solve social issues and provide for workers’ interests. And it will be probably difficult to find effective solutions to these issues without involving the trade unions and their leading organisation.”

UKRAINE: FPU WANTS TRANSPARENCY

The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) issued a statement 1 July 2015 on the forthcoming amendments to the country’s Constitution.

“The Constitutional Commission set in accordance with the decree of Ukraine’s President has been working for three months now, – the statement says. – The process is already said to be nearing its end, and citizens are still unaware in what way the state governance and the electoral system will be changed. The people as the source of power, and civil society organisations are deprived of any tools of influence on the authorities, and cut off from strategic decision-making”

Trade unions are alarmed by the fact that the bill adopted by deputies suggests that local authorities should be stripped of their powers to enforce compliance with human rights and freedoms (as provided for in the Constitution).

The FPU appealed to President, Speaker of the Supreme Rada, and Chair of the Constitutional Commission urging them to:

- make the process of preparing amendments to the Constitution open to civil society organisations and the press, and invite the former to submit their views and opinions to the Constitutional Commission; and
- before introducing the bill to Parliament, organise a broad public debate on the proposed changes on television and in other mass media, in work collectives, local communities, etc.

UKRAINE: UNIONS DEMANDING ADOPTION OF VITAL LAWS

Almost five hundred trade unionists took to the streets of Kyiv 1 July 2015 demanding a speedier adoption of the vital social bills awaiting consideration in Parliament, including draft laws on:

- indexation of monetary incomes of the population;
- reduced taxation of pensions;
- lifting restrictions on the payment of full pensions to working pensioners; and
- lower prices of natural gas for households.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's trade unions in conjunction with the ITUC spoke out

against the approval of the bill "On the state registration of legal entities, individual entrepreneurs, and nongovernmental organisations," and sent a joint letter about it to the International Labour Office.

If approved, the bill will oblige trade unions to undergo official registration to get permission from the Government to carry out their activities. This represents an obvious violation of Article 2 of ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise, which says that workers "shall have the right to establish and, subject only to the rules of the organisation concerned, join the organisations of their own choosing without previous authorisation".

In view of the above, the unions asked the ILO to render them technical assistance in the assessment of the bill.

The unions also believe that the state authorities break current legislation by failing to ensure the inviolability of private property. For example, 5 July 2015 Head of the Odessa regional administration, Mikhail Saakashvili, declared publicly that the city's House of Trade Unions, after its full restoration, will be turned into the headquarters of Ukraine's Navy. Soon after that, 4 September, a fresh attempt was made to capture the Lermontovsky Sanatorium owned by trade unions.

The unions condemned the state official's announcement and reminded him that throughout the world (and Ukraine is not an exception) trade union property is considered to be private property protected by law, and laws must be respected.

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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,
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DEAR READERS

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