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

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### **GCTU REVIEWS RATIFICATION OF ILO CONVENTIONS**

The Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) met in Moscow 13 April 2017 to discuss, among other things, the progress of ratification and compliance with ILO conventions in the countries of the GCTU member organisations. Executive Committee said the affiliates had done a significant amount of work to speed up the ratification of the 11 ILO Conventions, as selected by the GCTU in 2004 for priority ratification, with the support from the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly.

Trade unions are currently involved in the preparations for ratifying in the near future of Conventions 102 and 168 in Azerbaijan; Conventions 97, 173 and 131 in Kazakhstan; Conventions 102, 168 and 173 in Moldova, and Conventions 97, 102, 117, 131, 144 and 183 in the Russian Federation.

It is to be regretted that none of the region's countries has ratified the crucial Convention 168 concerning Employment Promotion and Protection against Unemployment. The meeting also took note of the increasingly frequent prolonged delays in wage payment, which represents a gross violation of Convention 95 ratified by all countries, and called on the unions in the region to do their best to remove the situation and prevent its recurrence in the future

Simultaneously, the Committee expressed concern over the fact that the Report of the ILO Committee of Experts on the Application of Conventions and Recommendations presented to the 105<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference in June 2016 cites numerous cases of ILO conventions, including fundamental ones, being violated in the countries of the region. The affiliates were called upon to continue their

efforts to get the key conventions ratified and duly reflected in national labour legislations and social policies as soon as possible.

Summing up the progress made by the ad hoc Commission on Amending the GCTU Statutes, the Committee approved the draft document as amended, and instructed the Commission to submit it, for consideration and approval, to the GCTU 8th Congress to be held in the autumn of 2017.

The session adopted a statement in connection with the World Day for Safety and Health at Work observed annually on the 28th of April.

### **GCTU COUNCIL SETS DATE OF CONGRESS**

At its session 14 April 2017, the Council of the General Confederation of Trade Unions decided to convene the 8th Congress of the Confederation in Moscow on the 12<sup>th</sup> of September 2017.

The meeting approved the Congress agenda proposals, together with the quotas of representation for affiliated organisations, based on the principle of paid membership.

The session adopted the Appeal to World Trade Unions on the Occasion of the GCTU 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary and the GCTU Appeal in Connection with the Day of International

Workers' Solidarity May 1 (see the full texts below).

### **«TOGETHER WE ARE STRONGER!»: GCTU CELEBRATES 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

A special ceremonial session of the GCTU Council took place in the Palace of Labour in Moscow 14 April 2017 to commemorate the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the General Confederation of Trade Unions.

Attending the event were the leaders of GCTU affiliated organisations, members of the Council, trade union activists, and also guests of honour – trade union veterans, and high-ranking representatives of the leading bodies of the CIS, the EAEC, the Union State of Belarus and Russia, etc.

The report entitled «The General Confederation of Trade Unions: 25 years along the path of struggle and solidarity» was delivered by GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov who dwelt on the history of the Confederation, stressing, in particular, that the unification of trade unions in the GCTU ranks had helped mitigate the hardships of the transition period for workers.

The General Confederation of Trade Unions received numerous messages of solidarity from inter-

national and national trade union organisations, and state and inter-state structures.

At the end of the grand meeting, leaders and veterans of the trade union movement and the heads of partner organisations were awarded the GCTU's gold medal «For Service to the Trade Union Movement» and the Anniversary Silver Medal «25 years of the GCTU».

### **GCTU MAY DAY APPEAL**

A little more than two weeks remains till May 1 when workers all over the world, including the countries of our region, will take to the streets of cities and villages to participate in rallies, meetings, demonstrations and marches to be organised by trade unions, and remind the authorities and employers of their requirements.

Despite all attempts to disguise May Day under other names and slogans, if not abolish it, for us, as for all trade unions in the world, this day remains the main day of the year when we can together declare our determination to strengthen the international class solidarity of working people and their trade unions in the fight for social justice, peace, and decent work.

This year, May 1 will be observed in a global environment marked

by growing political tensions, economic instability, and international terrorism. Armed conflicts in the Middle East and in the southeast of Ukraine continue unabated. The contradictions in the European Union have aggravated, and the problem of migrants and refugees has taken on a dangerous scale, which has triggered a new outbreak of xenophobia, intolerance, and ethnic clashes in Europe and the United States.

This affects gravely the situation in the global economy, the world of work and, consequently, the socio-economic conditions of workers. Financial markets are still dominating the real economy, the informal employment is expanding, more and more employees are being stripped of their rights, the working incomes and social protection are decreasing, while extreme poverty and unemployment, especially among young people, are growing.

Trade unions around the world are seriously looking for a way out of this situation. They see it their priority to protect workers and their families from any attempts by the official authorities and employers to solve the economic difficulties at the cost of worsening their social and economic situation. This is something the unions cannot agree with under any circumstances. They consider it important to fight against the decline in workers' living standards and social security

at all levels of their structure, from primary organisations and to global trade union federations.

A complex and controversial situation has developed in the countries of our region that are going through an economic downturn, albeit for various reasons and to varying degrees. The rising prices and electricity, fuel and utilities rates have led to a significant drop in the living standards. The monitoring of the social and economic situation carried out by the GCTU in the countries of the region has shown that social stratification and inequality are growing everywhere, while in some countries almost a third of the population live below the poverty threshold. Our countries are steadily moving away from the principles of social state as proclaimed in their Constitutions.

Against this background, the anti-union sentiments and attitudes have intensified in the employers' community, mostly at the level of companies and enterprises. They attempt to undermine the unions from within and prevent the building of new trade union organisations. More frequent have become the cases of infringement of the rights of trade unions and interference in their affairs by official authorities, especially at local level. As a consequence, increasingly new barriers are set up to frustrate social dialogue and collective bargaining, while the terms and conditions of

collective agreements concluded are often not fulfilled.

In view of this situation, the Council of the General Confederation of Trade Unions calls on all GCTU-affiliated national trade union centres and Trade Union Internationals, all working people in the region to mark 1 May 2017 as a Day of International Workers' Solidarity by holding mass activities, with a focus primarily on the problems and requirements currently vital for their countries or industries.

Simultaneously, let us jointly demand that the state authorities and employers:

- take effective measures to strengthen the real sector of the economy;
- continue with the efforts to create conditions for decent work for all;
- secure full and productive employment, especially for young people;
- establish decent wages and social benefits;
- raise the minimum wage to a level at least equal to the subsistence minimum;
- reduce poverty and prevent the impoverishment of the working population;
- ensure real equality of men and women in economic and political life;
- guarantee respect for human rights and trade union freedoms;

- strictly observe international labour standards – conventions and recommendations of the International Labour Organisation;
- provide a safe working environment, and take into account the needs of environmental protection in their policies;
- ensure conditions for unhindered social dialogue and collective bargaining; and
- take measures to withdraw the largest possible number of workers from the informal to the formal economy.

Long live labour, the source of economic growth and prosperity!

Long live the 1st of May, the Day of International Workers' Solidarity!

### **APPEAL BY GCTU COUNCIL TO WORLD TRADE UNIONS IN CONNECTION WITH GCTU 25<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY**

The Council of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, meeting in Moscow in the year of the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the GCTU, calls on all friendly trade union organisations to strengthen international solidarity in the face of increasingly new formidable challenges posed by globalisation and its negative consequences for workers.

Built in April 1992, the GCTU was a school of solidarity, cooperation

and joint action for the trade union movements of the newly independent states that emerged on the post-Soviet expanse. In its ranks, they jointly learnt the basics of trade unionism in a transition economy, together looked for ways to uphold their members' interests in the novel situation, and assimilated international trade-union experience. With the support of its affiliates, the Confederation has established and maintains fruitfully cooperation with CIS and EAEU interstate bodies.

Today, in a context of dramatically dropping economic growth in our countries, an almost universal decline in the living standards, weakening social security, increasing social stratification and, as a consequence, intensified attacks on the rights of workers and trade unions, the importance of the GCTU as a structure possessing a vast potential for staging actions of support and solidarity, and organising cooperation and exchanges of struggle experience has become particularly evident.

From the first moment of its establishment, the GCTU took a politically important decision to communicate with the outer trade union world in a spirit of openness and ideological impartiality, on the principles of equality and mutual respect. Time has shown it was the correct choice. It made it possible for our affiliates to successfully fit in with the world trade union com-

munity and actively indulge in its life, while largely retaining their own specific character. The GCTU, as a regional body, has won recognition not only in the international trade union movement, but also among non-governmental organisations in consultative status with the ILO and other specialised UN agencies.

Today, globalism is experiencing a crisis: multinational structures set up within its framework are cracking, trade and economic contradictions are aggravating, and wars and armed conflicts do not abate. We are witnessing the collapse of social welfare built on liberal values. The problem of migrant workers and political refugees, already unprecedented in scale and acuteness, has been further aggravated by a new surge of nationalism and xenophobia.

Recent developments in Europe and the US have ushered in a new phase in world development, when national interests openly enter into an uncompromising confrontation with globalisation modelled according to TNC patterns. The world has come to see that globalisation, in its current form, is not a historically objective reality to be taken for granted, but an artificial creation of transnational capital. That means we can and have to fight it, and this gives us new confidence in our struggles for workers' interests and trade union rights and freedoms.

In these conditions, the GCTU and its affiliates reaffirm their adherence to the principles of trade union solidarity, their willingness to support the fight of the international trade union movement in defence of the common gains, goals and values, indispensable for accomplishing the ambitious objective of the human race, decent work for all.

The list of these goals and values is well known, as it has been clearly defined by the congresses of international, regional and national trade union centres. They include the securing of full and productive employment, especially for young people; the achievement of sufficient work remuneration, social protection and social dialogue; the eradication of hunger and poverty, particularly the poverty of working people; the guarantee of human rights and trade union freedoms; the elimination of all forms of discrimination in working life and social exclusion; the ensuring of equal rights for men and women; the annihilation of forced and child labour, the protection of the environment; and the struggle for a peaceful settlement of armed conflicts now aflame in the hot spots of the planet.

We share the anxiety of the world's trade unions about the unprecedented spread of the informal economy, including its odious forms such as the global supply chains, with lawlessness, overexploitation

and even slave labour actually flourishing in their labyrinths.

Simultaneously, we are concerned over the situation that has evolved as a result of rapid technological progress in the global economy, and may be dangerous to trade unions. The sweeping advance of information and communication technologies, the computerisation and robotisation of production, the increasingly intensive use of atypical employment, such as distance and agency-mediated work, outsourcing and outstaffing, fundamentally change the very nature of work and threaten to transform radically the sphere of labour relations, eroding the very essence of the relationship «employee-employer». There appear actual conditions for the emergence of a parallel, virtual labour market with its low level of social protection, a high degree of alienation of the worker from the workplace, and practical inaccessibility for trade unions.

All this undermines the traditional membership base of trade unions, narrows the scope of organising, and shatters the classical foundations of social dialogue through weakening the position of one of its principal participants – the workers' organisations. This can lead to dire consequences for the future of the world of work.

The General Confederation of Trade Unions fully supports the

measures proposed by the major international and regional trade union movements, whose aim is to make the unions fully equipped for taking up the challenge, delve deeper into the ongoing processes, and get ready to give them an appropriate response.

We are glad that these problems have recently been addressed by the International Labour Organisation, ahead of its 100th Anniversary. We welcome the «Future of Work Centennial Initiative» it launched in 2013, and encourage our affiliates to get directly involved in its implementation and be active participants in the ongoing Dialogues on the future of work.

The ILO's course for decent work and social justice in a world of globalisation, reinforced by its policy documents of recent years, has met, and will meet, support from the trade unions of our region. We will resolutely fight for strengthening the tripartite structure and the standard-setting function of the ILO, for the compliance with international labour standards by all national and global stakeholders of the labour relations and social dialogue. For this reason, the GCTU will continue the trade union monitoring it initiated in 2006 to follow the process of ratification and observance of key ILO conventions in our countries. All attempts to challenge the legitimacy of ILO conventions, whoever makes them, will be decisively rebuffed by us.

Trade unions in our countries have accepted with understanding the programme of ILO modernisation. They are certain that, upon its completion, the Organisation, without losing anything of its unique experience, without deviating from its fundamental principles and tasks, will acquire new qualities and opportunities that will allow it to more promptly and in the spirit of our times respond to the challenges of the changing world of globalisation, and interact more closely and substantively with the UN in the sphere of labour and social protection.

As a regional non-governmental organisation enjoying permanent status with the UN Economic and Social Council and the UN Department of Public Information, the GCTU welcomes the United Nations' course for adding a genuine social dimension to world politics, and will promote and advocate all its important initiatives to this effect. Together with its affiliates, the GCTU declares its intention to contribute to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. We believe the voice of working people, as all social strata of the world's population, should sound louder and more confident in the ECOSOC and other UN agencies and bodies dealing with social problems.

Time puts before the world's trade unions more and more complex tasks whose solution is impossi-

ble without effective interaction. We are firmly convinced that in today's world there are no objective obstacles to the unity of working people and their trade unions. Their inherent desire to strengthen their stance through united efforts will overcome all difficulties in the name of achieving their principal goal: effective protection of workers' socio-economic interests.

## **GCTU AFFILIATES MARK MAY DAY**

**Armenia.** The Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA) and its 20 national industrial unions, together with trade union representatives from all regions of the country marked the Day of International Workers' Solidarity by organising a traditional march along Yerevan's Northern Avenue towards the CTUA Central Office. Participants carried banners «Decent work and decent wages for the working person!», «Decent future for our children!» etc.

The number of participants in the march and the meeting totalled two thousand.

**Belarus.** Marking the May Day, the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) organised traditional mass events throughout the country. Workers and their families, union activists, government officials, youth representatives and



intellectuals took to the streets to participate in rallies, marches, festivals and other open air festivities in order to demonstrate their commitment to peaceful, creative work. This time, the main events took place in the Belarusian capital's Victory Park. The celebration started with laying wreaths and flowers at the Memorial Stele «Hero City Minsk». The participants of the ceremony included, among others, FPB President Mikhail Orda and representatives of industrial trade unions.

**Georgia.** May 1 is a regular working day in Georgia, and solidarity activities were held in Tbilisi only by trade unions, non-governmental organisations and students who staged a protest action against exploitation of workers and business dictatorship. Members of the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) and students marched through Rustaveli Avenue to the Parliament House where they held a meeting voicing their demands on the authorities. Among the slogans carried and chanted by protesters were: «Down with business dictatorship!» «Restore efficient labour inspectorate!» and «Stop daily exploitation of workers!».

**Russia.** Millions of workers throughout the country took to the streets to participate in trade union marches, rallies and meetings. This year's massive All-Russia May Day action

was organised by trade unions under slogans and demands aiming to protect the social and labour rights and economic interests of workers. The total number of its participants amounted to 3,423 thousand, with 1,258 thousand being young people. All in all, 429 marches and 675 meetings were held in 79 regional capitals and 791 towns and settlements. The largest demonstration was held in Moscow where over 130 thousand representatives of work collectives marched through the Red Square.

**Ukraine.** On the morning of 1 May, central Kyiv was actually flooded by activists of the capital's Trade Union Council, representatives of all-Ukraine trade unions and regional organisations of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU), joined by ordinary Kyiv inhabitants with a fellow feeling for May Day. The columns marched to European Place where a multi-thousand meeting was chanting: «Jobs, wages, decent life!», «Long live May Day!», «Peace, work, justice!» There were also slogans demanding better social protection for workers, youth and pensioners, and working people's rights.

#### **AZERBAIJAN: MEMORANDUM SIGNED WITH TAJIKISTAN TRADE UNIONS**

The Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation (AHIK) and the

Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan (FITUT) signed a memorandum of cooperation and joint activities 25 May 2017 in Baku.

As he welcomed the guests at the signing ceremony, President of AHİK and an ITUC Vice President Sattar Mohbaliyev spoke highly of the fraternal ties between the two countries. He reminded the participants that Azerbaijan and Tajikistan were countries with ancient cultures and traditions.

Mr. Mohbaliyev said the FITUT and the AHİK had decided to sign a memorandum whose main objective was to strengthen trade-union solidarity on the basis of bilateral cooperation, with a view to protecting workers' rights and interests.

FITUT President Kodiri Kosim thanked heartily the Azerbaijan trade union leader for the warm reception and expressed the confidence that the fraternal relations between the two organisations would grow even stronger in the future.

### **KAZAKHSTAN: FPRK CONCERNED OVER FATE OF NURBEK KUSHAKBAYEV**

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of April 2017, the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FPRK) issued a statement on the situa-

tion around Nurbek Kushakbaev. The statement came following a court trial in Astana that had sentenced the trade union leader of the *Oil Construction Company* (OCC) Nurbek Kushakbayev to two and a half years in prison. He had been detained after several hundreds of OCC workers went on a two-week hunger strike in protest against the disbanding of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions.

The statement expresses concern over the situation that has evolved in connection with the imprisonment of the trade union leader Nurbek Kushakbayev.

«This country is a law-governed state, and we believe that any struggle for workers' interests must be carried out within the framework of Kazakhstan legislation. But this belief does not lessen our concern about the fate of Nurbek Kushakbayev.

We will defend the rights of all members of the trade-union movement, guided by the fundamental international standards and the country's legislation».

### **MOLDOVA: CNSM HOLDS 3<sup>RD</sup> CONGRESS IN CHISINAU**

More than 200 participants, including Congress delegates and representatives of regional trade-union

organisations, social partners and foreign guests, took part in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Congress of the National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM) held 7 June 2017 in Chisinau. Among those invited to attend was Valery Yuriev, a GCTU Deputy General Secretary.

Delegates and guests discussed the social and economic situation in the country, reviewed the CNSM's activity over the past five years, and identified the strategic directions for the development of the trade-union movement in Moldova for 2017–2022.

Congress elected new CNSM leaders, with Oleg Budza being re-elected as CSNM President by a unanimous vote.

According to him, over the last five years, despite the political instability in the country, trade unions have managed to keep a balance in their relations with the Government, while maintaining their strong position in society.

In the five years to come, the CNSM will promote social justice and decent work principles within the framework of social partnership.

The Congress completed its work by adopting a Declaration calling on the social partners to start negotiations with the aim of meeting all requirements that would help

provide decent work and a prosperous life to workers.

### **RUSSIA: FNPR GENERAL COUNCIL, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEET IN MOSCOW**

The General Council of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) held a regular meeting 3-4 April 2017 in Moscow to review the progress of follow-up to the FNPR 9<sup>th</sup> Congress made in 2016. It was decided to proceed with the planned activities to realise the congress decisions. Council supported the efforts by trade unions to secure decent work, develop social partnership and social policy, and preserve workers' life and health.

The General Council's agenda included the item «The Revolution in 1917 and the situation of workers in Russia». The resolution adopted says that history teaches us that revolutions come mostly where the rights and interests of wage workers, who form the bulk of the population, are violated.

The FNPR Executive Committee held 31 May 2017 summed up the results of the May Day action, and considered the outcome of the collective bargaining and the civil rights campaigns organised by the Federation's affiliates in 2016. EC members also discussed preparations for the World Day for Decent Work to be observed 7 October 2017.

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

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

THE BASIC OBJECTIVES OF THE GCTU ARE:

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

THE GCTU BUILDS ITS ACTIVITIES IN CONFORMITY WITH THE UNIVERSALLY RECOGNISED STANDARDS OF INTERNATIONAL LAW, WITH FULL RESPECT FOR ITS AFFILIATES' COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE AND THE EQUALITY OF THEIR RIGHTS AND DUTIES.  
THE GCTU AFFILIATES NATIONAL TRADE UNION CENTRES OF ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN, BELARUS, GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGYZSTAN, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA, TAJIKISTAN AND UKRAINE, AND ALSO 28 INDUSTRIAL TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### DEAR READERS

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