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

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### **GCTU EXECUTIVE BOARD SCRUTINISES IMPLEMENTATION OF ILO CONVENTIONS**

The Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) met in Moscow 12 April 2018. Among other issues, participants heard a report on the ratification and observance of ILO conventions in countries where the Confederation has affiliates.

The Committee noted with regret that since April 2017 only one new ILO Convention had been ratified in the region's countries (Georgia, No. 144 on Tripartite Consultations). Simultaneously, participants appreciated the initiatives and actions taken by member organisations to speed up the ratification process.

Special attention was drawn to the fact that, owing to many years of persistent efforts by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR), a law had been passed on raising the minimum wage in the country to the subsist-

ence minimum level as from the 1<sup>st</sup> of May this year. Committee members expressed their hope that this step could subsequently lead to the ratification of Convention No. 131 on the minimum wage.

Participants expressed their dismay at the numerous violations in the region's states of ratified ILO conventions, including fundamental ones.

The Executive Committee called on the affiliates to continue their pressure to achieve an earliest possible ratification of the 11 ILO conventions included in the GCTU list of priorities. They should also insist that ratified conventions be to the fullest reflected in their national labour legislations and social policies, and keep monitoring their practical implementation.

The meeting approved the GCTU May Day Appeal, and adopted Statements on the World Day for Safety and Health at Work, the Centenary of the Labour Inspectorate, and the 73<sup>rd</sup> Anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945).

## **GCTU COUNCIL EXAMINES SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION**

The GCTU Council held a meeting in Moscow 13 April 2018 to discuss the current tasks of trade unions in the socio-economic situation prevailing in the region's countries.

Participants noted that the social and economic situation in the countries of the region had somewhat stabilised. The economies and investments in fixed assets had been growing, and the consumer demand reviving. The moderate inflation rates, the stabilisation of national currencies, and the positive trends in the world economy had enhanced the opportunities for major structural and innovative transformations, real economic development, and the solution of social problems.

At the same time, there remains a deficit of decent jobs, with the main challenges being the atypical employment and the outdated methods of personnel training.

Significant income stratification persists in many of the countries. In spite of the general trend towards poverty reduction, a sizeable portion of the population, including people who have jobs, still languishes below the subsistence minimum level (poverty line).

The meeting adopted a detailed decision recommending priority tasks for the affiliated organisations in the struggles they are waging to protect

workers' fundamental rights and interests.

Council also heard information on the activities of the GCTU Executive Committee in the period from September 2017 to April 2018, presented by the Confederation's General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov.

## **GCTU: TRIBUTE TO KILLED AND INJURED IN WORKPLACE ACCIDENTS**

On the eve of the World Day for Safety and Health at Work, the GCTU issued a statement paying a tribute of memory, grief and deep sympathy with workers who died or were injured in occupational accidents.

Despite the falling accident frequency rates, the percentage of injuries in many countries of the region remains high. Quite a big number of people work in high-risk environments, which entails not only human casualties, but also economic losses amounting to almost four per cent of the GDP annually.

Given this, the GCTU suggested that affiliates should more firmly insist that measures to ensure safe conditions for decent work be included in the texts of the general agreements, and sectoral and territorial collective accords.

The Confederation expressed confidence that the unions, by actively using the rights granted to them by

national legislations, will continue demanding that:

- an up-to-date and efficient OSH management system should be gradually developed to help create an enabling environment where occupational safety and accident prevention will become priorities among the development tasks, and
- ILO Convention No. 81 concerning Labour Inspection in Industry and Commerce (1947) be observed in full scale.

### **GCTU MAY DAY APPEAL**

At its meeting in Moscow 12 April 2018, the Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) adopted an appeal urging its affiliates to mark this year's May Day on a large scale by holding marches, demonstrations, rallies, and other mass protest actions under slogans relevant to their countries or industries, in a spirit of unity and solidarity.

"Today," says the Appeal, "despite the rapid advance of the fourth technological revolution and the economic modernisation based on its achievements, the position of wage- and salary-earners has not changed for the better. The world is still dominated by monopoly capital mercilessly exploiting the working people. The ruling classes and transnational corporations look for ways out of arising economic difficulties by neglecting workers' fundamental interests and rights. Global unemployment has acquired

unprecedented scales, and hits primarily young people. The poverty of workers and pensioners has been growing; the income gap widening; the taxes and payments becoming increasingly burdensome; and the discrimination against women, migrants and other poorly protected segments of society continues. Armed conflicts do not abate, and international tensions keep escalating.

"This May Day will be the first after the 8<sup>th</sup> Congress of the GCTU where the Confederation's affiliates outlined a programme of joint struggles in defence of workers' rights for another five years. Its priorities include decent work for all, reduction of poverty, creating new jobs, fairer distribution of incomes; full and timely payment of wages; raising the minimum wages to the subsistence minimum level; gender equality, and protection of human rights, trade union freedoms and other most often abused rights and interests of workers, pensioners and students.

"In most countries of the region, these objectives will have to be implemented in a typical environment characterised by a slowdown in economic development aggravated by growing geopolitical tensions. One deplorable consequence of this will be almost universal growth of inflation and unemployment, a drop in the purchasing power of salaries and social benefits, a tangible fall in living standards, aggravation of labour migration problems, and infringement of the rights of workers and trade unions.

“The GCTU member organisations, like other trade unions around the world, are engaged in a relentless struggle to put an end to these and other negative realities. However, their efforts have not always been successful, and the accomplishment of the goals will require new mobilisation of forces and stronger solidarity and unity of action at the national, regional and world levels.

“Let us do all we can to make the voice of trade unions as speakers of workers’ aspirations heard and heeded by the governments and employers whenever they develop or implement any measures concerning social and economic policy. Let us say together:

- Give working people decent jobs, decent wages, decent and safe employment conditions, and decent lives!
- Preserve and expand productive employment as a guarantee of sustainable economic growth, as the right way to economic revival!
- Ensure decent pay and social benefits; raise the minimum wage to a level not lower than the subsistence minimum!
- Curb the growing prices and tariffs; stop the sliding of a significant portion of working population into poverty!
- Say “No!” to the anti-union policies and uncontrolled activity of TNCs in the countries of the region! Stop the anti-union mayhem in transnational companies!
- “Yes!” to the development and strengthening of social dialogue,

strict observance of international labour standards as fixed in ILO conventions and recommendations and in the Decent Work Agenda!

Long live the international solidarity of workers and trade unions! Long live May 1, the International Workers’ Day!”

## **REGION’S UNIONS MARK MAY DAY**

**Belarus:** May Day in the country has always been viewed as a symbol of international solidarity of working people. This year’s official celebrations began with the ceremony of laying flowers to the obelisk “Hero City Minsk”. By tradition, the festive procession in the Belarusian capital started at the Sports Palace. Marching shoulder to shoulder were leaders of industrial trade unions, activists from primary organisations, advanced workers, labour veterans and students.

**Georgia:** On the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, a mass rally and a march along Rustaveli Avenue to the Houses of Parliament took place in central Tbilisi. The demonstrators were beating the drums and chanting “Life to Workers!” The protest action, which focused on the recent deaths of coalminers in Tkibuli, was organised by trade unions. Its participants demanded an improved legislation on labour rights, decent and safe work, normal wages and guaranteed days off.

**Russia:** Members of work collectives across the country joined the rallies and processions held by trade unions under the umbrella motto “For decent work, for a fair social policy!”

Participants in the massive all-Russia trade union action put forward demands aimed at protecting workers’ social and labour rights and economic interests. Over 3.5 million workers were involved in various events, with 1.3 million of them being young people. Throughout the country, 476 manifestations and processions and 631 rallies were held in 79 regional capitals and 823 cities and towns.

The largest demonstration took place in Moscow, where about 120,000 workers marched through the Red Square. Their main slogans were: “A decent salary makes a decent life!”, “Provide safe work to every employee!”, “Russian citizens need decent work and decent wages!”, “We want peace and stability!”, “Youth without work means Russia without a future!”

**Ukraine:** Columns of protesters marched through central Kyiv to European Square, chanting: “Jobs, wages, decent life!”, and carrying slogans calling for better social protection for workers, youth and pensioners, and for respect of workers’ rights.

The march ended up with a many thousand strong rally organised by the unions. Speakers urged the

Ukrainian government to ensure decent pay, eliminate wage arrears, take measures to halt the growth of unemployment and create new jobs.

### **ARMENIA: NAIRIT WORKERS DEMAND PAY**

A great number of workers of the Nairit Chemical Plant gathered in front of the Prime Minister’s residence in Yerevan 16 May 2018. They demanded a restart of the company and payment of the wages they had earned for the last four months.

The chair of the plant’s trade union organisation Grach Tadevosyan said the term of the employment contract concluded between the Ministry of Emergency Situations of Armenia and the employees of the company security service had expired in late December 2017. However, the order to dismiss the employees had not been issued, and they continued working without pay.

“We demand that all problems of the 116 employees whose terms of employment expired 31 December should be resolved. We know that the full amount of the Ministry’s wage arrears is about 8 million drams (USD 16,575). This is not a very big sum, and the government can oblige the Ministry to pay out the salaries,” Grach Tadevosyan said. He hoped the new leadership of the Republic would find a positive solution to the issue.

## **BELARUS PRESIDENT MEETS WITH UNION LEADER**

President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko met with the leader of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB), Mikhail Orda 2 May 2018.

The main issue discussed at the meeting was the activity of the FPB to provide adequate protection of workers' rights. "I support the idea that the influence of our unions should be significant, at least, high enough for you to be aware of what is happening in work collectives in order to be able to protect the interests of our people," said Alexander Lukashenko.

The participants of the meeting touched upon the issues of upgrading the trade union structure, and, among them, creating new primary organisations and reforming the system as a whole.

President Lukashenko was interested to hear how the FPB was maintaining cooperation with the International Labour Organisation. "I'd like to know," he specified, "whether the ILO still has claims to us today, after the situation has been seriously amended."

Mikhail Orda briefed the President on the above questions and, in his turn, touched upon several other issues. In particular, he mentioned the FPB proposals on the amendments to the draft Labour Code, and the possibilities of salary increases in the public sector.

The Head of State supported the Federation of Trade Unions practically on all the issues raised, and said he expected the FPB to proceed with controlling and monitoring the developments that are currently of concern to workers in various fields of activity.

## **GEORGIA: UNIONS WANT TO SUSPEND WORK AT MINES**

President of the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) Irakli Petriashvili sent a letter to the country's Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili demanding that the work in the country's mines be suspended till the working conditions had been improved.

On the night of 5 April 2018, the lateral rocks of the tunnel collapsed in the "Mindeli" mine. On the spot, six miners were killed, with three more injured. In this connection, the sixth of April in Georgia was declared a day of mourning for the dead.

"We insist that all work in the mines be immediately stopped, and their rehabilitation be carried out. During the period of time the coal mines will stay closed, the workers should get compensation for their lost wages," said Vice President of the Confederation Tamaz Dolaberidze.

The unions demand that the authorities create decent working conditions and raise the salaries of miners.

According to GTUC statistics, over the first quarter of 2018 eighteen people have been killed in workplace accidents, with another twelve seriously injured.

### **GEORGIA: CLAIMS OF TRAIN DRIVERS SATISFIED**

Train drivers of the Tbilisi Metro launched simultaneously a strike and a hunger strike 4 June 2018 demanding higher wages. This paralysed the work of all 23 metro stations. Since the metro carries daily up to 300,000 passengers, the city was on the verge of a transport collapse,

Representatives of the train drivers' union said the mayor of Tbilisi had agreed to raise wages, but not earlier than in 2019, and that angered the strikers. The negotiations that followed were difficult. For a long while, the municipal authorities were not willing to make concessions to the striking drivers. However, 6 June 2018, Rati Kapanadze, a spokesperson for the strike participants, disclosed that the talks had finally resulted in an agreement reached with the mayor's office to raise the wages.

"The mayor's office has undertaken the responsibility to solve our problems. There is no reason why we shouldn't trust them, and it's our hope that in the course of teamwork our requirements will be met," he said in conclusion.

### **RUSSIA: UNIONS REJECT HIGHER RETIREMENT AGE**

President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) Mikhail Shmakov sent the following letter to Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev 8 June 2018:

"The Government of the Russian Federation is currently considering a possibility of raising the retirement age. In this connection, we believe it necessary to once again inform you of the position of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia and its member organisations on this issue.

"Until now, this country has not ratified any of the conventions regulating the sphere of workers' social protection.

"ILO Convention No. 102, repeatedly reviewed by expert communities both inside and outside the country and practically ready for ratification, has been, once again, removed by the government from the agenda of the Russian Tripartite Commission. In the meantime, not a single initiative aiming to reform the social protection system has brought any tangible benefits to workers, while the "optimisation" and "modernisation" of this sphere have only reduced their social protection.

"Given all this, the FNPR does not consider it appropriate to support any further initiatives regarding social protection reform before the

fundamental ILO conventions in this field have been ratified.

As for the so-called ‘unpopular’ measures, the FNPR insists on a preliminary nation-wide discussion of these proposals, the ways of their implementation, and their social consequences.”

Meanwhile, the Russian Tripartite Commission for Regulating Social and Labour Relations held a meeting 18 June 2018 to discuss the draft law on raising the retirement age. The decision taken following the debates makes the reservation that the trade union party of the Commission does not support the draft federal law “On Amending Certain Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation on the Issues of Appointment and Payment of Pensions”.

The trade unions believe that the main path to replenish the pension fund is through increasing wages and legalising the shadow business.

They also insist on full ratification of ILO Convention No. 102 “On Minimum Standards of Social Security”, and are ready to act should their demands be ignored.

### **UKRAINE: STOP ATTACKS ON UNION RIGHTS**

Violation of trade union rights by authorities and employers have become systematic, and this problem needs an immediate solution. This statement was made at a press-con-

ference held 11 May 2018 in Kyiv “On the attacks against the rights of trade unions, including their property rights”.

President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) Grygory Osovy told the press conference that, contrary to Article 41 of the Ukrainian Constitution proclaiming the inviolability of the private property right, the government had been grossly violating the property rights of trade unions for many years. Through illegal court rulings on alienating objects of trade union property and recognising them as belonging to the government, 40 major facilities had been seized from trade unions over the period 2011–2017.

Based on court decisions, the houses of trade unions and the buildings of training centres in the Transcarpathian, Ivano-Frankivsk, Chernigov and Poltava Regions have been seized in favour of the government in 2014–2016 alone. The litigation over the trade union houses continues in the Odessa, Khmelnytsky and Chernivtsi Regions.

“We demand from the Government and Parliament a legislative recognition of the legal status of trade union property, with due regard for the trade union proposals,” said Osovy. “The FPU and its affiliates condemn the attempts by local authorities to lay hands on trade union houses. We insist on the cancellation of the Government’s order regarding the transfer of trade union facilities, primarily the homes of territorial trade union



organisations, in the Transcarpathian and Poltava Regions. We have also appealed to the Cabinet of Ministers urging them to submit a draft law incorporating the union proposals to the Supreme Rada, with the aim of recognising the legal status of trade union property.”

### **UKRAINE: COAL MINERS PROTEST**

The Coal Miners’ Union of Ukraine held a protest action in Kyiv at the walls of the Supreme Rada (Parliament), the Cabinet of Ministers, and the Ministry of Energy and Coal Industry 19 June 2018.

Participants called for an urgent consideration of the bill on the amendments to the law on the state budget of Ukraine for 2018.

The bill provides for an increase in the financing of the coal mining industry by 2.8 billion hryvnias, as well as repayment of arrears of wages to miners, and their timely payment in the future.

The unions are particularly concerned about the chronic delays in wage payment to coal miners, particularly as over the last two and a half months the wage arrears have exceeded 751 million hryvnias.

The coal miners’ union called on all fraternal sectoral trade unions to display support and solidarity with the miners in their struggle to keep the state-owned coal mines going, and

protect workers’ constitutional rights and guarantees.

### **TAJIKISTAN: NEW TRIPARTITE AGREEMENT SIGNED**

A General Agreement between the Government, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions (FNTU) and the Employers’ Association of Tajikistan for 2018–2020 was signed in Dushanbe 4 April 2018.

Speaking at the signing ceremony, FNTU President Kodiri Kosim said that over the previous period of 2015–2017 a great deal had been done within the framework of social partnership to protect workers’ labour, legal, and socio-economic rights and guarantees.

Thus, in July 2016, a new Labour Code was adopted in Tajikistan, and trade union organisations had actively participated in the accomplishment of joint decent work programmes and projects to reduce the informal employment. A lot of work had been done to involve employers in social partnership, and ensure timely payment of wages.

“I’d like to assure the participants,” said Kodiri Kosim, “that, for its part, the FNTU will make every effort to secure the implementation of the General Agreement we have just now signed. The trade unions of our republic will be giving support to the Government’s efforts aiming to improve the well-being of our people, and defend workers’ rights and interests”

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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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