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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU CALLS FOR RATIFICATION OF ILO CONVENTIONS

The Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU) met in Moscow 4 April 2013 to review the progress in the ratification and observance of international labour standards by the countries of the region. The main accent was placed on the importance of the 11 ILO Conventions which the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly had called on its members to ratify, responding to the initiative by the GCTU.

The Committee noted that, despite all efforts by trade unions, the process had slowed down. Particularly regrettable is the fact that none of the countries has ratified Convention No.102 on the minimum standards of social security and Convention No.168 on employment promotion and protection against unemployment, both essential for workers.

Against this background, the unions are increasingly alarmed at the overt

violations of ratified international labour standards by some national governments and employers in the region, including such fundamental conventions as No.No.29 and 105 on forced labour, No.87 on freedom of association, and No.98 on the right to organise and bargain collectively.

Under the circumstances, the GCTU again appealed to the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly last November urging it to make its member states aware of the necessity to ratify and implement the ILO conventions. The IPA Council supported the GCTU and recommended that the national parliaments put the issue on their agendas and find the ways to solve it.

The Executive Committee expressed the hope that the combined efforts by trade unions and parliamentarians would push ahead the process of ratification. The GCTU believes that progress in this direction will provide an additional guarantee that anti-crisis programmes in the region will not be carried out at the ex-

pense of intensifying the exploitation of employees, reducing their living and working standards, and curtailing social guarantees.

The session approved a plan for future joint actions of the GCTU and the International Organisation "Chernobyl Union" aiming to strengthen the social protection of Chernobyl disaster victims. The Executive Committee also discussed how new information technologies could best be used in the work of the Confederation and its affiliates.

GCTU COUNCIL REVIEWS SOCIO-ECONOMIC SITUATION

At its meeting in Moscow 5 April 2013, the GCTU Council reviewed the socio-economic situation in Newly Independent States, and considered the subsequent steps to be undertaken by trade unions to protect the workers' interests.

Following the debates, the Council recommended that the GCTU affiliates should more energetically promote the principles of decent work in the course of formulating national development strategies, and help consolidate the efforts of all actors in social partnership to accomplish the goals of social justice.

The Council decided to establish the Youth Council of the GCTU, as well as commissions on:

- union organising and international cooperation;
- protection of workers' socio-economic interests and legal matters;

- safety and health, environmental issues, and social security;
- humanitarian cooperation and information; and
- gender equality.

GCTU MAYDAY APPEAL

On the eve of the International Day of Workers' Solidarity 1 May, the Council of the General Confederation of Trade Unions issued an Appeal calling on trade unions in the region to mark this day on a broad scale by organising demonstrations, rallies, protest marches, street processions, workers' meetings and other forms of manifestation.

"In the countries of the region, the Appeal says, mass discontent and social tensions are building up, which calls for a new mobilisation by trade unions to protect the workers' interests and enhance social dialogue."

The Council recommended that GCTU affiliates organise May Day events under the following slogans and demands:

- **Yes** to job-rich economic recovery!
- **No** to growing unemployment and enterprise closures!
- **Yes** to decent work and productive employment!
- **No** to the impoverishment of working people!
- **Yes** to high pay ensuring decent lives for workers!
- **Yes** to minimum pay not less than the subsistence minimum!
- **No** to outside interference in trade union activities!
- **Yes** to the respect of workers' and unions' rights, the observ-

ance of ILO conventions and other international labour law instruments!

GCTU STATEMENT ON WORLD SAFETY DAY

“Every year rallies and other such activities are organised on the 28th of April in many countries around the world to draw public attention to the outstanding issues of occupational safety and health, and identify new challenges to labour protection.

“Statistics reveal alarming world trends. According to some estimates, around 160 million people suffer currently from occupational diseases, and about 270 million accidents occur annually, with almost two million people dying from workplace injuries or occupational illnesses.

“The World Day for Safety and Health at Work is a powerful and significant international campaign. Trade unions in the Commonwealth of Independent States support the ILO idea to devote this year’s World Safety Day to the problem of preventing occupational diseases. The unions consider it currently important for the CIS countries to create jobs with decent working conditions, free from industrial hazards, and excluding occupational accidents and diseases.

“To implement the tasks, it will be necessary to:

- bring the current national health and safety standards and regulations in line with international

requirements, especially as a number of CIS countries have joined the WTO; and

- raise the efficiency of public control over occupational safety and health, and improve the performance of trade unions’ labour inspectorates.

“The GCTU and its affiliates will largely contribute towards achieving these goals”.

GCTU AFFILIATES MARK MAYDAY

Armenia

On the 1st of May, which Armenia celebrates officially as the Labour Day, the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA) organised street marches in central Yerevan and a rally that gathered over a thousand representatives of all industry-based unions.

“We must now do all to make the voice of trade unions heard and taken into account as the Government develops and implements various measures to overcome the current difficult situation,” CTUA President Eduard Tumasian told the rally.

Belarus

May Day activities were organised by trade unions in all regions of Belarus. According to official data, over 30,000 people took part in the demonstration staged in the municipal Yanka Kupala Park of the country’s capital Minsk.

“The Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) stands for higher wages, for decent working condi-

tions, and for modernising enterprises all over the country,” said FPB President Leonid Kozik.

Georgia

The Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) celebrated the Day of International Workers' Solidarity by organising a mass action in Rustaveli Avenue, the main street in Tbilisi. As GTUC President Irakli Petriashvili said, “May 1 is a day when all workers must take to the streets, voice their concerns, and demand their solutions.”

Russia

All major cities and district centres were the scenes of mass marches, demonstrations, rallies, and meetings organised by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) under the theme “Decent Work, Decent Pay!” The largest of them took place in the cities of Grozny (120 thousand), Moscow (90 thousand), Yakutsk (55 thousand), Khabarovsk (40 thousand), Perm (37 thousand), Ekaterinburg and Vladivostok (25 thousand in each), Kursk (24 thousand), Magadan (23 thousand), St. Petersburg and Omsk (15 thousand in Each).

Participants demanded that the authorities and employers provide decent wages, productive employment, and safe work, and respect workers' rights to organise and enjoy a comfortable habitat. Trade unions reminded that the average wage statistics, however favourable, could never conceal the real-life poverty of working Russians. Two thirds of them get for their work less than 20 thousand roubles (slightly above \$600) a month.

FNPR considers it necessary to:

- take a firmer stand on what concerns the implementation of the General Agreement for 2011–2013;
- seek to improve the labour relations and their legal regulation, based on the Decent Work Agenda promoted by the ILO.

Ukraine

The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine reports that May Day events were held in 21 regions of the country. The largest union rally numbering almost 30 thousand participants, took place in Simferopol, the capital city of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. Mass rallies were also held in the Dnipropetrovsk, Donetsk, Zaporozhye, Lugansk and Odessa Regions.

AZERBAIJAN: ORGANISING COVERAGE GETTING WIDER

A session of the Executive Committee of the Azerbaijan Trade Unions Confederation (AHIK) reviewed the Trade Unions Statistical Report for 2012. According to the paper, 78 new trade union organisations had been created in the country by 1 January 2013, while the number of organised workers in the private sector had increased by 6.6 per cent. Out of the complaints lodged by rank-and-file members with trade union bodies, 98.6 per cent were resolved in favour of the complainants.

Participants stressed that cooperation with the social partners to ensure better protection of workers' interests was the basic principle of trade union activity in the coun-

try. The principal task of AHIK for the near future is to get actively involved in the legislative policy of Parliament, and promote the ratification and implementation of ILO conventions and other international acts of socio-economic nature.

The Executive Committee summed up the results of the national review contest for the title of “Best Company for Creating a Healthy and Safe Working Environment in 2012.”

BELARUS: FPB DEMANDS BETTER WORK CONDITIONS

On the eve of the World Day for Safety and Health at Work, the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) issued a statement demanding that the Government and employers should create the proper work conditions in enterprises, as every worker is entitled to safe work, a favourable environment, easily available personal protective equipment, and a hot meal.

Simultaneously, FPB suggested that employees working in hazardous conditions should be annually sent for 14 days to health spas for recovery at the expense of the employer.

Belarusian trade unions believe prevention of occupational diseases to be a far more effective and less costly measure than treatment or rehabilitation.

GEORGIA: LABOUR CODE TO BE AMENDED

Draft amendments to the Labour Code of Georgia prohibiting the

employer to fire workers without justification were approved by the country’s Parliament in its first reading 7 May 2013. The next step will be line-item discussion.

The changes in the Labour Code will also deal with the problem of paying overtime and work on weekends and public holidays. For instance, the worker will get the right to get additional leave instead of the monetary compensation. “Under the old Labour Code, the minimum length of the work week was 41 hours, but the employer could make it longer, without even paying the worker an extra cent. According to the new draft Code, each overtime hour will have to be paid,” says the Head of the Legal Service of the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) Raisa Liparteliani.

“Prepared with due regard for the recommendations of international organisations, the draft Code provides a balance of workers’ and employers’ interests,” said GTUC President Irakli Petriashvili.

MOLDOVA UNIONS: MINIMUM PAY RISE TOO MODEST

As a result of negotiations with the employers and the Cabinet of Ministers, the National Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova (CNSM) was able to get a rise in the minimum pay for the real sector of the economy. As from 1 May 2013, the minimum wages will have grown from 1,300 to 1,400 lei (about 114 dollars) a month.

The parties managed to find a compromise formula for calculating the size of the minimum wage in the sector. Originally, CNSM insisted that the sum should be raised by 300 lei to reach 1,600 lei. However, the increase negotiated was only 100 lei.

A CNSM Vice President Petru Chiriac said the unions were not happy with such an insignificant increase, and were planning to revisit the issue in the near future and get the minimum wage in the real sector raised up to 1,600 lei a month.

MOLDOVA: CNSM EAGER TO BUILD PROSPEROUS SOCIETY

The newspaper "Vocea Poporului" (Voice of the People) of 28.05.2013 carried an Appeal by the Confederation of Trade Unions of Moldova in connection with the economic and social situation in the country.

On behalf of more than 450,000 union members, the Appeal expressed concern about the socio-economic and political developments in the country. The growth has recently been almost entirely due to foreign exchange remittances sent by Moldovan migrants from abroad, and it is one of the reasons why the living standards in the country remain very low.

While expressing their support for Moldova's pro-European course, CNSM said it would further do all within its powers to promote reforms in the country, aimed at strengthening the rule of law, creating favour-

able conditions for economic development, and providing a decent life for all citizens.

The unions called on politicians, the social partners, civil servants, and employees in all sectors to consolidate their efforts with a view to building up a prosperous society.

RUSSIA: BILL TO BAN AGENCY LABOUR PASSES SECOND READING

On the 26th of April 2013, the State Duma adopted in the second reading the draft law "On Amendments to Some Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation." The document, in particular, refers to measures that are expected to prevent employers from evading the signing of employment agreements through unreasonable use of civil law contracts, mechanisms of agency-mediated labour or other such dodges.

Commenting on the event, President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR), Mikhail Shmakov, said "the law on the de-facto prohibition of agency labour is a hard-won one, and the unions have been struggling for one-and-a-half years to get it approved in the second reading. The bill bans this form of actually slave labour when an employee feels unprotected by labour laws and stripped of all rights in the workplace. It is our hope that the draft law to prohibit agency labour, aiming to protect the rights and interests of workers in the Russian Federation, will be

finally adopted and signed by the President.”

TAJIKISTAN UNIONS HOLD ANNIVERSARY CONGRESS

The country's capital, Dushanbe, hosted the Anniversary 20th Congress of Trade Unions of Tajikistan 25 May 2013. The event was attended by 129 delegates from 20 industry-based unions and three territorial trade union organisations, as well as a great number of foreign delegations, including representatives of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, the International Confederation of Trade Unions, and the ILO.

As he presented the activity report, President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan (FITUT) Murodali Salikhov voiced particular concern over the spread of informal employment, whose share was 95.3 per cent in trade, 91.2 per cent in construction, 91 per cent in hotels and bars, and 69.1 per cent in nongovernmental enterprises.

A resolution adopted by the Congress declared the protection of workers in the informal sector to be a priority in trade union activities for the period 2013–2020.

Bro Valery Yuriev, a Deputy General Secretary of the GCTU, addressed Congress with a message of solidarity which was warmly welcomed. He described FITUT as a reliable support for workers, a reputable public organisation enjoying well-deserved respect of its social partners in the

country, among all affiliates of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, and in the world trade union community.

Congress elected the new FITUT leadership. Bro Murodali Salikhov was elected President of the Federation for another term of office.

UKRAINE: WORKERS GET WORTHY GIFT FOR SAFETY DAY

On the 25th of April 2013, President of Ukraine Viktor Yanukovich signed the Law “On the approval of the National Social Programme for 2014–18 to improve the occupational safety and health and the working environment.”

The signing of the law was one of the main results of the cooperation that the Government, the trade unions and the employers have maintained in the field of occupational safety and health in recent years. The programme includes most of the proposals put forward by trade unions, among them:

- implementation of OSH management systems at the national, sectoral and regional levels;
- ratification of ILO Conventions No. 121 on the Benefits in the Case of Employment Injury and No. 187 on the Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health; and
- participation of the Fund of Social Insurance against Occupational Accidents and Diseases in the financing of training programmes for union activists in safety and health.

UKRAINE: UNIONS KEEPING DRAFT LABOUR CODE UNDER CONTROL

The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) has well in advance prepared over 150 proposals to improve the draft of a new Labour Code adopted by the Supreme Rada in the first reading

The news was announced by an FPU Vice President Serhiy Ukrainets at a briefing for regional media representatives held 1 June 2013. The position of trade unions is that the new Labour Code must be in the best interests of the working people.

One innovation in the document is that the employment contract must be concluded in a written form, which will enable the worker to defend his or her rights on legal grounds.

FPU has also proposed that the employer should be forbidden to involve third parties to replace workers engaged in a strike or other collective actions.

At the same time, the unions are greatly concerned about the new rule in the draft law providing that “should the possibilities for settlement of a labour dispute be exhausted, the employer can resort to a temporary shutdown or a significant cut in the production volumes, with simultaneous termination of paying wages to part of workers or all workers”. In practice, this would mean a lockout.

In the course of further refinement of the bill, FPU will insist on the maxi-

mum consideration of trade union proposals, and on the withdrawal of provisions, directly or indirectly infringing the labour rights of people.

UKRAINE: FPU LEADER HEADS NATIONAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC COUNCIL

On the 18th of May 2013, Ukraine's President appointed the Head of the Joint Representative Body of National Trade Union Associations and the FPU leader Yury Kulyk as Chair of the National Tripartite Social and Economic Council

The main tasks of the National Council are:

- development of a consolidated position of the parties in social dialogue concerning the strategy of the country's socio-economic development, and the ways to solve the current problems in this area;
- preparation of agreed recommendations and proposals for submission to the President, the Supreme Rada and the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on questions related to the formulation and implementation of government economic and social policies, and the regulation of labour, economic, and social relations.

CAR AND FARM MACHINE BUILDERS HOLD CONFERENCE

A GCTU Deputy General Secretary Albert Potapov took part in the 7th ordinary report-and-election conference of the Trade Union International of Automobile and Farm Machine

Building Workers held 17 April 2013 in the town of Moskovsky near Moscow

The activity report was delivered by TUI President Andrei Fefelov who is also the leader of the Russian Union of Automobile and Farm Machine Builders.

Both the reporter and delegates repeatedly stressed that the activities of the TUI were closely linked with the activity of the GCTU in which they participate actively. Conference expressed satisfaction with the work done during the period under review.

At the end of the Conference Andrei Fefelov was unanimously re-elected President of the TUI, and Bro Valery Kuzmich Vice President

CIS OIL AND GAS UNIONISTS DISCUSS TRAINING

A seminar for trade union leaders and activists from oil and gas companies of CIS countries was held in Antalya (Turkey) from 18–25 May 2013. Natalia Podshibyakina, a GCTU Deputy General Secretary, attended the event and made a report on one of the topics.

Greetings and messages of solidarity came to the participants from General Secretary of the GCTU, Vladimir Scherbakov, trade union leaders of CIS countries, and a number of international trade union organisations.

The keynote report on “International legal regulation of personnel train-

ing and retraining. The forms and methods of trade union work in the present-day conditions” was delivered by Melik Mirzoyev, General Secretary of the GCTU-affiliated International Confederation of Trade Unions of Workers in the Oil and Gas Industries, and Construction Workers in the Oil and Gas Complex.

As a final document, the participants adopted Recommendations of the International Seminar. The document recommends, among other things, that local trade union organisations, national trade union centres and industry-based trade unions spend at least 5–6% of their budgets on training and development of trade union cadres and activists.

COMMUNICATIONS UNIONS MEET IN MINSK

The Belarusian Communications Workers' Union hosted a Session of the Council of the International Organisation of Communications Workers' Unions (IOCWU) in Minsk 4 June 2013.

The meeting, chaired by IOCWU President Anatoly Nazeikin, discussed topical issues of trade union activity in the sphere of social and labour relations.

Members of the Council and the heads of IOCWU affiliates made reports on the socio-economic situation of communications workers in their respective countries.

In the conclusion of the session, a number of documents were adopted by the Council.

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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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