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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU CALLS TO MARK WDDW-2014

The General Confederation of Trade Unions issued a statement 18 August 2014 in connection with the World Day for Decent Work to be held 7 October 2014.

“On the 7th of October 2014, – the Statement says, – the trade union movement will for the seventh time mark the World Day for Decent Work. This day has become a deserving complement to May 1, the Day of International Workers’ Solidarity, when organised employees all over the world take to the streets to reaffirm their unity and make their demands. The World Day for Decent Work gives trade unions in all countries an additional opportunity to put forward their major requirements to the governments and employers, and express their support for the Decent Work Agenda adopted in 1999 by the ILO.

“This year’s World Day for Decent Work will be held under the main slogan ‘For Social and Climate Justice!’ And this is not accidental.

The global financial and economic crisis which broke out in 2008 has resulted in a profound social crisis that is still felt in most countries. It has brought the unprecedented rise in mass unemployment embracing over 200 million inhabitants of the planet, including 75 million young people, the growing poverty with more than 1.2 billion people living in abject poverty, and the ever increasing social inequality. Whereas hundreds of millions of families can hardly make ends meet, the number of millionaires is growing at a record pace. Over the last year alone the army of millionaires went up by 15 per cent. Such a jump has not been observed since the beginning of the 2000s. Their aggregate invested capital is estimated at 52.6 trillion dollars, and about 40 per cent of the fortunes were made for the last five years.

“The present-day economic system, enforced on the world, has led not only to disastrous social consequences, but also to grave negative effects on natural environment. The hunt for profits at the expense of the environment has caused a

change in the climatic conditions. In the coming decades, this will pose a serious global threat to sustainable development, the reduction of poverty, the protection of human rights, and world peace. Suffering from the climate change are the poorest inhabitants of this planet, particularly those living in geographically unstable areas, primarily women and children, rural population, residents of spreading urban slums, and indigenous people.

“Simultaneously, the offensive on workers’ rights continues. Anti-union campaigns instigated by employers and authorities at different levels have become more frequent. The Employers’ Group at the International Labour Organisation made an attempt to undermine the ILO supervisory machinery. The employers have been trying to endanger the right to strike, a fundamental workers’ right recognised for many decades.

“Safe implementation of decent work meets with acute problems also in our region. In the countries of GCTU affiliates, there are still a considerable level of unemployment, informal employment, unreasonably low wages, pensions and social benefits, persisting discrimination in the sphere of labour, deepening social inequality, and the unsolved problems of labour migrants.

“The General Confederation of Trade Unions calls on its affiliates to mark this year’s WDDW by organising events with slogans and demands most topical for workers in their respective countries or industries, making them as massive as possible and ensuring them wide coverage in the media”.

GCTU ATTENDS TU FORUM IN CHINA

GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov participated in the 9th International Forum “Economic Globalisation and Trade Unions” organised in Beijing by the All-China Federation of Trade Unions from 24-25 September 2014.

Attending the forum were over 80 delegates representing trade union centres in 41 countries in Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America, and five international organisations (ILO, WFTU, GCTU, OATUU and ICATU). The participants also included representatives of two GCTU member-organisations – the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia and the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

AZERBAIJAN: NEW GENERAL AGREEMENT SIGNED

On the 7th of August 2014, the Confederation of Trade Unions (AHIK), the National Confederation of Employers and the Cabinet of Ministers of Azerbaijan signed a new general agreement for 2014-15.

The document provides, in particular, that the duration of the paid annual leave should be extended by seven days. In this connection, the parties to the agreement recommended that Azerbaijan accede to Article 2 of the European Social Charter whereby the paid leave shall not be shorter than 28 days (the threshold in Azerbaijan is now 21 days).

The Parties also intend to strengthen their joint control over the timely and full

payment of social insurance contributions by employers, which will promote a sustainable and dynamic reform of the insurance pension scheme. They also consider it necessary to examine ratifying ILO conventions No. 102 on Minimum Standards of Social Security and No. 128 on Invalidity, Old-Age and Survivors' Benefits.

The document points to the necessity of undertaking appropriate measures to advance the application of compulsory medical insurance.

The agreement also stipulates the payment of a funeral benefit in case of the death of a person on the dole, and exercising stricter control over the employees' use of their right to leave and over the insurance against risks by employers at enterprises with hazardous working conditions.

ARMENIA: NAIRIT WORKERS STAGE PROTEST ACTION

Almost a thousand workers of the synthetic rubber plant "Nairit" held a protest action July 10 in front of the building housing the Government and the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of Armenia, demanding payment of wage arrears and information about the future fate of the company.

Participants in the march organised by the enterprise trade union committee carried banners saying "Pay back our wages!", "We demand restoration of the plant", "Nairit" is the key to the country's economic development!" etc.

A letter sent to Prime Minister of Armenia said there were 2 292 em-

ployees in the plant "Nairit", of whom 1263 were forced to take unpaid leave, 803 were permanently employed (monitoring safety and carrying out repairs and administration), and 126 were on maternity leave

As a result of inefficient management and the accumulated wage arrears the plant has stood idle since April 2010. However, experts believe that, given the necessary investment and competent professional management, it can become fully operational again and bring profit.

In the above mentioned letter, the employees demanded that instructions be given to the relevant agencies to develop a clear-cut schedule of settlement of wage arrears which in the last 16 months have reached an enormous for Armenia amount equivalent to US\$ 13 million!

In order to avoid a social upheaval, Prime Minister and the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources yielded to the trade union insistence and met with employees of the plant. They said the Government was aware that the situation was grave, but did not have the means to solve the problem. They promised they would ensure the payment of a month's salary within a week, and meet again with employees in late August to give explanations about the future of the enterprise.

BELARUS: UNION LEADER WELCOMES UNIVERSITY FRESHMEN

On the 1st of September, marked as the Knowledge Day, students and faculty of the Trade Union

International University of Social and Labour Relations gathered in the Minsk Palace of Culture to welcome about 600 freshmen.

The festive event was attended by the leaders of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) and national industrial unions.

FPB President Leonid Kozik congratulated the newly-baked students and thanked the University management for their highly professional work. “The Trade Union University is one of the most successful universities in Belarus, and its graduates will never go jobless”, he said addressing the audience.

The Federation of Trade Unions presented the University with 100 modern computers to equip the new academic building, while the University leaders were awarded commemorative medals “Hundred Years of the Trade Union Movement in Belarus”.

GERORGIA: ANY VIOLATION OF WORKERS RIGHTS TO BE CHALLENGED

The trade unions believe that, although labour legislation in Georgia is much stricter now and the rights of workers are better protected, most employers still evade performing their duties. The problem is particularly acute in the trading, hotel and catering business.

First and foremost, companies violate the rights of those workers they hire for a term of up to three months. In this case, the work contract with them is not generally concluded (Georgian legislation

does not insist that a labour contract should be signed with those who are hired for less than three months), and employers take advantage of this situation to deceive workers.

A Vice President of the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC), Gocha Alexandria, explains that most often companies are not eager to conclude written labour contracts because they try to avoid paying the income tax, which is a serious offence punishable by severe sanctions. However, since very few victims apply to court, the relevant authorities do not react to the situation as they should.

When amendments were introduced to the Labour Code, the unions insisted on a provision stipulating the compulsory signing of written labour contracts even with workers employed for a short term. However, despite all their efforts, the proposal was not accepted.

“Any violation of an employee’s rights must be challenged in court, – said Gocha Alexandria. – The employer should know that an oral labour contract is as legally valid as a written one, and we shall carefully examine all details of any contract breach, should the offended worker turn to us for assistance”.

KAZAKHSTAN: FPRK HOLDS EXTRAORDINARY CONGRESS

Ninety-four delegates representing 24 industrial trade unions and 14 territorial trade union organisations took part in the 23rd (Extraordinary) Congress of the Federation of Trade

Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FPRK) held in Astana 23 July 2014. Among those who spoke at the congress was GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov.

The report on the tasks of implementing the new Law on Trade Unions was delivered by FPRK President Abelgazi Kusainov. Following the debates, Congress ruled that the mandatory adherence to the provisions of the Law was to be considered a principal task of the Federation.

Delegates amended and supplemented the FPRK Statutes bringing it in line with the new law, and approved the resultant revised version. FPRK President was instructed to get the Statutes formally registered in due time by the relevant state judicial bodies.

The Congress concluded with the adoption of a statement entitled “Eurasian Economic Union for the Benefit of the Working Person”, and an appeal to the country’s trade union organisations and members in connection with the forthcoming Labour Day.

The Congress approved the new composition of the General Council of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

REPUBLICAN FORUM HELD IN KAZAKHSTAN

On the 26th of September 2014, the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, hosted a Republican Forum “Towards Society of Universal Labour” dedicated to the celebration of the Labour Day.

The event, which brought together 226 delegates from all regions of the country, was organised by the Ministry of Health and Social Development, the Federation of Trade Unions (FPRK), and the National Chamber of Entrepreneurs. The Forum was attended by the First Deputy Prime Minister of Kazakhstan.

The FPRK leader Abelgazi Kusainov told participants of the new state award, the Labour Veteran Medal, that had been established as part of the campaign to implement President Nazarbayev’s idea “Twenty Steps Towards Society of Universal Labour”. This year Kazakhstan for the first time celebrates two new holidays – the Labour Day and the Family Day. On this occasion, review contests “Best in the Profession” were organised and labour dynasties were honoured across the country. Measures were also taken to ensure decent wages and the comprehensive social protection of the population.

In conclusion, Labour Veteran Medals were awarded to representatives of various professions and industries who had made significant contribution to the country’s economy.

KYRGYZSTAN: STUDENTS MEET WITH UNION LEADERS

Members of the Council of the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU) met with students of the Academy of Labour and Social Relations in Bishkek 3 September 2014.

As he congratulated the young people on the beginning of the new academic year, KFTU President

Asylbek Toktogulov stressed that nowadays Kyrgyzstan needed professional personnel as never before. He said the Academy had developed an innovative education model that helps to shape the civil and legal awareness of young people, and stimulate their involvement in trade unions.

The Academy of Labour and Social Relations of Kyrgyzstan has been working in close contact with the trade union academies of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Kazakhstan. These institutions carry out programmes of fundamental and applied research, and their students can receive legal, economic, financial or social education. After completing their course, the graduates can find job opportunities in different sectors of the national economy.

MOLDOVA: UNIONS REJECT LONGER WORKWEEK

The National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM) has resolutely opposed the attempts to make changes to the Labour Code of Moldova that will provide for extending the working day to 12 hours and more.

The draft law has already successfully passed the first reading in Parliament.

“The adoption of this bill would mean a breach of all national and international standards honoured by the Republic of Moldova. In this case, the Confederation will have to file a new complaint with the competent international bodies,” said CNSM President Oleg Budza.

Under current legislation, the standard workweek in Moldova is 40 hours (with the 8-hour working day and two days off one of which is Sunday) in all enterprises and institutions regardless of the type of ownership.

RUSSIA: SIBERIA DISCUSSES DECENT WORK STANDARDS

An international conference “Role of Trade Unions in Promoting Decent Work Standards” was held in the Siberian city of Chita from 26-29 August 2014 as part of the cooperation programme of the Russian Federation with the International Labour Organisation (ILO).

The Conference brought together representatives of the ILO and its sub-regional office in Moscow, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR), the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of the Russian Federation, the Pension Fund of Russia, and the territorial trade union organisations and employers’ associations of the Siberian Federal District, regional authorities, regulatory and supervisory bodies etc.

The task of the Conference was to develop proposals and recommendations as to how to enhance the role of trade unions in promoting decent work standards whose main elements include decent wages, social partnership, productive employment, and reliable social insurance.

Participants considered challenges facing the FNPR and its affiliates in their efforts to promote decent work standards. In addition to that, they

exchanged views on the measures to eradicate vulnerable employment, on trade union activities to protect workers' rights, on steps to be taken to bring the minimum wages up to the subsistence minimum level, and on the new principles of formulating citizens' pension rights. The issues discussed included also labour migration and the need for its regulation, unemployment, and the social support of the unemployed.

Conference participants met with the work collective of the Trans-Baikal Railway, and got acquainted with the experience of several primary trade union organisations, in particular, with what they are doing to introduce decent work standards.

The Conference ended with the adoption of Recommendations that should form the basis of a federal programme and a strategy for the implementation of the decent work agenda in Russia.

UKRAINE: FPU DEMANDS STOP TO ATTACK ON WORKERS RIGHTS

The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) appealed to Supreme Rada deputies not to vote for the Government's draft law on changes to the State Budget for 2014 as many of its amendments would constitute a tangible infringement on the rights of workers.

The announcement was made by FPU President Grigoriy Osovy at a press conference 23 July 2014. "This bill, he said, significantly restricts or even excludes the application of current labour law provi-

sions, whereas, according to the law, the effect of these standards can be limited only with the imposition of martial law."

The FPU President said the draft law was aiming to change the procedure of personal income indexation, which would result in reducing the already low purchasing power of pensioners, and significantly worsen living standards. The Cabinet of Ministers also suggested that the managers of budgetary institutions be given the right to establish part-time work schemes or send employees on unpaid leave for a period determined solely by the manager, without the employees' consent or notification. Moreover, the bill provides for freezing social standards and guarantees at a time when the minimum wage in Ukraine remains below the subsistence minimum.

Grigoriy Osovy also reminded that making changes in the State Budget was subject to public discussion, something that had not been done in this case. Therefore, he urged the Government to engage in constructive dialogue with society, particularly with the trade unions, before taking any decisions. "If the Rada do not hear us and approve the bill, our members will demand of us serious protest actions," he said in conclusion.

The Federation predicts significant unemployment growth in Ukraine. According to estimates by employer and trade union experts, the number of jobless people in the country could exceed one million in the near future. The trade unions expect the unemployment to hit its peak already this winter.

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GCTU INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT AND
GCTU PUBLIC RELATIONS CENTRE
42 LENINSKY PROSPEKT
119119 MOSCOW, RUSSIA
TELEFAX +7(495) 938-2155
PHONE +7(495) 938-0112
Web site: www.vkp.ru;
E-mail: inter@vkp.ru

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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