



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

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### **GCTU WDDW-2016 STATEMENT**

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2016, trade unions in the countries of our region, together with the entire international trade union movement, will for the ninth time observe the World Day for Decent Work (WDDW). Established in 2008 on the initiative of the ITUC, this Day from the outset was regarded by trade unions as an ample opportunity to express, together, in solidarity, and simultaneously, their support for the Decent Work Agenda adopted by the ILO in 1999.

The aim of the Agenda is to secure quality jobs, decent and fair wages, safe working conditions and reliable social protection, as well as ensure compliance with the universally accepted international labour standards and principles of social dialogue, and respect for the dignity of the worker.

Over the period, the WDDW has become the key element in the fight

waged by the international trade union movement to win favourable conditions for efficient and productive work, free exercise of their rights, including the right to collective bargaining, and further development of social partnership as the basis for modern labour relations.

The role and value of the decent work concept increases manifold at the present stage of the world crisis generating socio-economic instability. The unions are firmly convinced that the decent work principles and objectives must underlie all economic recovery measures affecting the interests of wage earners, and this is the only correct way to overcome the current difficulties.

This means that attempts by the authorities to patch budget holes through raising prices, taxes, rates or any levies on the working people, as well as cutting down the financing of the social sphere must always meet a resolute rebuff from the workers' organisations.

It is no accident that the world trade unions persistently raise the matter before the state and government leaders of G-7 and G-20, pressing for the inclusion of the issue in the agendas of their summits. The recent Labour Summit held during the G-20 meeting in Beijing offered the world leaders a programme entitled "Six Steps" which, if implemented, might help create a new post-crisis global economy that would take into account the decent work requirements and the needs and concerns of workers and their families. However, despite all these efforts, the world is still far away from the goals of decent work.

In the GCTU region, the implementation of the Decent Work Agenda is also facing serious challenges. The economies of our countries are going through a tough period. Almost everywhere, the key indicators have gone down, inflation has increased, the national currencies have been devalued, the basic services and consumer goods have risen in price, and, consequently, the population's real incomes have dropped. There are tensions in the labour markets, with an increasing number of labour disputes. Hidden unemployment has spread, involving young people. In addition, the work remuneration level is unreasonably low as compared to the value of labour, while attempts are being made to freeze the indexation of pensions and social benefits and constrain the growth of salaries. Quite a few countries have accumulated huge arrears in wages,

and the social gap keeps growing wider. The plight of labour migrants also causes a lot of criticism.

In this context, the unions of our region strongly insist that the governments abandon their belt-tightening policies and take measures to boost economic growth through developing the real sector of the economy, stabilising the labour market situation, and raising household incomes as an essential factor stimulating demand.

With due regard for these facts and trends, General Confederation of Trade Unions calls on its affiliates to join the world trade union community and organise, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October or on days around it, various solidarity actions in support of decent work, ensuring their wide coverage in the union press and other mass media.

Like last year, the International Trade Union Confederation proposes that this WDDW should be observed under the motto "End Corporate Greed!" which is explained by the desire of the trade union movement to resist the dominance of transnational capital dictating its inhumane rules of the game in the global labour market.

While supporting this proposal, the GCTU believes that local slogans and demands for this year's WDDW should be closely linked to the specific problems and circumstances that affect working people in each of the countries or indus-

tries where we have our member organisations.

The World Day for Decent Work gives us an opportunity to, once again, manifest the unity and efficiency of trade unions in our region and their readiness to defend employees' vital rights and interests. A successful WDDW-2016 will help further enhance workers' trust in the unions, and strengthen their credibility and influence in society.

### **GCTU HOLDS YOUTH FORUM IN MINSK**

The General Confederation of Trade Unions (GCTU), in conjunction with the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB), held the Second International Trade Union Youth Forum in Minsk from 29 June – 3 July 2016, bringing together 200 young trade unionists from 17 countries.

Addressing participants, GCTU Deputy General Secretary Valery Yuriev said “the FPB, as a vanguard of the CIS trade union movement, has always been on the frontline. Meetings like this forum of ours make a serious contribution to the preservation of our unity and brotherhood, and the augmentation of the good traditions of the trade union movement.”

The main discussion took place at the Youth Summit “The World of Work. Open Dialogue” held as part of the Forum. Participants famil-

iarised themselves with the basic provisions of the report “The End to Poverty Initiative: the ILO and the 2030 Agenda” delivered by ILO Director-General Guy Ryder to the 105<sup>th</sup> Session of the International Labour Conference. The ILO called on its 187 member states to eradicate poverty by the year 2030. According to ILO data, young people belong to the most vulnerable part of the population living, in many countries, below the poverty line.

During the Forum, the Youth Councils of the FPB and the GCTU signed a cooperation agreement.

### **AZERBAIJAN: AHIK EXECUTIVE BOARD SCRUTINISES GENDER ISSUES**

The Executive Committee of the Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation (AHIK) met 29 July 2016 in Baku to hear the information about the work done by the trade unions to promote gender equality.

Participants in the meeting noted that over the period since its establishment the AHIK's Centre for Gender Equality and Women's Issues had conducted 811 seminars, workshops and other training activities covering about 25 thousand people.

The unions have done a lot to achieve real gender equality in the labour market by making constant efforts to help women acquire leadership skills and the ability to inde-

pendently and competently defend their own rights, based current legislation

This has led to an increased number of women elected to the executive bodies of trade unions, high-ranking offices, and public councils.

The Executive Committee also amended and supplemented the Regulations for the Youth Council and approved the new composition of the Youth Council and its chairperson.

### **BELARUS: FPB SUMMARISES INTERIM RESULTS**

A report prepared by experts of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FPB) and published 1 September 2016 shows that the situation with the involuntary part-time employment has somewhat improved as against the previous year. Moreover, the country has managed to prevent a sharp leap in the number of unemployed. The unemployment rate as of July 1 amounted to 1.1 per cent of the economically active population.

Nevertheless, trade unions are extremely concerned over the low level of the unemployment benefits. According to an FPB representative, “both parties to the General Agreement have undertaken to raise the unemployment benefit up to the level of the minimum subsistence budget, and so this should be fulfilled”.

The Federation also came forward with the initiative to set up guarantee funds at enterprises to help them out of bankruptcies. The unions believe that the ongoing processes of upgrading and restructuring the economy enhance social risks, such as unemployment and unpaid wages in the event of enterprise bankruptcy. According to the FPB, the establishment of a guarantee fund can provide a real protective mechanism both to workers and employers.

### **GEORGIA: GTUC INSISTING ON GOVERNMENT CONTROL OVER OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH & SAFETY**

An accident that occurred in June 2016 in the transport department of the Tbilisi joint-stock company “Tbilsres” killed two workers and severely poisoned one. The reason behind the occurrence was that the enterprise management had ignored the basic safety regulations by failing to supply the workers with gas masks and other personal protective equipment.

In this connection, the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) issued a statement expressing strong protest against the intolerant situation in the sphere of occupational safety and health.

The unions, once again, urged the Government to:

- introduce immediate changes to the Labour Code providing for

the creation of a state health and safety inspectorate vested with broad rights, as stipulated by ILO standards; and

– adopt a law on occupational safety and health by providing the state labour inspectorate to check public and private enterprises without prior notification of the employer

### **KAZAKHSTAN: TRIPARTITE COMMISSION SCRUTINISES LABOUR RELATIONS IN REGIONS**

At its meeting 4 July 2016, the national Tripartite Commission on Social Partnership and Regulation of Social and Labour Relations considered the situation prevailing in some of the country's regions.

Member of the Commission and Vice President of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FPRK) Kairat Aituganov told participants how collective agreements were concluded in small and medium businesses. He said, in particular, that social guarantees were not available to the employees in more than 68 per cent of enterprises. In addition, large companies made wide use of agency-mediated work. The wages of agency contract workers were 35 per cent lower than those of full-time workers, their labour rights were being violated, including the right to guaranteed social and compensation payments.

However, he said, lately there had been a trend in Kazakhstan towards reduction of protest sentiments in workplaces. Thus, in 2014 there were 15 labour disputes, in 2015 seven, and in 2016 only four.

### **KAZAKHSTAN YOUTH CONDEMNS TERRORISM**

The FPRK Youth Council issued a statement expressing deep condolences to the families and friends of those killed in the terrorist attacks 18 July 2016 in Almaty, and strongly condemning any manifestation of terrorism both at home and abroad.

“Decent work must become our response to the terrorist threat. At this moment, we appreciate even more the peace, the quiet, and the social stability which our people have managed to keep over the period of independence ... Only united in a common front against terrorist threat, the people of Kazakhstan will be able to overcome all the difficulties with dignity“, the statement says in conclusion.

### **KYRGYZSTAN: UNION INSPECTORATES SUSPEND WORK IN ENTERPRISES**

The Labour Safety Inspectorate of the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions (KFTU) has published a report on the findings of a survey of 146 organisations and enterprises, conducted in the first half of 2016.

The survey revealed 559 violations of safety and health regulations. Labour inspectors issued 111 orders and have already received 90 notifications of compliance with them within the established deadlines

In five cases, because of the obvious threat to workers' life and health, the operation of equipment and machinery was suspended. 76 officials were prosecuted for violation of occupational safety regulations, and five people were removed from their posts.

The labour inspectors considered 169 appeals, applications and complaints about violations of workers' rights in the sphere of occupational safety and health, of which more than 90 per cent were resolved in favour of the workers.

The Labour Safety Inspectorate calculated that the amount of damages, lump sums allowances, and compensation for lost earnings and indexation exceeded 30.5 million soms.

### **MOLDOVA: UNIONS DEMANDING HIGHER MINIMUM PAY**

The National Commission on Consultations and Collective Bargaining met 26 July 2016 to consider the proposal by the National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM) that a unified minimum wage rate be set throughout the country.

The CNSM believes that the minimum wage must be made dependent on the rate of the average pay in the national economy. This is a provision stipulated by the European Social Charter ratified by Moldova. According to this document, the minimum wage should equal at least 60 per cent of the average national wage.

The Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Finance were asked to make all necessary estimates with a view to increasing the minimum pay rate in the real and the budgetary sectors of the economy.

### **MOLDOVA: CNSM FOR LOWER TAXES, AGAINST HIGHER RATES**

The CNSM Confederal Committee has approved the proposals aiming to supplement and amend a number of legislative acts regulating the taxation policy for 2017. In particular, the unions insist on cutting down the value added tax for kids' clothes and footwear from 20 to 5 per cent. The proposals will be forwarded to the Ministry of Finance.

A CNSM Statement published 23 September said the new increase in thermal energy rates would result in a dramatic drop of living standards and a further decline in the purchasing power of the population, already seriously hit by the national currency depreciation and the 9.7 per cent inflation growth in 2015.

## **RUSSIA: UNIONS & EMPLOYERS WISHING TO SUSPEND CHANGES IN PENSION SYSTEM**

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2016, the trade union and employer representatives on the Russian Tripartite Commission for the Regulating Social and Labour Relations came forward with a joint statement on pension issues that, in particular, reads as follows:

“The mass media keep discussing pension issues. Allegedly on behalf of different government ministries and agencies, a lot of variants are being proposed to update the current pension scheme.

“We call on all parties involved to show a balanced approach to the problem, based on the international and domestic experience in reforming pension systems, and abandon making ill-conceived and hasty decisions in the attempts to change certain elements of the pension scheme without taking into account the interconnections among all its elements or the challenges facing the pension insurance institution as a whole.

“The proposed changes of the pension system, if implemented, may reduce the degree of workers’ social protection and enhance the fiscal burden on business, which will go against the moratorium imposed on it by President of the Russian Federation.

“In this connection, we believe it necessary to suspend any discus-

sion about amending the pension insurance coverage, as well as the whole system of compulsory social insurance till the end of 2018”.

## **PRESIDENT OF RUSSIA MEETS WITH FNPR LEADER**

As they met 30 August 2016, President Vladimir Putin and the leader of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) Mikhail Shmakov discussed what should be done to do away with the wage arrears.

Mikhail Shmakov said the unions were concerned over the growing wage arrears, and reminded the country leader that Russia had ratified ILO convention No 95 on the protection of wages. In this connection, provision should be made in the Civil Code that wages have priority over all other mandatory payments, such as contributions to the social funds, and even taxes.

President Putin agreed with the FNPR proposal that a legislative framework should be provided for establishing the priority of wage payment.

“The idea seems reasonable to me,” he stressed, “especially now that all economic difficulties have not yet been overcome. Therefore, we can and must think it over”.

“No taxes will come unless the wages are paid”, remarked Mikhail Shmakov.

## **TAJIKISTAN GETS NEW LABOUR CODE**

On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July, 2016, Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon signed a new version of the draft Labour Code approved by Parliament.

Commenting on the event, a Vice-President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan (FNPT), Ismoil Faizizoda, said the new Labour Code gives clear-cut definitions to job responsibilities of distance workers, rotational workers, civil servants, deputies, military service personnel, law enforcement agents, diplomats and other categories of employees that had not been covered by the previous Labour Code.

A number of trade union proposals have also been taken into account. For example, the termination of a labour contract on the initiative of the employer will now be liable to prior (not less than two-weeks) notification of the respective trade union committee or other lawful representatives of the employee. The trade union committee should, in turn, inform the employer in a written form about their agreement or disagreement with the dismissal.

## **UKRAINE: UNIONS MEET WITH PRIME MINISTER**

The Presidium of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FPU) reviewed the results of the All-Ukraine

Protest March organised 6 July 2016 in Kyiv.

The event had gathered over 50 thousand representatives of trade union organisations, work collectives and all regions of Ukraine who took part in the march, rallies and picket lines at the houses of the Cabinet of Ministers and the Parliament in response to the shocking jump in gas and public utilities prices. As they met with Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman, the unions handed the Government a list of demands signed by 2.345 million people that include, among other things:

- an immediate reform of the work remuneration system;
- establishment, as from 1 October 2016, of a state-guaranteed minimum wage based on the economically justified subsistence minimum of 3,067 hryvnias a month, with a respective increase in pensions, stipends, etc.

As follow-up to the meeting, the Prime Minister instructed relevant central government bodies and agencies to prepare draft laws on reforming the work remuneration system, and set up a working group to develop proposals for the revision of natural gas prices.

The FPU Presidium also discussed a plan of preparation for the World Day for Decent Work to be held 7 October 2016, and the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty marked 17 October. The Presidium stressed that the FPU would do its



best to mobilise all member organisations for marking these important dates.

### **UKRAINE: NEW GENERAL AGREEMENT SYMBOL OF CONSOLIDATION**

The General Agreement for 2016-17 was signed in a solemn ceremony that took place 23 August 2016 in the Club of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine.

«The conclusion of this General Agreement for a new term marks the end of a long and rather difficult tripartite collective bargaining process», FPU President Grigoriy Osoviy told the participants. «The fact that this paper was signed on the eve of Ukraine's Independence Day proves that the Government, the employers and the organised workers are able to consolidate their efforts in the name of a better tomorrow».

The ceremony was attended by the leaders of the FPU affiliates and other all-Ukrainian trade union associations who also signed the document.

### **COMMERCE WORKERS UNIONS DECIDE ON CONGRESS**

The Council of the TUI «Confederation of Trade Unions of Workers in Commerce, Restaurants, Consumers' Cooperatives and Various Forms of Business» met in Minsk (Belarus).

Attending the meeting were the leaders of the Confederation's affiliates from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan and Ukraine, and the Latvian Union of Commerce Workers, and a number of guests.

Council reviewed the results of the member organisations' participation in the joint solidarity campaign «Minimum Pay at Least Equal to Subsistence Minimum!» being waged by the CIS trade union movement.

The report by the Confederation's President Valentina Mitrofanova and contributions by other participants stressed that the campaign, which has moved into its second decade, had long become a major landmark in the unions' fight for decent work.

Regrettably, its goal has been so far reached only in Belarus. In some of the countries, on the contrary, the gap between the minimum pay and the subsistence minimum has grown even wider. The minimum pay, guaranteed and legalised by the state, ranges between one third and one fifth of the subsistence minimum. Participants decided to proceed with the trade union solidarity campaign for the sake of protecting workers' social and economic interests.

The Council decided to convene the Confederation's 6<sup>th</sup> Congress in the third quarter of 2017 in Moscow.

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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](http://www.vkp.ru);  
E-mail: [inter@vkp.ru](mailto:inter@vkp.ru)

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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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