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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU EXECUTIVE MEETS IN MOSCOW

The outcome of the 4th Congress of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, GCTU, and measures to carry out its decisions came up for discussion at a session of the GCTU Executive Committee held 29 November 2002 in Moscow.

The discussion of a report presented by GCTU President Vladimir Scherbakov showed that the overwhelming majority of the member organisations approved of the results of the Congress. They appreciate the GCTU's efforts to consolidate trade union actions in defence of workers' interests, promote integration processes in the CIS, strengthen the trade union movement, and enhance international workers' solidarity. Executive members agreed it would be pointless to engage in any further debates aiming to get some of the Congress decisions reconsidered and revised.

The Executive adopted a Plan of Actions to Realise the GCTU 4th Congress Decisions based on the principal document of the Congress, the Guidelines for GCTU Activity for the Period 2002-2007. The affiliated organisations were advised to allow for its provisions in their practical work, while making their members aware of the challenges currently facing the Confederation.

The session updated and amended the composition of the GCTU Commissions dealing with the protection of workers' socio-economic interests, legal questions, health and safety, environmental protection, trade union structure and organising, etc. Besides that, a GCTU Commission for International Affairs was established.

The Trade Union International of Shipbuilders «Korabel» (President Vladimir Makavchik) was admitted as a new member of the GCTU. Consequently, the Confederation has now 48 affiliates with a total membership of 75 million.

TRADE UNIONS AND PARLIAMENTARISM IN CIS

The topic was discussed at a seminar organised by the GCTU for its affiliated organisations in Moscow 28 November 2002.

The event brought together the leaders of national trade union centres and industrial trade union internationals, Members of Parliament, and the heads of Parliamentary factions and committees from CIS countries.

In his opening address, GCTU President Vladimir Scherbakov said: «The very fact that the first event to take place after our 4th Congress is this highly representative forum on co-operation of trade unions with

legislative power, proves that the unions in our countries attach a top priority to securing legislative support for the realisation of decisions taken by the Congress. First of all, it concerns better social protection, and broader rights and guarantees for our workers».

Over the last few years, the unions in the CIS have gone a long way from lobbying separate bills or union amendments to independent development of their own draft laws, active involvement in the general election campaigns, and the building of trade union or interfactional parliamentary groups. Particularly rich experience in this sphere has been acquired by trade unions in Kazakhstan, Russia and Ukraine.

Most speakers were of the opinions that representative power was the key factor in the provision of a legislative basis for building a socially oriented economy, and for social protection of workers. It was natural, therefore, that the Constitutions of the national trade union centres mentioned co-operation with the legislatures as a primary task.

The past period has shown that the Parliaments in the CIS countries are also interested in winning support of trade unions as organisations promoting the interests of the economically active population that creates the national wealth.

As they spoke of co-operation with the political parties, most participants believed it expedient to establish and maintain partner relations with those parties that expressed workers' interests in Parliament better than others.

The GCTU has been rendering expert advice to its affiliates in CIS countries helping them to appraise social draft laws developed by their national legislatures. At the CIS level, the Confederation represents a united trade union movement, and its aim is to promote harmonisation of social legislation as a basis for successful integration of our countries and peoples.

Chairman of the Russian State Duma, Mr Guennady Seleznev, took part in the seminar.

GCTU MAINTAINING TIES WITH EURASEC

Addressing a session of the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Eurasian Economic Community, EurAsEC, comprising Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, GCTU President Vladimir Scherbakov said the unions were interested in adding a «strong social component» to the integration processes.

The session that took place in Dushanbe (Tajikistan) from 1-2 November 2002 produced a draft agreement on the status of the Basic Principles of Legislation in the Eurasian Economic Community. When adopted by the EurAsEC Interstate Council, the Basic Principles will be legally binding and liable to direct application by all Community members. The session also approved a framework legal act «On the Internal Migration» defining and regulating the migration processes in the above states.

A cooperation agreement was signed by GCTU President Vladimir Scherbakov and EurAsEC General Secretary Grigory Rapota with the aim of promoting stronger ties between the two organisations. Both parties agreed to help establish cooperation between the industrial councils of the EurAsEC Integration Committee and the GCTU-affiliated Trade Union Internationals.

BUILDERS' UNIONS FACING CHALLENGES

The Executive Committee of the International Confederation of Trade Unions of Workers in Construction and Building Material Industries (a GCTU-affiliated TUI) held its session in Kiev, Ukraine, to review the current situation in the sector, the relations of trade unions with state power bodies, and the problems of labour migration.

Participants noted bitterly that the CIS states did not pay enough attention to the development of the construction sector. There are no industry-oriented programmes, and the funding is far from sufficient. The result is that the union membership in the sector has shrunk from 7.5 million to 1.5 million over the last few years.

The unions have difficulties in rebuffing attacks by the authorities and employers. The reason is that their financial status is weak and they often lack independence, many union leaders are compromise-happy, and the bulk of their membership is reluctant to engage in active struggles.

A builder from Moldova emphasised the need to enhance protection of elected trade union leaders, as the number of direct assaults on them and reprisals against union activists had lately increased.

The Executive considered the problems of labour migration in the CIS. According to union estimates, there were more than 5 million labour migrants in Russia alone, with over 50 per cent of them employed in the construction sector. Therefore, the problem is particularly acute for the builders' unions.

Participants considered and approved the outcome of the 4th Congress of the General Confederation of Trade Unions.

CIS: UNDER BANNER OF SOLIDARITY

Unity of action, mutual assistance and solidarity were the three factors that were conducive to successful activity of the GCTU-affiliated International Confederation of Water Transport Workers' Unions (ICWTWU) in the preceding five-year period. This was the keynote of the Confederation's 3rd Congress held 10 October 2002.

Congress noted that the water transport workers had successfully resisted unlawful interference in the affairs of several ICWTWU affiliates, and frustrated all attempts to infringe on their rights. The Confederation

had been promoting broader application of international labour standards for seafarers in CIS countries, and pressed for the ratification of the appropriate ILO Conventions. Together with the General Confederation of Trade Unions, it had drafted a model law «On the Particulars of Regulating the Work of Seafarers» and had it approved by the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly.

Delegates appreciated particularly the work done by the ICWTWU to fulfill the welfare programme for seafarers in the CIS and Baltic states for 2000-2005 financed by the ITF Seafarers' Trust.

The Congress approved the Guidelines for the Confederation's Activity for another five years, and adopted the resolutions on the social and economic situation of seafarers, on international solidarity and the unity of the water transport workers' unions, and against interference in trade union affairs.

Delegates made a particular point of the latter resolution, and called on the Confederation to work out a mechanism of immediate response to any cases of interference in union affairs. They hoped the GCTU would assist the ICWTWU in developing such a mechanism.

The Congress elected George Stolyarenko President of the Confederation.

ARMENIA: PRESIDENT ACCEPTS UNIONS' PROPOSALS

President of Armenia Robert Kocharian met the leader of the Confederation of Trade Unions, CTUA, Martin Harutyunian 27 September 2002 to discuss the economic and social situation in the country, and the ways to improve the population's conditions through better cooperation between the Government and the unions.

The President accepted the unions' proposal that an agreement on the promotion of production, health and safety, work remuneration, and pension payments should be signed by the Government and the Confed-

eration for the year 2003. Both leaders spoke in favour of a speedy adoption of a new Labour Code.

The CTUA President said the unions were willing to contribute to developing the health resort sector within the framework of the Government programme.

ARMENIA: CTUA HOLDS TWO SUCCESSIVE CONGRESSES

The 2nd (extraordinary) Congress of the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia, CTUA, was held in Yerevan 26 November 2002.

The delegates listened to a report by CTUA President Martin Harutyunian and found the work done by the trade union centre satisfactory. The Constitution of the CTUA was amended to bring the unions' structure and principles of activity in line with the new Law on Trade Unions. Immediately after that, as required by the above law, the Congress proceeded as a constituent congress of a new Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (alliance of trade union organisations).

The Constituent Declaration was signed by 25 national industrial trade unions, i.e. the 24 industrial unions previously affiliated with the CTUA plus the Union of Employees in Banks and Financial Institutions that was not a member of the former CTUA. The delegates discussed and adopted the constitution of the newly built trade union centre and the programme of its activity for 2002-2007, and elected its governing bodies. Martin Harutyunian was elected President, and Hrach Oganessian and Boris Haratian Vice Presidents of the CTUA by an absolute majority of votes.

The Congress was a remarkable national event. Armenia's President and Prime Minister both addressed its participants, while some members of parliament and government participated in its work.

GCTU President Vladimir Scherbakov attended and addressed the Congress.

UNIONS OF KAZAKHSTAN, CHINA COOPERATE

A delegation of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, FTURK, visited China from 15-22 October 2002 to mark the tenth anniversary of its friendly relations with the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, ACFTU. The delegation included FTURK President Siyazbek Mukashev and the leaders of some industrial unions, regional trade union councils, and major joint ventures with Kazakh and Chinese capital.

The two sides informed each other of the socio-economic situation and trade union activity in their respective countries. The impact of economic globalisation on the trade union movement was discussed at a joint seminar «Trade Unions and Labour Relations» organised during the visit.

The hosts told the delegation about the measures they were taking to safeguard the interests of the country's workers against the negative implications of China's entrance into the WTO. Participants exchanged experience in collective bargaining, particularly at joint ventures with Chinese interest in Kazakhstan. The guests also studied the work of commercial enterprises owned by Chinese unions in trade, manufacture of consumer goods, tourism, and finance.

ACFTU Chairman Wei Jianxing thanked the FTURK for the support of the Chinese union candidate in the elections to the ILO Governing Body in 2002. He also spoke highly of the friendly relations the ACFTU maintains with the General Confederation of Trade Unions.

RUSSIA: SUMMING UP

Over 9.3 million people took part in the nationwide protest action organised by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, FNPR, 17 October 2002. The unions demanded settlement of all wage arrears, substantial pay raises, return to the

principle of solidarity in social insurance, and retention of the social guarantees.

Twelve thousand Muscovites formed a living «chain of popular indignation» that stretched over 4.5 kilometres from the building of the State Duma to the Federal Government House. Teachers and service staff of the union-owned sports schools who get miserable wages of 700-800 roubles (or \$20-25) a month were among the most active protesters.

Massive protest actions involving many thousands of people were held in numerous cities, towns and settlements all over the country. Strikes and work stoppages were called in 520 industrial enterprises. In some places, participants blamed the government of Mikhail Kasyanov for the hard economic and social situation in the country and demanded that it should resign.

According to FNPR estimates, not all member organisations have duly carried out the decisions concerning the collective action. Several regional trade union organisations did not even consider resorting to such effective forms of protest as marches and rallies. In several regions, no procedure was established for submitting the demands to the Members of Parliament.

Having analysed the results of the action, FNPR sent official letters to the President, Prime Minister and leaders of both parliament chambers of Russia urging them to examine the union demands and take the appropriate steps to meet them.

RUSSIA: SOCIAL CONFRONTATION INSTEAD OF SOCIAL DIALOGUE?

The last month of 2002 saw an upsurge in the strike movement. Most regions reported the beginning of collective industrial disputes or strikes.

The Irkutsk Province in Eastern Siberia was certainly a front-runner, with the striking workers of the Baikal pulp-and-paper mill, miners, school teachers and nursery school

personnel. The strike of housing and municipal services workers in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski lasted for several weeks. So did the industrial action organised by their counterparts in the Tver Province (Central Russia). Workers at the Zlatoust iron and steel plant in the Urals called a new strike, and so on.

Increasingly often, workers make use of Article 148 of the new Labour Code that says the employees can stop work if their wages are not paid, something novel in Russian legislation. The second main reason behind the present-day strike movement is the dissatisfaction with the level of work remuneration.

Most of the strikes were called and conducted by FNPR-affiliated unions. Among organisations outside FNPR, the Federation of Air Traffic Controllers' Unions was the most militant. It had organised several hunger-strikes, the only form of protest legally available to the profession, considering that the law forbids regular strikes by air traffic controllers.

The December protests took place against a background of a worsening economic situation when whole industries had considerably reduced their output volumes or were actually on the verge of a crisis.

RUSSIA: UNION LEADER ASSAULTED IN ST.PETERSBURG

President of the Trade Union Federation of St.Petersburg and the Leningrad Province, Harry Lysiuk, was assaulted on the evening of 13 November 2002. The union leader received a brain concussion and many bodily injuries. As there was no robbery attempt, the reason for the criminal assault may be the professional activity of Harry Lysiuk who represents the interests of more than a million union members.

The Federation issued a statement expressing its utter indignation at the criminal attack on its leader. «This recurrent crime shows the extent of criminalisation in our society.

Once again, we had an occasion to discover that our state is unable to protect its citizens».

The unions demanded a painstaking investigation into the crime and strict punishment of both its organisers and executors. The statement was sent to the Plenipotentiary of the President of Russia in the North-Western Area, and the heads of the region's executive power bodies and police authorities.

UKRAINE: FTUU HOLDS TWO-STAGE CONGRESS

The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, FTUU, held its 4th Congress in two stages, from 19-21 November, and 12 December 2002. The event brought together in Kiev 775 delegates and over 500 guests, including union activists, and heads of state institutions and public organisations of Ukraine. Attending the Congress were also representatives of 50 international and national trade union organisations.

A GCTU delegation comprising President Vladimir Scherbakov and a vice-President Valery Youriev took part in the first stage of the Congress.

From 19-21 November, delegates discussed the report by the FTUU Council on the work done in the past five-year period, which they found satisfactory. The Congress adopted a Programme of Action for 2002-2007, approved a new version of the FTUU Constitution, and revised the regulations for the Credentials Committee and for the Control and Auditing Commission.

Chairman of Ukraine's Parliament Vladimir Litvin told the Congress that the trade unions were a connection link between society and the state, and they had a dual function to perform, i.e. to protect the interests of the employees vis-a-vis the employer, and to promote the development of civil society. There were hardly any human rights or freedoms that the unions would not be fighting for, he added.

Delegates discussed social protection problems to be addressed immediately, in particular, the issues of work remuneration and industrial health and safety. They stressed the need for measures to protect home production, secure full employment, and reform the system of property and the municipal services sector.

The Congress adopted a resolution on trade unions' activity in the conditions of globalisation, a statement on the social orientation of the national budgetary policy, and other documents.

Following the debate about the trade union youth policy, the Congress recommended that a chapter dealing with the social protection of young workers be included in the General Agreement, and that a unit responsible for implementing the FTUU youth policy be set up within its executive structure.

A special resolution was also adopted on the measures to secure the equality of men and women.

On the initiative of delegates representing the industrial unions, the Congress approved the statements «On the Critical Situation in Health Care», «On Reform in the Municipal Services and Housing Sector» and «On the Critical Situation in Education», and also an «Appeal to the Supreme State Authorities Concerning the Growing Gap in Social Justice and Discrimination of Rural Workers».

As neither of the two candidates for the President of the FTUU, Alexander Stoyan and Valentin Pozhidayev, received the needed number of votes the Congress was adjourned to resume its work 12 December 2002.

Alexander Stoyan emerged from the second round of elections as President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine for another term.

Grigory Osovy, Alexander Yefimenko, Igor Romanchuk and Igor Lutsishin were elected Vice Presidents of the Federation.

DOCUMENTS

**STATEMENT BY THE GENERAL
CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS
ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR
THE ERADICATION OF POVERTY**

Moscow, 17 October 2002

On the initiative of the United Nations the 17th of October is annually marked as the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

On this day, the people of our planet, and first of all workers and their trade unions, appraise their living standards as they summarise the results of the outgoing year. It is to be regretted that in most countries huge sections of the population are still vegetating on less than one US dollar a day, which is a universally recognised indicator of abject poverty. Even in the wealthiest countries of Western Europe and North America, quite a few people live under the officially established poverty line.

The situation is aggravated by the widening material gap, as the handful of rich countries and well-off people possessing fortunes sufficient to feed the hungry millions, cure the hundreds of thousands of sick, and educate the illiterate masses prefer to spend that money on their own excessive consumption. All this provokes further increases in social tensions, both nationally and globally.

The General Confederation of Trade Unions is particularly concerned with the situation in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Last year, only three CIS countries could boast of real wages exceeding two US dollars a day, while the pensions, students' scholarships, unemployment benefits, and other social allowances were even less. The struggles waged by the unions to raise workers' incomes and bring up the minimum wages at least to the level of the subsistence minimum have unfortunately failed to produce tangible results and, therefore, must be carried on and intensified.

The General Confederation of Trade Unions calls on all state authorities in the CIS countries to pay prime attention to the problem

of eliminating poverty and raising the living standards of the broad masses, and take immediate measures for its final settlement.

The GCTU urges all trade unions in the CIS countries and their members to step up their struggles to secure decent life for the people, higher real wages and social benefits, and fairer distribution of wealth and resources in the Commonwealth and elsewhere in the world.

The world's workers and their unions must pool their efforts to put an end to the globalisation of poverty!

**STATEMENT BY THE GENERAL
CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS**

Moscow, 25 October 2002

Speaking for its member organisations, the General Confederation of Trade Unions expresses its deep indignation at the tragic events in Moscow, the capital of the Russian Federation, namely, the seizure of hostages by terrorists. The lives of hundreds of people have been exposed to danger. The GCTU condemns strongly terrorism in any forms. Whatever goals and arguments may be used by the champions of terror policies to cover their deeds, they will, always and everywhere, inevitably result in death, suffering and horror for peaceful citizens. The trade union movement regards terrorism as a dangerous and implacable enemy of the democratic institutions and socio-economic progress.

The GCTU pledges complete support for President Vladimir Putin and the Government of the Russian Federation, and also for the authorities of Moscow in their attempts to release the hostages, avoid a bloodshed, preserve the lives and protect the health of the innocent people, and prevent any dangerous consequences for the city and the country.

The GCTU calls on trade unions in all countries of the world to condemn bitterly the terrorist act committed in the capital of Russia, and unite their efforts in the struggle against outbursts of terrorism in any part of the world.

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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 ON 22 SEPTEMBER 1993, AND THE THIRD CONGRESS OF THE GCTU ON 18 SEPTEMBER 1997

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, BELARUS, GEORGIA, KAZAKHSTAN, KYRGHYZSTAN, MOLDOVA, RUSSIA, TAJIKISTAN, UZBEKISTAN, AND UKRAINE, AS WELL AS 39 BRANCH TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS. BESIDES BILATERAL AGREEMENTS ON CO-OPERATION WAS SIGNED WITH THE TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION OF AZERBAIJAN .

THE GCTU IS READY TO CO-OPERATE WITH ANY OTHER NATIONAL TRADE UNION FEDERATIONS, IRRESPECTIVE OF THEIR BEING MEMBERS OF OTHER INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THEIR PARTICIPATION IN GCTU ACTIVITIES DOES NOT IN ANY WAY RESTRICT THE INDEPENDENCE OF ITS AFFILIATES.

THE CONFEDERATION ENJOYS OBSERVER STATUS WITH THE CIS INTER-PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY, 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 , UN DPI AND ECOSOC.

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

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

PRESIDENT OF THE GCTU IS VLADIMIR SCHERBAKOV

DEAR READERS

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