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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU CONGRATULATES UN ON 60TH ANNIVERSARY

On the 6th of September 2005, the General Confederation of Trade Unions issued a Statement on the 60th Anniversary of the United Nations Organisation.

Born in the wake of the Great Victory won by the progressive forces over the most cruel and ruthless dictatorships in world history, – the Statement reads, – the United Nations has for many decades been the symbol of peaceful progress of the human race. Largely owing to its multifaceted activity, the world has been spared the horrors of global wars for sixty years now, and can develop in an environment free from universal conflicts.

Trade unions in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, – the Statement goes on, – are particularly appreciative of the fact that the UN has been recently devoting increased attention to the social aspects of international security, while actively involving in its

work non-governmental organisations and a variety of other civil society actors, including the trade unions as the main exponents of workers' will and aspirations. Of paramount importance are such UN initiatives as the Millennium Development Goals set in the Millennium Declaration, and the Global Compact designed to consolidate the international framework for civilised development of labour relations.

The GCTU and all its affiliates seek to make a feasible contribution to the common efforts being taken by the world public to solve the vital social problems of our times. They include the struggles with extreme poverty and unemployment, against human rights violations and international terrorism, and for social justice, decent work and human dignity.

The GCTU assured the United Nations of its firm support of all UN endeavours aiming to strengthen peace and international security, and solve socio-economic problems for the good of workers.

AZERBAIJAN: WAGES MOVING UP

According to the National Statistics Committee, the average monthly pay in Azerbaijan amounted to 561 manats (roughly US\$119) in the first half of 2005, which is almost 26 per cent higher than in the same period of the preceding year. The best paid were specialists employed in the mining, construction, financial, and services sectors. Meanwhile, the government expects the average monthly remuneration to rise to 626 manats, or \$133, by the end of this year.

Addressing a session of the PSI Council in the capital city of Baku, the leader of the Azerbaijan Trade Union of State Organisations and Public Service Workers Rasim Sariyev said that over the last three years they had managed to get the wages in the sector raised appreciably, with the minimum pay currently amounting to US\$75 a month. About 80 per cent of the affiliated organisations had negotiated collective agreements with their employers. However, with all the improvements, some categories of workers still remained low-paid. Those employed at the district level were getting twice as little in pay than their counterparts at the republican level.

ARMENIA: TRAINING UNION LEADERS

The Commerce, Catering and Consumer Cooperatives Workers' Union of Armenia in conjunction with the International Union of Food Workers (IUF) held a seminar on trade union

policies in organising, particularly in recruiting young workers.

The Union's district and local leaders said the training course, the second in a row conducted this year with the assistance of the IUF Moscow Office, was helpful in improving the quality of their work and raising its efficiency. One result of the well-motivated organising policy pursued by the Union was the establishment of new locals at several enterprises in the industry.

BELARUS: FTUB GETS MORE RIGHTS

A Presidential decree issued 19 July 2005 has empowered the health and safety, and legal inspectorates of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, FTUB, to exercise public control over the observation of labour laws by organisations and individual employers, irrespective of their unionisation.

Upon visiting a number of private enterprises, the FTUB inspectors discovered that the health and safety conditions were worse at union-free workplaces. Among the most common violations were the absence of work safety training and the lack of equipment repair control. Many enterprises hired replacements for their temporarily absent staff without even offering them special training courses or at least checking their knowledge of safety regulations, which is particularly crucial for workers in highly hazardous jobs. Such violations had entailed increased numbers of employment injuries, including lethal ones. Some enterprises wanted job attestation.

BELARUS: FTUB HOLDS 5TH CONGRESS

The Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, FTUB, held its 5th Congress in Minsk from 19-20 September 2005. Attending the event were 446 delegates representing all regions of the country and 28 national industrial trade unions. FTUB President Leonid Kozik said in his report that, owing to their constructive cooperation with the social partners and authorities, Belarussian unions had found their own niche in society and now were able to protect efficiently workers' socio-economic interests. Addressing the Congress, President Alexander Lukashenko stressed that the political and social stability in the country largely depended on the constructive stand taken by the unions.

The Congress elected new governing bodies of the Federation, with Leonid Kozik again elected President of the FTUB.

Shortly before the Congress the FTUB President had told a press conference of the Federation's activity in the period following the previous congress. In his opinion, the unions' decision to stop politicking and resume normal dialogue with the state authorities had yielded positive results. They had managed to conclude an efficient General Agreement, do away with the problem of wage arrears, and get the system of work contracts amended. The degree of social protection of workers had become higher, which resulted in stronger confidence in the country's trade unions.

KAZAKHSTAN: UNIONS DISPLEASED WITH ALIEN INVESTORS

President of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan, FTURK, Siyazbek Mukashev spoke to a session of the Council of Foreign Investors under the President of Kazakhstan. He said workers demanded that the government and trade unions put an end to the arbitrary rule prevailing at many foreign enterprises and joint ventures in the republic.

The unions point particularly to the violations of health and safety regulations and the lack of proper social conditions and industrial welfare. Foreign workers and Kazakhstan citizens get different remuneration for work of equal value, with the rights of local residents being infringed upon.

What attracts foreign investors to Kazakhstan is not only the rich natural resources, but also the cheap workforce. The FTURK insists that decent pay be ensured in the country and that the share of wages in the GDP be increased to 50 per cent. To achieve the aim, it will be necessary to reform the work remuneration system.

Violations of the labour standards are more frequent at non-unionised workplaces, while the employers keep hampering the appearance of trade unions at their enterprises. For instance, all attempts to build trade union organisations at the construction sites in Astana have met with the stubborn resistance by the employ-

ers. Most foreign enterprises and joint ventures have no collective agreements.

The FTURK proposes that:

– the Council of Foreign Investors under the country's President should publicly acknowledge the General Agreement, and industrial and regional accords;

– foreign employers should provide all necessary conditions for the creation of trade unions and their free activity, as specified by law;

– foreign investors should respond to President Nazarbayev's appeal to the private business to increase the wages of employees at their enterprises by 32 per cent in order to catch up with the similar pay raises in the budgetary sector effective as of 1 July 2005.

KAZAKHSTAN: NUMBER OF IMMIGRANTS GROWING

The overall number of immigrant workers in Kazakhstan amounted to 15,086 as on 1 July 2005, which is 6,250 people more than in the same period of the preceding year.

The companies using foreign workforce provide employment for 258 thousand citizens of Kazakhstan, while the employers engaging immigrant workers have created 15,900 new jobs for local residents and re-trained 7,200 Kazakhstan specialists. Foreigners account for 5.8 per cent of the total workforce employed at the enterprises. In the meantime,

423 job seekers left Kazakhstan in the first half of the current year, with 341 out of them having gone to the Russian Federation, and 82 to South Korea.

RUSSIA: TRADE UNIONS MARKING CENTENARY

A motor rally under the slogan "United Country, United Trade Unions" was held by the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, FNPR, from 16 July-22 August in connection with the centenary of the Russian trade unions to be formally marked in October 2005. The rally started in Kaliningrad, western Russia, and finished up in Vladivostok, the Far East.

Forty-seven trade union organisations contributed to the preparations for the rally that has covered 35 Russian provinces, with stopovers in 37 cities and towns. Driving Russian-made cars, the trade union activists travelled a distance of 14 thousand kilometres. Mass rallies and meetings with workers were held in each city or town where the car convoy made a stop. Trade union experts were available for consultation on various issues and rendered practical assistance to the local population. Most of the questions asked were about organising trade union activity and wages.

RUSSIA: WAGES UNPAID IN MOSCOW

Mayor of Moscow Youry Luzhkov and President of the Moscow Fed-

eration of Trade Unions Mikhail Nagaytsev met to discuss the issue of wages in arrears in city enterprises and organisations. As of 1 July 2005, twenty-two Moscow organisations had pay debts amounting to 393 million roubles (approximately US\$ 13.6 million), with 50.2 million roubles out of the sum resulting from the lack of financing from the federal budget. Youry Luzhkov instructed the prefects of the city's district administrations to take the debtor enterprises under special control.

RUSSIA: UNIONS CONSIDERING PROTEST ACTIONS

Representatives of the FNPR and a number of Russian trade unions affiliating budgetary sector workers met with leaders of the State Duma (Parliament) 12 September 2005.

Speaker of the Duma Boris Gryzlov told the meeting in what way trade union proposals had been taken into account in the draft budget for 2006. He reminded that in 2005 the minimum wage rate had been raised twice, and, starting from 1 May 2006, it would amount to 1,100 roubles per month.

Vitaly Budko, a FNPR Vice-President, said that, as a result of the reforms being carried out in the country, the workers in the budgetary sector had found themselves among the least protected categories of the population. He warned that the forthcoming 20% pay rise for budgetary workers was insufficient, and, if need be, the unions

were prepared to stage protest actions.

The representatives of the industrial trade unions expressed their reservations about the budget proposals for 2006, concerning mainly the system of pay indexation. President of the Educational Workers' Union Galina Merkulova argued that "the budget treats pay indexation in the same way as it would treat pension indexation, which leaves us with almost no motivation for attracting new workers into the industry, first of all young specialists."

The leaders of the State Duma and the trade unions agreed to discuss in perspective the possibilities of providing additional social guarantees for budgetary sector workers. Those may include free or partly paid medicines, and passage to and therapy in convalescent homes or resorts.

RUSSIA: FNPR 15 YEARS OLD

The FNPR marked its 15th Anniversary 19 September 2005.

The Federation currently affiliates 122 member-organisations, including 43 all-Russia inter-regional trade unions, with a total membership of 29.7 million people, and 79 territorial trade union organisations. Together with the trade unions cooperating with the FNPR on the basis of agreements, the total membership amounts to 30.5 million people. The union members account for 45.9 per cent of the whole economically active population em-

ployed in enterprises of all types of ownership.

Today, the FNPR maintains contacts with trade union centres in more than 100 countries, takes part in the activities of the International Labour Organisation, and is affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and the General Confederation of Trade Unions.

UKRAINE: FTUU LEADER SPOTLIGHTS UNION OBJECTIVES

As he met with trade union activists of the Kharkiv Region in Eastern Ukraine, President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine, FTUU, Olexander Yurkin gave his assessment of the present-day challenges facing the Ukrainian trade union movement.

The major task to cope with was strengthening the organisation of trade unions and improving their structures. The time of numerous but fragmented unions is over, they do not have enough weight to influence social dialogue, particularly in the context of expanding globalisation. Women and young people must be more actively involved in union leadership, he said. A special fund should be established to ensure social protection for trade union members, particularly for those who have achieved their pension age and must retire. Trade union activities are not sufficiently publicised, whereas publicity is known to be a powerful motivation factor for organising.

All those aspects have been reflected in the new Concept of Trade Union Movement, now under discussion in FTUU member-organisations. The FTUU leader noted the emergence of new professions and new jobs in the country, alongside new types of companies, such as insurance, service and other firms. However, he said, practically no attempts have been made to build trade unions in such companies and make them affiliated to the FTUU.

As he touched on the Federation's international activities, Olexander Yurkin stressed that the FTUU was doing its best to join the ICFTU, while striving to maintain even closer cooperation with the ILO and the ETUC. "We regard affiliation to the ICFTU as important, he said, and one reason for this is that, as an ICFTU member, we could rely on efficient support from the international trade union community in case the Government or Parliament should resort to undemocratic actions".

The union leader dwelt on the problems of social dialogue. He said the dialogue between the authorities and trade unions had actually stopped for various reasons since the end of the previous year, and thought it was high time the activity of the National Council for Social Partnership, NCSP, were revived and renewed. Until recently, the NCSP comprised 10 FTUU representatives and 12 members from other trade union groups, though the Federation affiliates 11 million workers while the remaining trade

unions about 2.5 million. "We have corrected this disproportion through negotiations with our partners", he added. Today, the FTUU has 14 members on the Council, while the other unions have 8 members. Such representation will enable the FTUU to influence the negotiation process more actively.

The Federation intends to change its approach to the process of elaborating and signing the General Agreement. The document should be freed from the excessive "technicalities", and its contents should be more easily understood by the rank-and-file union members for whose benefit it is negotiated. It is essential for the General Agreement to be concluded for a period coinciding with the President's term of office, which will make it possible to amend it every year, for example, in what concerns the minimum wage rates. Moreover, the General Agreement should be signed before the State Budget is approved by Parliament.

The FTUU leader said that the draft Labour Code of Ukraine in its current wording (after the first reading in the Supreme Rada, Ukraine's Parliament) contains many discriminatory provisions restricting seriously workers' rights and interests. In particular, the employers succeeded in incorporating a clause into the draft Code that makes collective bargaining in enterprises and organisations merely optional. The unions will have to struggle for eliminating this and other anti-worker provisions from the text of the Code.

UKRAINE: TRADE UNIONS APPEAL TO SUPREME RADA

A meeting held 14 September 2005 in Kiev by the industrial trade unions and national trade union centres of Ukraine issued an appeal to the members of the Supreme Rada (Parliament).

The appeal says the negotiations with the Government regarding the minimum wage rates have reached a deadlock. The unions' proposals for setting the minimum wage at 100 per cent of the subsistence minimum as from 1 January 2006 and at 130 per cent as from 1 July 2006 have not met with support. They were ignored by the authors of the draft state budget for the coming year. The minimum wages proposed by the Cabinet of Ministers in its draft budget for 2006 are below the subsistence minimum. This violates the provisions of Ukraine's Law on State Social Standards and State Social Guarantees. The trade unions cannot accept the fact that the sum of the subsistence minimum as contained in the draft State Budget has been calculated based on the old standards. No account has been taken of the actual expenses borne by citizens on payments for housing, medical services and education, in particular, for children attending pre-school establishments.

The trade unions have urged MPs to take a principled stand when approving the budget and protect the constitutional guarantees of decent living standards for workers and their families.

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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, UZBEKISTAN, AND UKRAINE, AS WELL AS 32 BRANCH TRADE UNION INTERNATIONALS.

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 COUNCIL AND THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE.

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

*PRESIDENT OF THE GCTU IS MIKHAIL SHMAKOV,
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DEAR READERS

The GCTU information bulletin "Inform-Contact" is also distributed by E-mail. Apart from that, the English and French versions of our publication are available on our web site: www.vkp.ru
