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

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### **GCTU**

The GCTU Executive which met 1 November 2005 decided to hold an International scientific and practical conference on "The Status and Problems of the Trade Union Movement in the CIS" in 2006. The decision was the result of a broad discussion involving representatives of national trade union centres who exchanged their views on the present-day objectives in the struggle for workers' rights and interests and on the ways to strengthen trade union solidarity and unity within the CIS.

In connection with the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chernobyl Disaster, the CIS trade unions were encouraged to draw the attention of authorities and economic entities to the situation and problems of the Chernobyl victims, help preserve the privileges and guarantees they have been granted, ensure their healthcare and create adequate living and working conditions.

The GCTU Council met 2 November 2005 to discuss trade union actions with

regard to raising the minimum wage rate up to a level not lower than the subsistence minimum (minimum consumer budget).

The Council urged its member-organisations to continue active actions to this effect within the joint solidarity campaign undertaken by the CIS trade union movement. The Council emphasised the importance of enhancing information support for the campaign.

The issue of pension security in the CIS countries and the necessity for the CIS trade unions to pay more attention to the pensioners' situation was also considered. The ongoing pension reforms in the CIS have deteriorated the situation of the retired people who constitute a numerous social group comprising some 65 mln people. The present level of pension security does not guarantee for the majority of retirees even the absolutely indispensable subsistence conditions. The retired people are the poorest category of the population in the CIS countries. The GCTU's report on the situation of pensioners in

the CIS will be finalised with due regard for the results of the discussion and forwarded to the CIS Heads of Government. The GCTU jointly with its member-organisations will work out and submit to the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly proposals on harmonising national pension laws and establishing legal arrangements for preserving the money allocated to non-governmental pension funds. Apart from that, the CIS trade unions will undertake actions demanding decent living conditions for retirees.

At its XXVI plenary session held in November 2005, the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly approved the framework laws elaborated by the GCTU. They include a law "On State Guarantees for Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women" and a law "On Social Protection for Citizens Exposed to Radiation as a Result of Accidents, Nuclear Tests and Incidents".

### **AZERBAIJAN: TRADE UNION RANKS ON THE RISE**

According to the Republican Committee of the Azerbaijan Oil and Gas Industry Workers' Union, the interest for joining trade unions has substantially grown among the industry's workers following a strike at McDermott enterprises. At present, there are some 70 thousand workers in the oil and gas industry, including 56 thousand employed by the Azerbaijan State Oil Company. The Republican Committee is persistently working to create trade union organisations at foreign companies which

presently amount to more than 50 in the country.

Organising groups have been formed at McDermott and Bosshelf enterprises. Principle draft documents are being worked out, and preparations for elections are underway. So far, the management of the companies does not hinder the activities of these groups.

### **BELARUS: TRADE UNION RIGHTS EXPANDED**

The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection has granted the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB) the right to exercise "public control over timely wage payments at enterprises and individual businesses (irrespective of the availability of trade union members among their employees)".

The control will be performed by legal and technical labour inspection boards of the FTUB and its organisational structures. In case of delays in wage payments, the trade unions will make representations to eliminate the violations. The information on delays in wage payments will be submitted to the State oversight and monitoring authorities for labour law compliance.

### **BELARUS: LEONID KOZIK'S PRESS-CONFERENCE**

FTUB President Leonid Kozik addressed a press-conference 20 December 2005. The major event in 2005 was the election campaign that culminated in the FTUB 5<sup>th</sup> Congress. "Our objec-

tive remains the same – to seek higher incomes for people, to press for higher real wages and for an increase in incomes as a whole, including pensions, scholarships and allowances,” he said.

The FTUB focuses on the protection of workers’ socio-economic interests. “The workers have many rights but not all of them are implements in full”, stressed the trade union leader.

In particular, the overall employment situation in the country is favourable. The unemployment level is 1.8 % of the able-bodied population while the General Tripartite Agreement signed in 2005 specifies that unemployment should not be higher than 2%. However, in some regions of the country the unemployment indicator substantially exceeds the average level. It is essential to solve this problem not only through the labour exchange but by creating new jobs as well.

Leonid Kozik noted that the organising process was actively going on at private sector enterprises. During the last few months, over 700 grass-root unions were set up at private enterprises with a total workforce exceeding 37 thousand people. “About 30 thousand of them have become our members. These people know that now their socio-economic interests are under our protection”, said Kozik.

### **GEORGIA: GTUA EXTRAORDINARY CONGRESS**

An extraordinary congress of the Georgian Trade Union Amalgamation was held 23 September 2005.

The Congress discussed the current situation and trade union objectives. GTUA President Irakly Tugushi who presented a report on the activities carried out emphasised the necessity for active trade union efforts to defend workers’ interests. He highlighted the importance of enhancing the unity of various industrial trade union sectors, improving the organisational structure and increasing the number of young people among trade union officials and activists.

Speaking at the Congress, delegates seriously criticized the GTUA Board. In particular, the leadership of the trade union centre has failed to establish fruitful dialogue with the authorities and employers’ associations, make the social partners respect the unions’ opinion and listen to their proposals on a wide range of social problems. The leaders’ stand regarding the protection of the trade union property and the solution of economic and financial issues was also subjected to criticism.

The Congress spoke in favour of seeking optimal ways of integrating industrial trade unions and strengthening grass-root organisations. The Congress emphasised the necessity for securing normal business relations between the trade unions and their social partners, based on tripartite principles.

Irakly Petriashvili, former President of the Communal Enterprises Workers’ Union, was elected new President of the GTUA, while G.Alexandria, M.Dolidze, T.Guiladze and G.Kereselidze were elected Vice-Presidents.

## **KAZAKHSTAN: TRADE UNIONS SUPPORT PRESIDENT NAZARBAYEV**

The 21<sup>st</sup> Extraordinary Congress of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTURK) held 31 October 2005 endorsed the nomination of current President Nazarbayev for the presidential elections on 4 December 2006.

Addressing the Congress, President Nazarbayev thanked the trade unions for their support. He underlined that “even in the most difficult years of the establishment of a new Kazakhstan, he always found the trade unions among his consistent and active advocates”.

Nursultan Nazarbayev noted that the sustainable economic growth would make it possible to increase substantially social support for the population. This year, he said, the interests of the State and trade unions match each other as never before. By 2012, it is envisaged to increase the per capita GNP up to US\$ 8-9 thousand, double the population’s income, raise the average pay up to 70 thous. tengues (US\$ 545) and increase the social allowances and scholarships by 2-2.5 times.

“The trade unions should virtually participate in developing and implementing the socio-economic policy of the country”, stressed Nazarbayev.

The Congress appealed to trade union members and all the workers of Kazakhstan to vote for Nazarbayev, “for

the Kazakhstani way of building a strong social state, for solving workers’ socio-economic problems, for democracy and freedom”.

At its session held 9 December 2005, the Executive noted that the FTURK member-organisations had carried out a wide-scale organisational and propaganda campaign with a view to re-electing Nursultan Nazarbayev for the next term. During the pre-election campaign they had organised over nine thousand meetings, rallies and other publicity events. The number of trade union officials and activists involved in the campaign among the electorate exceeded 11 thousand.

## **MOLDOVA: UCRM 4<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**

The 4<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Union Confederation of the Republic of Moldova (UCRM) was held from 27-28 October 2005.

Speaking at the Congress, UCRM President Petru Chiriac noted that after 15 years of independence the population of the country did not have serious confidence in any democratic institution. It equally applies to the trade unions.

To win such confidence, it is essential to enhance the efficiency of social dialogue and partnership as the key tool for economic and social progress. The UCRM urges all the political forces and organisations of civil society to co-operate on the principles of equality and independence in order to address the nation-wide socio-economic objectives

and promote the implementation of the European standards.

The Congress approved the UCRM Council's activities in major areas and elected a new Council and an Auditing Commission. Petru Chiriac was re-elected President of the Confederation while A.Nistor was elected Chairman of the Auditing Commission.

### **MOLDOVA: VIOLATIONS OF TRADE UNION RIGHTS CONTINUE**

The UCRM organised a press-conference 11 November 2005 to inform of multiple facts involving the violation of ILO Conventions Nos. 87 and 98 in Moldova. At present, the ICFTU has appealed to the European Union to tie up the issue of granting Moldova a preferential customs tariff with the cessation of the current practice by the authorities to interfere in the trade unions' internal affairs.

Following the UCRM complaint submitted to the ILO over such violations, a governmental commission was set up. However, it has failed to put an end to the confrontation of the authorities and the trade unions at the national and local levels.

Neither the Criminal Code nor the Administrative Law stipulate any punitive measures for violating trade union rights. This makes it possible for the prosecutor's office to dismiss trade unions' claims concerning unlawful actions by the employers and authorities.

Violations of the Law on Trade Unions remain unpunished.

The sanctions that may be applied to Moldova at the international level, specifically, by the European Union, will bear heavily on tax-payers. The UCRM urges the country's authorities to take immediate action to exclude the possibility of violating the standards and principles set forth in ILO conventions.

### **RUSSIA: CALL FOR UNITY OF TRADE UNION ACTIONS**

The major national trade union centres, the Federation of the Independent Trade Unions of Russia, the All-Russia Confederation of Labour, the Confederation of Labour of Russia and the Congress of Russian Trade Unions, issued a joint statement on the eve of the centenary of the Russian trade union movement.

"We are different but we have common aims and objectives – a struggle for the implementation of the right to work, for decent pay, safe working conditions and solid social guarantees for workers and their families", the Statement says.

The Statement appeals to Russian trade unions and their federations and to the entire trade union movement of Russia to join efforts and co-operate more closely in the struggle for workers' rights and interests.

### **RUSSIA: FNPR 5<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS**

Addressing the 5<sup>th</sup> (Extraordinary) Congress of the FNPR held in October 2005

and dedicated to the centenary of the Russian trade unions, its President Mikhail Shmakov said that the Russian trade unions intended “to seek social dialogue”. At the same time, he warned that “pressure on workers’ rights by the employers and authorities is growing”. The pay rise lags behind the inflation rates while the housing and utilities reform is capable of impoverishing the entire population of the country “if it is reduced to increasing tariffs”. Mikhail Shmakov stressed that the FNPR was ready “to give a fitting rebuff both to the State and the business in case they infringe upon workers’ rights”. “Legal protection of workers remains the FNPR’s streamline policy”, he said.

The Appeal of the Congress to the trade union organisations and workers emphasised that “workers should be aware that in the current wild capitalism environment the trade unions have become a real “school of life” for every Russian toiler”. In defending employees’ interests, the trade union uses all lawful forms: from negotiations through to industrial action”.

The Appeal also underlined that in 2004 alone trade union legal service officers “helped prepare claims to the labour dispute commissions and participated in court proceedings representing the interests of over 170 thousand union members. Due to the high competence of trade union lawyers, the courts satisfied more than 90% of claims by trade union members. And what can be done single-handed?”

The Appeal noted that “when joining a trade union, one should not remain a

passive observer. It is only a concerned attitude of every union member that brings success!”

### **RUSSIA: DEMAND TO ELIMINATE WAGE ARREARS**

In his interview to the “Mayak” radio programme on 24 December 2005, Mikhail Shmakov branded as “shame” the facts of delays in wage payments still taking place in the country. Today, this problem has largely been solved, however, the total pay debt in Russia so far constitutes 9 billion roubles (US\$ 325 mln). As of 1 December 2005, the wage arrears affected every 23<sup>rd</sup> worker employed in the national economy. This makes up 1 300 thousand people.

The Labour Law of the Russian Federation gives every worker, whose pay is delayed for more than 15 days, the right to stop work until the wage debt is settled. The courts may impose substantial fines on employers for delaying wage payments.

According to the FNPR President, the trade unions will continue pursuing a policy aimed at eliminating all cases of pay delays.

### **TAJIKISTAN: ASSISTANCE TO LEGAL LABOUR MIGRANTS**

Over three thousand people have used the services of trade union centres for assisting migrant construction workers that opened in major regions of Tajikistan early in 2005. These centres

were set up by the Tajikistan Construction Workers' Union with ILO assistance. Approximately 1 000 people have got an opportunity for legal employment in Russia.

The national construction workers' unions of the two countries have reached an agreement whereby "members of the Tajikistan Construction Workers' Union, while in Russia, automatically become members of the Russian Construction Workers' Union and will not be left unheeded".

Three-month training courses for acquiring brick-layer and welder skills have been opened in Dushanbe, the national capital. Apart from that, the trainees study Russian and get acquainted with the basic rights and obligations of migrant workers. The graduates receive certificates that enhance their chances to find a job.

### **UKRAINE: FTUU JUBILEE**

Celebrations dedicated to the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FTUU), the centenary of the first collective agreement signed in Ukraine and of the emergence of the national trade union movement were held 4 November 2005 in Kharkov, Ukraine.

About 300 militants received State and trade union awards. While greeting the participants in the ceremonial meeting, a GCTU Deputy General Secretary Valery Yuriev underlined that the Ukrainian trade unions occupy a prominent place in the family of the GCTU

member-organisations and enjoy a well-deserved prestige in the world trade union movement.

### **UKRAINE: ICFTU MISSION FINDINGS**

An ICFTU mission visited Ukraine from 24-26 November 2005 to assess the FTUU's conformity with the ICFTU membership criteria. The FTUU was recognised as an independent democratic organisation. The mission members were unanimous in their decision to recommend the Executive Committee to admit the FTUU as an ICFTU member. The proposal was approved at an Executive Committee session held 9-10 December 2005 in Hong-Kong.

### **UKRAINE: FTUU EXPANDS ITS RANKS**

New member-organisations were admitted to the FTUU at a session of the FTUU Presidium 23 December 2005. These are:

- All-Ukraine Union of "Lukoil-Ukraine" Workers affiliating 3.5 thousand members;
- All-Ukraine Independent Transport Workers' Union affiliating 28.6 thousand members;
- Independent Union of Farmers and Private Land-Owners of Ukraine affiliating 42 thousand members.

The Presidium approved the plan of preparations for the FTUU 5<sup>th</sup> Congress to be convened in April 2006.

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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,  
GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE GCTU IS VLADIMIR SCHERBAKOV*

**DEAR READERS**

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