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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU HAILS HIGH-LEVEL ECOSOC MEETING

Vladimir Scherbakov, General Secretary of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, sent a message of greetings to participants in the 2006 High Level Segment of ECOSOC held in Geneva from 3-4 July 2006.

The message says the GCTU and its affiliates support the idea that world governments should adopt national strategies of poverty reduction providing first of all for the elimination of such phenomenon as “working poor”, and develop national decent work agendas based on values such as employment, the right to work, social protection, and social dialogue. The GCTU hopes that the world community led by the United Nations will do its best to make urgent social problems the focus of efforts being taken by humankind to ensure a successful implementation of the Millennium Development Goals.

Trade unions in the CIS countries have been consistently struggling to build better conditions for workers. With this purpose in view, they organ-

ise protest actions, participate in the national tripartite commissions, approach their national parliaments, and appeal to the executive and judicial authorities.

“We hope that the results of the Geneva ECOSOC session will help us win decent living and work conditions for all employees in the CIS countries”, the message says in conclusion.

AZERBAIJAN: TRIPARTITE AGREEMENT SIGNED

The Government of Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijan Trade Unions’ Confederation (ATUC) and the National Confederation of Employers’ Organisations signed a general collective agreement for 2006-2007.

The parties to the agreement have undertaken the commitments to work towards the solution of social problems, such as liquidation of poverty, reduction of the unemployment level, improvement of the working conditions, and ensuring an increase in the population’s incomes.

The agreement specifies the steps to be taken to enhance workers' social conditions, build new education and health facilities, and introduce a more efficient net of recipient-oriented social assistance. Particular emphasis shall be placed on securing timely payment of taxes and deductions to the fund of obligatory social insurance.

In spite of the positive tendencies in the economic and social development, the unemployment and inflation rates are still high, something that the unions are worried about.

The economic policy will seek promoting further production development, sale of home-made products, and job creation. The agreement includes concrete obligations concerning raises in pay, incomes of the population, pensions, etc.

The ATUC proposal that all stakeholders should unconditionally help employees in foreign enterprises operative in Azerbaijan establish and run independently their trade union organisations. met with approval.

The agreement recommends that enterprises and organisations allocate at least 0.15 per cent of their payrolls to help implement the collective accords signed.

ARMENIA: UNIONS MAKING AVAIL OF NEW LABOUR CODE

The new Labour Code warns against any provisions in collective agreements that would make the conditions of workers worse than established by labour legislation or other legal acts containing labour law norms.

The Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA) is currently concentrating on organising collective bargaining campaigns and rendering practical assistance to its member-organisations. A model collective agreement for enterprises of different forms of ownership has been developed, together with a sample labour contract that is an obligatory condition for establishing and legalising individual labour relations.

In accordance with the new Labour Code, the CTUA has drafted and submitted to the government several statutory normative acts concerning such problems as investigation of occupational accidents, health and safety commissions etc.

The GCTU provides workers with free legal advice on labour legislation, and helps them file claims for reinstatement in their former jobs, reimbursement for damages caused by industrial accidents, etc. The number of people applying for such advice is constantly growing.

The Confederation insists that the government establish the minimum consumer goods basket and the minimum consumer budget. This implies the development of the contents, structure and cost of the basket and the budget as required by law.

BELARUS: FTUB EXAMINES RESULTS

The Council of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB) held a plenary session in Minsk to analyse the Federation's activity in the period following its 5th Congress.

In his report to the session, FTUB President Leonid Kozik said that quite a lot had been done since the last Congress. However, he added, there were some forces in Belarussian society that “were not happy about the growing influence of trade unions affiliated with the FTUB”.

At all levels of state administration representatives of the Federation stood on guard of workers’ interests. Leaders of FTUB affiliates sat on the boards of 14 Ministries and three state committees.

“As far back as 2005, we managed to bring the minimum wages up to the level of subsistence minimum budget”, said FTUB President. “As the budget proposals for 2007 were prepared, the Federation of Trade Unions suggested another raise in the minimum wages to make them equal 1.2 subsistence minimums”.

The Federation was going to concentrate on the improvement of the social partnership system, particularly at municipal and regional levels. Another important thing was the trade union proposal to develop and adopt a special legal provision that would automatically extend the coverage of the General Agreement and the National Collective Bargaining Accords to all employers in all forms of ownership, including those who did not sign the agreements.

BELARUS: UNIONS TO ENHANCE HEALTH & SAFETY

The FTUB Presidium considered the work of the Federation’s trade unions’ health and safety inspection done in the first half of 2006.

There were 80 labour inspectors in the republic as of 1 July 2006. Over the period under review, they had surveyed the health and safety conditions in 2,181 enterprises and organisations. Based on the results obtained, 1,872 prescriptions have been issued to the employers obliging them to remove 25,173 defects violating the health and safety regulations.

The health and safety discipline at workplaces in the private sector is very poor. This is mainly due to the fact that most of the enterprise leaders and high-ranking officials have not been properly examined for their knowledge of health and safety rules as required by law. Neither are the workers briefed or trained in the safety code, which increases the risks of occupational accidents.

The FTUB intends to take more active steps to enhance the work of its health and safety inspection.

GEORGIA: JOINT INSURANCE PROJECT

The Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) and the GPI Insurance Holding Company are considering a joint project to insure social risks.

The insurance programme is meant to protect employees and their families who have lost their jobs by paying them a fixed sum of monetary compensation. A trade union member who has lost his/her job and is in search for new employment will get insurance compensation of 150 laris for a period of 10 months.

According to George Kvirikadze, GPI general manager, it is for the first time that a collective agreement on unemployment insurance is being developed in Georgia. It is an essential fact to all employees in the country who are union members. The insurance policy will not repair the moral damage, but will provide a certain material guarantee, he added.

Over the first six months of 2006, the GPI Insurance Holding Company has attracted premiums worth 8,183,617 laris. The total compensated loss for the period amounted to 3,008,763 laris, with 1,842,529 laris falling on the second quarter.

KAZAKHSTAN: PERPETRATORS TO BE PUNISHED

A fire caused by a methane explosion broke out at 8.56 a.m. 20 September in the Lenin coal mine owned by the joint-stock company *Mittal Steel Temirtau* in the Karaganda Region, with 368 people being caught down in the pit at a depth of 620 metres. Over 300 miners were able to get to the surface on their own immediately after the blast, while 41 miners were killed and six taken to hospital.

In a statement issued 21 September, the Federation of Trade Unions of Kazakhstan, FTURK, expressed its sincere condolences to the families and other relatives of the victims. The country's trade unions decided to render considerable material assistance to the families of the miners killed by the explosion.

"This is the second such accident in the past two years causing a massive

loss of human life at collieries belonging to *Mittal Steel Temirtau* whose managers seem unable to provide their workers with safe working conditions under the surface, the Statement says.

"The British billionaire Lakshmi Mittal feels altogether free-and-easy in Kazakhstan. Constitutional labour rights of workers at his mining and metal enterprises are regularly violated, safety regulations are not observed, the bulk of machinery is outdated and needs renovation, and the state of many sanitary and amenity rooms is beneath criticism.

"The miners and metallurgical workers employed by the *Mittal Steel Temirtau* are the lowest-paid among the workers both in the country's industrial sector and in other overseas enterprises of this transnational corporation".

The FTURK has lodged a protest with the Government against its connivance with the owner and employer and suggested that a special government commission be set up with the involvement of trade unions to thoroughly investigate the observance by the *Mittal Steel Temirtau* of the labour legislation and health and safety regulations.

MOLDOVA: CTURM REJECTS GOVERNMENT DECISION

The Confederation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Moldova (CTURM) has expressed its disagreement with the government's ruling regarding the method of calculating the subsistence minimum.

The CTURM leadership are of the opinion that in some cases the application of the new provision will not only undermine the social protection of the population, but also negatively affect the determination of minimum social guarantees, such as wages, pensions, scholarships, allowances and other fringe benefits.

It is to be guessed what makes the authors of the decree believe that the energy value of the food basket has grown when, in accordance with the new provision, the average allowances for most foodstuffs in the basket have been cut down.

The CTURM has expressed its regret over the fact that the government continues adopting normative acts affecting workers' interests without consulting its social partners.

Russia: Unions Defending Future Retirees

In his interview to the "Mayak" radio station, President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) Mikhail Shmakov said that a part of employers in the country did not pay contributions to the Pension Fund in full (or make no contributions at all). This leads to a situation when workers often cannot get a pension that corresponds to their wages and length of service.

He noted, however, that the unions could maintain control over timely and regular payments of insurance premiums. "The trade union organisations at enterprises would normally check if the accounting office pays these contributions accurately. As a rule,

large non-payments to the pension funds are typical of non-unionised enterprises".

According to the FNPR President, Russia does not comply with the ILO recommendations that the rate of lost income compensation by the pension must be at least 40 per cent. "Unfortunately, since 2002 the compensation rate has decreased from 32% in to 27%. This is unacceptable", he said.

Russia: FNPR Executive Reviews Health and Safety

A meeting of the FNPR Executive Committee held 23 August 2006 considered the progress made in preparations for the 6th FNPR Congress. Participants noted that practically all FNPR member-organisations would hold their own congresses or conferences before the FNPR Congress. As of 23 August, 352 delegates from 50 affiliates had been elected.

As they reviewed the activity of the trade union technical labour inspection in 2005, the Executive members noted certain positive downward trends in occupational injuries in 53 constituent entities of the country, in the agro-industrial complex, forestry, transport and communications, and budgetary sphere. Concern was expressed over the increased number of fatal occupational accidents since 2004 in 30 constituents of the Federation.

The Executive decided to strengthen the cooperation of the trade union technical labour inspection with the State technical inspection and with the regional executive authorities.

RUSSIA: LABOUR CODE AMENDED

As amendments to the RF Labour Code are due to come into force in October 2006, a FNPR Vice-President Alexander Surikov has commented on some of them.

Serious amendments have been introduced to the section "Social Partnership", which outlines and specifies many issues concerning collective bargaining at enterprises. Authorities would often adopt laws and normative acts ignoring the opinion of workers and their organisations. Today, the amended Code incorporates a new article (Article 35-1) requiring that the authorities at all levels, before they admit any such draft law or normative act, should submit them for consideration and comments to the tripartite commission for regulating social and labour relations.

Article 410 of the current Labour Code defines a clear-cut mechanism to be used by a workers' collective when deciding on industrial action. The previous requirement was that at least two thirds of the collective members should take part in the meeting or conference to consider the issue. The FNPR has managed to change this rule. Now for a workers' collective to decide whether or not to go on a strike, there is no need to gather two thirds of their membership, which is a difficult task for large-scale and scattered collectives. Half the workers plus one will be enough to pass such a decision.

An important amendment has been introduced into Article 236 of the Code making the employer liable to give

workers monetary compensation for violating the established time-limits for paying wages, annual leave allowances, severance pay etc., irrespective of the existence of the employer's fault.

TAJKISTAN: UNIONS PREPARING FOR WINTER

The Tajikistan Federation of Trade Unions is actively involved in the process of getting the national economy and the social sphere ready for the autumn-winter period.

The unions have mobilised their labour inspectors and all other activists for helping the economic agencies prepare industrial enterprises and the engineering systems of the housing and communal services for operation in the winter period.

As of 1 August 2006, over 300 organisations and enterprises, irrespective of their forms of ownership, had been surveyed by the trade union inspection. As a result, their managers were given over 1,500 prescriptions obliging them to eliminate the drawbacks revealed.

UKRAINE: GOVERNMENT CHOOSES CONFRONTATION

The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FTUU) decided 21 July 2006 to enter into a collective labour conflict with the Cabinet of Ministers in an attempt to make the government meet the trade union demands.

The reason for that was a new decision by the National Commission for Regulating Power Engineering to

raise the prices and rates of electricity by 25 per cent.

The FTUU had demanded that the Cabinet of Ministers suspend the legal acts increasing the prices and rates of natural gas, electricity, railway fares and telecommunication services used by the population. The trade unions insist that any decision involving changes in these prices and rates should be accompanied by a package of additional measures on the social protection of workers and their families.

UKRAINE: UNIONS DEMAND ELIMINATION OF PAY DEBTS

According to the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the total pay debt in Ukraine constituted 1,089 million hryvnias (roughly US\$ 215 million) as of 1 September 2006.

Particularly critical is the situation in the Transcarpathian, Kharkov, Odessa, Zaporozhye and Ivano-Frankovsk regions. The trade unions have filed more than 3000 law suits against delays in wage payments. They demand that the wages be paid in full.

UKRAINE: DIFFICULT DIALOGUE GOING ON

FTUU President Olexander Yurkin met with Ukrainian Prime-Minister Victor Yanukovich 8 August 2006 to discuss a new General Agreement and the most burning issues of workers' socio-economic protection in the context of rising prices and rates.

The FTUU's leaders also held consultations with the Ministry of Labour and

Social Policy. The problems discussed included the necessity for the trade unions to participate in the development of the Government's Programme of Action and the State budget for 2007.

FTUU President Olexander Yurkin appealed to the Council of National Security and Defence to consider the problem of social protection of the population, given the sharp rise in the prices of electricity, gas and communal services. In his letter, Olexander Yurkin warned that "mass protests can be expected in the very near future, and certain political forces can take advantage of them, unless the Government takes measures to curb the growth of prices and rates, and introduces social compensation for citizens".

UKRAINE: RELIEF TO FAMILIES OF KILLED MINERS

The FTUU Presidium decided on 21 September 2006 to allot 25 thousand hryvnias to the trade union committee of the *Zasiadko* coal mine in Donetsk for rendering material aid to the families of the killed or injured miners. The Presidium also appealed to the FTUU affiliates urging them to help the mine's trade union committee.

Sudden outbursts of coal and gas mixture that took place 20 September 2006 at the coal pit at a depth of 1,078 metres killed 13 miners and injured about 60 miners who were hospitalised.

The Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers allocated 1.5 million hryvnias to help liquidate the consequences of the accident.

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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

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