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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU EXECUTIVE MEETS IN MOSCOW

The GCTU Executive Committee held its session 16 April 2007 in the Palace of Labour, Moscow. It was attended by the leaders of the national trade union centres and industrial Trade Union Internationals affiliated with the Confederation and representing 53 million organised workers.

The Executive met exactly on the day when the GCTU was marking the 15th Anniversary of its foundation as an international trade union organisation.

Addressing the session, GCTU President Mikhail Shmakov underlined that the past years had convincingly proved that the historical choice made by CIS trade unions 15 years ago, the creation of the GCTU, was right. Over the period, the Confederation had turned into

an influential regional trade union organisation recognised by our fellow trade unionists, interstate bodies, legislative and executive authorities, and employers in the Commonwealth countries.

GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov presented a report on the occasion "Time-tested Fraternal Solidarity".

Leaders of several CIS interstate agencies and national parliaments were present at the session as guests.

The Executive adopted an appeal to world trade unions on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the Confederation, a declaration "GCTU 15 Years: Looking Into the Future", and an appeal in connection with May-day.

The GCTU Executive considered also a number of specific issues

of trade union activity, including the work of industrial TUIs to protect rights and interests of employees in transnational enterprises operative in CIS countries, the ratification and observance by CIS countries of the fundamental and other ILO conventions, the prospects for GCTU cooperation with the ITUC and PERC, etc.

GCTU HEALTH AND SAFETY COMMISSION SCRUTINISES IMPLEMENTATION

The GCTU Health and Safety Committee met in the Palace of Labour in April 2007 to review the implementation of the GCTU Council's decision relating to labour protection in the CIS countries and the trade union tasks in enhancing public control over safety and health at work.

The GCTU issued a Statement in connection with the World Day for Safety and Health at Work observed 28 April on the ILO initiative.

The Statement says among other things:

“The CIS trade unions, being part of the world trade union movement, regard the protection of the right to safe and healthy work as a priority task in their activities.

The trade unions view their participation in the World Day observance as an important milestone for even more active and effective efforts to prevent occupational accidents”.

Speaking for the CIS trade unions, the GCTU declared its readiness and determination to continue its persistent efforts aimed at creating a working environment that would exclude injuries and industrial diseases.

GCTU: ROUND TABLE ON PENSIONS

GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov took part in the round table meeting entitled “Decent Living Standards to Pensioners in the CIS Countries” that was organised in April 2007 by the GCTU and the Coordinating Council of the Association of Public Organisations of Veterans (Pensioners) in the New Independent States, in conjunction with the FNPR.

GCTU: HUMANITARIAN COMMISSION CONCERNED ABOUT YOUTH

The GCTU Commission for Humanitarian Cooperation and Information met in Moscow in April 2007. The Commission reviews systematically trade union propos-

als for draft framework laws to be adopted by the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly concerning education, culture, tourism, sports, and mutual information support. In addition, it prepares regularly draft decisions and background papers for consideration by the GCTU Council and Executive Committee, analyses and generalises the best trade union practices and experience, and promotes the use of modern communication facilities and digital technologies.

Speakers stressed it was important to give more concern to the youth problems. In particular, the GCTU and its affiliates should strive to win decent social and labour guarantees for young workers and students, and provide adequate conditions for their professional advancement and active public involvement.

GCTU REPORTING ON ITS ACTIVITY

Presenting reports to the leaders and activists of affiliated organisations on the activities of the GCTU Council and Executive Committee in the period after the GCTU 4th ordinary congress (2002-07) is an important phase of preparations for the forthcoming 6th Congress of the Confederation to be held 14 September 2007 in Moscow.

This year such reports are particularly topical as they deal with the activity of a renewed GCTU that emerged after its 5th extraordinary congress in March 2004, an up-to-date and democratic organisation that has managed to embark on the path of successful development.

The reports, which are being presented by GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov or some of his deputies, give the affiliates an opportunity to feel the big difference between the old and the new styles of GCTU activity, and compare their effectiveness and usefulness, while the Confederation, on its part, has a chance to verify the course chosen.

As can be gathered from their response, the affiliates believe the decisions of the 5th extraordinary congress to be utterly correct, which has been convincingly proven by the time that has elapsed. The results of the report presentations, as well as the proposals, critical remarks and opinions made by the leaders and activists of the affiliated organisations in the course of discussions on GCTU activities will provide the basis for draft documents and decisions to be prepared for the forthcoming Congress.

DECENT WORK AGENDA IN ARMENIA

The Government of Armenia, the ILO, the Confederation of Trade Unions of Armenia (CTUA) and the Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of Armenia have signed an agreement on joint implementation of the Decent Work Agenda for 2007-2011. Its main objective is to promote decent work as an integral part of the country's socio-economic development. The programme comprises three major sections: promotion of the employment policy, enhancement of social partnership, and improvement of social protection.

The ILO has undertaken to assist the Government and the social partners in the development and implementation of labour market issues.

ARMENIA: UNIONS PRESS FOR DECENT PAY

Raising the role of collective agreements, whose number grew by 13% in 2006, remains the principle task of the CTUA. The Confederation is directly involved in the revision of the Strategic Programme for Eliminating Poverty adopted by the Armenian Government in August 2003. The main demand of the Confederation is

that the minimum consumer budget should be taken as the basis for determining the poverty line.

A Coordinating Council has been set up within the framework of the Programme headed by the Prime-Minister, with CTUA President Martin Harutyunian being its member.

The CTUA has succeeded in securing a regular increase in the minimum wage that has been reviewed thrice since 1 January 1 2004. As from January 2007, it was raised again by 33% to reach an equivalent of \$56 a month, which is equal to 43 per cent of the minimum consumer basket.

BELARUS: FTUB INVOLVED IN DRAFTING LABOUR CODE

The Chamber of Representatives of the National Assembly of Belarus approved on 4 May 2007 the bill on amendments and supplements to the Labour Code in the first reading.

According to President of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus (FTUB) Leonid Kozik, the FTUB has repeatedly submitted its comments to the Chamber of Representatives already at the drafting and coordination phase; however, they have not so far been taken

into account. "If this be the case, we shall undertake active actions to ensure that the solutions we believe to be appropriate are included in the draft law. We are set to put up a serious fight and ask the drafters to be more attentive to the proposals submitted by the FTUB", the trade union leader said.

The trade unions urge the authorities to restore the legal provision envisaging severance pay to workers suffering from occupational injuries or diseases, retain the current extra payment for night shifts, provide legally guaranteed additional leave for the irregular working day and for long service.

KAZAKHSTAN: LABOUR CODE SIGNED

President Nursultan Nazarbayev has signed the Labour Code of Kazakhstan 16 May 2007, establishing a new model for legal regulation of labour relations that will meet the present-day requirements of national economic development and fit with international labour standards.

Simultaneously, the President signed the law "On the Amendments and Supplements to Several Legal Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan Relating to Labour Regulation" that will bring the cur-

rent laws into line with the new Labour Code.

KAZAKHSTAN: FTURK EXECUTIVE DISCUSSES FURTHER REFORM

The Executive Committee of the Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Kazakhstan (FTURK) met 30 May 2007 to consider a draft plan for further reform of trade union activity to make it more adequate to the current situation. The document had preliminarily been discussed by a working group that summed up the proposals received from different seminars and round-tables. Following further examination by the member organisations, the plan will be adopted at the next session of the General Council.

The Executive also discussed organisational and publicity measures to be taken to explain the new Labour Code to union members.

In addition to that, the Executive reviewed the outcome of the National Safety and Health Competition held at industrial enterprises in 2006, and the results of the collective bargaining at industrial and regional levels. Delegates to the GCTU 6th Congress were also elected.

RUSSIA: UNIONS DEMAND DECENT PENSION

The Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR) organised an all-Russia trade union action "For Decent Pension" 10 April 2007. Participants in the manifestation demanded that the minimum pension be set at the level of subsistence minimum as from 1 December 2008, the earnings replacement rate be not less than 40 per cent as required by international standards, and provisions be made in the federal budget for making the minimum wages catch up with the subsistence minimum by 1 December 2008.

RUSSIA: MAY-DAY MARCHERS DEMAND HIGHER LIVING STANDARDS

The May Day action by Russian trade unions in 2007 was held under the slogan "For Observance of Workers' Rights! For Decent Life!"

The number of participants in the events was almost 1.5 times higher than planned, with over two million people having taken to the streets under the trade union banners.

The collective union actions mainly took the form of marches and rallies held in 77 republican, territo-

rial and regional capitals and in 1000 other cities and district centres.

The May Day marchers were critical of the Government's socio-economic policies as they pointed out that the emerging trends towards economic growth in the country had not brought about any improvement of the living standards. The continual rises in prices and rates are not offset by adequate raises in wages, pensions, scholarships, allowances and subsidies for low-paid population categories. The pension schemes fail to meet the minimum international requirements for the earnings replacement rate.

Participants in the rallies and marches demanded that the federal budget for 2008-10 and the regional budgets should be drafted based on the procedure set by law, which requires consultation with the trade unions and discussion of issue by the tripartite commissions.

Workers that took part in the May Day events were unanimous in their belief that all lawful methods must be used to attain real growth of the population's income, and ensure social and legal protection of workers.

The resolutions and appeals adopted by the rallies were sent to the

President of Russia, the Government, the Federal Assembly (Parliament), other state authorities, and members of local legislatures.

RUSSIA: FNPR INSISTS ON HIGHER STANDARDS

The FNPR held another day of collective trade union actions for higher pay and social guarantees 24 May 2007.

The event was timed to coincide with the first reading by the State Duma (Parliament) of the draft federal law "On the Federal Budget for 2008 and for the Period up to 2010".

Some 15 to 19 million Russians are currently drawing a pension below the subsistence minimum. Even government sources, when evaluating the results of the socio-economic development for the past year, admit that the income gap continues growing. With the number of billionaires rapidly growing, Russia ranks only sixth among the CIS countries in the minimum wages, fifth in the pension rates, and seventh in the earnings replacement rate.

It is exactly for this reason that the trade unions demand the Federal Budget for 2008-10 should allocate funds necessary for making

the minimum pay, pensions and scholarships at least equal to the subsistence minimum.

UKRAINE: TRADE UNION LABOUR INSPECTORATE DAY

The Ukrainian trade unions observed the Trade Union Day of Work Safety Inspectorates 18 May 2007. The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FTUU) congratulated trade unions' work safety inspectors who spare no effort to protect citizens' constitutional right to a healthy and safe working environment, and defend the interests of those who suffer from accidents at work or occupational disease.

UKRAINE: STRONG LOCALS, STRONG UNION

As follow-up to the decisions of the its 5th Congress, the FTUU proclaimed the year 2007 a Year of the Primary Trade Union Organisation. An organising committee was set up to manage the events and activities to be held during the Year.

The FTUU Presidium passed a decision proclaiming an All-Ukraine Competitive Review of workplace union organisations to be held under the motto "Strong Primary Organisations, Strong Union".

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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
