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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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July-September 2008

GIVE UNION SUPPORT TO DECENT WORK!

*Appeal by the GCTU of 8 July
2008*

“On the initiative of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the largest trade union body in the world, trade unions will be organizing a World Day for Decent Work 7 October 2008. This Day is expected to be an important manifestation of international solidarity by trade unions in the struggles they wage for workers’ rights, the eradication of poverty, higher living standards for all people on this planet, and against any forms of inequality, social exclusion or discrimination.

“The actions to be organized on this Day by the world trade union movement will make a tangible contribution to the promotion of the Decent Work Agenda which the International Labour Organisation has proclaimed to be a cornerstone of its policy in the decades to come. This

initiative, highly acclaimed by the world public, has received strong support from the United Nations, its specialized agencies, and practically all nongovernmental organisations.

“Together with the ILO, trade unions urge the world community to find the necessary material and political resources to provide, in the foreseeable future, every working person with a quality job, fair wages, an adequate degree of social protection, and the possibility of full enjoyment of their rights in the sphere of labour relations and social policy. This aim can hardly be attained without further development of social dialogue, real measures to protect the environment, including the natural environment, exercise of the union rights to collective bargaining and protection of workers’ interests by other means.

“The International Trade Union Confederation has highlighted three major themes for this year’s World Day for Decent Work, and they are

rights at work, solidarity and ending poverty. The GCTU believes this set of concerns to be of high priority to the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, as well as to their workers and trade unions. The issues are in the spotlight of the GCTU affiliates as they work, each in their own country or industrial sector, towards an efficient realization of the decent work agenda in a globalising economy.

“The General Confederation of Trade Unions believes it necessary for its affiliates to support the ITUC initiative and organize actions under the common slogan “Decent Work Basis for Decent Life!” It is essential that the unions insist on the implementation of full and productive employment policies, substantial pay rises, and a curb on agency and contract labour, and oppose the spread of the “pool pay” system. The actions to be held must also help advance the GCTU-initiated solidarity campaign by CIS trade unions to get the minimum wages set up at a level above the subsistence minimum, with subsequent increases to make them equal to the minimum consumer goods basket.

“The GCTU calls on its affiliated organisations to join in the events of the World Day for Decent Work, and, based on their real possibilities, specify the forms and frameworks of their involvement. The main slogans and demands of the forthcoming actions may be linked to the concrete situation prevailing in each

separate country, to the present-day problems of trade union activity.

“Let us support the idea of Decent Work for All with concrete actions!

*General Confederation
of Trade Unions”*

ILO GETS INTERESTED IN GCTU'S PAY REPORT

In a letter to GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov, Director of the ILO Sub-regional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia in Moscow Ms Elaine Fultz expressed her thanks for the copy of the GCTU Report “On the work remuneration situation in CIS countries and the solidarity-based actions by trade unions to protect workers’ interests” earlier sent to the Office.

The issue of work remuneration had been reviewed at the GCTU Council Executive session 8 April 2008. Following the analysis they heard, participants of the session adopted a decision saying that the struggle for decent pay had been a key point in the activities of trade unions in the Commonwealth states. The problem is crucial for the social and labour sphere, and is, therefore, high on social policy agendas.

Trade unions in CIS countries have been promoting the growth of nominal and real wages, with the aim of bringing up the minimum pay to the subsistence minimum level. However, the current work remuneration

systems are still facing a lot of serious difficulties which, if not removed, will undermine the efforts to protect workers' social and economic rights and provide them with decent living conditions.

The Executive Committee decided that trade unions in the CIS would continue their solidarity campaign "Minimum Pay not Lower than Subsistence Minimum!", and that the work remuneration report would be published as a brochure.

Ms Elaine Fultz appreciated highly the Report and informed the GCTU that the ILO would have it translated into English for further dissemination among its constituents.

GCTU ANXIOUS ABOUT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH OSSETIA

The GCTU issued a statement 8 August 2008 reading as follows.

"It is with deep anxiety and grave concern that the General Confederation of Trade Unions notes the aggravation of developments in South Ossetia where the collapse of the negotiation process has resulted in fierce fighting with the use of heavy war equipment and artillery.

"According to news reports, Georgian troops are storming the city of Tskhinval by throwing precision fire into residential quarters and into the garrisons of the Russian peace-keeping forces. There are wounded

and killed among civilian population and the peace-keepers.

"It is to be regretted that the large-scale hostilities have been deployed on the opening day of the Olympics, a day of lull in fighting when all cannons must keep silent.

"Speaking for more than 50 million workers organised in its affiliates, the General Confederation of Trade Unions demands an immediate stop to the bloodshed in the area of the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict, and calls for direct negotiations on the crisis settlement in South Ossetia involving all parties concerned"

AZERBAIJAN: ATUC PREOCCUPIED WITH MOTIVES

Azerbaijan Trade Union Confederation, ATUC, held a round table meeting in Baku for trade unionists dealing with the problems of organising.

Participants discussed the motives for workers' joining trade unions and the ways to solve the problems arising in the sphere of organising. Attending the event were national union leaders, heads of organising departments of industrial trade unions, and chairpersons of regional and workplace union organisations.

As he welcomed the participants in his opening speech, ATUC Vice President Javanshir Alhasov said it was crucial for the country's trade unions to step up their activities aim-

ing to keep the workers in their ranks and recruit new members. Although the total number of ATUC members had increased over the last three years, some industrial trade unions still tended to be losing their members.

Diminishing union memberships, the meeting noted, were largely due to objective reasons. They stem from the structural changes in several industries, continued processes of privatisation in the economy, production restructuring, etc. Sometimes the decline in membership is caused by subjective factors and antiunion attitudes being taken by the employers both in state-owned and foreign companies and enterprises.

The seminar continued its work in sections. Based on the debates held at the plenary sessions and in the sections, participants concluded the meeting with adopting Recommendations on the work to be done to enhance the motives for trade union membership in the industrial federations, republican committees and shop-floor union organisations.

BELARUS: TU LEADER MEETS WITH PRESIDENT

The leader of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, FTUB, Leonid Kozik met with Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko 12 August 2008.

The FTUB leader informed the President of the current situation in

the country's trade union movement, while the Head of State confirmed, once more, his support of the FTUB's line for social partnership with the government and employers stressing that the national leadership regards the FTUC as a pillar of Belarussian society.

President Lukashenko said the government could not rely on small trade unions as, in his opinion, they represented the will of a few thousands of people rather than the will of a considerable part of the population. For that reason, the state authorities could not be guided by their estimates. Against this background the work of the FTUB was appreciated as being constructive and socially useful. According to the President, Belarus has recently managed to settle a great deal of highly important problems: real wages have been growing, new industrial projects have been implemented, the number of jobs has been increasing, unemployment is practically nonexistent, and the budget-financed sectors, such as education and health service, have been developing successfully. Trade unions have played their own role in this work by participating, together with the government bodies and economic agents, in the solution of the above problems.

KAZAKHSTAN: ACTION YIELDING RESULT

The number of collective agreements signed in the course of the national

campaign “Conclude a Collective Agreement!” increased substantially.

By the beginning of this year, there were 19,155 collective agreements signed in the country. As a result of the campaign activities, another 11,045 agreements were concluded by 1 June 2008, which brings the total up to 30,200. In other words, 19 per cent of enterprises operating in Kazakhstan now have a collective agreement.

Concluding a collective agreement is one of the requirements of the Labour Code aiming to ensure a high degree of workers’ protection and employers’ responsibility.

RUSSIA: UNIONS READY TO PROTECT DECENT WORK

As the World Day of Action for Decent Work is drawing nearer, the affiliates of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, FNPR, are actively preparing for mass marches and rallies that will be held throughout Russia on that day. Their participation in this unprecedented act is necessitated by the principles of international trade union solidarity and the current situation in Russia.

The FNPR policy document “For Decent Work!” corroborates fully its adherence to the aims and ideals of the international workers’ movement, and protection of employees’ rights and interests. This document adopted by the 6th FNPR Congress

offers a comprehensive system of measures promoting sustainable development of the economy and radically improved living standards for workers and their families.

Issues such as higher wages, renewed contents of the consumer basket as the basis for calculating the subsistence minimum, narrowing of the unjustified pay gap between different categories of workers, migration disproportions etc. are still actual for Russian workers today. Trade union demands that social protection should be restored to the insurance principles and that the earnings replacement rate should be increased remain unheeded.

RUSSIA: UNIONS AGAINST EXPENSIVE FUEL

Participants in a meeting held in Moscow 10 September 2008 as part of the all-Russia trade union protest action against fuel price rises adopted a statement that reads, among other things, as follows.

“Since the beginning of 2008, the prices of motor petrol have gone up by an average of over 20 per cent in Russia, diesel fuel by more than 30 per cent, and aviation fuel by over 40 per cent.

“The dramatic increase in fuel costs threatens the sustainability of many enterprises and even entire industries, restricts the resources for pay raises, causes curtailment of social programmes aimed at improving oc-

cupational health and safety, and precludes modernisation of the rolling stock and road-building machinery.

“The enormous fuel costs render Russian motor and air carriers non-competitive in international markets.

“The unpredictable and uncontrolled rise in aviation kerosene prices has put a lot of air companies on the verge of bankruptcy, removed home-made aircraft out of service, reduced the number of flights, and deteriorated the quality of passenger service. Air companies are compelled to buy fuel in the neighbouring states, as the leading oil exporters, such as *Lukoil* and *Rosneft*, are selling their products on domestic markets at overestimated monopoly prices motivated exclusively by their drive for excess profits.

“Diesel fuel supplied to the *Russian Railways Company* in the first half of 2008 was 60 per cent more expensive as against the similar period of the preceding year, whereas the wages of railway workers rose by a mere 7 per cent in the same period.

“The fuel and lubricant price rises occurring systematically on the eve of the sowing and harvesting seasons not only increase the cost of farm produce, but also make enterprises and farmers bankrupt.

“Lack of state pricing policy in the fuel sector has created an absurd situation where an oil-exporting

country buys petrochemicals from oil-importing countries!

“Over three years, the Statement says, trade unions have been engaged in dialogue with executive authorities on the issue of motor fuel pricing. However, no decisions that would radically improve the situation have so far been taken.

Participants in the protest actions demanded that President and the Government of the Russian Federation:

- establish public control over the pricing process and prices of fuel and other energy resources;
- bring down fuel prices to a level where they would correspond with the economic situation in Russia and with the population's incomes;
- develop financial mechanisms promoting a higher quality of motor fuel; and
- make laws increasing the responsibility of monopolist enterprises for collusions and unjustified fuel price rises.

STATEMENT BY RUSSIAN UNION LEADERS

The leaders of three Russian trade union centres: Mikhail Shmakov of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, Boris Kravchenko of the All-Russia Confederation of Labour and Alexander Shepel of the Confederation of Labour of Russia issued a joint statement in connection with the preparations for the World Day for Decent Work in Russia.

In the course of preparations for the all-Russia trade union action scheduled on 7 October 2008 as part of the World Day for Decent Work, the statement says, certain forces tried to discredit the efforts being made by Russian trade unions to protect workers' lawful rights and interests.

Attempts were made to split the country's trade union movement with the help of dirty tricks and black-leg organisations.

The Russian trade union centres confirmed their solidarity with one another, and called upon all union members to manifest trade union unity and solidarity, rebuke the forces trying to foil the planned event, and take an active part in the all-Russia trade union action on 7 October 2008.

UKRAINE: FTUU CHANGES LEADER

The Presidium of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine (FTUU) met 17 July 2008 to grant the application by FTUU President Olexander Yurkin for relief from duty.

It was decided to convene the Federation's congress from 10-11 December 2008 in Kyiv. Meanwhile, Igor Lutsishin was appointed acting FTUU President.

The Federation's affiliates were requested to recommend their nomi-

nees for FTUU President as provided for in the Statutes.

UKRAINE: COOPERATION WITH UN OPENS UP NEW VISTAS

Acting FTUU President Igor Lutsishin met with experts from the UN Mission in Ukraine.

During the discussion, Igor Lutsishin said the UN Mission had made a significant contribution to the shaping of a UN Global Compact network in Ukraine and the application of its principles in the sphere of human rights, labour standards, and environment protection for sustainable development in the country. The unions believe this helps achieve the living standards as defined in the Millennium Development Goals, and the appropriate European standards.

"No doubt, the creation of the Global Compact network in Ukraine, along with attaining a clear definition and a uniform understanding of the values and vectors of development based on integrated democratic and market principles and approaches, will provide a sound basis for promoting social responsibility of business and Global Compact principles in Ukraine", said Igor Lutsishin.

It is likewise important that the UN Global Compact and corporate social responsibility help translate the democratic principles, transparency and openness from declaration into real life.

YOUTH FORUM OF RAILWAY WORKERS

The Forum held from 26-27 June 2008 in Moscow gathered together over 130 participants from Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.

Its objectives were to sum up the experience gained by member-organisations in the field of youth policies, and to exchange opinions on the problems of involving young workers in dynamic trade union activity, developing partnership ties and enhancing co-operation between young trade unionists.

Forum participants held three successful workshops on “The youth and trade unions: motivation strategies”, “The youth in the social partnership system”, and “Young students’ problems”. The workshops were moderated by representatives of the participating trade union organisations.

In his concluding speech, Nikolay Nikiforov, President of the International Confederation of Railway Workers’ Unions, summed up the debates. He stressed the importance of the event, the good contact established between colleagues from different countries, and the constructive manner of communication. The exchange of positive experience gained by the youth structures of the railway workers’ unions was of practical value, he said. Young workers are now faced up

with challenges such as making their trade union participation more active, getting involved in management processes, acquiring new knowledge, and mastering novel technologies.

The forum participants adopted a resolution addressing the trade unions of their countries and expressing their confidence that effective youth policies by industrial trade unions of the CIS and Baltic states could help enhance the image and influence of the railway workers’ unions.

The next forum is planned to be held in 2010 in Belarus.

SAFETY FOR ALL ROAD USERS

The Council of the International Federation of Transport and Road Construction Workers’ Unions held its regular session 24 June 2008 in Baku, Azerbaijan. It was attended by the leaders of the industry’s trade unions from Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The session reviewed the scope of contract and agency labour in the CIS, and defined more exactly the unions’ position on these new forms of employment.

TUI Council members took part in the 29th session of the CIS Intergovernmental Council of Highway Engineers (ICHE) and the International Workshop “International Travel Corridors” held from 25-26 June 2008 in Baku.

The industry unions approach the issue of international travel corridors development from the point of securing socio-economic protection of the industry's workers. The ICHE conference emphasised that it was the workers who ensured a stable and effective operation of travel corridors. The creation of comfortable and safe working conditions for road users and securing decent wages and social protection for those employed in the sector are priority tasks that have to be addressed along with the technical and economic problems, the introduction of up-to-date technologies, and the development of new markets of transport services.

TEXTILE TUI: IMPROVEMENT OF UNION STRUCTURE URGENT

The Council of the International Association of Textile and Light Industry Workers' Unions met 25 September 2008 to discuss the ways of promoting social partnership. The session was attended by 14 out of 16 Council members representing six affiliates in Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Ukraine, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

TUI President Ludmilla Shalamova presented a progress report covering the period since the previous session.

The report presented detailed and objective information on major problems related to wages, employment, motives for joining unions, and structural reform in the unions. The speaker described as positive the

role played by the GCTU in providing methodological and practical assistance to the TUI on a great number of issues.

The industries involved are severely handicapped by the uncontrolled import of consumer goods from foreign countries, particularly from China and Turkey. Suffice it to say that in Russia, with its US \$ 22-25 billion trade turnover, the national brands account for a mere 4 per cent of the market.

The report notes that cases of employers ignoring or avoiding collective bargaining with the trade unions have acquired a mass character in the industry. The wage rates negotiated in local collective agreements are usually below the rates indicated in the industrial agreements. Collective agreements are often signed without prior discussion in the workers' collectives.

The reporter believes shop-floor organisations to be the weakest link in the union vertical structure. The chairpersons of such organisations normally work as volunteers, they have no opportunity for career advancement and are unprotected against the employer's arbitrariness.

The report also touched upon such an urgent issue as the improvement of trade union structures, specifically their enlargement through mergers.

Natalia Podshibyakina, a GCTU Deputy General Secretary, attended and spoke to the session.

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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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