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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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GCTU EXECUTIVE MEETS IN MOSCOW

The Executive Committee of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, GCTU, held its regular session 16 October 2008 in the Palace of Labour, Moscow, to discuss the trends and problems in the CIS trade union movement. The general situation in the Commonwealth trade union community was described as being steadfast and stable. As an integral part of the civil society, the unions are waging hard struggles to protect workers' interests, rebuffing attempts to infringe on trade union rights and freedoms, and organising mass protest actions whenever necessary.

However, the Executive stressed that the tremendous potential of the unions is far from being fully realised. The main negative tendency is a steady decline in membership, which calls for more effective

motivation of trade union membership, particularly in transnational enterprises, small and medium businesses, and new industries.

The session also reviewed the work done by trade unions to raise the minimum wage. The Executive decided to proceed with the international solidarity campaign "Minimum Wages not Lower than the Subsistence Minimum!". The unions intend to maintain this demand in the course of negotiating their General Agreements for 2009.

The Executive approved of the outcome of the International Meeting of Young Union Leaders from CIS Countries held 14-15 October, and agreed with its proposal on the trade union work with the youth. The GCTU member organisations were called upon to get actively involved in the preparations for, and observance of, the Year of Young People in 2009, as proclaimed by

the heads of state of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Upon hearing and discussing the information on the outcome of the 97th session of the International Labour Conference (2008) and on the preparations for its 98th session in 2009, the year of the ILO 90th Anniversary, the Executive noted that the GCTU and its affiliates were fully aware of the importance of their more active involvement in ILO activities. They were in favour of a stronger ILO as the only international body dealing with labour and social issues on a tripartite basis.

The GCTU Executive welcomed the results of the 97th session, and, in particular, the adoption of policy paper "ILO Declaration on Social Justice for a Fair Globalisation" Getting more actively involved in ILO activity and strengthening the positions of CIS workers in the Organisation will remain a most important objective in the international policies of the GCTU and its affiliates. Simultaneously, participants were anxious over the recent slowdown in the ILO's standard-setting activity.

The session approved a plan of preparation for the celebration of the 65th Anniversary of the Victory in the Great Patriotic War of 1941-1945.

The Executive supported the decision by the UN General Assembly

to proclaim 20 February as the World Day of Social Justice. The GCTU welcomed this initiative as aiming to strengthen the social dimension of world policies, solve the problems of sustainable development, and eradicate poverty, lawlessness and economic backwardness.

The session reviewed and approved the outcome of the World Day For Decent Work in the CIS countries (See Article below).

The GCTU appealed to its affiliates not to relax their efforts in the struggles they wage for the formulation and implementation in the CIS countries of a socio-economic policy aiming to raise workers' living standards.

YOUNG UNION LEADERS FROM CIS STATES COME TOGETHER IN MOSCOW

An international meeting of young union leaders from CIS countries was held in the outskirts of Moscow from 14-15 October 2008. They represented the national trade union centres of Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan and Ukraine, and the industrial Trade Union Internationals affiliated with the GCTU. Participating in the meeting were also students of Moscow's Academy of Labour and Social Relations.

In his introductory speech, GCTU General Secretary Vladimir Scherbakov told the participants about the GCTU's aims, tasks and principal lines of activity.

GCTU Deputy General Secretary Valery Yuryev delivered a lecture on the state and problems of youth work in the CIS trade union movement which presented a detailed analysis of experiences and practices accumulated in the field by GCTU's affiliates. The Deputy General Secretaries Natalia Podshybyakina and Albert Potapov, and the heads of GCTU departments informed their young colleagues of the implementation of decisions taken by the GCTU 6th Congress, the structure and activity of the International Labour Organisation, the current situation in the international trade union movement, the labour legislations in CIS countries, trade unions' information policies, and motivation of union membership.

Participants were actively involved in the panel discussions on "Youth in the system of social partnership", "The place and role of young members in trade unions' information policies", and "Youth and trade unions: strategy for motivation" moderated by GCTU officers and instructors from the above Academy.

The meeting wound up with adopting detailed Recommendations.

Participants found it necessary to recommend that the authorities of the CIS states, in conjunction with trade unions, take a package of measures to improve the conditions of young people. These include a stronger state influence, further development and enhancement of the regulatory and legal framework for youth policy, creation of proper work conditions for the young, and social protection for working youth and students.

GCTU ALERTS AFFILIATES TO WORLD CRISIS

On the 20th of October 2008, the GCTU issued a Statement on the world crisis reading as follows.

"The General Confederation of Trade Unions, GCTU, affiliating national trade union centres in 10 countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States and 32 industrial Trade Union Internationals, expresses its alarm at the crisis developments in the world economy and their eventual outcome for workers in the region.

The problems that have recently emerged in the finance sector tend to result in a general aggravation of the world economic situation. As part of the international trade union movement, the GCTU is deeply concerned over the attempts to solve the problems arisen at the expense of working people. There

are already disturbing reports of declining business activity in various economic sectors, delayed payment for fulfilled orders and jobs, reduced work hours, termination of employment relations, especially with workers on temporary contracts, sending employees on leave without pay, and reluctance to meet guaranteed social obligations. The inflation processes keep gaining momentum, which affects directly millions of people.

The CIS states are taking measures to curb the negative impact of the crisis. However, these measures must not result in the burden of the economic crisis being shouldered solely by the population and, in particular, by workers of the Commonwealth countries. It is the owners and top managers of industrial enterprises and corporations that must bear the main responsibility for the consequences. It is the excessive and, in fact, parasitical consumption habits of the new bourgeoisie that must be reduced, not jobs and wages. Any attempts to make people tighten their belts will meet with an organised rebuff by trade unions that will respond with solidarity actions. Trade unions also warn against any possible attempts to undermine the established principles and machinery of social partnership, break the earlier concluded collective agreements, or belittle the role of trade unions, under the pretext of alleged or real difficulties.

In this context, the GCTU and its affiliates will be ready to enter into dialogue with the state authorities and business interests of the CIS countries, and support any constructive steps aiming to find the ways of overcoming difficulties caused by the advancing world financial and economic crisis, without detriment to the real economy, employment rates, incomes of the population, and the realisation of earlier adopted social programmes”.

GCTU STATEMENT ON 60TH ANNIVERSARY HUMAN RIGHTS DECLARATION

On the 10th of December 2008 the world will mark the 60th Anniversary of the adoption by the UN General Assembly of a historic document, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

The significance of this international act, which has become the starting point for the struggle to promote respect for the individual's freedom and dignity, can hardly be overestimated. For the first time in history, it has outlined the inalienable rights of the human being in modern society, such as the right to life, liberty and security of person, equality before the law, freedom of opinion and association, the right to receive information, take part in the government of his/her country and hold peaceful assemblies.

Trade unions appreciate highly the fact that the document declares the right of every worker “to form and to join trade unions for the protection of their interests”, as well as social rights, including the right to work, to free choice of employment, to protection against unemployment, to just and favourable working conditions, to a standard of living adequate for the well-being of himself and of his family, to rest and leisure, to education, to social protection, to equal pay for equal work, and to special care for motherhood and childhood.

In the past decades, the United Nations and the world community, including the international trade union movement, have further developed the UDHR provisions by adopting the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995), the Millennium Development Goals, and other international instruments. The UDHR ideas underlie the Conventions adopted over the period by the International Labour Organisation, and its Decent Work Agenda that serve as a basis for GCTU affiliates in their struggles to protect workers’ interests.

However, the rights embodied in the Declaration are still, alarmingly, violated in various parts of the

world. The right to life is being reduced to nil by military and ethnic conflicts, and by rampant crime. The right to work is being infringed by corporate economic restructuring, falling employment, the use of forced and child labour, the growing informal sector, and the anti-worker policies and practices of transnationals. The right to decent living standards is being jeopardised by the weakening social protection systems, dearer services, and constantly growing prices of essential goods across the globe. Workers are being victimised for attempts to form trade unions or participate in their work; and trade union leaders and activists are still being killed.

The issues of full observance of human rights, and trade union rights and freedoms have been brought to the frontline by the sweeping globalisation. Particularly acute and topical are they today, amidst the world financial and economic crisis. Therefore, while marking the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the GCTU appeals to all its affiliates not to overlook any case of infringement on labour rights and trade union freedoms in their respective country or industry. The world trade union movement must close its ranks to better protect human rights, particularly workers’ rights. The unions should combine their efforts to rebuff resolutely any attempts to overcome crisis-born

difficulties at the expense of workers' rights as provided for in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other human rights documents.

CIS WORKERS SUPPORT DECENT WORK

Together with their brothers and sisters all over the world, hundreds of thousands of workers in the CIS countries took to the streets to mark the World Day for Decent Work observed at the call of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

In its appeal issued 8 July 2008, the General Confederation of Trade Unions called on its affiliates to support the ITUC initiative and mark the World Day in the Commonwealth under the common slogan "Decent Work as Basis for Decent Life!".

In the context of the World Day, trade union actions were organised in all CIS countries in the form of mass rallies, marches and demonstrations, round table workshops, public hearings, conferences and educational and cultural events. Their participants demanded the implementation of full and productive employment policies, substantial pay and pension rises, minimum wages not lower than the subsistence minimum, the creation of safe and agreeable new jobs, a

curb on agency and contract labour, and respect for union rights and freedoms.

The success of the World Day in the CIS countries has revealed that their trade unions possess an impressive mobilising potential, and for this reason are capable of making their contributions to global solidarity actions. It has also shown that the ILO's Decent Work Agenda enjoys broad support among the workers and trade unions of the region.

BELARUS: UNITE TO REBUFF THREAT OF CRISIS

At its session held 27 November 2008, the Presidium of the Council of the Federation of Trade Unions of Belarus, FTUB, decided it would work to achieve consolidation of efforts by all trade unions operative on Belarussian territory to minimise the negative consequences of the world financial and economic crisis.

While making this step halfway towards trade unions not affiliated with it, the FTUB also decided to petition the Republican Commission for Proper Utilisation of Non-residential Buildings and Other Objects in State Ownership to charge reduced rents for the offices occupied by the above unions.

The FTUB called on all nonaffiliated unions to combine efforts with it

to support the real economy, save jobs, and protect the rights and interests of workers in the face of the spreading financial and economic crisis.

KAZAKHSTAN: SOCIAL STABILITY MEMORANDA AS ECONOMIC SAFETY NET

In order to protect workers from potential economic risks, the trade unions have initiated a nation-wide process of concluding the so called "Social Stability Memoranda" between the social and labour partners and the state authorities.

For example, the Kazakhstan Ministry for Industry and Commerce and a number of enterprises in the ore mining and smelting complex have signed Memoranda on retaining social obligations to the industry's workers amidst economic risks.

In accordance with these documents, the employer should, in case of a workforce cut, submit to the employment authorities information on the forthcoming redundancy at least one month before the reduction begins so that appropriate measures could be taken.

The major objective of the Memoranda is to guarantee that the interests of the parties to the labour relations are duly taken into account,

to reduce social losses caused by the economic crisis and secure normal operation of industrial enterprises.

KYRGYZSTAN: NEW LEADER IN THE TRADE UNION CENTRE

The Council of the Kyrgyzstan Federation of Trade Unions of Kyrgyzstan (KFTU) met 4 November 2008 to relieve Sagyn Bozgunbayev of his duties as FTUK President.

The Council elected Baktybek Imanaliyev, MP, as President of the Federation.

MOLDOVA: YOUTH SHOULD BE IN THE FOREFRONT OF TRADE UNION MOVEMENT

On the initiative of the Youth Organisation of the National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova (CNSM), a round table was held 14 November 2008 to discuss the "Role and place of the youth in modernising the trade union movement".

Speaking at the event, NCSM President Leonid Manea emphasised that the trade union movement could not count on adequate modernisation in future unless it addressed youth problems in the most earnest way, bearing in mind that the youth was a social catego-

ry with a special role to play in the democratisation of both the trade unions and society as a whole.

The participants also discussed issues related to further development of the national trade union movement and direct involvement of the youth in strengthening union structures, enhancing social partnership, promoting cooperation with various youth and public associations of the country and international organisations, as well as fostering joint solidarity actions.

RUSSIA: UNION STRATEGIES IN GLOBAL CRISIS

The FNPR General Council held its session 19 November 2008 in Moscow. It was attended by the leaders of all-Russia, inter-regional and territorial trade union organisations, FNPR educational establishments, trade union officials and activists of member organisations, the leaders of the General Confederation of Trade Unions, FNPR Youth Council members and media representatives.

The General Council considered the issue of "Trade union strategies in the global financial crisis". FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov presented a report on this problem.

As was noted at the session, the global financial crisis affected the

development of the economy in the RF and its regions. Since the middle of the II quarter 2008, the Russian economy has been exhibiting a slowdown in growth against the background of worsening external market situation and lowering growth rates of the population's real take-home incomes.

The FNPR believes that the State should, without substituting market mechanisms, use the toolkit available to secure guarantees in the social and labour sphere. The actions by the State authorities in the crisis situation should not lead to any curtailment of social obligations to the population.

The General Council emphasised that union organisations at all levels should be ready to curb any trends in the employers' behaviour to try and shift the responsibility for their own economic egoism and blunders onto workers' shoulders.

In considering the "Role and objectives of the trade unions in the area of workers' life-long professional development in the Russian Federation", the General Council noted that the financial opportunities and demographic limitations left Russia no alternative to a long-term socially oriented innovative development. The strategic objective of the undergoing reforms in the country should be the promotion of public progress for the people and by the people.

UKRAINE: FTUU ELECTS ITS PRESIDENT

The Council of the Federation of Trade Union of Ukraine (FTUU) held its session 20 November 2008, where Vassil Khara, MP, President of the Donetsk Regional Council of Trade Unions, was elected FTUU President by an absolute majority of voices.

UKRAINE: IN SEARCH OF ADEQUATE RESPONSE TO GLOBAL CRISIS

The Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine organised an International Conference on "Social justice and unions' role at the age of a global crisis" 26 November 2008. It was attended by experts and trade union officials from Armenia, Belarus, France, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Sweden and Ukraine.

A Deputy President of the FTUU Grigory Osovy presented a report on the trade union role at the age of a global crisis.

The Conference discussed such topics as the role of trade unions in defending workers' rights at the age of the "managers' revolution"; social and regulatory mechanisms for surmounting the crisis; social partnership as a strategy for overcoming the crisis.

The Conference has emerged as an attempt to meet the challenges of the current crisis in the world socio-economic system.

UKRAINE: UKRAINIAN TRADE UNIONS PROTEST

An All-Ukraine Protest Action was staged by the FTUU 23 December 2008 in Kyiv. The action started with a rally in the Independence Square and then proceeded with a peaceful demonstration and picketing of the Government and Parliament buildings, with the FTUU demands handed over to the Ukrainian supreme State authorities.

The Protest Action brought together 27 thousand union representatives from all the regions of the country. These included representatives of all the branches of economy, the budgetary sectors, the youth and students. A numerous delegation of metal workers and miners, machine builders and power engineering workers came from Eastern Ukraine, and the Western regions were mainly represented by union members from the agro-industrial complex, machine-building and budgetary sectors. A considerable part of the rally participants included representatives of trade unions in the cultural sphere, education, as well as state employees and health workers.

In opening the rally, FTUU President and MP Vassil Khara warned that the country was disastrously sliding into the chaos of the financial and economic crisis. The current arrears in wages have reached 1 bln hryvnias and they may double in the near future. People are left face to face with their problems.

The trade unions urged all the branches of State power to unite, despite the differences existing between them, for the sake of preserving peace and concord in the country, work out integrated programmes aimed at retaining workplaces, creating new jobs and protecting home manufacturers, make provisions in the Ukrainian draft law on "State Budget of Ukraine for 2009" for the establishment as of 1 January 2009 of the minimum wage rate at a level of the subsistence minimum for able-bodied persons, and secure unconditional payment of wage arrears.

Among the speakers at the rally were representatives of unions in the coal-mining, metallurgical and ore mining industries, automobile and agricultural machine building industry, agro-industrial complex, sea transport, construction and building materials industry, education and science, and public health.

The speakers' attention was focused on the necessity for the

State leaders to give up their ambitions and sit down at the negotiating table for the sake of saving the State and its independence. Should the State authorities ignore the union demands, the FTUU intends to organise a second, far more impressive stage of the protest action.

During the rally, a trade union delegation headed by FTUU President Vassil Khara met with Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko for negotiations and handed over the FTUU demands.

The delegation also had a meeting with Chairman of the Ukrainian Supreme Council Vladimir Litvin.

Earlier, 17 December 2008, mass protest actions organised by trade unions in response to the FTUU appeal took place in all regional centres and major cities. They gathered 112.5 thousand union members, with the number of speakers exceeding 200. The trade union actions were supported practically everywhere by other public associations and a number of political parties.

The all-Ukraine Protest Action resulted in the adoption of a resolution approved by the rally participants.

The Action has demonstrated the active stand of the Federation in defending workers' interests. The

event has shown high civic engagement and consciousness of union members and trade unions' adherence to the principles of workers' solidarity.

TRANSPORT TUI COUNCIL MEETS IN DUSHANBE

The Council of the International Federation of Transport and Road Construction Workers' Unions held its session 8 October 2008 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The session was chaired by TUI President Alexander Shurikov.

Among the participants were the leaders of branch trade unions from Tajikistan, Russia, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and a number of trade union activists from Tajikistan.

The participants were greeted by President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Tajikistan Murodali Salikhov who provided information on the activities of the republican unions in defending workers' rights and interests.

During discussions, there was an interested exchange of opinion and information on major sectoral issues, including strengthening trade union movement, enhancing membership motivation in branch trade unions and the problem of union mergers.

COMMERCE TUI CONCERNED OVER GLOBAL CRISIS

The Confederation of Unions of Workers in Commerce, Restaurants, Consumers' Co-operatives and Various Forms of Business approached the leaders of its affiliates with a letter expressing its concern over the growing crisis phenomena in the world economy and their possible impact on the workers employed in this sector.

The CIS countries are currently taking measures to curb the negative consequences of the economic crisis. However, these measures should not result in shifting all the hardships onto the workers' shoulders, the letter stresses, and the emerging difficulties should not be used as a pretext to undermine the socio-economic situation of people and try to ignore the earlier social guarantees.

The Confederation has urged its member organisations to supply updates on any crisis-related problem emerging in their activities and on all the cases of unfounded closures of enterprises, redundancies, violations involving work regimes and payments, implementation of social programmes, fulfilment of obligations under collective agreements and accords. Particular attention should be focused on monitoring the issues of defending workers' rights and interests at all enterprises of the sector irrespective of their form of ownership.

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GCTU INTERNATIONAL DEPARTMENT AND
GCTU PUBLIC RELATIONS CENTRE

42 LENINSKY PROSPEKT
119119 MOSCOW, RUSSIA
TELEFAX +7(095) 938-2155
PHONE +7(095)952-2782
+7(095)938-8649
Web site: www.vkp.ru;
E-mail: inter@vkp.ru

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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