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NEWS FROM THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF TRADE UNIONS

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CIS: Appeal by GCTU Affiliates

Today all CIS countries feel a need for reviving their agricultural machine building industries.

This was the principal message of a statement sent to Presidents and Prime Ministers of the CIS countries by President of the TUI of Workers in the Agro-Industrial Complex Alexander Davydov and President of the TUI of Workers in the Automobile and Farm Machinery Industries Alexander Kashyryn.

The lack of finance has caused a catastrophic upheaval in the production of agricultural machinery in the Commonwealth. Over the last 5-7 years, thousands of rural enterprises have not purchased a single new tractor, combine, or other equipment. According to expert estimates, up to 80 per cent of the farm machinery has by now fully exhausted its technical resources, awaiting to be written off. In two or three years from now, the production of farm machines may come to a complete stop in several regions. No imports of machines or technology could save the situation.

The statement calls on CIS leaders to take urgent, radical measures to restore the farm machinery production. Otherwise, the countries might inevitably face massive destruction and poverty in the agricultural sector, and further dependence on imports of foodstuffs from abroad.

Armenia: Legislative Basis of Trade Unions

«Armenia practically lacks a legal basis for trade union activities», said Martin Arutyunian,

President of the country's Trade Union Confederation, as he spoke at a meeting of union leaders with the Parliament Speaker. Meanwhile, the workers' organisations need to be urgently strengthened in the face of increased arbitrary rule by employers in the privatised sector. The unions' spokespersons stressed it was necessary to accelerate the adoption of laws on the trade unions and labour, and other acts that would provide the legislative basis for more efficient trade union activity.

The Chairman of Parliament agreed with the demands by the trade union centre. He suggested that the union leaders should cooperate more actively with Parliament and promised he would submit the draft law on the trade unions for Parliamentary consideration as soon as it had gone through the commissions.

Belarus: Sad Results

Experts of the Belarussian Trade Union Federation have reviewed the observation of the National General Agreement for 1999. They said that the most important obligations had not been fulfilled. First of all, it was true of the work remuneration and living standards. The real wages kept falling - in 1999 they made up only 50 per cent of the 1990 level.

Below the subsistence minimum were the wages of workers in agriculture, culture, education, health care, public catering, forestry, and some other industries. The minimum wages had fallen down to 10.8 per cent of the subsistence minimum. The General

Agreement commitment to take gradual steps aimed at bringing nearer the average earnings of budgetary sector employees to those of industrial workers had not been met either. All this has resulted in a situation where half of the country's population has incomes lower than the existence minimum.

Belarus: Unions to Amend Social Policy

The so called «dialogue between the Government and the opposition» has been launched in Belarus, involving political parties and movements, and public organisations, including the Belarussian Trade Union Federation.

BTUF President Vladimir Goncharik stressed that the BTUF intended to participate only in the part of this dialogue that concerns social and economic problems, such as pay raises, productive employment, the observation of trade union rights, etc.

A national meeting of trade union and work collective delegates was organised as part of the dialogue. The BTUF leader told the gathering that the state socio-economic policy needed amendment if the country was to do away with poverty. He criticised the concept of socio-economic development in Belarus for the period 2001-2005, drafted by the government. Even if the programme were fully implemented, the unions say, every fifth citizen of Belarus would still remain poor. Vladimir Goncharik rejected flatly the government's idea of centralised administrative regulation of wages at enterprises of all kinds of ownership.

Georgia: International Union Conference

An international trade union conference «Social and Economic Reform in Georgia and the Role of Trade Unions in Developing Dialogue» was held in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi. Attending the event were representatives of the Central Organisation of Trade Unions of Georgia, Parliament and the Government, and also the ILO, the ICFTU, the IMF, the World Bank, the European Union, and several other European institutions.

The two-day debate ended with the delegates arriving at the conclusion that the Georgian

trade unions needed democratic change and a meaningful dialogue with the government and employers. The conference supported the intention of the Central Organisation of Trade Unions to join the ICFTU.

Kazakhstan: Congress Reviews Gains and Losses

The 18th ordinary congress of the Federation of Trade Unions of Kazakhstan, FTUK, held in Astana on 24 May 2000, brought together 296 delegates representing all industries and all regions of the country.

The report on activities in 1995-1999, presented by FTUK President Siyazbek Mukashev, pointed out that the acute economic crisis had led to a sharp drop in the people's living standards. Today half of the country's population lives in poverty and misery. The arrears of wages and social benefits have reached an astronomic amount, the employment rates have fallen by more than twice, with one-third of the able-bodied citizens having no jobs and the unemployed being deprived of benefits and material support.

The grave economic situation together with the increasing outflows of emigrants and growing anti-union sentiments amongst the employers have reduced the number of organised workers by two times.

Nevertheless, the Federation has managed to hold out and survive. Moreover, it has been struggling bitterly for the revival of production, and defending workers' rights and guarantees. In the period under review, the unions' basic demands, which they put forward during collective bargaining campaigns, rallies, picketing and strikes, were the settlement of wage debts, timely payment of wages, and respect for law in labour relations. Among major nationwide actions, organised by the FTUK for the period, were:

- the all-Kazakhstan action in 1996 to mark the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty;
- the protest actions in 1997 against the government's intention to introduce an accumulating pension scheme and raise the retirement age by 5 years;

- the massive support of the 1998 statement by the industrial unions «Stop the falling living standards, stop the elimination of social guarantees» (1998);

- the actions demanding the government's resignation, and the mass protests against the adoption of the antilabour legislation in 1999.

The 1st Congress of Kazakhstan Workers, held in late 1998, was a remarkable event, as it in fact passed a vote of no-confidence in the Government and spoke for a change in the economic course, for social reorientation of the Government policy and for efficient social partnership.

As a countermeasure, the Government called a national conference of managers and trade union leaders of major enterprises. The organisers hoped they would be able to impose upon the conference the so called «general accord», bypassing the FTUK. However, the firm position taken by FTUK affiliates disrupted these separatist designs. The Federation of Trade Unions of Kazakhstan has come out of the conflict stronger than ever, and is now a firmly established national movement the Government must reckon with.

The workers' actions forced Parliament and the Government to make concessions. They abandoned their plans to raise the retirement age and slash the maximum pensions. Workers employed in hard or hazardous jobs will retain their benefits. Yielding to the union pressure, the Government agreed to increase annually the budgetary allocations for education, health care, and culture. Special central and local commissions were set up to monitor the settlement of pay debts.

The formal recognition by the Government of the appalling extent of poverty and the existence of a million-strong army of the unemployed in Kazakhstan can also be ascribed to the unions. The Trade Union Federation is currently involved in the development of a state programme to fight poverty and unemployment. The General Agreement for 2000 provides for establishing a system of social and economic security for the country's citizens, something that trade

unions demanded during last year's general election campaign.

In the period under discussion, the FTUK paid particular attention to collective bargaining. Today most of the industrial unions and all the regional trade union organisations can boast of a collective agreement. So can almost 9 thousand industrial enterprises and organisations. What is important, the collective bargaining campaigns focus primarily on the issues of employment, pay raises and timely payment of wages, improving the working conditions, and legal protection of workers.

A special chapter on collective bargaining appeared in the text of the labour law, which means that collective agreements have obtained legal status now. The law has also secured other labour standards initiated by the previous trade union congress, based on the CIS Charter of Social Rights and Guarantees, prepared by the GCTU and adopted by the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly. In particular, the working time cannot exceed 40 hours a week; 16-18 year-olds and workers employed in hard and hazardous jobs will now work 36 hours a week.

However, the FTUK has not managed to accomplish some of the tasks set by the previous 17th Congress. In particular, the draft law on social partnership, prepared by the trade unions, is still on the waiting list in Parliament. Despite all the efforts by the Federation, the national employment program has not been approved either. What is worse, the unemployed have been stripped of Government financial support. The urgent problems of reforming the system of work remuneration are still in the stage of discussion.

All these issues were anew raised at the 18th Congress. Adopted, among others, were the statement «On Wages and Income of the Population», the resolution «No to Unemployment, Yes to Full and Productive Employment», and the appeal «For Fair Labour Relations».

The Congress has commissioned the Council of the Trade Union Federation to do all they can to promote the development of a system of social partnership, help the universal spread

of labour relations based on collective agreements, enhance the motivation in organising through specific and tangible protective actions.

Bro Siyazbek Moukashev was reelected FTUK President.

Moldova: New Concept for TU Movement

The General Federation of Trade Unions of the Republic of Moldova, FGSM, has approved a new concept of trade unionism for the country, whose aim it is to ensure better protection of workers' rights and interests.

The concept tries to identify new priorities, and improve the strategy and tactics of trade unions. Its adoption was a response to the challenges of the radical changes in the socioeconomic sphere and the population's structure, the expanding private sector, and the new administrative and territorial division of Moldova.

The concept deals, in particular, with such questions as the role of trade unions in social dialogue, cooperation with political parties and public organisations, trade union training, information policy, finances and property, international activities.

Russia: Battle for Social Insurance

In 1993, the state authorities wrested control over social insurance from the trade unions that had successfully managed the system for many decades. Since then, the Government has been administering it through the social insurance fund, the pension fund, the employment fund, and the fund for obligatory health insurance. Trade unions sit on the supervisory boards of the funds with the aim of monitoring their activities. As far as 1994, the Government made its first attempt to incorporate the financial means of the above funds into the state budget, which would have given it the possibility to spend the money at its own discretion. Fortunately, the trade unions succeeded in rebuffing the encroachment.

Today, President Putin's government has launched a fresh attack on the extra-budgetary funds. It has proposed to unite all the

deductions for the social funds into a single social tax to be collected like any other tax. This would in fact mean establishing complete Government control over the huge financial resources that equal half of the federal budget.

Being concerned with the new developments, the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia, FNPR, voiced its strong protest on 16 May 2000. The unions think such new attempts would endanger the system of social protection of workers in market conditions, as a most important component of labour relations. The consolidation of insurance payments in the federal budget, combined with the intended cut-down in the deductions for social insurance, may cause interruptions in the payment of pensions, unemployment benefits, and temporary disability allowances. This will also put an end to the favourable terms of workers' treatment in recreation homes and sanatoria, and children's rest and rehabilitation.

The FNPR stressed that neither the economic nature of insurance premiums, nor their purpose suggest that they can be regarded as taxes, they must rather be treated as deposited wage. Therefore, they should be returned to the workers in the form of social protection. Besides, the Government's proposal undermines the very principle of workers' solidarity and mutual assistance, because the money they earn and earmark for the needs of social insurance will come back to them as charity from the Government, depending on the state of the budget.

Above all, the Government has flagrantly violated its own obligations assumed under the General Agreement for 2000-2001. The text of the Agreement contains a clear paragraph saying that the Government pledges it will neither consolidate the extra-budgetary funds, nor introduce a single tax. The Moscow Federation of Trade Unions believes that this irresponsible step would actually lead to a breakdown of social partnership.

The fierce resistance by the FNPR and its affiliates, who staged protest actions in 47 regions of Russia, has not stopped the Government. The draft law submitted to the Duma was adopted in the second reading on 9 June 2000. The unions have lost this crucial

round in their confrontation with the Government. However, this is not the end of the day, as the draft law has to go through a third reading in the Duma and, subsequently, through the Upper House of Parliament. The unions are determined to resist the further passage of the anti-labour act.

Russia: Minimum Wages Up. So Are Wage Debts

On 20 June 2000, President Putin signed the federal law on the minimum wages.

The law establishes the monthly minimum wages at the following levels: 132 Roubles (\$ 4.68) as of 1 July 2000, 200 Roubles (\$ 7) as of 1 January 2001, and 300 Roubles (\$ 10.6) as of 1 July 2001. Even in today's Russia it would be very hard to find anyone who would agree to work for such miserable remuneration. The main function of this index is to serve as the account unit for figuring out the rates of wages, student allowances, benefits and other social payments. This, however, reveals the hypocrisy of the new law. The trick is that till the end of this year the above social payments will be calculated based on the old minimum wage of 83.49 Roubles (\$ 2.96), and starting with 1 January 2001 based on a special account unit equal to 100 Roubles (\$ 3.5).

Meanwhile, the wage arrears went up again, and by 1 May 2000 reached 38,674 million roubles (\$ 1.37 million). The bulk of the sum falls on the informal sector.

Russia: Pay Increase or Insult?

An all-Russia protest action by budget sector employees, due to have taken place this spring, was called off as President Putin had issued a decree increasing pay in the sector by 20 per cent «in order to raise the level of employees' social protection».

This first step the new Russian leader made in the sphere of work remuneration met with little applause, though. «Here, in the Yaroslavl Region, the decree has only evoked sardonic smiles», said Ivan Burtsev, Vice-President of the regional Federation of Trade Unions, explaining that the pay raise was almost negligible. Workers in the Chelyabinsk Region

(the Urals) described the pay rise as an insult. They believe that if the Government really wanted to improve the people's well-being, it would have taken the trouble to raise the wages at least to the level of the subsistence minimum. Which means that in the budgetary sector they must be raised by 3-4 times.

It was this issue that caused disagreement between the government and the trade unions, as they signed the General Agreement. The unions demanded a 50 per cent pay increase for the budgetary sector in the first quarter of 2000, and a 100 per cent increase by the end of the year.

Russia: Unions Defending Entrepreneurs?

21 April 2000 the Russian Tripartite Commission for the Regulation of Socio-Economic Relations spoke in favour of the speediest possible adoption of a law regulating the rights and activities of employers' organisations. Speaking for the trade unions, FNPR President Mikhail Shmakov said he was concerned with the unjustified sluggish progress in the amendment of the draft law on the employers' associations, due to be submitted to the Duma. He laid the blame for it on the Ministry of Labour.

Trade unions consider it important that the law specify the measure of responsibility the employers' unions must bear for agreement reached within the framework of social partnership. Without this, Mikhail Shmakov believes, we are doomed to have increasingly new employers' organisations that are not responsible for anything. There is another point the unions believe to be a key one. They insist that the law should specify in clear terms who must be regarded as the employer in budgetary sector organisations. So far it has been a vain thing to try and find an employer there who could be called to account for pay delays.

DOCUMENTS

STATEMENT

by the General Confederation of Trade Unions in connexion with the Special Session of the UN General Assembly «Women-2000: gender

equality, development and peace for the 21st century» *The General Confederation of Trade Unions*.

GCTU, is an international organisation affiliating trade union centres in the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and 37 sectoral trade union internationals. The GCTU enjoys observer status with the CIS interstate and intergovernmental bodies, and also with the ILO, ECOSOC and DPI. It organises interaction of its member organisations, coordinates their work, and participates in activities by NGOs in support of the policies of the United Nations and its specialised agencies concerning the social sphere.

As an organisation protecting the interests of working women as part of the general struggle for workers' rights, the GCTU is convinced that all structures of modern society, from governments to public organisations, must pay close attention to improving women's situation.

The GCTU appreciates deeply the efforts the UNO and its agencies have been taking to promote genuine equality between men and women. We are confident that the forthcoming Special Session of the UN General Assembly will make an important contribution towards the full accomplishment of the tasks and objectives contained in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

Secretary-General's report «Review and Appraisal of the Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action» provides an objective analysis of the women's situation in the world. It identifies the major trends and difficulties resulting from recent developments that have affected the process of attaining gender equality in the economic, social and political spheres. We support its main conclusions about the progress and failures on the way to ensuring a decent place for women in society. What is important, the worldwide focus on the implementation of the Beijing Platform has put the gender issues in the mainstream of national policies. Many states have adopted, or are developing, special programmes for carrying out the Beijing decisions, and some have created mechanisms to achieve equality between women and men.

The CIS countries have also adopted plans of action to improve the situation of women. Steps have been taken to extend the relevant legislative basis and reinforce the legal provisions removing the very grounds for discrimination against women. In some CIS countries, special structures have been set up within the government bodies to address gender issues. However, in real life equal rights do not always mean equal opportunities. For instance, the existence of laws prohibiting gender-based discrimination in employment is far from being enough to provide secure protection for women. We agree with the Report as it concludes that the lack of financial and human resources, together with the deep-rooted stereotyped thinking, remain a serious obstacle in the way towards gender equality.

The GCTU and its affiliates express their concern over the fact that women are hardest hit by the harsh economic situation in the CIS countries. Against the general background of growing unemployment, the conditions of women in the CIS labour markets have deteriorated. In some CIS countries, they account for almost 70 per cent of the unemployed. More often than not, women stand a slim chance of getting a job adequate to the level of their education or professional training. The widening pay gap between women and men is also alarming. The wages and salaries in the traditionally «female» sectors, such as the light and food-processing industries, public health and education, culture and art, are below the subsistence minimum level, and the latter in the CIS countries is, on the average, less than \$ 50 a month. Trade unions express their concern that the shrinking demand for women workers in the public sector, alongside the dismantling of many industries employing mainly female labour, push women out into the informal sector, with all its superexploitation and superlow work remuneration.

As these phenomena are almost universal, the GCTU and its affiliates would like to draw the attention of the forthcoming UNGA Special Session to the specific role the state must play in securing and enhancing social guarantees for women. National governments must not only develop target-oriented programmes to promote female employment, but also keep under control their implementation, and

maintain a fair gender balance in the sphere of work remuneration.

CIS trade unions are confident that women's capacity to compete in the labour market depends largely on the opportunities they have in education and training. In the countries of the Commonwealth, despite the relatively high percentage of girls and women studying at secondary school and higher education establishments, women find it increasingly difficult to realize their lawful rights to education and occupational training. The problem has grown even more acute because of the curtailed social infrastructure, reduced number of child-care facilities and increased utility rates.

CIS trade unions call upon the Special Session of the UN General Assembly to draw the attention of the member-states to the need of building for women a social environment conducive to their lifelong education and training. UNESCO international projects could contribute to the success of such efforts. The General Confederation of Trade Unions regrets that in most CIS countries women are unable to enjoy fully their constitutional guarantees and rights in the sphere of health protection, first of all, in what concerns reproductive health. We believe that a major reason behind the situation is the wide spread of commercial medical care accompanied by reduced volumes of free health-care services. The result is the growing number of abnormal childbirth cases, gynaecological and venereal diseases, cancer, TB and HIV/AIDS. The rates of maternal and infantile mortality are 6-10 times higher in the CIS countries than elsewhere in the developed world.

Commonwealth trade unions insist on affordable health care, tangible government support for public health, and a guaranteed right of women to quality and timely medical aid. We urge the UN General Assembly to focus the attention of national governments on this problem, and to support the idea that the right of women to healthy and secure motherhood and proper socio-medical aid should be incorporated into national legislation. Every step should be taken to minimise the risks to women's health in the prenatal and postnatal periods, and to create mechanisms enabling women to exercise these rights.

The GCTU and its affiliates can neither accept the growing gender inequality in politics. Some CIS countries have recently experienced a fall in the number of women in parliaments and other government bodies. Recent reviews show that hardly any of them can boast of a consistent policy to advance women to high-ranking jobs.

As many countries in the world are still a long way from creating conditions allowing women to get more actively involved in the life of society and, first of all, in decision-making, the GCTU believes it appropriate to encourage wider use of special quotas for women representation in various state structures.

We appeal to the world community and the UNO not to relax their efforts aiming to achieve full realisation of the Beijing Platform for Action, with due regard to the experience gained over the past five years. All international programmes for the advancement of women should be made even more target-oriented; they should be flexible enough to respond to any changes that occur both globally and regionally. We believe this could be easier achieved through an improved system of collecting statistics and making them readily available to the broad public.

The ECOSOC and the ILO must have a special role to play in monitoring the accomplishment of the tasks and objectives of the Beijing Platform. The CIS trade unions consider it necessary to press for the ratification and observance of the ILO conventions and recommendations concerning gender equality in social and labour relations, and for the fulfilment of obligations taken by national governments under the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, adopted in 1998.

Nongovernmental organisations and, in particular, trade unions should be more boldly engaged in this process. We hope that the UN policies of coordinating the efforts by all structures and sections of the world community, together with political goodwill of states and their strict adherence to the obligations taken, will enable us to make a decisive turn for a world where the feminisation of poverty will give way to the feminisation of welfare and prosperity so much needed by humanity.

*General Confederation of Trade Unions
Moscow, 10 April 2000*

STATEMENT

by the General Confederation of Trade Unions in connexion with the Special Session of the UN General Assembly on the Implementation of the Outcome of the World Summit for Social

Development and Further Initiatives (Copenhagen + 5) The General Confederation of Trade Unions, GCTU, affiliating national trade union centres in most countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, CIS, and 37 industrial trade union internationals, and enjoying special observer status with the CIS interstate and intergovernmental bodies, the ILO, the ECOSOC and the UN DPI, welcomes the UN initiative to call a Special Session of the General Assembly to consider the implementation of the decisions taken at the World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen, 1995).

Five years ago, the Heads of State and Government of the UN member-states assumed commitments aiming to improve substantially the social conditions for people all over the world. First and foremost, they agreed to take urgent measures to eradicate poverty and achieve full and productive employment and social integration. The final document of the Copenhagen Summit said it was possible and advisable to involve international nongovernmental organisations in monitoring the implementation of the above commitments.

As an NGO that had contributed to the preparations for the Copenhagen Summit, the GCTU would like to make some comments on the forthcoming event.

First, the GCTU would like to congratulate UN Secretary-General on his follow-up report that gives an in-depth analysis of the current economic and social situation in the world and, particularly, in the CIS region. We have noted that quite a few observations made in the report coincide with our own considerations and estimates.

In this connexion, we would like to accentuate that the economic reforms, which have continued in the CIS countries over the last five years, have had grave social consequences for a sizeable majority of the population. Trade

unions cannot ignore the growing discontent of workers with the persisting hard social conditions, and with the unjustified abandonment by some CIS countries of public control over the economic processes, something that could have eased the negative impact of the ill-conceived transition from the planned to the market economy.

Over the years of reform, CIS countries have experienced a dramatic drop in living standards and a steady rise in mass poverty. In some of the countries, over a half of the population receive incomes that are below the official poverty line. Today, the poor include not only the least protected sections, such as large families, invalids, pensioners, etc., but also the working citizens, i.e. the backbone of society. Blue and white collar workers in hundreds of thousands of enterprises and organisations have virtually been stripped of any means of subsistence, being unpaid for many months in a row. At the beginning of 2000, the average arrears of wages in the CIS countries amounted to nearly three billion US dollars.

Many workers earn so little they cannot meet even the basic human needs. Millions of citizens in CIS countries are paid less than 50 cents a day. In 1999, the average wages in the Commonwealth countries varied, dollarwise, from \$ 9 to 90 per month. Simultaneously, the income gap between different sections of the population was enormous.

The rates and payment of pensions and other social benefits are as alarming. In addition, some CIS countries have recently raised the retirement age, in defiance of the dominant global tendency.

The ranks of poor people are being swollen by those who have lost their jobs. Over the last five years, the employed population in the CIS has shrunk by more than four million people. If calculated according to ILO methods, at the turn of the year the number of unemployed in the region exceeded 14 million, or 11 per cent of the economically active population. The unemployment benefit in CIS countries varies from 5.5 to 31.3 per cent of the average wages. However, even such scanty sums are not always paid in time.

Most of the forced migrants found themselves in a plight, driven out of their homes by political turmoil, social changes, economic reforms and local armed conflicts. There are 1.5 million refugees and forced migrants in the Commonwealth countries today.

A considerable part of the population has been particularly hit by the increased rents and public utility rates, and by the introduction of paid services in education and public health. Paid health care prevents a great deal of people from enjoying it to full extent. The result is the spreading infectious diseases, including AIDS, and other plagues of the poor, such as TB and diphtheria. The drastic cutbacks in public expenditures for education and science has led to a reduced level of education and an increased brain drain from the CIS to more developed countries.

The process of reform has been accompanied by an unprecedented growth in the massive violations of labour rights and personal freedoms. Almost universally, employers do not observe the established schemes of working time and rest, ignoring the employees' right to compensation for material damage or injuries.

The trade unions have been struggling against these negative trends. However, in some CIS countries, there have been frequent attempts, whether in a legislative way or in practice, to restrict the unions' rights and curb their ability to influence the settlement of burning social issues.

This is the unfavourable situation that has evolved in the CIS countries five years after Copenhagen. However, the GCTU is not inclined to paint the picture too black, and it tries to take all possible measures to mitigate the situation. These include, among other things, a whole series of model laws on social problems adopted by the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly on the GCTU's initiative. We have also called on the Commonwealth countries to ratify the core ILO conventions, and the move has resulted in a considerable increase of the number of ratifications.

It is our conviction that the developments in our region have only corroborated what we had

said in the Memorandum sent to UN Secretary-General in 1994. We emphasised in the document the need to pay special attention to the social problems in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the CIS, in order to maintain world stability. It is understood that this should be done without any prejudice to the solution of problems facing the developing countries and other groups of countries and their public organisations.

As regards general international problems, the GCTU shares the position of the ILO Workers' Group formulated in November 1999 that stipulates for universal support of the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work as the main instrument regulating labour standards at global level. We insist that the ILO standards should be made binding for all countries. In particular, we consider it important to agree on a legislative provision that would oblige the employers, including transnational corporations, to conclude collective agreements at all enterprises, irrespective of their form of ownership.

The GCTU believes it would be both fair and expedient if nongovernmental organisations could play a bigger role in resolving international social problems. However, priority should be given to the trade unions as the most massive organisations of workers.

The GCTU is also of the opinion that the ILO and ECOSOC should continue monitoring the implementation of UN decisions concerning social issues, with the active involvement of trade unions and the broad use of supervisory mechanisms available to the International Labour Organisation.

Finally, we believe that the realisation of the decisions taken at Copenhagen, and those to be taken at Geneva, should be regularly reviewed at various UN world events and, in particular, at respective forums organised under the United Nations' auspices, both at regional and national levels.

*General Confederation of Trade Unions.
Moscow, 28 April 2000*