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LTD Georgian Railways
Mamuka Bakhtadze
Director General
Tbilisi
Georgia

HTUR/NT

Brussels, 14 November 2013

Pressure and intimidation on Railway Workers New Trade Union leaders and members

Mr Bakhtadze,

I am writing on behalf of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), which represents 175 million workers in 156 countries and territories - including Georgia - to strongly condemn LTD Georgian Railways (GR) management's continuous refusal to negotiate and the pressure put on railway workers striking today in Georgia.

I have been informed by our affiliate the Georgian Trade Union Confederation (GTUC) about the on-going industrial conflict between LTD Georgian Railways (GR) management and the Railway Workers New Trade Union (a GTUC affiliate). Aware of the importance of stable operation of the railway for economy of the country, the Railway Workers New Trade Union tried to settle the dispute through negotiations. I understand that GR management refused to negotiate in good faith on three crucial issues: overtime pay, a fair bonus system and bonuses for the length of service and qualifications. This despite a number of unsuccessful attempts of the Deputy Labour Minister, Mr. Sakandelidze, to mediate between the parties to the conflict; as well as an extension of the period for negotiation agreed by the union.

As a consequence, the union had no other choice than exercising its fundamental right to strike guaranteed by the Georgian Constitution. Hence, the industrial action held today mobilizing more than 6,000 workers in the whole country.

I am very much concerned by the information I received regarding the on-going pressure and defamation exerted by the management before and during the strike. Instead of negotiating, the management interfered in the union internal affairs and in particular its right of assembly. When the notice of the strike went public, the management started to threaten workers of reprisals in case they joined the strike. To mislead public attention, GR management also tried to slander the railway union and GTUC by speaking of blackmail and sabotage as well as by accusing the GTUC leadership of masterminding the process.

The ITUC has also been informed of threats and intimidation of union leaders and activists. Along with the GTUC, the ITUC is particularly worried about the health of one

leader of a regional branch union and that another regional branch union leader remain out of reach.

The ITUC strongly denounces the use of strikebreakers to replace striking dispatchers and locomotive engineers. Heads of the departments and units are driving few freight trains and locomotives. Not only is this against the law and internal regulations of the GR but this is clearly threatening the railway security in the country.

Along with GTUC, the ITUC supports the Railway Workers New Trade Union's call on LTD Georgian Railways management to resume the negotiations without making the termination of the strike a precondition; and reminds the management that the Georgian labour code makes the negotiations and conciliatory procedures obligatory even under the ongoing industrial action.

Finally, the ITUC urges to respect fundamental workers' and trade union rights and stop all attack against trade union and workers exercising their legitimate and fundamental rights.

I look forward to your positive response on these urgent and important matters.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to be 'A. B.', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

General Secretary

Copy to

Mr. Davit Sergeenko, Minister of Labour, Health and Social Affairs of Georgia

Ambassador Philip Dimitrov, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Georgia