

March 16, 2022

Attn: National Trade Union Federations
of BRICS Countries

Dear colleagues,

First of all, we would like to thank you for the words of support and understanding that we receive in connection with the current geopolitical situation.

We decided to inform you about the position of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia regarding the special military operation that is going on in Ukraine since February 24, 2022.

We know that some trade union organisations, mainly European, present their own, distant from reality, and sometimes just false interpretation of the events that are taking place. We hope that this letter will help to understand the current situation.

Without going into details and historical aspects, we will only note that immediately after the coup d'etat that took place in Kiev in 2014, we started receiving information from our member organisations in the regions of Russia bordering Ukraine, as well as from trade union organisations of Donetsk and Lugansk regions that refused to recognize the new authorities, about the onset of continuous pressure on the Russian-speaking population in the south-east of Ukraine. Such pressure was expressed in:

- obstructing the activities of enterprises and organisations;
- refusing to purchase products from and supplying raw materials to those regions;
- bankrupting operational enterprises, mass layoffs and dismissals;
- refusal to pay pensions and benefits for the unemployed in those regions, termination of employment, disorganisation of the social sphere.

Our affiliates initially regarded these circumstances as temporary difficulties related to the economic and political crisis in Ukraine. Our territorial, sectoral and grass-roots organisations, rank-and-file union members conducted numerous humanitarian aid collections and helped sending several dozen humanitarian convoys to the territory of Ukraine target addressed to work collectives.

As the confrontation escalated, tens of thousands of displaced people and refugees who were unable to adapt to the increasingly deteriorating situation in Ukraine started moving to the border regions of Russia.

The Russian government was compelled to address the issue of legalising people who had lost their jobs, homes, education and healthcare opportunities, and to facilitate their access to Russian citizenship. To date, about one million Ukrainian citizens who previously lived in Donetsk and Lugansk regions have become Russian citizens, and about the same number have applied for Russian passports, which is slightly less than 50% of the total population living there.

At the same time, annual labour migration from Ukraine to Russia in those years ranged from 2 to 3.5 million Ukrainian able-bodied men and women. We have examples when more than half of the workforce of Russian enterprises was made up of migrant workers from various regions of Ukraine. Over 12% of the able-bodied Ukrainian population was working in Russia!

As subsequent developments showed, the central leadership of Ukraine launched a campaign to squeeze the population of uncontrolled Donbass and Lugansk regions out of the country. Moreover, this was done on an ethnic basis and related to Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine. Particular zeal in this matter was shown by nationalistic movements, essentially gangs, actively supported by the neighbouring country's authorities.

Suffice it to say that the first decree of the new government was a decree banning the Russian language in Ukraine. At the same time, according to the only population census conducted in Ukraine in 2001, 29.6% of people, including 14.8% of Ukrainians, called Russian their native language, although according to independent estimates its actual prevalence is much higher.

Our public opinion has gradually developed the conviction that a real genocide on ethnic grounds was committed against Russian-speaking citizens of Ukraine and Russian citizens living in the Donetsk and Lugansk regions. All this was happening in the centre of the Europe directly at the borders of the Russian Federation.

The unfolding of Nazi hysteria in the Ukrainian society has greatly alarmed us during the past eight years and especially in the last two years, when it turned out that a number of foreign states, in addition to humanitarian aid, were supplying the Ukrainian nationalist minority with modern weapons, and now with mercenaries, which in no way contributes to the de-escalation of the conflict.

In sum, these facts have led to an unprecedented aggravation of the situation and to the consequences that the whole world is now talking about.

With the beginning of a special military operation, there was hope that nationalistic forces in Ukraine would be stopped, the dangerous militarisation of that country would be stopped and Russian-speaking citizens would be protected from discrimination and be able to return to their homes and peaceful life.

Should you be interested in a more comprehensive information on historical and political aspects of what is going on, the position of the official authorities being shared by the overwhelming number of Russian citizens (according to recent opinion polls, more than 72% of our population support the operation in Ukraine), we offer you the links to two addresses of President Putin to the people of Russia, which may offer responses to many issues raised here.

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67828>

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

In turn, we would always be ready to give you up-to-date, detailed, exhaustive explanations on the situation.

Yours in solidarity,

Evgeny Makarov

FNPR Vice-president,

National coordinator, BRICS TU Forum