



*Opening remarks by Mr. Mikhail Shmakov, President of the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR)*

## **Impact of the pandemic on the labour market, the role and tasks of trade unions**

Dear colleagues, comrades, ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome you from St. Petersburg, the city of glorious history and fighting traditions of the Russian trade union movement.

Today, not all of us can shake each other's hands. This pandemic brings to mind the barriers at the borders of countries and continents. But it cannot force us to give up the common goals of the BRICS trade unions in the fight for the interests of working people.

Virtual communication will not prevent us from standing shoulder to shoulder facing the challenges that time has set for us.

Globalisation has made the entire world sick with COVID-19. And this is not just a viral infection: the economies and social fabric of many countries are seriously ill, too.

According to ILO estimates, in the first three quarters of this year global labour income fell by 10.7%, or three and a half trillion dollars. More than 400 million people lost their jobs worldwide in the second quarter alone.

The current epidemic has further aggravated the socio-economic problems of the pre-crisis period. States are forced to go to unprecedented expenses related to the support of the population. Thousands of businesses have been forced to temporarily shut down, while many are on the verge of collapse or have gone bankrupt.

Against this background, there are voices demanding austerity. This is how they want to pay for anti-crisis measures, as if "relieving" business and the state from social responsibility.

But trade unions know that deregulation and austerity only slow economic growth and accentuate inequalities. The normal cycle between production and effective consumption is being disrupted. The redistribution of income takes on a particularly ugly and unfair nature. Life has taught us this lesson more than once. The current dramatic situation in the world requires changing the very paradigm of social and labour relations.

Science-based dialectics asserts that development crises give impetus to qualitative leaps. What seemed so familiar and acceptable yesterday should be reconsidered with the realisation of the present-day imperatives. A new political will is required from all actors in the world of work: the working people can't wait for the pandemic to fade away, they have to earn a living for themselves and their families every day.

The ILO Centenary Declaration on the future of work with its human-centred agenda is a reliable road map for us on this thorny path.

This is why the ILO calls on us to address the consequences of the pandemic by:

- stimulating the economy and employment;
- supporting businesses, jobs and incomes;
- protecting workers in the workplace and
- relying on social dialogue in the search for effective solutions.

In other words, the strategy for overcoming the crisis is based on creating effective employment as a prerequisite for fair incomes and protecting workers in the workplace.

The social sphere and labour protection can no longer be financed by a leftover principle. The time has come to extend social protection to all.

Occupational safety and health is a fundamental right. In the context of fighting the pandemic, they should be included in the fundamental norms of the ILO.

Covid-19 infection in the workplace should be included in the list of occupational diseases in accordance with the ILO Recommendation No.194. As you know, it provides for creating awareness, for medical care and compensation to employees.

Consultations with trade unions are essential to ensure that workers are protected during their return to work. Employees need to be fully informed about the dangers and risks they face.

Risk assessment should be subject to consultation with trade unions and should be continuously monitored. It should form the basis of a solid plan with clear allocation of roles and responsibilities to each one of the social partners.

In the workplace, trade unions should be actively involved in planning the return to work, taking into account the views of employees and ensuring their safety. Any enterprise that does not interact with trade unions puts the lives of both workers and the public in general at risk.

National procedures or special bodies for recovery should be established to monitor and adjust return-to-work plans. They should include social partners and have access to information and expert advice.

Additional efforts are needed to create protective mechanisms to prevent a sharp decline in workers' incomes. We are talking about the establishment of a fair minimum standards, especially the minimum wage.

Restrictive health measures have led to the widespread use of remote work. This provided unscrupulous entrepreneurs with new levers of pressure on workers and their unions, as well as additional opportunities to expand informal employment.

We believe that the time has come to improve the legislative support for such expanding forms of employment as "remote work" and "flexible employment". At the same time, we proceed from the need to enhance workers' guarantees for fair remuneration, protection from arbitrary changes in working conditions and unjustified dismissals.

Dear colleagues!

Today, more than ever, it is important to strengthen constructive tripartite cooperation in the world of work.

We welcome the deepening interaction between the BRICS Ministers of labour and employment and support their efforts to continue social dialogue.

As you know, earlier this month a BRICS labour ministerial meeting was held via videoconference, where we recognised that the topics chosen by the Ministers during the Russian chairmanship are relevant to all actors involved in labour relations.

The discussion focused on such areas of joint activity as the development of a preventative safety and health at work culture, poverty alleviation through social and economic transformations, and the future of work in the digital economy.

On behalf of all our trade union centres, we expressed our agreement with the main provisions of the Declaration adopted by the labour Ministers: you have the text of it.

However, this does not prevent us from deepening our contribution to these topics in our Forum today. We shall be able to reflect in detail the positions of trade unions in our final Declaration, the draft of which has been made available to you in advance. This document will be conveyed to the governments and social partners of the BRICS countries.

Let me wish all of us successful and meaningful work.

Thank you for your attention.