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Ukraine: “Our union protects workers under martial law”.

Volodymyr Kozelsky, President of the Free Trade Union of Ukrainian Railways

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During the Russian Federation’s armed aggression against Ukraine, “Ukrzaliznytsia” (Ukrainian Railways) , as a critical infrastructure company, ensures the transport of passengers and goods 24 hours a day. Railway employees contribute to the State’s defence capability through their heroic work during hostilities and rocket attacks

Before the war, the VPZU trade union, along with other trade union organisations operating in the Ukrainian railway sector, constantly negotiated with the administration of “Ukrzaliznytsia” to improve the working conditions of railway workers and increase their wages. In addition, in order to regulate the legal and social protection of the labour rights of union members, the elected bodies of the VPZU formulated proposals for regulatory acts, which were then submitted to the relevant committees of the Supreme Council of Ukraine.

In addition, the VPZU is a member of the joint representative body of trade unions operating in “Ukrzaliznytsia” for the signing of a new (first) collective agreement for the enterprise, but at present, due to martial law in the country, the activities of this body have been suspended.

From 2014 to 2024, during Russia’s armed aggression, relations with a number of VPZU union organisations in the Luhansk, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions and in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea were severed.

Our union is a non-profit, autonomous public organisation that brings together citizens with common interests in the nature of their professional and working activities. The VPZU has the status of a Ukraine-wide public organisation/trade union, organised on a territorial basis.

The union’s organisational units are as follows:

- basic union organisations are voluntary associations of trade union members who work in the same company;
- local and regional trade union organisations are united:
- rank-and-file trade union organisations in railway companies, institutions and organisations with distinct structural subdivisions of the railway ;
- trade unions from transport, construction and metro companies, institutions or organisations;
- grassroots trade unions in the companies, institutions and other sectors concerned.

The VPZU has confirmed its representativeness at sectoral level in accordance with Article 5 of the Ukrainian law "On Social Dialogue in Ukraine".

In addition, the VPZU includes employees of the municipal company Kyivpastrans (trolleybus depot and bus fleet workers) in Kyiv, at the municipal company "Zhytomyr Tram and Trolleybus" in Zhytomyr, in the "City trolleybus" in Kryvyi Rih, in Kamianske (Dnipropetrovsk region), in the municipal company "Kharkiv Metro" in Kharkiv where the workers are represented by the union organisations of the VPZU.

The VPZU is a member organisation of the Confederation of Free Trade Unions of Ukraine (KVPU) and cooperates in solidarity with the Independent Miners' Union of Ukraine (IMU), the Free Trade Union of Education and Science of Ukraine (VPONU), the Free Trade Union of Health Workers of Ukraine (VPMU), and the Free Trade Union of Entrepreneurs [small vendors - editor's note] of Ukraine (VPUU) and other organisations of the KVPU confederation. This cooperation takes the form of:

exchange of information on the application of innovative methods

protection of trade union members' employment rights ;

joint union activities to defend members' rights

unions that have been violated by their respective employers;

joint appeals to the public authorities and the the mass media on labour relations in Ukraine.

Since 24 February 2022, the VPZU's trade union organisations have been operating under martial law, providing legal and public protection of workers' fundamental rights in accordance with current Ukrainian legislation.

The VPZU provides ongoing humanitarian assistance to union members or citizens affected by martial law and war. VPZU trade union organisations also provide assistance to the military, including food, warm clothing, various military munitions, etc.

This is currently the VPZU's main task.

In this respect, the VPZU would like to see the possibility of receiving any form of help from the international workers' movement, depending on its resources and budget, for the establishment of relations that could be built up in the future.

Volodymyr Kozelsky

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