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INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU)

ICFTU OnLine...

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Interview with ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder on eve of the ICFTU World Congress

Brussels, 24 November 2004 (ICFTU online): On the eve of the 18th World Congress of the ICFTU, which opens on December 5, ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder sets out key issues for debate.

Why is the theme of "globalising solidarity" so important?

Globalisation is having an enormous impact on working people in every country. More than ever before, trade unions have to take account of the international dimension, in order to organise and represent workers effectively. Effective trade unionism depends on solidarity, so our ability to deal with the huge challenges we face depends on our capacity to organise solidarity at the global level. We are seeking to transform globalisation and reach out to millions of unorganised workers, and that means we have to look at our own working methods and our own international structures, because these have not always been adequate to the tasks we face. Along with this is probably the most significant internal challenge of all - how to bring national and international trade union work much closer together. Only when we achieve this can we expect to have the necessary impact on governments, employers and international institutions.

The international trade union structures are not always well understood, even inside the union movement. What can be done to change this?

It's true that our structures are often not well understood - working people are often not aware of what their international trade union bodies do, or even of their existence. But it is a priority now for us to make a much more meaningful connection between international and national trade union organisations. In practice, Congress will decide on whether to take steps to build a new, unified international trade union organisation. It will also take a hard look at the way in which the various regional and global parts of the ICFTU can work together more cohesively and with greater impact. In parallel, we'll also look at how to scale up measures which we've already piloted in recent years to make our policy-making and campaigning work more effective and more flexible. We're also proposing to intensify the Global Unions partnership of recent years in very practical ways, building more systematic cooperation with our Global Unions partners.

Will this be the last ICFTU Congress then?

Even if the ICFTU decides to move forward in creating a new trade union international, our constitution requires us to hold a dissolution Congress before the ICFTU is transformed, along with the WCL and non-affiliated democratic national centres, into a new organisation. The ICFTU's values and principles will remain the bedrock of our work.

Which do you expect to be the highlights of the Miyazaki congress?

I'd like to think that a high point of the 5 days would be the debate around the draft Resolution "Globalising Solidarity", which is presented in the Congress Theme Report (<http://www.icftu.org/www/pdf/Globalising%20Solidarity.pdf>). Other Resolutions on a range of specific topics will be discussed at Congress, to set out the detailed policy framework for the ICFTU in the coming years. Each of these concludes with action points to implement the

commitments made in the Resolution. And the "Globalising Solidarity" Resolution sets out important changes needed in our methods and structures, and the outcome of the debate on this Resolution will be a major factor in equipping the ICFTU to really implement the commitments made at Congress.

Other key points will be addresses from national leaders from Japan, Finland and Tanzania, and special activities around tackling injustice and poverty, equality, combating HIV/AIDS and other major questions. The ultimate purpose of Congress is to enable the leaders of our affiliates from around the world to debate the issues and set out our future direction. So for me, the whole Congress is a highlight.

What kind of support are you getting from the Japanese trade union movement?

RENGO, our affiliate in Japan, is doing a magnificent job in helping us prepare what is gearing up to be a really memorable Congress, and we're truly grateful to them for this. The Congress is also an opportunity for colleagues from around the world to get to know the Japanese trade union movement better. The government of Japan has also been very supportive, and the assistance of the local Miyazaki authorities has been quite outstanding.

This will be your first congress as ICFTU General Secretary. What will be your main preoccupations as a leader as the curtain goes up in Japan on December 5?

I think that a lot is riding on this Congress, and as General Secretary, I certainly feel the pressure to ensure that ICFTU affiliates engage deeply in the debate, and come out with a renewed sense of purpose around the decisions made by the Congress. Our President Fackson Shamenda and I will do all we can to bring about this engagement. The rest is up to the national delegations themselves. We've really worked hard to ensure that the Congress proceedings will be more interactive and dynamic than ever before. Our Congress plenary discussions have not always been very dynamic in the past. We are working to change that at this Congress.

My main preoccupations at the end of Congress will be that the ICFTU's affiliates take up the challenges which they themselves will set, with the necessary commitment and solidarity, and that all the components of the ICFTU can meet or hopefully exceed our affiliates' expectations in the coming years.

The ICFTU represents 148 million workers in 234 affiliated organisations in 152 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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