

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS (ICFTU)

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Tsunami relief: Global Unions launch reconstruction initiative and call for sustained international effort

Brussels, 11th January 2005 (ICFTU Online): With trade unions around the world raising millions of dollars for tsunami relief efforts, the ICFTU and its Global Unions partners today launched an international trade union initiative to channel funding to sustainable rehabilitation and reconstruction work in the areas affected by the disaster. The initiative will identify reconstruction work where trade unions have a specific role to play and where union expertise is most needed, including rebuilding trade union infrastructure, and will help ensure maximum cohesion in the trade union movement's reconstruction activities.

Trade unions in the affected countries mobilised immediately in response to the disaster. Union members are providing humanitarian relief and health-care and are working to re-establish supplies of power and other services. A mission of international and regional union leaders will travel later this week to Indonesia and Sri Lanka to seek further information and undertake groundwork for trade union reconstruction efforts, complementing reports already received from trade unions in the region and building up a comprehensive information base on reconstruction needs.

Global Unions will be pressing the international community to fulfil the pledges which have been made, and to ensure maximum coordination of the efforts of donor governments, UN agencies and non-governmental organizations, with sustainable economic reconstruction and public infrastructure as primary objectives. "With initial humanitarian assistance underway now, we need to take a hard look at the future with the people and communities affected. Long term commitment to rebuilding infrastructure and creating decent employment are essential tasks which must be right at the centre of international support", said ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder. "The global trade union movement will play its part in this, through this initiative, and by making our views heard by the UN, governments and other agencies involved in reconstruction work", he added.

Today's Global Unions meeting in Nyon, Switzerland, received reports from Global Union Federations on tsunami solidarity action in their sectors, from the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD on development assistance discussions planned at the OECD's Development Assistance Committee, and from the ICFTU on pledges received from national affiliates and on trade union actions in the Asia/Pacific region. The meeting was also briefed by the UN's International Labour Organisation (ILO) on its plans and on the broader UN approach, and an ICFTU representative is taking part in today's UN donor coordination meeting in Geneva. The report of the Global Unions fact-finding mission, involving Education International General Secretary Fred van Leeuwen who is Chair of the Global Union Federations' General Conference, ICFTU Assistant General Secretary Mamounata Cissé, ICFTU-APRO General Secretary Noriyuki Suzuki and regional representatives from Global Union Federations, will provide key information for further trade union fundraising and reconstruction work, as well as for Global Unions action around the overall international aid and reconstruction effort.

The trade union movement will be working to ensure that aid agencies, trade unions and NGOs are allowed to carry out their legitimate work effectively, especially in areas which have been affected by civil conflict. It also stresses that the funds set aside by donor governments for tsunami relief are allocated in addition to existing development aid commitments. "There are high expectations for progress in 2005 on debt relief and international development within the OECD, the G8 and other international fora," said Ryder. "While the international community focuses, as it should, on tsunami relief, broader and longer term action to tackle global poverty is also of paramount importance", he said.

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

For more information, please contact the ICFTU Press Department on +32 2 224 0206 or +32 476 621 018.