

INTERNATIONAL CONFEDERATION OF FREE TRADE UNIONS

ICFTU OnLine...

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Pakistan Trade Union Centres Unite in New Organisation

Brussels 7 September 2005 (ICFTU OnLine): At a special Founding Congress in Islamabad today, the three ICFTU affiliates (APFOL, APFTU and PNFTU) joined together to form the Pakistan Workers' Federation (PWF), with a total membership of around 880,000 representing more than three quarters of organised Pakistani workers. The founding Congress placed trade union organising, workers' rights, equality and the interests of young workers at the top of the new organisation's priority list for action. The top officials of the PWF include Kurshid Ahmed as President, and M Zahoor Awan as General Secretary. Membership of the PWF is also open to other trade union organisations in Pakistan which have not yet joined.

ICFTU General Secretary Guy Ryder, in his address to the Congress, welcomed the unification as a major development which will enable more effective organisation and representation of Pakistani working people, remove obstacles to effective trade union action, and help ensure that workers get a greater share of the country's wealth. Pakistan is currently experiencing economic growth of around 8% per year. Along with ILO Executive Director Kari Tapiola and ICFTU-APRO General Secretary Noriyuki Suzuki, government and employer representatives also attended the Congress.

At a meeting on 6 September, Pakistani Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz informed Ryder and national trade union officials that the government was examining amendments to the country's Industrial Relations Ordinance (IRO), which has been the subject of heavy criticism over violations of trade union rights. The IRO imposes heavy restrictions on the right to organise and bargain collectively, including the right to strike, and altogether denies the right trade union membership to workers in several industries in the public and private sectors. Further violations are contained in "essential services" and anti-terrorism laws. In 2003, the International Labour Organisation recommended many changes to the legislation to bring it into line with international standards.

Prime Minister Aziz also spoke of the government's efforts to improve and extend skills development to meet growing demand for skilled workers, and urged the international trade union movement to support more opportunities for workers to migrate across borders, as a means to encourage skills transfer and improve their employment prospects.

The ICFTU represents 145 million workers in 234 affiliated organisations in 154 countries and territories. ICFTU is also a member of Global Unions: <http://www.global-unions.org>

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