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**CIS FORUM ON YOUTH:
“Youth of the XXI Century: Realities and Perspectives”**

Kiev, Ukraine, 24-26 September 2003

SOUTHERN CAUCASUS YOUTH DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

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Georgia, as a former post-Soviet country passed the significant stages of its development from political, social, economic and mental point of view. Today Georgia being a sovereign state, has the fair pride, desire and orientation to help out the country and the whole population in current economic and social difficulties, the prevention of which means the strategic development of the country. Therefore, creation of the firm basis for the development is considered to be one of the basic tasks both for governmental and non-governmental sectors.

I have the honor to introduce the achievements of the network of non-governmental organizations of Youth Employment Summit's Country Network of Georgia within the period after the foundation of the network of non-governmental organizations of youth employment summit of Georgia by nearly 30 non-governmental organizations and by initiative of Association for Farmers' Rights Defense, AFRD on 30 May 2002. This significant arrangement was proceeded by active and truthful negotiations and consultations with our future partner organizations and governmental, non-governmental and youth organizations, different local and international institutions, donors and accredited in the country diplomatic corps. The meeting gathered over 30 NGOs, experts, stakeholders (business, Governments, NGOs, academies of sciences, mass media), and youth representatives.

Previously isolated, Georgia now faces the challenge of becoming part of global processes. This presents many social, economic and political changes in the former Soviet system of Georgia. Nowadays, the Georgia is being transforming from old planned economy to new free market relations. From behind it in Georgia the question of employment of the population and especially employment of youth are very active, because destructions from civil war and from the not balanced reforms in the country the question of employment and question of a free choice of trades and works is very important in country.

That is why the problem of the youth employment assumes the great importance for Georgian non-governmental organizations. The unemployment is not only problem of Georgia and Southern Caucasus countries, but also other post-Soviet countries. Our purpose is to develop the coordination between young people of three Caucasian countries on the basis of mutual projects, programs, monitoring, seminars and trainings. Our purpose is the minimization of the youth problems and on this purpose caring out the lobbyist activities to defend their rights in governmental and non-governmental and other institutions by close cooperation with UNDP, UNECE, UNICEF, ILO, FAO, WYB, YES.

The short and long-term purposes of youth are rather important for us. The government proceeding from these purposes and with a view to youth employing will create relevant conditions based on symbiosis principles and its effect will equal to synergism. It is necessary to simplify the banking requirements, particularly the high mortgage and percent rates that impede the youth from testing their strength in private business. Existence of youth banks or youth funds necessary for many developing countries of the world will be of economic efficiency.

We shall welcome and encourage the establishment of World Youth Bank's Network in Georgia, which will be especially important for the our country and for youth of Georgia. The current problems, the ways of settlement of which often do not differ, are absolutely identical. With a view to better coordinating, our network put forward an initiative to create **Southern Caucasus Youth Development Agency**, the main function of which consists in youth employment, retraining, improvement of professional skills and quick integration with the world youth, student and professional institutions and organizations.

In future establishment of the Southern-Caucasian Youth Parliament and active cooperation may follow the successful work of the aforesaid House between the aforesaid Parliament and the Youth Parliament of the European Council thus creating additional levers for our region from the political, economic and social point of view.

Neither country will develop without promotion of small and medium business, insurance of the youth with long-term credits under beneficial terms, settlement of gender issues, increase of women's role in private and governmental structures, rendering assistance to students during probation period and studying of second profession and improvement of professional skills.

We hope that the issue of youth unemployment and provision of works will be solved on the basis of such coordination that will be based on active mutual cooperation of government, private and non-governmental organizations, donors and different financial institutions. And this is easily realizable provided that this activity is widely implemented in all countries and the conducted measures and achieved results are accessible for all of us.

CONCEPT OUTLINE: BUILDING A YOUTH EMPLOYMENT INFRASTRUCTURE

Among the critical challenges facing the current generation of young people in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan is the lack of employment opportunities and with it, the loss of positive motivation and hope in a better future. This is true for youth living in municipalities and cities with traditional labor markets, and in rural areas where jobs are few.

The situation is not unexpected. Few institutions and organizations in the Caucasus specialize in preparing youth for work. In the post-Soviet era, far too many out-of-school and out-of-work youth are not getting up-to-date career information or have the necessary training or background to be employable; this is unfortunately now true for secondary school and college graduates. Most youth are not aware of the different career or entrepreneurial options that may exist now or in the future, and they do not have the requisite education, entry-level job skills, confidence, or the practical experience that employers want. For many young people, the very notion of entrepreneurship and self-employment is unknown or not considered to be realistic.

In addition to the unsettling impact that persistent unemployment has on the individual youth and their families, there are serious societal implications that over time adversely affect macro-economic policy, social services, delinquency patterns, and ultimately overall community stability. Unless concerted action is taken at the policy and program level to reverse the downward trend and create more coherent and stable pathways to productive employment, future generations of young people will share a similar future.

This proposal aims to create an organizational infrastructure to systematically and strategically address youth unemployment in three Southern-Caucasian countries.

EMERGING COLLABORATION

For the past year or so, representatives of 30 NGOs in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan have been investigating forming a regional network to address the education and employment needs of young people in the Southern-Caucasus – with special attention focused on rural unemployment.

Our idea is to build a comprehensive regional “second-chance” youth employment system that significantly improves the education, economic, and social conditions for unemployed young men and young women in each country. The target population is youth aged 18 to 30 whose future

prospects are limited by background, gender, poor motivation, insufficient education or job skills, or access to productive work, self-employment opportunities, training or credit because of geography or other circumstances¹.

The GWYB has an ambitious 5 to 10 year youth employment development agenda, including the development of projects and joint ventures aimed at preparing youth to better access traditional and agricultural employment opportunities, as well as create a range of self-employment possibilities for young people who:

- are early school-leavers and graduates who have not found productive, decent, or full-time employment;
- have not been successful staying in the existing labor market or are under-employed;
- do not have the basic education, self-confidence, linkages to employers, job training, specific occupational or technological skills, or the work experience employers require; or
- are not aware of the requirements needed to start up a small or medium size business, or do not have the financial means, social status, and professional skills to become self-employed.

While these needs are similar, the solutions are not the same. Experience in other countries has demonstrated that relying on just one approach to youth unemployment is not sufficient to improve the job and career prospects of diverse populations of young people with multiple needs.² The issue is too complex to rely on simple and incomplete solutions. Therefore, an intensive and comprehensive strategic development process is called for that, over the next 12-18 months, will result in a structured, systematic approach to youth unemployment that identifies major priorities in each country. This strategy will include mutual planning and goal setting with representatives from Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, and will recommend new and powerful program models to address youth employment priorities in the Trans-Caucasian countries.

Southern Caucasus Youth Development Agency

The operational vehicle for this historical regional initiative is the establishment of the **Southern Caucasus Youth Development Agency**, an independent project to be jointly undertaken by committed individuals and innovative organizations who are involved in the strategic development process. Once operational, the SCYDA will work with public officials, private business, international donors, and public entities in to accomplish five core tasks:

- to provide career information to young people,
- to develop and administer pilot training and projects,
- to launch, monitor, and evaluate youth employment programs serving a large number of youth in all three countries,
- to expand youth employment initiatives that demonstrate promise and are successful, and
- to promote education and employment policies beneficial to young people.

¹ The term “second chance” refers to a structured approach to assist out-of-school youth without adequate job or career skills or access to employers, are under-employed, require additional education or training, or have an interest and aptitude in exploring self-employment opportunities – hence, a comprehensive approach to providing young people with a “second-chance” to be successful.

² Prior research and practical experience designing, implementing, and assessing the characteristics of successful youth employment programs throughout the world suggest that a range of policies, program models, and services are needed.

As a first step, early in 2003 the GWYBN Network plans to assess existing local and national youth policies, and the education and workforce development models currently in use to establish a baseline of current practices before making any recommendations about new policies or program models. Simultaneously, they will begin a 9 to 12 month strategic development process that involves:

- Convening local and regional leaders to conduct an educational process about youth employment problems and solutions, and gain their active support;
- Begin a dialogue with young people in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan about their education and employment needs and the critical problems they face in gaining skills and jobs;
- Establishing a **Southern Caucasus Youth Development Agency** working group charged with researching and recommending the organizational direction, initial program priorities, and the SCYDA governance structure, including how to coordinate projects and programs with a wide-range multi-sectoral partners, and determine how to best accomplish SCYDA goals through strong and mutually beneficial partnerships with public sector institutions, private enterprise, and government throughout the region;
- Securing public and private partnerships to provide the support and resources needed to launch SCYDA initiatives; and
- Establishing a board of directors who will be responsible and accountable for the success of the SCYDA.

The purpose of the development process is to ensure that all stakeholders and potential partners understand the purpose of the SCYDA, are invested in its goals, participate in key decisions, agree to follow-through on commitments, and accept joint responsibility for its success.³ By working together and being intimately involved in the planning and decision-making for the SCYDA, participants will establish stronger working relationships, build internal leadership, and be better prepared to work cooperatively in the years to come.

The GWYBN is confident that we have the support of our governments, elected officials, and key private and public sector stakeholders representing the oil industry, academia, secondary education, mass media, business and financial institutions, and of course young people and their families to undertake this effort. However, given the lack of regional stability, it goes without saying that the GWYBN must be sensitive to the history, culture, customs, beliefs, and local authority structures that can influence the ability of SCYDA to improve the life circumstances and change the employment outcomes for young people in the Southern-Caucasian countries.

Once the SCYDA development process is completed, the targets date to recruit youth participants and begin program operations in 2004.

³ The development process has been adapted from a model used to engage diverse stakeholders in communities in the United States.