

Conference On Reconstruction Documents Major Obstacles

PARIS, France - The first international conference on the reconstruction of Armenia completed its work on December 6, 1989 in Paris. During three days of deliberations, over thirty speakers presented reports and analysis of various aspects of the reconstruction in the area of Armenia affected by the earthquake in December 1988.

The deliberations of the conference made it clear that reconstruction is facing major obstacles, and that only a small portion of the planned activities have been realized. To overcome obstacles, the region needs increased resources, better management of available resources, coordination of efforts and organization of information.

The conference, entitled "The Earthquake in Armenia: One Year Later" was convened jointly by the USSR Academy of Sciences' Commission on the Reconstruction of Armenia and the Zoryan Institute of Cambridge, MA. Academician Abel Aganbegyan, chairman of the Commission, headed a long list of scientists and specialists from Armenia, Moscow, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Canada and the United States in presenting critical analysis of the current efforts as well as proposals and projections for the future.

Mr. Bernard Kouchner, French Secretary of State for Humanitarian Affairs joined Dr. Aganbegyan and Zoryan France's President, Professor of Law and Attorney Catherine Kessedjian to open the meeting. In an eloquent and significant statement, Mr. Kouchner discussed the inevitable link between humanitarian and political action and the need to focus on the needs of people in the earthquake disaster area.

Speakers introduced reports and research on the geophysical situation, rescue and relief efforts, housing, medical and psychological issues, sociological and political dimension, employment and ecological aspects and economic reconstruction.

A number of problems critical for the reconstruction were debated intensely: the location of new cities, particularly Leninakan; temporary versus permanent housing; ecological considerations versus employment needs; the usefulness of free economic zones versus slow introduction of non-socialist forms of ownership and production; the role of Western countries and of the Armenian diaspora, specifically, the impact of the Azerbaijani blockades; the problems posed by the two-year rebuilding plan introduced in January 1989 by the USSR governmental commission on reconstruction; and the problems of bureaucratic decision-making and corruption

that have an effect on all dimension of reconstruction.

The discussions also made it clear that given the scope of reconstruction work, it was necessary to conceive of most aspects of that process as part of a new economic concept to be developed for the whole of the Republic.

In the closing session devoted to economic issues, Academician Aganbegyan presented a lecture on the potential for Armenia's economic development.

The problem of economic development of Armenia, and especially the role of foreign capital and technology, were the subject of a special seminar organized by the Zoryan Institute on December 7, 1989 in Paris following the conference. Economists and other specialists from Armenia, Canada, France, Italy, the United States and Moscow began a debate on a draft proposal from the government of Armenia on the theoretical and practical aspects of the role of international resources in Armenia's economic development. The participants considered the session the start of a process that must be institutionalized.

In remarks made at the close of the conference, Mr. Theodore Bogosian, chairman of the Board of Director of the Zoryan Institute (USA), announced that the Zoryan Institute would publish the proceedings of the conference in the shortest time possible. In addition to papers presented and the discussions that followed, the volume will include a summary of topics debated and recommendations made, as well as reports of various relief and reconstruction agencies involved in the reconstruction process.

The conference, which will become an annual event was organized by the Zoryan Institute of France, Canada and the United States. The conference was also the occasion for the release of a new publication produced by the Zoryan Institute, *The International Bulletin for the Reconstruction and Development of Armenia*, sponsored jointly with the USSR and Armenian Academies of Sciences.

This first international conference was financed by donations from private sources, including a major grant from the brothers Souren, Hrair and Kourken Sarkissian.

At the conclusion of the conference, teams from the Academy of Sciences Commission on Reconstruction and the Zoryan Institute, headed respectively by Academician Abel Aganbegyan and Dr. Gerard Libaridian started discussions on the second annual conference which is scheduled to convene in Moscow and Yerevan in December 1990.