

## Visit of the American Federation of Teachers to Ukraine: cooperation of trade unions

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On October 11-12, 2022, a delegation of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) headed by President Randi Weingarten paid a visit to Ukraine at the invitation of the Trade Union of Education and Science Workers of Ukraine.

The delegation included Director of the International Relations Department Patricia Keefer, Communications Advisor Michael Powell, AFT Press Secretary Andrew Crook,

International Secretary of the Polish Education Trade Union ZNP Dorota Obidniak, Regional Program Director of the AFP Solidarity Center Rudy Porter, and international media. The host of the international event was the Lviv Regional Organization of the Trade Union.



The purpose of the visit of the AFT delegation was to get acquainted with the situation in the field of education during the full-scale war in Ukraine, to understand the impact of military actions on the lives of teachers, children and the educational process in general, as well as to convey to the state leadership their vision

of the war, and the struggle of Ukrainians for their independence and peace in the native land.

First of all, a round table was held with the heads of regional Trade Union organizations at the Ivan Franko Lviv National University, where trade union colleagues talked about education during martial law, the work of teachers, etc.



*"Colleagues, we are here to witness the terrible consequences of the Russian war and the incredible resilience of the Ukrainian people. Obviously, no one expected two days of rocket rain on Ukraine. We are happy to communicate with you, although we had to adjust our program, especially after all the schools went online again,"* said Randi Weingarten at the first meeting with the heads of regional organizations of

the Union.



The heads of the regional organizations of the Trade Union spoke about the state of education in the localities. The American delegation was impressed by the stories of Tetyana Matveeva - head of the Chernihiv regional organization of the Trade Union, Nadiya Hryn - head of the Zaporizhia regional organization of the Trade Union, Serhiy Borysenko - deputy head of the

Kharkiv regional organization of the Trade Union, Valentina Borovik - head of the trade union committee of Sumy, because they are from the places that suffered the most from shelling and bombings by the occupiers. And Maria Yatseyko - the head of the Lviv regional organization of the Trade Union, Tetyana Povkhanych - the head of the Zakarpattia regional organization of the Trade Union and Anatoly Stetsenko - the head of the Cherkasy regional organization of the Trade Union spoke about the incredible unity of educators and their work in difficult conditions. *"It is important for us to show and tell you the truth about the life that Ukrainian educators live today, and despite everything they keep the educational front. The armed forces of Ukraine liberate our lands from the occupiers, and the teachers continue to educate our children and take care of the future of the country,"* stressed the Head of the Trade Union of Education and Science Workers of Ukraine, Heorhii Trukhanov, and told his colleagues about the

current state of education and the organization's activities in such a difficult time for all the time.



The delegation of the American Federation of Teachers had a number of meetings during their stay in the country. The most poignant and emotional were the conversations with emigrant educators from Mariupol, Bakhmut, Kharkiv, Kherson, who now live in the trade union sanatorium "Prolisok" and a dormitory of Drohobyt'sk State Pedagogical University named after I. Franko.



Educators shared their own life stories with their American colleagues. They told how they experienced those terrible times at the beginning of the war, how they ran away from bullets, how they lost their homes and how grateful they are for the care and support they have here.



*"I am touched and inspired by Ukrainian teachers. I listened today about their experiences, about their hope and most of all*

*about their struggle. One teacher, when we were waiting in the shelter during the air raid, said that he wished that the sky above our schools would be clear, and that our school bells would continue to ring and call children to school... And we decided that we would be the voices of the Ukrainian community. You are at the forefront of democracy and freedom. You work every day so that education continues and children learn. And we will deliver your truth. We will not leave you and will support you,"* AFT President Randi Weingarten stressed.



As part of the visit, a meeting of the American-Ukrainian trade union delegation took place with Lviv Mayor Andrii Sadov. The mayor of the city briefly informed about the work of education in the city during the war and its importance.

Full-fledged cooperation between trade unions and social partners was discussed at the next meeting of the international delegation with the

director of the Department of Education and Science of the Lviv State Administration Oleg Paska and the head of the Commission for Education, Science and Innovation of the Lviv State Administration Ivanna Gerus.

Leaders of the education industry told the foreign guests about the education of the region during the war and about the daily work for the result. *"We have common goals with our department and deputies - our educators must be protected and receive everything provided for by the law, even in the extremely difficult time of war,"* said the head of the Lviv Regional Committee of the Trade Union, Maria Yatseyko.



In turn, the social partners emphasized that it is high time to develop friendship between Ukrainian, American and Polish schools and establish full-fledged cooperation between educational institutions. At the end of the work, the idea of this type of cooperation was discussed.

*"I had the opportunity to once again thank our friends for their support, and it was nice to see their understanding of the need to help develop education in Ukraine right now,"* remarked Ivanna Gerus.



Also, within the framework of the visit, there was an exchange of opinions between AFT President Randi Weingarten and Head of the Federation of Trade Unions of Ukraine Hryhoriy Osovoy regarding the peculiarities of the legal regulation of the activities of trade unions, their role and place in modern society.

American Federation of Teachers had the opportunity to communicate directly with trade union colleagues from many areas, with VPO educators, and with educational leaders of various levels.

In general, these working days were full of meetings and emotions. Colleagues from the



We hope that this visit by colleagues will be a powerful impetus for the continuation of effective cooperation between the American Federation of Teachers and the Trade Union of Education and Science Workers of Ukraine.

Andrew Crook, Press Secretary, AFT

607-262-9431