News Release

Contact: Marta Baziuk
Tel: (416) 923-4732
E-mail: hrec@ualberta.ca

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Communism and Hunger: The Soviet, Kazakh, Ukrainian and Chinese Famines in Comparative Perspective

14 July 2014 — A ground-breaking conference to examine communist-orchestrated famines will be held on September 26–27 in Toronto, organized by the Holodomor Research and Education Consortium (HREC) of the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, University of Alberta. *Communism and Hunger in Comparative Perspective* will bring together some of the best specialists on the Ukrainian, Kazakh, all-Soviet, and Chinese famines to assess their common features and differences and place their findings within the dynamics of the histories of these countries on the basis of new scholarship and the rapidly increasing specialized literature.

Over the past two decades, research on the great political famines of the twentieth century has made significant progress, thanks to increased access to formerly closed archives and to the collective effort of the international scholarly community.

“We now have a more or less accurate picture of the causes, dynamics, demographic impact, and consequences of the pan-Soviet famine of 1931–33, the Ukrainian Holodomor, the Kazakh great hunger, and the terrible famine in China produced by the Great Leap Forward in 1959–61,” said Professor Andrea Graziosi of the Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research, who is one of the conference organizers.

The conference will feature the following scholars: Nicolas Werth, Institut d’histoire du temps présent (Paris), speaking on “Famine in the Volga Region, Famine in Ukraine: Political Mechanisms and Recent Debates”; Lucien Bianco, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (Paris), on “Comparing Soviet and Chinese Famines”; Andrea Graziosi, Italian National Agency for the Evaluation of Universities and Research (Naples), on “Stalin’s and Mao’s Famines: Analogies and Differences”; Niccolò Pianciola, Lingnan University (Hong Kong), on “Kazakhstan and the Geography of the Soviet Famine of 1931–33”; Sarah Cameron, University of Maryland, on “The Kazakh Famine of 1930–33: Current Research and New Directions”; Zhou Xun, University of Essex, on “The Great Famine in the Chinese Communist Party Archives”; and Ralph Thaxton, Brandeis University, on “The Traumatic Past in the Contentious Present: How the Great Leap Famine Has Affected Legitimacy and Resistance in the Post-Mao Era.” Olga Andriewsky, Trent University, and Kimberly Manning, Concordia University, will serve as discussants. Public lectures will be delivered by Professor Bianco on the evening of September 26 and by Professor Graziosi on the afternoon of September 27.

Dr. Graziosi pointed out that while there have been attempts to compare these famines, a systematic comparison that could reveal both similarities and differences and thus produce a deeper understanding has yet to be realized. All three famines were direct byproducts of major
“leaps forward” unleashed by communist parties endowed with centralized planning mechanisms whose targets and priorities they believed could be controlled and freely manipulated. Moreover, in both the Soviet Union and China, these parties were led by powerful, quasi-despotic figures prepared to use any means and profit from any circumstance to preserve power, often presenting themselves as the sole guarantors for the accomplishment of higher missions. Whatever the economic motivations, these famines were also political events that require political analyses of their causes and courses.

There were also major differences, however. According to Professor Graziosi, semi-colonial mechanisms and the national question played a much more important role in the USSR than in China. The Chinese party was able to oppose its leader’s choices much more effectively than its Soviet counterpart; the geographical specificities of the famines seem to have had quite different causes; and, while the Soviet famines allowed Stalin’s policies to triumph, the Chinese famine ended in a major defeat for Mao. The aftermaths were also substantially different, as demonstrated even by a superficial comparison between the Soviet show trials and the Great Proletarian Revolution.

HREC is making available stipends to graduate students and early career scholars to support their attendance at the conference and give them an opportunity to interact with leading scholars. Last year, HREC organized Contextualizing the Holodomor: A Conference on the 80th Anniversary of the 1932-33 Famine in Ukraine, and nearly twenty young academics came from North America, Europe, and Ukraine to participate.

HREC is organizing the Communism and Hunger conference with the support of the Petro Jacyk Program Centre for European, Russian and Eurasian Studies at the Munk School, University of Toronto; the St. Vladimir Institute; and the Ukrainian Canadian Research and Documentation Centre.

For more information, contact HREC: hrec@ualberta.ca; 416 923-4732; www.holodomor.ca and www.ualberta.ca/CIUS/

Photo:
Professor Andrea Graziosi

The Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies (CIUS) is a leading centre of Ukrainian studies outside Ukraine that engages in and support research and scholarship in Ukrainian and Ukrainian-Canadian studies. If you would like more information on the Institute, please visit our website at www.cius.ca; facebook page at www.facebook.com/canadian.institute.of.ukrainian.studies?ref=hl; or contact Dr. Bohdan Klid at (780) 492-2972; cius@ualberta.ca

Канадський інститут українських студій (КІУС) — провідний осередок українознавчих студій поза межами України, покликаний розвивати і підтримувати науково-дослідну роботу з української та українсько-канадської тематики. Щоб отримати детальнішу інформацію, просямо відвідати наш веб-сайт www.cius.ca, фейсбук www.facebook.com/canadian.institute.of.ukrainian.studies?ref=hl або зв’язатися з д-ром Богданом Klidom (780) 492-2972; cius@ualberta.ca