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## Message from the International Co-operative Alliance

82<sup>nd</sup> ICA International Co-operative Day – 10<sup>th</sup> UN International Co-operative Day – 3 July 2004

### Co-operatives for Fair Globalisation: Creating Opportunities for All

Fair globalisation means putting people first; respecting their rights, cultural identity and autonomy, and the empowerment of the local communities in which they live. On this International Day of Co-operatives, co-operative enterprises worldwide, whether large or small should be recognised as making this kind of globalisation a reality.

Globalisation affects everyone. It undoubtedly has benefited many, but overall its advantages are not yet being felt by the majority of the world's population. Persistent imbalances in the current workings of the global economy are ethically unacceptable and politically unsustainable. The World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalisation made up of world leaders has been working on finding ways to make globalisation work for all. They argue that economic benefits should and could be more fairly shared through fair globalisation based on universally shared values, and respect for human rights and individual dignity which is inclusive, democratically governed and provides opportunities and tangible benefits for all countries and people.

The Commission highlights the critically important role that co-operatives can play in shaping the evolution of globalisation alongside other actors of civil society. It specifically mentions the key role co-operatives can play in the following areas: *strengthening dialogues and governance* – co-operatives have long been known as “schools of democracy”; *strengthening economic capacity* – co-operatives are market leaders in many industry sectors around the world, they also often address situations of market failure thus ensuring the economy functions more efficiently; *building a local economic base* – co-operatives start by addressing a local need, but they remain committed to their local communities, unlike some businesses; *increasing corporate social responsibilities* – co-operatives have long been innovators in combining economic and social values and practices.

People at the heart of enterprises that is what co-operatives are all about. Co-operatives create opportunities for people to help themselves; to response to the economic and social challenges faced in their lives. Over 800 million people around the world are already members of co-operatives. Co-operatives employ more women and men than multinational corporations, one of the main symbols and beneficiaries of globalisation. Although co-operatives focus on serving and meeting local member's needs they also connect and co-operate globally. They share a set of internationally agreed principles and values. Because of their democratic base and unique combination of economic and social objectives they are ideally placed to play a role in making globalisation fairer – something they have been doing for generations.

In many ways co-operatives represents a fairer and more human face of globalisation. For example, co-operatives themselves are globalising their activities with transnational co-operatives that respect local communities but are economically competitive with multinational enterprises. Fair trade initiatives for the most part include a co-operative component either at the producers or retailer side, and enable smaller producers to access global markets. And no matter what activity that a co-operative may have at an international scale, the economic and social return goes to its members usually in local communities.

Globalisation is not of itself necessarily bad. The challenge is to make it fairer and distribute its benefits more widely. The co-operative movement stands ready to play its part.

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*The ICA unites, represents and serves co-operatives worldwide. Established in 1895, it has over 230 international and national co-operative organisations in membership from over 100 countries. Its members are active in all sectors of the economy.*