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Amid Global Economic Crisis, UN Launches International Year of Co-operatives

Co-operatives Offer a Successful Business Model that Puts People First

New York – October 31, 2011 – At a time when national economies are faced with high unemployment and financial instability, the United Nations is launching an international year focused on a unique way of doing business—co-operative enterprise.

Today's official launch of the 2012 International Year of Co-operatives at the United Nations will recognize a self-help and development model that is also a serious business model. To commemorate the event, more than 150 CEOs and Presidents of some of the world's largest co-operatives will gather in New York City for the official launch and to consider how to create the conditions that ignite the growth of cooperative enterprise throughout the decade. These leaders come from all sectors of the economy, including banking, credit, insurance, housing, health, retail and agriculture.

The International Year designation provides an opportunity for co-operatives globally to come together and to raise awareness of their way of doing business. The theme for the International Year is "Co-operative Enterprises Build a Better World." Co-operatives are successful values-based businesses that are owned and democratically controlled by their members—the people who use the co-op's services or buy its goods.

"Consumers have lost trust in the traditional banking system and are joining co-operative banks and credit unions, a type of co-operative, because they trust them," said International Co-operative Alliance Director-General Charles Gould. "The demand for this type of banking indicates that consumers want businesses that put their needs first."

According to the latest Global300 report, released today and prepared by the International Co-operative Alliance, the world's largest 300 co-operatives generate revenues of USD 1.6 trillion—equal to the GDP of the world's ninth largest economy. Co-operatives operate in all sectors and in all regions of the world – from agriculture to banking from health to housing and from transport to consumer retail.

"What's ironic about co-operatives is that they are everywhere. They are part of everyone's daily life, but until you stop and look at their scope and effectiveness you don't realize that this values-based business model is what people have been yearning for and what governments need in order to support and solve many of these international crises that we face today," said ICA President Dame Pauline Green. "In these economic hard times when financial institutions are failing, credit unions and banking co-operatives have been able to weather the storms. For the world's economies and the public that invests their money, this is of critical importance."

The events at the United Nations begin with a roundtable discussion involving some of the world's cooperative leaders, Maria Aranzazu Laskurain – Secretary General of Mondragon (turnover USD 23 bn); Li Chengyu - President of the All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Co-operatives and Piet Moerland, Chairman of Rabobank (turnover USD 43 bn).

After the roundtable, Dame Pauline will deliver an address to the United Nations General Assembly. In her address, she will emphasize the important role that co-operatives play in global sustainable development and financial stability.

On November 1, leaders of some of the world's largest co-operatives meet at the ICA Leadership Forum in New York to identify the conditions needed to incite dramatic growth and make co-operative enterprise the fastest-growing business model by the end of the decade. Hosted by Dame Pauline, delegates will receive keynote presentations from Peter Marks, CEO of the Co-operative Group, UK (turnover USD 15 bn) and Monique Leroux, President and CEO of Desjardins Group, Canada, (turnover USD 9 bn).

The ICA is coordinating its activities surrounding the International Year of Co-operatives launch in New York with the US-based National Cooperative Business Association that represents the over 29,000 co-operatives doing business in the United States and the World Council of Credit Unions, the global trade association and development agency for credit unions, which promotes the sustainable development of credit unions and other financial co-operatives around the world to empower people through access to high quality and affordable financial services.

The full agenda of the launch can be accessed [here](#).

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Notes to editor:

1. **The International Co-operative Alliance** is the global voice for the values-based business model of the cooperative, uniting co-operatives worldwide and providing a forum for knowledge and concerted action. ICA was established by co-operatives in 1895. It has members in almost 100 countries representing one billion people worldwide.

The ICA working with the National Cooperative Business Association and the World Council of Credit Unions to promote the International Year of Cooperatives. NCBA is a US-based membership association that represents the over 29,000 co-operatives doing business in the United States. WOCCU is the global trade association and development agency for credit unions, which promotes the sustainable development of credit unions and other financial co-operatives around the world to empower people through access to high quality and affordable financial services.

2. **Co-operatives** are successful, values-based businesses owned by their members. Whether they are customers, employees or residents, the members get an equal say in the business and a share of the profits. The Cooperative principles were first established in 1844 by the Rochdale Pioneers.

Employing 100 million people, co-operatives are significant economic actors in many different sectors: agriculture/forestry, banking/credit unions, consumer, health, insurance, workers, fisheries, housing, transport and tourism

3. The United Nations has declared 2012 the **International Year of Co-operatives**. With its theme of 'co-operative enterprises build a better world', the Year is an opportunity to raise awareness of how co-operatives are successful values based businesses owned by their members.
4. For information about US-based co-ops, including a list of the 100 largest co-ops, please visit www.ncba.coop.
5. Further information available at www.2012.coop.