



INTERNATIONAL  
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ALLIANCE

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## Statement of the International Co-operative Alliance

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Mr. President, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Habitat II has offered the co-operative movement and in particular housing co-operatives a special opportunity to engage in leadership to promote sustainable human settlements and reduce poverty by providing sustainable livelihoods.

The Habitat Agenda identified a number of areas in which co-operatives had a role to play. I am happy to report that International Co-operative Alliance has responded to that challenge with a number of concrete activities especially with regard to enabling partnerships and building capacity.

For co-operatives to play any role, they must first have an enabling environment provided by appropriate legislation and governmental policies that recognize the unique character of the co-operative enterprise. Autonomy and independence from government control is essential for co-operative growth and survival as is access to government resources under conditions that respect the co-operative principles. ICA has been working with governments and the UN system in defining the key areas that require review if an enabling strategy for the co-operative sector can be adopted. These include the upcoming revision of the International Labour Office Recommendation 127 and the draft United Nations Guidelines aimed at creating a supportive environment for the development of co-operatives.

However, the main focus of ICA's activity continues to be capacity-building. ICA Housing, a sectoral organization of the International Co-operative Alliance has spearheaded specific activities in human settlements. It has successfully implemented a series of regional seminars and national activities to exchange professional expertise. In Kampala, Manila, Mexico and Tallin, best practices have been shared and partnerships formed. The impact has been measurable: in Kampala new housing co-operatives were formed; in Manila partnerships with government and other stakeholders were strengthened as was the existing national network; in Mexico partnerships among organizations in the region were bolstered while in Tallinn Baltic co-operation for the strengthening of housing co-operatives through legislative reform and education was reinforced. ICA Housing has sought financing and support for co-operative self-help initiatives both at the international and local levels as a follow-up to these activities.

The initiatives and the case studies ICA Housing has been able to compile show clearly that housing co-operatives are effective providers of shelter while putting people at the centre of their concerns. We invite you to consult the recently published document which includes description of best practices in co-operative housing approaches to shelter delivery and identifies challenges as well as major accomplishments. We hope that this will assist in your shelter policies and programmes.

Housing co-operative are effective organizations as they are less bureaucratic and are based on voluntary commitment of members; they have a social role in building; they have been able to reduce violence and promote social integration of ethnic groups by building respect, they are democratic and transparent and there is greater concern for people especially for the young, the aging and handicapped and they provide low cost housing and services.

ICA as a whole through both its regional and head office has also been active in programmes that promote co-operative development both in rural and urban areas. It has pushed forward on issues such as gender equality, improving access for financing of co-operative initiatives and other areas highlighted in the Habitat Agenda. It has undertaken joint activities with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements on furthering the promotion of housing co-operatives in Africa and will be holding a joint seminar in 2002 that will focus on developing a co-operative approach in the shelter sector in Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS.

This is a glimpse of what has been done to implement the Habitat Agenda and Global Plan of Action, but still much remains to be done. We feel that the co-operative approach to resolving the challenges of economic, social and cultural development is one that enables individuals to help themselves. They are able to pool resources no matter how small or large and improve their conditions of life. ICA with its 253 member organizations in 101 countries representing over 760 million individuals attests to the fact that the co-operative model is time tested. We need to work together to ensure that individuals are able to effectively form and participate in co-operatives and members have the possibility of having their co-operatives respond to the needs.

Future implementation of the Habitat Agenda and Plan of Action must take this into consideration. Democracy, equity, and social responsibility and sustainable human settlements can be achieved if we work in partnership. ICA is committed to this.