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## UN Habitat - ICA - UN ECE

### Colloquium on Contribution of the Co-operative Sector to Housing Development, 26-28 June 2002, Hilton Hotel, Ankara (Turkey)

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is my distinct honour and pleasure to be here today as a representative of the ICA and ICA Housing at the opening of this colloquium on the contribution of the co-operative sector to housing development. This impressive gathering of experts from all over Europe, and even beyond, is a manifestation of an increasingly close collaboration between Habitat and the ICA. It is also a recognition of the importance of co-operatives in this sector.

As some of you will recall, at the Second Substantive Session of the Preparatory Committee for Istanbul + 5 in February 2001 in Nairobi, Kenya, a Memorandum of Understanding, which calls for concrete collaboration in the promotion of housing and shelter, was signed between Habitat and the ICA. The Memorandum of Understanding now forms the basis for concrete initiatives such as the promotion of housing co-operatives in Africa and the holding of this joint colloquium that will focus on the shelter sector in Central and Eastern Europe and the CIS.

Today I am particularly pleased that the UN Economic Commission for Europe has joined us in this endeavour as a third partner. This not only lends added pertinence to the theme of this meeting. It could also be the beginning of a more concerted effort to promote co-operative solutions to housing and shelter problems.

Six years ago, in Istanbul, the governments "recognised co-ops as important actors in promoting sustainable human settlements". These were the words used in the HABITAT Agenda and the Global plan of Action.

When the world leaders were meeting in New York last June at the UN General Assembly Special Session on Housing and shelter, called HABITAT II + 5, ICA and ICA Housing were invited to participate and show the results of the co-operative follow up of the HABITAT Agenda during the last five years. Let me briefly share some of these with you.

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 ICA 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 new International Labour Office Recommendation adopted only a few

days ago and the United Nations Guidelines aimed at creating a supportive environment for the development of co-operatives adopted in December 2001.

However, the main focus of ICA's activity continues to be capacity-building. ICA Housing, a sectoral organization of the ICA 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.

These initiatives and the case studies it 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. ICA and ICA Housing have produced a booklet called "Best Practice – Innovative Approaches to co-operative Solutions of housing Problems of the Poor", a collection of case studies. We invite you to consult this document which includes description of best practices in co-operative housing approaches to shelter delivery and identifies challenges as well as major accomplishments.

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 worked with the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements on furthering the promotion of housing co-operatives in Africa and is now a partner in this joint colloquium that will focus in particular on the development of the 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 over 230 member organizations in over 90 countries representing over 760 million individuals attest 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.