



INTERNATIONAL
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URGENT

TO: ICA Member Organisations

REF: Call to ICA Members to lobby their governments for support of a United Nations International Year of Co-operatives

Dear Colleagues,

The ICA is requesting all ICA members to contact their governments as soon as possible to lobby for their support of the proposal for a United Nations International Year of Co-operatives which will assist in promoting the co-operative model of enterprise worldwide.

The 64th UN General Assembly will begin discussions on the Year of Co-operatives on 5 October 2009 in the Third Committee¹ of the General Assembly. Following a short period of negotiations, governmental delegates will draft, amend and finally agree on a draft resolution which will be put to final approval in the closing plenary sessions of the General Assembly usually in late November or early December 2009.

ICA members are requested to contact their governments to ensure that governments are aware of the upcoming discussions and that these provide instructions to their delegates attending the UN General Assembly to support for the initiative.

Below you will find more information on the International Year of Co-operatives, who you should contact in your government, how the United Nations will address the issue, and some information to assist you in successful lobbying.

We thank you in advance for your collaboration on this important initiative and ask that you let us know if your government will support the proclamation of an International Year of Co-operatives.

Best regards,

Iain Macdonald, ICA Director-General

¹ The Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee) deals with a wide range of social and humanitarian issues including co-operatives.

Background Information to Assist in the Lobbying Process

1. History of the initiative

Every two years, the United Nations Secretary-General issues a report on co-operatives to report on how co-operatives are contributing to further economic and social development. After consideration of the report, a resolution on co-operatives is submitted to the General Assembly in which it suggests follow-up actions to improve the contribution of co-operatives to economic and social development.

Following the discussions on the 2007 UN Secretary-General Report on Co-operatives and Social Development, the resolution adopted requested,

“the United Nations Secretary-General, in consultation with Member States and the relevant international organizations, to consider effective ways and means of raising public awareness of the overall socio-economic impact of cooperatives, including the desirability and the feasibility of proclaiming an International Year of Cooperatives...”

The resolution also stipulated that the Secretary-General report on the consultation to the UN General Assembly at its 64th Session in 2009.

The 2009 report therefore focuses on the socio-economic impact of co-operatives and the desirability of proclaiming an International Year of Co-operatives and the progress made in promoting co-operatives. The report underscores the importance of co-operatives to socio-economic development and how agricultural and financial co-operatives contribute to long-term solutions for food security and a more resilient and inclusive financial system, in the light of the food and financial crises worldwide. It suggests that proclaiming an International Year of Co-operatives is an opportune moment to highlight the importance of co-operatives in development. The report, *Cooperatives and Social Development* (document reference: A/64/132 of 13 July 2009), is available in five languages – English, French, Spanish, Russian, Arabic and Chinese (see www.copac.coop/publications/unpublications.html)

2. The UN Process

Each Member State of the United Nations is represented by a national delegation consisting of one or more officials with authority to represent their government.

These national delegations will participate in the 64th UN General Assembly which will be held at UN headquarters in New York (USA). It will begin on 15 September 2009 and will hold general debates until 2 October 2009. Following that, the various committees of the Assembly will begin their more focused discussions.

Co-operatives fall under the mandate of the Third Committee of the General Assembly along with a series of other social and humanitarian issues. This Committee will begin its work on 5 October 2009. Delegates will be invited to express the opinions/positions of their respective governments on the topics under discussion including UN Secretary-General's report on co-operatives.

Following these discussions, government delegates will have time to until the last week of November 2009 to negotiate a consensus text which summarises the points made and recommendations proposed. The consensus text takes the form of a draft resolution.

In these negotiations delegations are organised in caucusing groups of like-minded states including the Group of 77 (G-77)², the European Union (EU), the Non-Aligned States³ and the CANZ⁴, etc. In each of the groups, it is important that one of more countries take up the issue of co-operatives and gain support for an International Year of Co-operatives or at least ensure no opposition. The largest groups in these negotiations are the Group of 77 and the European Union. (see more information on the caucusing group below under “*How are UN negotiations undertaken?*”)

Traditionally, the Government of Mongolia, which is a member of the Group of 77 (G-77), has been the initiator of all resolutions on co-operatives.

At the deadline of the negotiation process, the countries sponsoring the resolution submit it to the plenary of the General Assembly. Generally the resolution on co-operatives is adopted by consensus on the basis of the text agreed in the informal consultations.

It is therefore important that governments actively support the International Year of Co-operatives when the resolutions is discussed in October and negotiated from October through November.

3. Who should I contact in my government?

The contact between the government and the UN representatives of that country can include the Foreign Ministry or Ministry of External Affairs, but it can vary depending of the issue to include the Ministry in charge of International Co-operation (Development) or a sectoral ministry. Governments also vary in the amount of liberty of action that they allow to their UN representatives. Some governments must send specific instructions to their UN representatives, while other only very general policy lines that can then be interpreted.

4. How can I contact my representative at the UN?

Nearly all countries have UN Missions – i.e. representative offices to the UN. See <http://www.un.org/members/missions.shtml> for the contact information on your mission.

5. How are UN negotiations undertaken?

Member States in the European Union are required to uphold common positions as per EU treaties. In order from them to determine these positions, individual government delegations of countries in the EU meet prior to negotiations in a coordination meeting. Since the EU is likely to vote in a block, it is important that a sufficiently large number of individual EU Member States support the proposal the International Year of Co-operatives to ensure full EU support.

² The Group of 77 is the largest intergovernmental organisation of developing states in the United Nations, which provides the means for the countries of the South to articulate and promote their collective economic interests and enhance their joint negotiating capacity on all major international economic issues within the United Nations system, and promote South-South cooperation for development. Formed in 1964 by 77 countries, it now counts 130 countries – see www.g77.org for more information.

³ See www.nam.gov.za/background/background.htm

⁴ CANZ is the grouping of Canada, Australia and New Zealand at the United Nations.

Developing countries generally work through the Group of 77 to establish common negotiating positions. The country holding the Chair of the G-77 in New York often speaks for the G-77 and China as a whole. However, because it is such a diverse coalition, regional groupings within this coalition are very important for the negotiations. These also meet prior to negotiations. These are the groups of the African States, Asian States, the Latin American and Caribbean States. If there is one or more individual country in the Groups that are sympathetic to the International Year of Co-operatives, this can prove useful in convincing the entire Group of 77 to be in favour of the Year.

Canada, New Zealand and Australia generally work through a separate group called CANZ whereas the USA, Switzerland and Japan usually speak in their individual capacity.

6. Other questions?

a. Why an International Year on Co-operatives?

An International Year of Co-operatives will:

- raise awareness about co-operatives and how they benefit their members and contribute to socio-economic development and internationally agreed development goals including the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (eliminate poverty, .
- Encourage people to organise themselves into co-operatives as self-help measures to address their economic needs and as a means to empowerment;
- Encourage Governments and other policy-makers to establish policies, laws and regulation conducive to co-operative formation and growth;
- Promote awareness of the global network of co-operatives and their efforts in community building, democracy and peace.

b. What year has been proposed for the International Year of Co-operatives?

For the moment, the first year available is 2011; however 2012 has also been suggested for the International Year of Co-operatives to allow more time for planning of activities. The actual year will be decided during by government delegates during their negotiations in October-November 2009.

c. Who will plan the International Year of Co-operatives?

Once the Year is agreed, the United Nations will set up a secretariat for the Year. It is likely that this Secretariat will be shared with the International Labour Organisation which has a Co-operative Branch. The UN and ILO as members of the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Co-operatives (COPAC) will work closely with the ICA.

d. Who finances International Years?

The United Nations finances International Years through extra-budgetary contributions. Governments and other stakeholders will be requested to finance activities to celebrate the year at the international and national levels. The UN will seek to finance or co-finance an international event for the Year.

e. Can the ICA or co-operatives participate in the General Assembly?

The General Assembly participation is reserved to Member States. The ICA is a non-governmental organisation and thus is not able to participate in the General Assembly.

f. Has ICA and/or the co-operative movement been involved in the lead up of the International Year of Co-operatives?

Yes. The ICA and the Committee for the Promotion for the Advancement of Co-operatives were consulted in 2007 by a UN member state regarding their interest in proposing an International Year of Co-operatives. The ICA Board reviewed the proposal and gave it its full support. The ICA also worked with the UN Secretariat to ensure input to the UN Secretary-General's report by requesting them to respond to a questionnaire regarding the desirability and feasibility of an International Year. Finally, the ICA participated in a UN Expert Group Meeting where the International Year of Co-operatives was discussed. It will continue to work with the UN and UN Member States to provide support for the Year and will be involved in the planning and implementation of the International Year.

Questions or more information? Please contact:

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