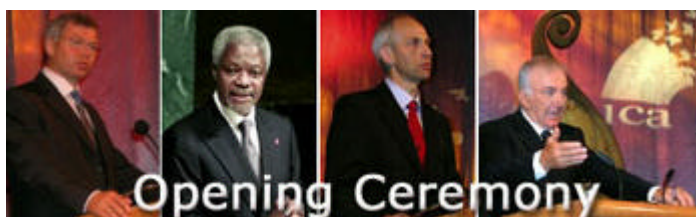


ICA General Assembly 2003 : Opening Ceremony

3 September 2003, Oslo (Norway)



[Kjell Magne BONDEVIK](#) - [Kofi ANNAN](#) - [Steinar DVERGSDAL](#) - [Ivano BARBERINI](#)

**Kjell Magne
BONDEVIK
Prime Minister,
Norway**

Mr President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to extend to all of you a very warm welcome to Oslo and Norway. The 2003 General Assembly of the International Co-operative Alliance is the first ever ICA General Assembly to be held in Norway.

The ICA is represented in more than 100 countries. It has more than 750 million members. These are indeed impressive figures. They demonstrate the important role that the co-operative movement plays internationally. They demonstrate the added value of working together to meet common challenges, be they on the local, national or international level.

The ICA makes a difference in peoples' lives in a broad spectre of sectors. The co-operative movement is active in core areas of society such as agriculture and fisheries, banking and insurance, health and housing, communications and energy, tourism and gender.

In Norway the co-operative movement has contributed in important ways to the development of our welfare society.

The co-operative movement has a long-standing record in contributing to social progress and social equality in Norway. Agricultural, fisheries, consumer and housing co-operatives have produced concrete results and have over the years made a difference in people's everyday lives.

The Norwegian agricultural co-operative movement started already back in the 1850's when the first small dairy co-operative was established. Agricultural co-operatives have since been key factors in developing not merely agriculture but also much needed local businesses in rural areas.

In the housing sector, housing co-operatives were key partners in implementing the social housing policy after the Second World War. The objective was to provide affordable housing for the population. In Oslo close to 40% of all housing is co-operative. On the national level the figure is 15%.

Furthermore, co-operatives are organised in many other parts of social and economic life in Norway - ranging from business co-operatives in areas such as transport and energy supply to smaller co-operatives in health care, school, local radio and TV-production, and child care.

As a child, I grew up in a small town on the Norwegian west coast. The co-operative movement was also active in my part of the country. I still remember as a boy that it was among the highlights to buy sweets in the local co-operative grocery store. The consumer co-operation, which includes local co-operative shops like the one I used as a little boy, is now a significant player in the national economy and is responsible for 25% of the retail market in Norway.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

When the modern co-operative movement was established in Norway, the inspiration and knowledge was collected from abroad. Today Norwegian co-operatives in their turn use the experience they have gained and serve as an inspiration for co-operatives in other countries.

The theme for this General Assembly is "Co-operatives for Democratic, Social and Economic Development". The ICA has a key role to play in promoting co-operative development in developing countries and in countries in transition. The values that have inspired and guided the co-operative movement are just as valid today as they were 150 years ago when the very first co-operative was established in Rochdale. Self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity are indispensable in the development of local communities, for nations as well as on the international level.

Today the world faces serious challenges. We must combat poverty. We must safeguard the environment. We must fight against terror. We must use every opportunity promote these values. Co-operation and common efforts based on democracy, solidarity and respect for human rights, is the best way to meet challenges and get results to the benefit of all of us.

Finally, Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish you all a successful General Assembly and a very pleasant stay in Norway.

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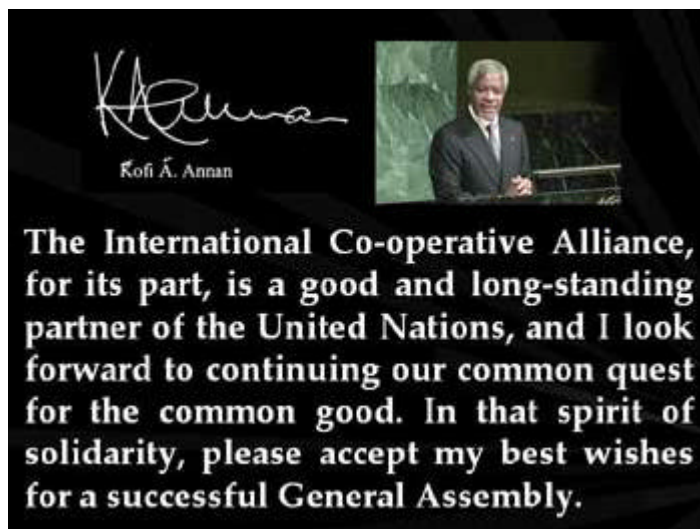
Kofi ANNAN
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Message to the ICA General Assembly Millions of men and women throughout the world have secured for themselves, their families and their communities a decent life, economic well-being and expanding opportunities by organizing themselves in cooperative associations and enterprises.

From its modest beginnings in the 19th century, the cooperative movement has become a significant force in global civil society, both in terms of membership and impact. More than 760 million people are engaged in the cooperative sector, and cooperatives are at work in more than 100 countries in almost all areas of human endeavor. As people-centered organizations based on equity, solidarity and self-help, cooperatives are a catalyst for entrepreneurial expansion and an important factor in social stability and cohesion. They also provide essential services, such as appropriate and affordable housing, utilities, infrastructure, health care and social, financial and insurance services.

The cooperative movement thus has a key role to play in our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Those goals will not be met with a major effort to accelerate progress and it is States which have the overriding responsibility to take the political and economic lead. But on the ground, cooperatives can make an important contribution. That is why, two years ago, the United Nations produced guidelines to help Member States create a supportive environment for the establishment of cooperatives. It is encouraging indeed that cooperatives and governments are working together more closely to provide opportunities for people to improve their lives.

The International Co-operative Alliance, for its part, is a good and long-standing partner of the United Nations, and I look forward to continuing our common quest for the common good. In that spirit of solidarity, please accept my best wishes for a successful general assembly.



**Steinar
DVERGSDAL
Chairperson,
Norwegian
Organising
Committee and ICA
Board Member**

Mr Prime Minister, Ministers, President of the ICA, Delegates from all over the world and guests,

On behalf of the host organisations, I welcome you to the ICA General Assembly 2003. Welcome to Oslo and welcome to Norway! We hope for useful negotiations during the conference. We hope that many of you will get the opportunity, now or later, of seeing more of Norway than just Oslo, the capital city. We hope you will experience the magic of the midnight-sun in the north, the splendour of the greatest glacier in Europe, the dramatic scenery of the longest fjord in the world surrounded by steep mountains and mighty waterfalls.

Norway is a beautiful country situated so far up north that one third of the country reaches above the arctic circle. If you could turn Norway upside down with Oslo being the axis, the northern part would touch Rome. All the same, the population of just 4 million leaves Norway as the most sparsely populated country in Europe.

During the last century, Norway has developed from being one of the poorest countries of the world to becoming one of the richest countries of the world. People acting together in co-operatives have had a great influence on that development. Co-operatives have contributed to the high standard of living and a homogeneous population, and also to the growth of both well-functioning cities and a active rural life. Today Norway is a country based on a market economy, nevertheless with a strong democratic tradition. In the co-operative movement, we have a very strong belief that this kind of organisation is a tool for desired development, not only in the developing countries, but also in the developed parts of the world.

The Norwegian co-operative organisations have developed continuously over the last hundred years. Today they emerge as powerful democratic business-organisations. They are market-leaders in several sectors. Most of them operate on a national level while others are transnational.

One quarter of the population in Norway are members of the consumers co-operative COOP, with a 25% market-share.

Today Norway, Sweden and Denmark operate together in COOP Norden. This is the Nordic way of meeting the challenges.

The co-operative housing and building association has increasing support and represents 15 % of Norwegian housing. They extend their range of activities on behalf of their members.

Even big farms around the world are small in a global perspective. That is why farmers need strong cooperatives all over the world. In Norway, most farmers are members of one or several co-operative organisations. Their market-shares vary from 60% to 98%. Fishery is a main economic sector in Norway. Most of the caught fish is purchased through the fishermen's co-operatives.

In Norway the co-operative organisations of the different sectors are

working well together through a co-operative committee.

As host organisation we are proud to have representatives of co-operatives all over the world with us here in Oslo.

People need co-operatives for a better life. The globalisation call is for more, not less, co-operative activity. Individuals need co-operatives in order to be competitive with the multinationals, and to get her or his part of the economic growth. To give our members economic and social benefit, it is necessary to have efficient and competitive organisations executing business.

Being the largest movement in the world, we all here today can affect politics and political decisions. We can provide respect and right to existence independent of different conditions provided by nature.

We want to control globalisation - not globalisation to control us.

Ladies and gentlemen:

This is business the democratic way !!!

Thank you!

Ivano BARBERINI
President, ICA

Mr. Kjell Magne Bondevik, Prime Minister of Norway, government officials, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

Firstly, dear Prime Minister, I would like to warmly thank you for joining us in this General Assembly. Your presence is a pleasure and an honour for us.

[word](#) -- [pdf version](#)

I also wish to thank the Norwegian Co-operators for setting up the framework and hosting the Assembly in this historical and beautiful city. I also thank our guests and guest speakers, the representatives of the associate cooperative organizations, and the staff of ICA for all their work in preparing this event.

Many thanks to Nobel Prize winner for medicine, Rita Levi Montalcini for her message to this Assembly, in which she acknowledges the essential role of the Co-operative movement to improve the quality of life of people, everywhere. Here, in this beautiful country, Co-operation has very old roots and it has grown hand in hand with democratic, economic and social development.

As the UN Secretary-General underlines in his very important message, the Co-operative Movement - beginning its history 160 years ago, has become a reality widespread all over the world and in all economic sectors. Through difficult changes, oscillating between crises and growth, it has built a solid foundation, becoming a major player in the economy and society of the new century. This can be seen in its growth in the last decade and in its development prospects for the near future.

Co-operation, by definition, is an undertaking together and on equal terms - a choice bringing together business and solidarity and therefore, useful and effective in our present situation, as was also the case at the beginning of the last century. Often all this has been achieved contrary to the dominant economic culture and globalisation processes, mainly characterised by a sort of "escape from responsibility". Differently to co-operative companies, the main players in the market globalisation are free from the worries and responsibilities arising from being linked to a particular place or community. This, of course, gives them an undoubted competitive advantage. Yet, at the same time, this lack of responsibility creates a widespread malaise which manifests itself in many forms, from protest to resignation. An economic development divorced from the ethic of responsibility cannot solve the problem of social exclusion, creating new inequalities in our societies.

Today, the word "poverty" reoccurs increasingly more often in economic and political debates, at all levels, nationally and internationally. In recent decades the world has experienced an economic growth without precedence, but poverty and hunger still remain and have not been significantly reduced in any way.

Two economic historians, Rogers and Gibbins, wrote that "during the Medieval Ages, looking at the poorest of the poor, there did not exist the hopeless and grinding poverty and the chronic famine that now exists among large groups of the populations in today's metropolises or in Africa".

Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize Winner for Economics, wrote that there are dramatic deprivations in the world in which we live- mass poverty and hunger, basic unsatisfied needs, violations of basic rights and liberty, contempt for the active role of women, increasingly serious threats to the environment and economic and social sustainability in our way of living.

In one form or another, most of these deprivations can be found in both poor and rich countries.

Overcoming these problems is central to development. True economic development is much more than an increase in the GDP. Development, Sen concludes, is freedom. The freedom to politically and socially participate, to exchange goods and words are the building blocks for development. Therefore, many aspects of social and economic life are inter-related - freedom, security, peace, development, reduction of poverty, education, democracy.

Peace has taken on a dramatic new importance. There are about 30 wars going on at the moment, all passed over by the media and, consequently, by public opinion. We of course know that peace is never a reality at one time for all. It must be built up day by day with the knowledge that it is even more complex than war, as it involves a society having a political and social order accepted by the majority as being just. Co-operatives contribute in achieving this objective in different ways. Firstly, by creating a network of small and

medium-sized companies where the members are owners and stakeholders, at the same time.

In general, the governments and organisations of a civil society appreciate the role co-operatives play and their peculiar contribution in economic development programs.

This is important but not enough. This recognition must be translated into clear and dynamic policies in order to ensure a favourable environment for the development of co-operative enterprises.

On the other hand, international institutions have recently assumed measures - UN Guidelines and ILO Recommendation 193 - strongly supporting co-operative development. We have to use them at the best.

However, despite this, we cannot say we have achieved a fully satisfying appreciation of the Cooperative Movement. There is still a lot to do. In some countries, the attitude of governments is encouraging, but in others there is a move to reduce the role or independence of co-operatives. Wherever this is happening, the International Co-operative Alliance is committed to giving a strong and definite support - defending the independence of co-operatives is, firstly, a battle for freedom and as such, a priority.

Co-operatives enterprises don't ask to enjoy a privilege. The laws and the tools must simply respect the principle of equality - the same conditions for the same subjects; different conditions for different subjects. In other words, co-operative legislation has to provide the necessary tools to co-operatives to compete in the global market, keeping steady their mutual identity and basic values.

It is also in the interests of the public institutions to allow the co-operative model to release all its best energies. Its vast and effective application can represent an important way to meet the challenge of an economic development linked to social progress. A challenge that involves without distinction both the developed and developing countries.

The issues of productivity and economic competitiveness, organisational reforms, financial balances, work for the young and women and the aging population are among the most important on the agenda of the economically advanced countries.

In some countries in Latin America and Asia important social experiments are underway aimed at overcoming age-old crisis situations and defeating poverty. These countries must be able to count on the support of the international institutions to put them on the path to a recovery linked to development. The success of these attempts are important for the economic and social future of the whole world. In such a scenario big challenges and opportunities open up for the role and growth of the Co-operative Movement.

Its particular form of solidarity based on mutuality and

self-determination is a positive way to contribute that the reduction in welfare occurring in all developed countries, does not drastically reduce levels of social protection but should be a means to create new jobs, a new opportunity for development and efficiency in fighting against social inequalities and poverty. Based on knowing how to work together, a concept shared by many, is how Co-operation best expresses its experiences, its energy and the culture of which it is the spokesperson. The experiences of equal and fair trade, knowledge sharing, and technical assistance are "best practices" we need to deepen and expand. They are useful contributions to co-operative companies starting-up, to their growth and their management. Therefore, the co-operative system can contribute to a better balance between the north and south of our world.

It is important that the international Co-operative Movement has a special look at the African situation, strongly appealing to every possible initiative of solidarity and support from the international institutions. In a present, difficult situation where the world appears more linked by risks rather than opportunities, Africa represents the extremes in conditions. It is a continent devastated by civil wars, oppressed by a general indifference, by the recruitment of child soldiers, by the scourge of AIDS, by social degradation and by famine and thirst. In many countries, 50% of population has no access to clean water. The African countries are the poorest in the world. Ethiopia and Burundi, for instance, have a GDP pro capita of \$107 per year: less than 30 cents per day!

It is a terrible picture in a tragic reality.

However, it is also a testimony to the problems that involve the whole world. The conflict for the control of water even in a country like Uganda, where the Nile originates, shows us how important water is as the most strategic of the natural resources. It will be the reason for the wars of the future if the international community does not intervene in time, promoting cooperation between those peoples involved. Yet, in this often passed over continent something is changing. In different countries important moves towards democratic development are underway. It is essential that they are encouraged and supported by international organizations and by public opinion.

Fighting poverty, to reduce and eventually eliminate it, firstly involves people becoming aware of their conditions and feeling that the future depends on them, themselves, and their governments. However, in the case of Africa a support from abroad is essential. You cannot escape from a model of economic organization based on subsistence without going through a complex process of learning. This must be facilitated by those who have the means, the knowledge and experience and also contributing the appropriate resources. It must be based on medium to long term projects. This is the time necessary to set up internal systems making them able to manage small and medium sized enterprises, operate in the market, promote and carry out new innovations.

Co-operation has an important role in these processes. This same

growth depends, to a major extent, on an actual demonstration that, thanks to the co-operatives, they can improve the quality of life and liberty for many people.

When we face these problems, looking at getting underway ongoing processes, two subjects inevitably come to the fore in playing a major role in every part of the world - women and young people. In general, if we want to build a Co-operative Movement able to address 21st century society, we must make room for the new generation of co-operators, women and men, encouraging training and a sense of belonging, especially involving them in decision-making processes. It is vital that we develop even more the rapport among generations of co-operators, based on a reciprocity of listening and respect. However, knowledge and experiences acquired are essential but not enough. They must be united with an innovative spirit and the culture of the younger generations. This fusion could release a renewed energy and a better ability to act in a world where the global and local dimensions interact more and more. These are the premises for a new cycle of life for the Co-operative Movement. Young people must follow this road together. For this reason, on many occasions there has arisen the need to enlarge and strengthen the network of young people, globally. It appears to be a viable and effective road for them to be more actively involved in ICA, with more visibility and possibility to participate in training of their strategic choices. For this reason, the Board feels it important that a representative of the network, chosen by the young people themselves, will be permanently invited to all Board meetings.

Dear statespersons, ladies and gentlemen, co-operators and friends,

The prospects for economic development are founded on different aspects - cultural, social and political.

International policy has taken on a clear and shared commitment to reducing poverty in the world. However, present forecasts do not lead to optimism. The objectives of sustainable, equal and democratic development and those stated in the UN's "Millenium Development Goals" can only be achieved if they become an integrative part of the policies for economic growth and economic and commercial integration, and not an appendix entrusted to the social softeners.

The Co-operative Movement has many expectations placed on it, more than it can do. Co-operation cannot solve the problems which have taken on an endemic feature. But it must be part of the solution as it has the values and useful experiences. They should be fully valued and exploited. We have to link together vision and concreteness. We must aim at a "fertile ground of utopias" and make it a reason for an ideal impetus, for arousing the interest and energy of many who, in this world, believe in the possibility of creating a better one.

This General Assembly should open up a way for a type of "global alliance against poverty" - a widespread campaign able to bring concretely together the co-operative organisations from the North and South of the world developing bilateral relations within a common

project. We are appealing to the governments of developed countries to support our campaign and I am sure that the Norwegian government, Mr. Prime Minister, which has a strong tradition in supporting social and economic development in the south, will be prominent amongst them.

The theme of this Assembly which is economic, social and democratic development through Co-operation is well placed to promote this work. It is a difficult and complex path from which we cannot expect remarkable results in the short term. But what counts is to agree on determining a type of "chain reaction", never-ending but changing.

Learning to see the world as it is and trying together to understand where it is going, is, however, a way not only to better define the roads to follow, but also to build an awareness of what we are, the potential and the viable synergies. A movement united by grand values which respect cultural differences, promote active participation and the willingness to involve new members and participate in change. For this reason cooperation appears as the company model best suited to meeting the economic and social challenges of the 21st century, both regionally and globally. In all this we have the "co-operative advantage" - an asset created by generations of co-operators, and to be passed on and improved upon, to future generations. Of course, all of this is not happening spontaneously.

The door of the future is narrow. Entering it means that cooperatives must be able to face the challenges of global market, improving their image in each country and worldwide, fulfilling the dreams and meeting the needs of women and men looking at cooperative movement, full of hope and trust.

Fellows co-operators, I believe these are also the reasons we are committed to have a stronger ICA.

Thanks to this commitment, this General Assembly signals an important step for the reorganisation and growth of the International Co-operative Alliance. I am very proud to represent you as President of the ICA, which embodies these ideals and I have great pleasure in declaring our General Assembly open.

[Back to the agenda of the General Assembly and related meetings ...](#)

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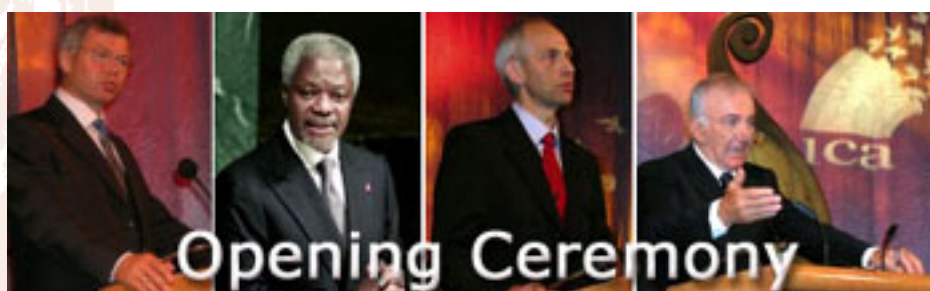


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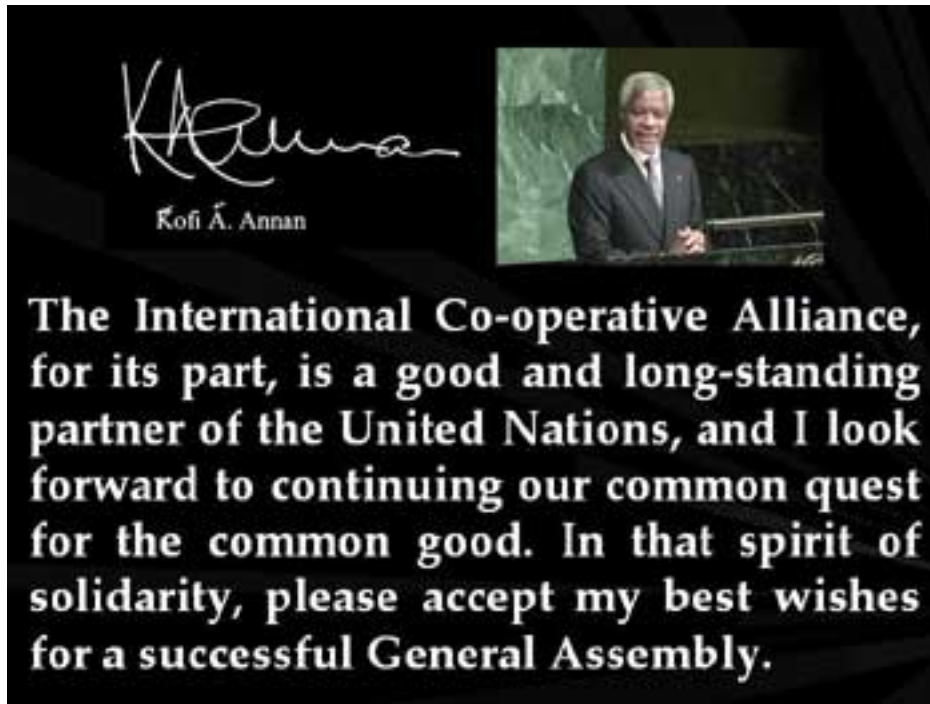
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As the UN Secretary-General underlines in his very important message, the Co-operative Movement - beginning its history 160 years ago, has become a reality widespread all over the world and in all economic sectors. Through difficult changes, oscillating between crises and growth, it has built a solid foundation, becoming a major player in the economy and society of the new century. This can be seen in its growth in the last decade and in its development prospects for the near future.

Co-operation, by definition, is an undertaking together and on equal terms - a choice bringing together business and solidarity and

therefore, useful and effective in our present situation, as was also the case at the beginning of the last century. Often all this has been achieved contrary to the dominant economic culture and globalisation processes, mainly characterised by a sort of "escape from responsibility". Differently to co-operative companies, the main players in the market globalisation are free from the worries and responsibilities arising from being linked to a particular place or community. This, of course, gives them an undoubted competitive advantage. Yet, at the same time, this lack of responsibility creates a widespread malaise which manifests itself in many forms, from protest to resignation. An economic development divorced from the ethic of responsibility cannot solve the problem of social exclusion, creating new inequalities in our societies.

Today, the word "poverty" reoccurs increasingly more often in economic and political debates, at all levels, nationally and internationally. In recent decades the world has experienced an economic growth without precedence, but poverty and hunger still remain and have not been significantly reduced in any way.

Two economic historians, Rogers and Gibbins, wrote that "during the Medieval Ages, looking at the poorest of the poor, there did not exist the hopeless and grinding poverty and the chronic famine that now exists among large groups of the populations in today's metropolises or in Africa".

Amartya Sen, Nobel Prize Winner for Economics, wrote that there are dramatic deprivations in the world in which we live- mass poverty and hunger, basic unsatisfied needs, violations of basic rights and liberty, contempt for the active role of women, increasingly serious threats to the environment and economic and social sustainability in our way of living.

In one form or another, most of these deprivations can be found in both poor and rich countries.

Overcoming these problems is central to development. True economic development is much more than an increase in the GDP. Development, Sen concludes, is freedom. The freedom to politically and socially participate, to exchange goods and words are the building blocks for development. Therefore, many aspects of social and economic life are inter-related - freedom, security, peace, development, reduction of poverty, education, democracy.

Peace has taken on a dramatic new importance. There are about 30 wars going on at the moment, all passed over by the media and,

consequently, by public opinion. We of course know that peace is never a reality at one time for all. It must be built up day by day with the knowledge that it is even more complex than war, as it involves a society having a political and social order accepted by the majority as being just. Co-operatives contribute in achieving this objective in different ways. Firstly, by creating a network of small and medium-sized companies where the members are owners and stakeholders, at the same time.

In general, the governments and organisations of a civil society appreciate the role co-operatives play and their peculiar contribution in economic development programs.

This is important but not enough. This recognition must be translated into clear and dynamic policies in order to ensure a favourable environment for the development of co-operative enterprises.

On the other hand, international institutions have recently assumed measures - UN Guidelines and ILO Recommendation 193 - strongly supporting co-operative development. We have to use them at the best.

However, despite this, we cannot say we have achieved a fully satisfying appreciation of the Cooperative Movement. There is still a lot to do. In some countries, the attitude of governments is encouraging, but in others there is a move to reduce the role or independence of co-operatives. Wherever this is happening, the International Co-operative Alliance is committed to giving a strong and definite support - defending the independence of co-operatives is, firstly, a battle for freedom and as such, a priority.

Co-operatives enterprises don't ask to enjoy a privilege. The laws and the tools must simply respect the principle of equality - the same conditions for the same subjects; different conditions for different subjects. In other words, co-operative legislation has to provide the necessary tools to co-operatives to compete in the global market, keeping steady their mutual identity and basic values.

It is also in the interests of the public institutions to allow the co-operative model to release all its best energies. Its vast and effective application can represent an important way to meet the challenge of an economic development linked to social progress. A challenge that involves without distinction both the developed and developing countries.

The issues of productivity and economic competitiveness,



organisational reforms, financial balances, work for the young and women and the aging population are among the most important on the agenda of the economically advanced countries.

In some countries in Latin America and Asia important social experiments are underway aimed at overcoming age-old crisis situations and defeating poverty. These countries must be able to count on the support of the international institutions to put them on the path to a recovery linked to development. The success of these attempts are important for the economic and social future of the whole world. In such a scenario big challenges and opportunities open up for the role and growth of the Co-operative Movement.

Its particular form of solidarity based on mutuality and self-determination is a positive way to contribute that the reduction in welfare occurring in all developed countries, does not drastically reduce levels of social protection but should be a means to create new jobs, a new opportunity for development and efficiency in fighting against social inequalities and poverty. Based on knowing how to work together, a concept shared by many, is how Co-operation best expresses its experiences, its energy and the culture of which it is the spokesperson. The experiences of equal and fair trade, knowledge sharing, and technical assistance are "best practices" we need to deepen and expand. They are useful contributions to co-operative companies starting-up, to their growth and their management. Therefore, the co-operative system can contribute to a better balance between the north and south of our world.

It is important that the international Co-operative Movement has a special look at the African situation, strongly appealing to every possible initiative of solidarity and support from the international institutions. In a present, difficult situation where the world appears more linked by risks rather than opportunities, Africa represents the extremes in conditions. It is a continent devastated by civil wars, oppressed by a general indifference, by the recruitment of child soldiers, by the scourge of AIDS, by social degradation and by famine and thirst. In many countries, 50% of population has no access to clean water. The African countries are the poorest in the world. Ethiopia and Burundi, for instance, have a GDP pro capita of \$107 per year: less than 30 cents per day!

It is a terrible picture in a tragic reality.

However, it is also a testimony to the problems that involve the whole world. The conflict for the control of water even in a country like Uganda, where the Nile originates, shows us how important water is

as the most strategic of the natural resources. It will be the reason for the wars of the future if the international community does not intervene in time, promoting cooperation between those peoples involved. Yet, in this often passed over continent something is changing. In different countries important moves towards democratic development are underway. It is essential that they are encouraged and supported by international organizations and by public opinion.

Fighting poverty, to reduce and eventually eliminate it, firstly involves people becoming aware of their conditions and feeling that the future depends on them, themselves, and their governments. However, in the case of Africa a support from abroad is essential. You cannot escape from a model of economic organization based on subsistence without going through a complex process of learning. This must be facilitated by those who have the means, the knowledge and experience and also contributing the appropriate resources. It must be based on medium to long term projects. This is the time necessary to set up internal systems making them able to manage small and medium sized enterprises, operate in the market, promote and carry out new innovations.

Co-operation has an important role in these processes. This same growth depends, to a major extent, on an actual demonstration that, thanks to the co-operatives, they can improve the quality of life and liberty for many people.

When we face these problems, looking at getting underway ongoing processes, two subjects inevitably come to the fore in playing a major role in every part of the world - women and young people. In general, if we want to build a Co-operative Movement able to address 21st century society, we must make room for the new generation of co-operators, women and men, encouraging training and a sense of belonging, especially involving them in decision-making processes. It is vital that we develop even more the rapport among generations of co-operators, based on a reciprocity of listening and respect. However, knowledge and experiences acquired are essential but not enough. They must be united with an innovative spirit and the culture of the younger generations. This fusion could release a renewed energy and a better ability to act in a world where the global and local dimensions interact more and more. These are the premises for a new cycle of life for the Co-operative Movement. Young people must follow this road together. For this reason, on many occasions there has arisen the need to enlarge and strengthen the network of young people, globally. It appears to be a viable and effective road for them to be more actively involved in ICA, with more visibility and possibility to participate in training of their strategic choices. For this reason, the Board feels it

important that a representative of the network, chosen by the young people themselves, will be permanently invited to all Board meetings.

Dear statespersons, ladies and gentlemen, co-operators and friends,

The prospects for economic development are founded on different aspects - cultural, social and political.

International policy has taken on a clear and shared commitment to reducing poverty in the world. However, present forecasts do not lead to optimism. The objectives of sustainable, equal and democratic development and those stated in the UN's "Millenium Development Goals" can only be achieved if they become an integrative part of the policies for economic growth and economic and commercial integration, and not an appendix entrusted to the social softeners.

The Co-operative Movement has many expectations placed on it, more than it can do. Co-operation cannot solve the problems which have taken on an endemic feature. But it must be part of the solution as it has the values and useful experiences. They should be fully valued and exploited. We have to link together vision and concreteness. We must aim at a "fertile ground of utopias" and make it a reason for an ideal impetus, for arousing the interest and energy of many who, in this world, believe in the possibility of creating a better one.

This General Assembly should open up a way for a type of "global alliance against poverty" - a widespread campaign able to bring concretely together the co-operative organisations from the North and South of the world developing bilateral relations within a common project. We are appealing to the governments of developed countries to support our campaign and I am sure that the Norwegian government, Mr. Prime Minister, which has a strong tradition in supporting social and economic development in the south, will be prominent amongst them.

The theme of this Assembly which is economic, social and democratic development through Co-operation is well placed to promote this work. It is a difficult and complex path from which we cannot expect remarkable results in the short term. But what counts is to agree on determining a type of "chain reaction", never-ending but changing.

Learning to see the world as it is and trying together to understand where it is going, is, however, a way not only to better define the roads to follow, but also to build an awareness of what we are, the potential and the viable synergies. A movement united by grand

values which respect cultural differences, promote active participation and the willingness to involve new members and participate in change. For this reason cooperation appears as the company model best suited to meeting the economic and social challenges of the 21st century, both regionally and globally. In all this we have the "co-operative advantage" - an asset created by generations of co-operators, and to be passed on and improved upon, to future generations. Of course, all of this is not happening spontaneously.

The door of the future is narrow. Entering it means that cooperatives must be able to face the challenges of global market, improving their image in each country and worldwide, fulfilling the dreams and meeting the needs of women and men looking at cooperative movement, full of hope and trust.

Fellows co-operators, I believe these are also the reasons we are committed to have a stronger ICA.

Thanks to this commitment, this General Assembly signals an important step for the reorganisation and growth of the International Co-operative Alliance. I am very proud to represent you as President of the ICA, which embodies these ideals and I have great pleasure in declaring our General Assembly open.

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