

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

**MESSAGE TO THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
OF THE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATIVE ALLIANCE**Oslo, 3 September 2003

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 endeavour. As people-centred 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 insurances 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 without 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 Cooperative 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.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Annan', written in a cursive style.

Kofi A. Annan