



ICA GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Geneva, Switzerland

Election of the ICA President
Dame Pauline Green Acceptance Speech

Geneva, 20 November 2009

Fellow Co-operators, dear Friends,

Thank you for the great honour and trust that you have given me today by electing me as President of our global movement. I am very conscious of the great responsibility that I am taking on for the next four years, and I give you my word that I will do my very best to be worthy of it.

The values and principles of our movement, its ethos and its contribution to the struggle for equality, fairness and the development of a plural and sustainable world economy are the things that excite and drive me. I believe that co-operation is not just an alternative model of business; it is a better model of business. And I look forward to working with, and for you to enhance the strength and reach of co-operatives across the globe.

I want to take a moment to pay tribute to my predecessor, Ivano Barberini. A man who could not be faulted for the energy and commitment he gave to our movement through his life long work for co-operatives in Italy and, during the last eight years of his life, for the enthusiasm with which he undertook his work as President across the world. I know that we all regret that he could not be here today to complete his term of office and receive the thanks of this movement for all that he has done for us in every corner of the world. Colleagues, I can't promise to be as omnipresent as Ivano was, but what I can promise you is that I will pursue the development of the global co-operative family in my way with all of the passion and drive that I have. I hope in this way that I will be at least a worthy successor to Ivano whose memory we all cherish.

I have a particular message today to the hundreds of thousands of co-operative women serving our movement around the world. I want them to know that nearly 115 years after its foundation, the ICA has its first woman President. I feel humbled to be that woman. But we all need to acknowledge that since its inception, co-operation has upheld equality between men and women as a key principle. And yet around the world that equality is still more noticeable in its omission than in its commission. I hope our women co-operators take heart from having a woman President – I can tell them that they will have all my support.

Colleagues, the ICA is a changed organisation. Thanks to the quite incredible work of the outgoing global Board and with the support of the staff of the ICA in Geneva, in Costa Rica, in New Delhi, in Nairobi and in Brussels, this organisation has reformed itself. It now has a constitution and a subscription structure that brings it into the 21st century. So internally, the organisation is ready to move on from the reform platform of the last years.

At the same time, the world is travelling through a difficult and stressful economic period when trust and confidence in the traditional financial and business model has been severely shaken, some would say destroyed!

Our model with its commitment to returning surplus to the business, members and the community, its unique ownership structure and democratic traditions built on the enduring values and principles that have served for nearly 200 years, has a real potential to build a more plural economy, a diversified economy that will ensure that such a corporate collapse should never again occur. Our model gives back to communities and individuals a sense of control and engagement with their own economic good health; and how inspiring it was to hear Elinor Ostrum the first woman Nobel Economic Laureate supporting this thesis.

So now colleagues it is time to make all that internal reform work for you, our members, and to capitalise on the opportunity that the global recession now offers for us to further serve families and communities across the globe.

Now it is time for change – a change of pace, of focus, of direction.

In the true spirit of our founding fathers, it is time for us to take our own future in our own hands and begin to act like a global organisation. To force upon an unsuspecting world the knowledge that the largest 300 of the hundred of thousands of co-operative organisations across the world – just the largest 300 – have a GDP equivalent to that of Spain the 10th largest economy in the world. That together we employ 20% more people than all the multi national companies, and that we are owned by nearly 1 billion people across the world. There is not another sector of the economy that can compare with those figures.

Very shortly, the United Nations will declare that 2012 will be the International Year of the Co-operative. It is our responsibility to make sure that we are not only ready for that year, but that we maximise the value it offers to us. That means that we have to act now and with speed.

Firstly, lets prepare by making sure that we drive our co-operative visibility into the decision-making global institutions and create a real sense of the strength and values of the co-operative economy in the world.

And to do that we have to recognise that we are not visible enough now - that the ICA is not a sufficiently recognised brand within the walls of the global institutions - that our co-operative identity is not given the priority that our size and contribution deserves and demands. So let's change that and change it now. Let's use the name that our founders gave us – lets make sure that it is know around the globe that we are proudly and confidently Co-operatives.

If we are going to respond to the UN announcement for the International Year, and if we are going to signal that the global movement is now ready to move on from a period of internal reflection and modernisation - lets use this moment to re-launch ourselves and mark a clear and focussed change of direction by taking action and pursuing influence now that we have modernised ourselves. The International Year will give us the opportunity for enhanced visibility and we must use it.

Secondly, we need to recognise that if we are going to succeed in 2012, we must build up our global influence.

That means colleagues we must devote our limited resources and time to how we can best influence global decision making in the UN, the World Bank, the IMF, the Economic and Social Fora and other global institutions. This means acknowledging where the centres of economic and political power increasingly reside in the world today and for the foreseeable future. And we have to make sure that we have adequate and active representation and lobby capacity in those centres.

We need to be present in North America making our arguments with the global institutions that are situated there, and we need to recognise the huge opportunity presented to us to put our global issues to the co-op friendly Obama administration through close collaboration with our partners in the US.

We need to build on the growing influence of the European co-operatives in the corridors of power in Brussels and the European Union. Whilst five years ago the European Commission told a Co-operatives Europe conference that 'co-operatives were invisible in the European Commission', now they are actively seeking us out as partners in a range of European activities. Our voice has got to be driven yet further, so that in global discussions the European Union is arguing for co-operative development.

But the US and the EU are not enough.

Today we have to be extending our reach to the governments of the emerging economic and political nations, and in particular at this moment to China and India and Brazil. We have to work with our influential co-operative colleagues in those countries so that global co-operative issues are in the forefront of their government's minds when they meet in the global institutions to discuss economic and political evolution. We know that these and other countries are going to make the pace in the coming years, and our global body has to be ahead of the game, light on its feet so that we can respond as the economic and political environment changes.

Colleagues, we are constantly being challenged to identify just what membership of the ICA is worth. For too long we have had to answer this by relying on the altruism of our members - urging them to keep the ICA alive because we needed to do so. It is time that we began to repay that commitment by proving that we have the drive, the energy, and the imagination to go forward and to create the visibility and influence for the movement that only the global body can truly do. And that this work will manifest by growing recognition of, and support for our movement by decision-makers and opinion formers in the economy, governments and the media. That is the real difference that a truly global body can make for our members on the ground.

In pursuit of that agenda, I have asked the Director General to set up a meeting of the new Board before we leave Geneva this week – all the candidates for election have been advised that it will happen. At that meeting I will be bringing forward ideas for the first six months work of this new mandate. I hope that we will come out of that meeting with some clear decisions that will give you a positive signal of change and determination to make a difference.

Colleagues, I am certain in my own mind that a membership owned and led organisation doesn't deserve to exist, unless it is able to demonstrate its worth to its members.

I am also sure that to do that means that change is a constant for a service based body.

We cannot stand still nor, having spent the last four years reforming the ICA, can we rest on our laurels.

I know that the quality of candidates up for election here today will throw up a Board that is more than up for the challenge set for them by the excellent Board, that it has been my privilege to serve with for the last four years, and which is passing on an ICA ready to move on to the next stage of its development.

I am hugely excited by the coming four years and look forward to working with you all in building a co-operative sector of the global economy, that is able to create a fairer world, a better world, a more sustainable world for its people.

Thank You.