

**Through Co-operation, Another World is Possible.  
The Youth Statement to the ICA General Assembly, Oslo 2003.**

Friends, we are the sons and daughters of our co-operative family. A family should support each other and share its strengths. We all have different strengths, but they should be regarded equally. We share common goals, but we may walk different paths to reach them.

Young as we may seem we are not the future. We are the present. We are here and we are able. We want to take an active role and share responsibility with you, to ensure a healthy co-operative movement for our children and our grand children.

We ask you to listen but we need you to act!

This statement is from co-operative youth. It reflects the ideas and discussions generated over three days here in Oslo. At an informal and interactive event, eighty young co-operators from fifteen countries around the world met, debated, generated ideas and were inspired.

Of course, any successful event has a lot of people to thank. In particular the youth conference would like to thank the ICA, the Norwegian support organizations, the Young Co-op Network of Scotland for facilitating, May Woldsnes for her assistance, and all the participants for their enthusiasm and contributions to this dynamic event.

People of all ages have come together here in Oslo, united by the co-operative values and principles that we all share. Young people across the world are passionate about co-operation. Why? Because it puts people first and cares about the environment in which we live. Co-operative values and principles make peoples' right to enjoy life in a decent way a reality.

Unfortunately, many young people are not represented here, simply because they cannot afford to attend. It is all of our responsibility to strive to represent those who cannot speak, and ensure they are here in future.

The co-operative model can contribute to the eradication of poverty. It is the responsibility of large well-established Co-operatives to support the creation and growth of co-operatives in developing countries - ensuring that they are treated fairly in a growing global economy through fair and ethical trade.

A growing number of young people are becoming disillusioned with Globalisation and see it as the concentration of power in the hands of the rich minority while the poor majority become increasingly excluded.

However, Globalisation need not be a negative phenomenon – Co-operation can provide a viable alternative to purely capitalist values and be a positive force for change. It could mean a worldwide effort to tackle environmental decay and protect the earth. The co-operative movement must have the confidence in its model to ensure that globalisation means global co-operation.

Co-operative values and principles put people first: we must never forget that. We, the co-operative movement employ 20% more people than all the large multi-national corporations in the world.

Co-operatives are solutions to providing employment and we should be educating our employees and members about our values and principles, encouraging them to live them in the wider world.

If we harnessed our potential and worked together, we have the power through co-operation to combat exploitation, inequality and poverty.

Co-operative values and principles can and should be applied to more than just business – they should form the base of how we live our lives. It's about fostering the Co-operative spirit in all that we do. We must not forget our founding principles and roots - ours is a social as well as business mandate.

Perceptions of what co-operatives are, how they work, and what they do vary greatly throughout the world. There are brilliant examples of vibrant, young co-operatives, such as the University Co-operatives in Japan. At the same time, we are concerned by the overall image of

the movement. We must challenge the myths that exist, and promote our values and principles in everything we do.

We must ask ourselves: How do we all work together? How do we engage, empower and enable young co-operators?

Young people must be empowered and supported within the co-operative movement's democratic systems. Young and old must work together within a transparent and accessible democracy. Democratic representation must facilitate the expression of ideals and not be overly bureaucratic.

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All of these problems have been discussed before. What are we going to do about them? To ensure young co-operators can actively address these issues:

We need a voice.

We need a place to share information.

We need ways of connecting with each other.

We need to promote change.

We want to make a difference.

We want to support each other.

We want to be proactive.

We want to have fun!

We must ensure succession.

But we cannot do this without your support.

Everybody has a part to play in the creation and expansion of a vibrant youth movement.

As a result of this conference we, the Youth, have begun to address these needs and have established a steering group to lay the foundations for an International Youth Co-operation Network.

This Network will link Young Co-operators together from across the world to share a common vision, a vision first perceived by the Rochdale Pioneers when they founded this movement.

We will strive to carry their vision forwards into the future and work with every generation to make it a reality.

Young people can do a lot with our energy, creativity and commitment to the Co-operative movement, but for our Network to succeed we need your support.

We are really encouraged by the ICA's offer of a place on the main board for a youth representative. This is a positive development and we are excited by the possibilities that this will create for international young co-operators.

We had a lengthy and animated discussion and we feel really strongly that we had to be democratic in the way we approached this and do justice to the opportunity we have been given.

We believe that this will facilitate young people to bring new energy and ideas to the revitalization and growth of the co-op movement.

We want to work together with the ICA to define the role of the youth representative and we seek to put forward a researcher to attend the ICA board meetings to assist this process.

We need to be a strong, democratic Youth Network when we elect our first representative to the board.

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The Youth Conference should take a prominent role in the heart of ICA, so young and old can share and discuss their ideas together.

It is important that the Youth Conference is given the same level of support and resources as the General Assembly so it attracts more attention, significance and sponsorship.

It is vital that the steering groups first priority is to ensure our Network is truly international.

We need to involve and represent youth from every part of the world to ensure that when we say we speak with the voice of the world's Young Co-operators, we really are.

Democracy doesn't come cheap. The steering group will have to source funding, to enable full international participation.

We are creative thinkers and we can make a little money go along way. But we will need financial resources to support our development. There are funds available for international Youth projects such as this and we can access it with your assistance.

Discussion is essential but lets start to think about how you can help us.

We need your full co-operation.

Be proactive in your country!

We want you to go back to your organisations and ask yourselves: Are you relevant to young people? How can you attract young people to the co-operative movement in your country?

Don't just agree with our words. Act upon them!

We ask you to agree today that when you go home every organization here will find at least one young person who believes in Co-operative values to join our Network.

The young people we need who share our vision of the future may not be part of your Co-operative yet. However they will be in your community, campaigning passionately for equality and democracy yet unaware of that their beliefs are those of the Co-op movement.

Your job is to find them for us.

If every body here answers this request our International Co-operative Youth Network will flourish.

But to continue flourishing, we must not be complacent. We will not be youth for much longer and we have to crate a sustainable International Youth Network, which will nurture the leaders of our co-operative movement not just in the future but now!

Could everyone, in this room, whos organization came with a youth representative to this conference please raise their hands now?

Thank you. Please don't put you hands down just yet. Anyone else in this room who would like to commit now to try to bring a young representative to the next conference, please raise your hand as well.

Look around this room. Lets remember this statement we have made today. Through co-operation, another world is possible.

Thank you.

From: The Youth of

Italy  
Japan  
Kenya  
Malaysia  
Mauritius  
Norway  
Philippines  
Poland  
Portugal  
Russia  
Slovakia  
South Africa  
South Korea  
Sweden  
United Kingdom