

ICA DG Report
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Co-operatives mean business says ICA Director-General

Every now and again I am allowed to return to the UK from whence I came, and recently I spoke at the annual general meeting of Leeds Co-operative Society.

This is one of the bigger consumer co-operatives in the UK and rather successful at the moment. With nearly 300 people in attendance it was a very healthy meeting with the usual critical debate - an essential ingredient for a good co-operative discussion in the UK!

As a good example of a successful co-operative business however, it gave me the opportunity to emphasise the ICA's policy of promoting the business credentials of our co-operative members.

Of course at all of these kind of meetings I take the opportunity to remind the audience of the enormous size and scale of the international co-operative movement - and in almost all cases people are astonished to realise the extent of the movement they are part of.

It is one of our most frustrating traits - not knowing our own organisation. And until we know ourselves, we can hardly expect others, outside of the movement, to know much about us.

So I used the Leeds opportunity to launch a series of keynote speeches this year. They are intended to highlight the size and successes of our movement, both to ourselves and to the outside world.

Not only does it raise our profile in the international community, it makes the organisations themselves, like Leeds, promote their own self-image which can only benefit the business.

I see international co-operation as a vehicle challenging the assumptions and excesses of free-market globalisation. This is an ongoing debate which emerged from discussions at our General Assembly in Cartagena.

Many of us there were motivated by Sherron Watkins, the whistleblower from Enron, who challenged us to convince the rest of the business world that the co-operative movement was the natural home of corporate social responsibility. There is no need to be defensive about our way of doing business.

However we do need to know more about ourselves and understand the issues facing us. We need to have more imagination in our business dealings; to face the challenge of capital availability for instance, whilst remaining within our values and principles. This is why we are constantly emphasising the importance of communication and why we must strive to build up a better and more accurate statistical base. We seek to provide a better service to our members from a business orientation point of view which is where our **Global 300** project comes in.

We also need to expose the myth of demutualisation using reports such as that recently produced by the British Parliament which shows how demutualised companies have failed to

perform as well as they did as mutuals. The World Bank and the WTO and other international bodies need to know that the co-operative model of business is a better one.

My audience in Leeds seemed to like this message. It's quite simple – *Co-operatives Mean Business!*

Iain Macdonald

“There is no need to be defensive about our way of doing business”

Iain Macdonald