

Working towards unification south of the border

Another Board meeting, another country! In this case Mexico. It was my first visit to this beautiful country part of Latin America clearly, but also North America. An interesting contrast in today's cultural debates, but even the sparsest knowledge of Mexican history will tell you that Mexico's involvement and interest in North America is a big issue.

The border between the USA and Mexico is physically real but philosophically arbitrary at least. Our hosts, [Caja Popular Mexicana](#), looked after us in a truly magnificent fashion and are clearly proud of their ICA membership and international links. This is another example of the strength of our global movement.

Unfortunately, work had to be done at the same time! This meeting had long been planned to consider the proposals of the strategic plan and restructuring process. Certainly the strategic plan was approved with a bit of tweaking and will now go to the General Assembly for approval. At the same time, the constituent parts of ICA – regions, sectors and the centre will prepare multi-annual programmes for presentation at the December Board meeting, using the strategic plan as the overall umbrella.

This represents a major step forward and the first time the entire ICA will have a single global strategy, monitored by the Board, as the guideline for all activities and actions. Hand-in-hand, of course, is the important work being done by the restructuring working group chaired by

Alban D'Amours of [Desjardins](#).

Most of the recommendations were approved and will be presented to the General Assembly. However, a number of issues are yet to be resolved and a simulation exercise on an improved membership subscription scheme needs to be completed. And, regions and sectors have to be consulted as to its final shape.

The Board also had a lengthy discussion on how best to promote co-operative enterprise and organise ICA activities in Africa. Following the initial report of our Commission on Africa, much discussion has taken place about how to organise African operations. No clear solution has yet emerged but our Director of Development, Jan-Eirik Imbsen, is spending much of his time ensuring that our work in Africa is not only maintained but improved.

It would appear likely however that a different form of regional structure may be proposed which will emphasise activities and working closely with our partners such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO), Swedish Co-operative Centre (SCC) and Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA). Whatever the outcome, a lot of work needs to be done to rebuild our membership base. As with all other organisations, working in Africa and trying to offset the worst excesses of global capitalism is not easy but essential.

After lengthy discussion, the Board agreed to support the setting up of a global co-operative trade fair, Expo 08, to take place in Lisbon next year.

This is a very exciting project and one which I hope will be supported by our membership and beyond. This is one way to make a reality of our sixth principle ("co-operation among co-operatives") and where we have much catching up to do if we are to be taken seriously by our competitors. The *Digest* will keep you abreast of developments here.

Last but not least, the Board supported the proposal of the Director of Finance to transfer our main account from UBS to Swiss co-operative giant, MIGROS Bank. Given the strength of the co-operative financial sector as shown by the *Global 300* project – and the Board enthusiastically endorsed its latest plans – it is surely time for ICA to practice what it preaches!

DG's report



Iain Macdonald
Director-General

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Busy time for ICA President



Ivano Barberini, has been busy in recent months, apart from the Board meeting in Mexico, he has been to UAE, (see separate report)and will shortly be going to Japan. He also attended meetings in Nepal, see photo above.