

ICA DG Report
October 2006
Progress in a number of areas

It is always a pleasure to visit Stockholm. The people, the buildings, the general appearance always seem to be so bright and clean -- at least in summer!

And the co-operative movement generally in Scandinavia is in pretty good health, all things considered.

Whether it is the consumer, housing, agriculture or financial sector - the co-operative movement has a serious place in the economy and society as a whole.

Such a shock then when just after the Board meeting the Swedish people rejected social democracy and moved to the right. But on the other hand it shows that democracy is alive and well and that we can never take the people for granted. Not a bad lesson for the co-operative movement as well!

Indeed our Board meeting in Stockholm reflected the seriousness with which we take our democracy and how to relate it to our businesses.

We agreed on the theme and plans for the General Assembly in Singapore next year. Innovation in Co-operative Business will be our theme, continuing that of Cartagena last year. It is clear that this is now the overall direction of global ICA and developments such as the Global 300 reflect that.

We are also setting up a Structure Working Group, chaired by Alban d'Amours, which will continue the good work of the regionalisation working group, but in a more strategic setting. The same meeting accepted that ICA should establish Co-operatives Europe as an integral part of ICA and as its European region. All pointing to an exciting future for ICA.

I also sit on the board of Mutuo, the UK's co-operative think tank. At its recent AGM we reiterated our belief that co-operatives and mutuals have to go on the attack rather than just be on the defensive.

Mutuo has developed excellent links with the British government who are supporting the development of co-operative and mutuals in the fields of health, finance, utilities and transport, as well as other areas. It shows us that demutualisation is not inevitable and there are tremendous examples of commercial success in our sector. Hence the excitement being caused by the Global 300 project which is also something which Mutuo is showing a great deal of interest in.

The Global 300 was also the subject of a presentation I made at the same time to the ICMIF board in Manchester, who pledged their support. As possibly our most successful and progressive sector, it is a very positive development to see the increasing co-operation between ICA and ICMIF. During a week of activities the co-operative and mutual insurance world came together in Manchester for a very successful conference.

It is good to see that our African colleagues were represented in Manchester, showing how African co-operation can succeed and compete at the highest level. At the time of writing I am about to attend our regional assembly in Tanzania and this is the positive message I will be taking there.

“The theme for next year’s General Assembly has been agreed. It will be: Innovation in Co-operative Business...”