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## TAKE A STAND: MAKE GENDER EQUALITY A REALITY!

### *ICA Message on the occasion of International Women's Day, 8 March 2006*

The theme “women in decision-making” chosen at international level to celebrate the 2006 International Women's Day is a good occasion to assess the progress made, and set out the path ahead, in line with the commitments taken, to accomplish true and sound gender equality at all levels, including in decision-making.

According to global data, despite much recorded progress and numerous policy commitments, women's representation needs to be strengthened at all levels of decision-making. The empowerment of women is at the centre of the Millennium Development Goals which are so important to the ICA and the Global Campaign against Poverty; women and men sharing equally in decision making is vital for democracy, peace and development.

Women all over the world create and join co-operatives. Through them millions of women have been able to raise their living standards and “co-operate out of poverty”. They contribute to the development and cohesion of their communities and local and national economies, both developed and developing.

The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) promotes gender equality: it is specifically noted as one of its fundamental organisational aims. An equal sharing of responsibilities between women and men is not only a way to put in practice our values and principles and bring them alive, but is an essential element in promoting co-operative excellence in all fields - social and economic. Most ICA member organisations and their co-operatives have adopted policies and programmes for women's participation and leadership.

In 2000, the ICA Board adopted the *ICA Strategy for Promoting Gender Equality*. It acknowledged some issues and challenges, and adopted concrete targets including those for women co-operators in decision-making positions. In 2005, for the first time, four women - one from each of the ICA Regions - were elected as ICA Board members. The future challenge is to have women elected to decision-making positions at all levels; locally, nationally, regionally and worldwide.

Our society is developing rapidly and to face this, the co-operative movement needs to continue to change. In doing so, we must have women, who are frequently agents of change, in decision-making positions. We must ensure that women assume leadership roles for the benefit of the movement.

On this International Women's Day, the ICA calls on all its members and all co-operators to take a stand and ensure that women are enabled to fully contribute to the future of our movement at all levels.

Stefania Marcone  
Chairperson, ICA Gender Equality Committee

Ivano Barberini  
ICA President

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*The International Co-operative Alliance is an independent, non-government association which unities, represents and serves co-operatives worldwide. The ICA was founded in London in 1895. Its members are national and international co-operative organisations in all sectors of activity. ICA has 222 member organisations from 90 countries, representing more than 800 million individuals worldwide.*