



INTERNATIONAL
CO-OPERATIVE
ALLIANCE
Switzerland

Route des Morillons 15
1218 Grand-Saconnex
Geneva

Tel: (41 22) 929 88 38
Fax: (41 22) 798 41 22
E-mail: ica@ica.coop
Website: www.ica.coop

**9th ICA Asia-Pacific Regional Assembly
Beijing – 3rd September 2010-09-06**

Opening Joint Plenary Speech

**Dame Pauline Green
President, International Cooperative Alliance**

Your Excellency, Mr Hui, Vice Premier of the People's Republic of China

The Honourable Mr Li Chengyu, President of the All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives

Honoured Guests and Ministers from the Government, and the National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China

Fellow Cooperators and Friends,

It is my great honour and privilege to take the floor here this morning and bring greetings from the global cooperative movement to the Chinese people, and our cooperative colleagues meeting here today for the Regional Assembly of the Asia/Pacific Region of the International Cooperative Alliance, and to bring congratulations to you on the 50th anniversary of the establishment of this region as a constitutional part of the ICA.

In particular, I would like to thank Mr Hui for his words this morning and the clear commitment of the Chinese Government to the further development of the cooperative economy in China.

Colleagues

This is an exciting moment to be a cooperator.

With the declaration by the United Nations that 2012 will be International Year of Cooperatives, our global movement has a once in a generation opportunity to take a massive step forward, and lead the growth of our movement in all parts of our globe.

To do that we need to massively increase the knowledge and visibility of the size, and sustainability of our model of business, and of its reach into every community across the world. We need to demonstrate that the values and principles that have inspired our movement for nearly 200 years, are even more relevant today, and that we, collectively are a movement of creativity, innovation and flair that is producing solutions to the problems of today's world.

If we can together raise our global profile by using 2012 to create common global messages and a common global presence, we will maximise our influence on key decision-makers and, with their active support and help we will grow more and new cooperative businesses across the world in the coming decades.

I can think of no better place to launch this ambition and the aspiration of the Board of the ICA that was elected at the end of last year, than here in China.

With its rapidly developing economy, with growth levels outstripping all of its major competitors, and as a country that is now taking its place at the world's top table in terms of political and economic influence, China has the opportunity to shape the future, and those of us who have had the change to look around at the imaginative development of Beijing in the last few days, will have seen only too clearly that China has the political will and the economic power to do just that.

The importance of this region for the future of the world's economic development should not be underestimated.

Let me at this point pay tribute to our hosts, the All China Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives. The All China Federation has been a member of the International Cooperative Alliance since 1985, and since that time has been a strong and consistent supporter of global coherence and united action for the growth of our movement. It is a key player in the Region and always constructive and positive friends of the global ICA. The work of Chinese cooperators in seeking to develop new cooperative activity in China is testament to the role that they see for cooperation in China's future.

My thanks to Mr Li Chengyu, President of the ACFSMC for his support for this excellent meeting and that of all his colleagues and, of course, to Mr Li Chunsheng, President of the Asia/Pacific Region and Vice President of the Global Board of the ICA for his commitment and of course for the promotion and implementation of this event.

Colleagues,

Why do I and the Board of the ICA believe so strongly that the moment is right to launch a public campaign to tell people across the globe that cooperatives work, and work well.

Firstly, the collapse of the corporate financial and banking sector in so much of the world has devastated the confidence of ordinary people in the very financial institutions to which they had entrusted their life savings, their homes, their children's education and their pensions. Their jobs have been put at risk by those same financial institutions which, despite huge handouts from the public purse, have often chosen to use the bailout money to recapitalise their own institutions, rather than lend to cash strapped businesses, let alone individuals.

Conversely, during this global financial melt down, our financial sector, the cooperative, credit union and investment institutions, have fared much better. It would be remiss of me to claim that we have been totally unscathed. There have been problems within our movement. But they have been relatively small and contained, most usually by using the financial guarantee systems that the movement itself had developed, and more often than not without having to resort to any public bailout funding.

But, of course, cooperatives are as prone to be damaged by the global recession as any other player in the economy.

However, our financial institutions have overwhelmingly come through this crisis stronger. As funds have been withdrawn from our High Street competitors, they have flowed into cooperative facilities. Buoyed by the knowledge that our sector most often only lends from its own deposits, and does not engage with the more risky financial ventures – we have seen our deposits rise, sometimes quite substantially, our asset base grow, and our lending rate remain steady, and

sometimes even grow, at the same time as the lending rate of the leading corporate financial institutions dropped dramatically. These claims are not simply mine, they are now well documented and commented upon in the media, and these in particular are taken directly from a recently published brochure from the International Labour Organisation.

However, it is not just our cooperative financial institutions in which we can have confidence. I would remind you of the impact of our Global 300.

The ICA's Global 300 identifies the 300 largest coops in the world and demonstrates that they alone are worth 1.3 trillion US\$ in turnover. 300 coops alone whose turnover is equivalent to the GDP of the 10th largest economy in the world. Those 300 are, of course, just the tip of the iceberg given that we have hundreds of thousands of coops across the globe.

But coops are not only about the size of turnover. Our movement is owned by nearly one billion people around the globe. People who have made the active choice to become a member of a coop. Who are able to take part in, not just the economic value of being a member of a cooperative, but who can play a key role in the way the coop works and its economic direction. Our ownership structure empowers ordinary people, gives them new skills, encourages active community engagement, and develops leadership potential in local communities, creating confident, active citizens. We are a democratic, values led model of business that is about so much more than just returning shareholder profits.

And, of course, as well as having a massive turnover, and having an ownership structure that allows one billion people to participate in the business, together we also employ over 100 million people. I'm told that that is 20% more than the world's multi national companies put together.

So we can be satisfied that we have a record of which we can be proud.

But if we are going to succeed in our ambition to grow our cooperative worldwide family, and create a global economy that respects different models of economic behaviour such as ours, we need to take our lobby directly to the key centres of economic and political power which will dominate global thinking for the coming decades – the US, the European Union, China, India and Brazil for a start. When these political players meet in global bodies they need to know that the cooperative movement has an agenda that can bring solutions to some of the world's most pressing problems.

We have the solutions now, and will be talking about some of them in the next two days – innovative new coops that are taking action to prevent the damage of climate change, developing renewable energy based on locally owned sustainable facilities that will rebalance the energy needs and use in the world. New development in agricultural coops that will ensure a greener, and once again an enhanced sustainable future for our children's children. We are creating coops to rebuild failing rural areas, in care for the young and the elderly, in tourism, in health, fair trade, housing, transport, schools, and so much more.

And we have the network of people around the world that can deliver these and yet more innovation, as well as having a huge network of local cooperatives on the ground through whom we can work.

Dear colleagues, I believe that we have a vision that is within our grasp. But only if we work together.

Lets go forward together to prove that this generation of cooperators is worthy of our forefathers

Lets grow our movement together.