



Co-operative Congress

Glasgow 2005

20-23 May 2005-05-13

**Speech of Ivano Barberini, President,
International Co-operative Alliance**

Ladies and Gentleman, Dear Friends,

I am very grateful for your invitation to participate in this Congress, which takes place in a Country so meaningful for co-operators from all over the world.

It is the second time, since I became President of the ICA, that I have the opportunity to be with you. However, I have a very clear memory of my first attendance at the British Co-operative Congress in Eastbourne in 1979 and, two years later, in Edinburgh.

It is here, in Scotland, that co-operative principles were born, thanks to the ideas and experimentation of Robert Owen, who had the same moral approach of Adam Smith, within a favourable context for the diffusion of faith in democracy, under the influence of other important thinkers, such as James Stuart Mill.

The main factors which promoted co-operative development all over the world are to be found in the roots of the co-operative movement and in the success of the Rochdale Society: the unity among co-operators, the strategic vision together with concreteness.

George Jacob Holyoake, in the preface of his book about the Rochdale Pioneers edited in 1893, wrote that many co-operators believed that the reason of the success of many co-operatives was due to the reading of that story.

This is an early confirmation that not only the creation of knowledge and the forming of experiences are important, but also and above all, their diffusion. This is essential to promote new initiatives and create added value.

Quoting an Italian saying, “those who go slow go far”, Holyoake remarks that: "co-operation went slow and far. It came out like a turtle from its shell in Lancashire Britain, it crossed France, Germany and the freezing Russian steppes; it was put into practice by the smart Bengalese as well as by the careful and keen Americans; and our compatriots who migrated to Australia are involved in promoting its values”.

Since then, co-operation has spread in over 150 Countries. Co-operators learned that even failures and crisis can be helpful when they activate new energies and promote unity among co-operators.

When we consider today's movement we have to keep in mind the complex ideology behind it, its history, the peculiarity of its organization and co-operative ideals.

We should not forget how much co-operatives have been opposed by all authoritarian Governments. In many Countries, freedom of association represented a difficult achievement, and even today co-operative development continues to be opposed or undervalued without taking into consideration the usefulness it showed during two centuries of modern history.

Co-operatives cannot be simply considered as one of the many forms of organization; Governments, institutions and opinion leaders cannot ignore their innovative potential, demonstrated in the past as well as in the present.

The co-operative movement is well aware that the wealth of a society derives from the interest shown by its members towards poor people.

The statement on co-operatives, approved by the ICA Congress in Manchester in 1995, includes values such as self-help, equity, democracy, equality among members and solidarity.

This is even more important today, when we are committed to achieving a fair globalisation, based on the participation of every man and women, giving all the opportunity of sharing the benefits, inverting the tendency of social distances to increase.

These problems need to be faced both at local and global level. Here we find the present role of the Co-operative Movement and the raison d'être of the ICA.

"Movement" means the push towards innovation.

Ladies and Gentlemen and Dear Friends,

I would like to conclude by expressing a warm and sincere thank you to British co-operators for their great contribution to the setting up of the International Co-operative Alliance and their continued support to its role and evolution.

.

It is also a great pleasure to be here with Iain Macdonald, as President of the Congress and also a great honour for the International Co-operative Alliance as well.

I wish Co-operatives UK the greatest success, in the interest of the Co-operative Movement of your country, of Europe and of the entire World.