



ICA General Assembly

*“ICA Global Youth Conference*

*Singapore, 14 October 2007*

Address by Ivano Barberini, President, International Co-operative Alliance (ICA)

Dear Friends,

Thank you very much for your kind invitation.

It is a great pleasure to be here with you and to have the opportunity to welcome you and to say a few words on the situation of the international co-operative movement and the challenges it is called upon to face, now and in the future.

This Conference represents an important step in the development of the Youth Network, launched in the ICA/GA in 2003.

The progress over these years has been very encouraging. The Network has strengthened and regional groups have been formed in Asia and America. This is a very important step, in line with both the global and local levels of the co-operative movement. A successful network results in synergies as it spreads knowledge, creates new systems of relations and innovative ideas through the sharing of experiences and skills. It is the ripple effect as in a pond.

Jo Bibby-Scullion, and his replacement two years ago, Juan Carlos Mejia Cuartas, in their role as youth representative member have given a significant contribution to ICA debates, activities and strategic choices, confirming it as the right decision made in 2003.

I thank them warmly for their involvement.

During the last few years, ICA has markedly increased its activity in expanding relations so as to become much more innovative in its way of being and acting.

Here, I would like to mention: The Global Campaign against Poverty with ILO, the On-going Regionalization process, the Focus on ICA Africa by a Board Commission, the Re-definition of ICA governance, the Review of the ICA global vision, mission and strategy, the Four-year program and budget, the ICA restructuring and membership, the Communication strategy, and the Global 300 Project.

The co-operative movement has started, nationally and internationally, on a new phase of thinking for co-operative business, its mission, its competitive strategies, its possible changes, its system of basic principles and values and its governance.

In today's socio-economic context, increasingly characterized by higher competitive challenges, the cooperative enterprise is called upon to continuously update its true *raison d'être* - an effective merging of entrepreneurial performance and social aims.

Innovation still remains the main condition in being able to successfully face the future, as it is one of the crucial drivers of economic development. Therefore, we need to focus all our ideas and energy here, without lingering on past regrets.

Our experience has taught us that to create a winning strategy and be successful we must anticipate, promote and drive change, with the courage, the passion, hard work and skills of all those who are committed to our organisation.

Innovation must be fostered and protected without being paralyzed by the fear of making mistakes. Within certain limits, mistakes are also physiological. However, a lack of mistakes also indicates a lack of experimentation in what is new, and consequently, nothing truly innovative is produced.

In facing these huge problems and trying to start up continuous processes, the co-operative enterprises must involve women and young people on a much greater scale.

New generations have been born into the age of the Internet, where the only way to organize life, thinking and living is through the new technologies. The digital revolution is the most important factor of modern globalisation.

These young generations have grown up fully aware of a fast-changing

world and a future involving flexibility, new types of jobs and the need for on-going training and updating.

Nowadays, young people expect to be provided with the necessary tools to live, work, and start up a family, in a radically different way to that of their parents. However, their expectations are often disappointed. A decent job is an unfulfilled ambition for many young people. The sense of precariousness, uncertainty and insecurity represents a serious social problem, widespread everywhere and yet, at the same time, experienced in solitude.

With few exceptions, young people in both developing and developed countries seem to have lost the memories of the past and, at the same time, a sense of the future. On the one hand, roots and identities have become weaker, and on the other, the dreams and the hope for a better world have been lost. As a consequence, young people end up living day to day, focused on the present, without tapping into the energy needed to introduce radical change in our social and economic structures.

The future depends on the investment in Young People and our movement must become fully aware of this and translate it into sound actions and policies.

The co-operative enterprise is the most appropriate form of business to encourage young people into business. Sharing equally with other young people a common idea and common goals results in generating energy and reducing insecurity and uncertainty.

In the years to come, competition will be increasingly fought with ideas. That means an idea will become more precious than a company. And if this is so, young people, who are brimming with ideas, will become more and more important as well.

The co-operative wishing to be innovative must have a future vision and must know how to effectively translate this into tangible objectives in an international context. An innovative enterprise does not separate the functions of thinking and doing - it favours generative learning rather than a comfortable traditional learning, it attracts young talent and allows and fosters their development. The empowerment of young people needs to be put into practice based on equal rights and duties between generations, within the context of a relationship based on reciprocal listening, loyalty and respect.

Encouraging the entrepreneurial ability of young people, providing them with the right conditions to become competitive and supporting knowledge and skill creation are important goals, of fundamental social and entrepreneurial value.

In conclusion, in order to build a co-operative movement able to communicate with the society of the 21st century, we must make room for our younger generations, by promoting their training and sense of belonging, and especially, by involving them in the decision-making processes. Because, as we all know, the decisions made today are those

that determine the future.

We must continue on this path with determination, innovative spirit and far-sightedness.

Thank you