

BITS WORLD CONGRESS, BLANKEBERGE, BELGIUM

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ADDRESS BY IVANO BARBERINI, PRESIDENT OF INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATIVE ALLIANCE

Mr. Secretary General, Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends

I am really grateful for this celebration of BITS World Congress and for your kind invitation to address participants.

It is a pleasure and an honour to be here together with you and some common friends

This Congress also provides an opportunity to discuss important topics for ICA, including social policies on tourism and exchange. We have a lot of things in common.

Let me introduce briefly, ICA.

Founded in London in 1895, ICA has more than 230 member organizations in over 100 countries, representing 800 million individuals worldwide. Its members are national and international co-operative organizations in all sector of activity.

ICA is involved in supporting the development of the co-operative movement, sustaining its policies with institutions, protecting its distinctive identity and promoting co-operation among co-operatives. BITS and ICA have in common some social goals such as economic development, active participation, peace and social cohesion.

In a world today where tourism is growing rapidly and borders are opening up, a large number of countries are still victims to appalling poverty and exploitation.

The aim set by BITS, of making tourism accessible to all, necessarily means being involved in the struggle against inequality and the management of social and cultural diversity. These are the same social objectives that TICA is actively pursuing, thus making relations between these two organizations very closely linked.

TICA, one of ICA's nine sectoral organizations, is an international network of tourism co-operatives. Its major aim is to promote the development of co-operative tourism locally, regionally, nationally and globally. To achieve this goal, the collaboration between TICA and BITS is very important, in order to defend and inform the traveller, as well as to promote a social vision of tourism, benefiting the whole community.

Both organizations recognize the value of social tourism as a mean to encourage the knowledge of different lifestyles and the cultural exchanges between people all over the world. Holidays and travel can provide many opportunities for the discovery of new places, cultures and civilizations, therefore contributing to improving human relationships.

Social tourism is a vehicle for social cohesion, for respecting racial, cultural, religious, political differences and also for learning what is helpful from other cultures. This carries with it a need for society to create the best practical conditions allowing effective access to this vehicle for all citizens, without discrimination.

Globalization has reduced geographical distances but hasn't been able to abolish social ones.

For this reason, cooperatives need the right environment, supporting their birth and growth, as they are based on the free association of many people, who, at an individual level, would not be able to undertake a project.

Tourism requires a set of services, such as hotels, restaurants, infrastructures and so on. By providing these services, it is possible to attain a contribution from various co-operative sectors.

Throughout the world, new forms of cooperation are essential, since tourist development requires support of many local authorities, social organizations and financial partners. This is particularly true for the economically disadvantaged countries, for which tourism represents a way to attain economic strength, a promoter of economic growth.

With their commitment to bringing together people from different backgrounds pursuing common aims, TICA and BITS contribute to the social and economic development of regions, ensuring at the same time, respect for the natural environment and the identity of local communities.

Facing the challenge to overcome discrimination and promoting integration, BITS and TICA are involved in promoting a responsible way to travel, building an environmental and cultural awareness and respect, based on sensitivity to host countries political, environmental and social problems and supporting international human rights.

I would like to stress once again, the importance of the co-operative movement in the development of tourism, especially in developing countries.

One of ICA's main objectives is to promote a greater use of co-operatives in developing countries, becoming a central player in eradicating extreme poverty and hunger and improving living conditions.

In September 2003, at the Oslo General Assembly, ICA launched a large-scale campaign against poverty, focusing on the educational and economic development of developing countries, particularly African nations. Africa is a priority for ICA. It is a forgotten continent, but fortunately, something is changing.

The development of African countries seems to be another objective ICA and BITS have in common, and therefore a further occasion of working together and developing effective strategies.

Cooperation is an form of enterprise established to act in the market, on the basis of the self determination of the people who associate in order to provide for their future and to contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of their own community

It has therefore the right conditions to grow and develop within the new context, as can be seen in several cases. However, to achieve these objectives It needs a favourable environment, as the International Institutions and several national governments have already recognized.

They acknowledge that compared to other kinds of enterprises, cooperative enterprises are more able to adapt to the 21st century setting because they are deeply rooted in their territories and part of a global network.

The formal recognition of the Un is certainly not fortuitous.

The statement of co-operative identity, defined by ICA, has been adopted by the International Labour Organization, in Recommendation 193/2002; the European Union has recently approved a communication on the co-operative enterprise to remove the obstacles to its development and promote its growth and role.

At present, the reorganization of the global economy involves serious risks for all organizations, especially in the developing countries. Co-operatives, as well as non government organizations, play an important role in the interaction between local and global problems, being focused on human relations, contributing, with their specificity, to create a world government which is becoming more and more necessary in the globalization process we are undergoing.

To embrace this intercultural perspective means considering people and their backgrounds as part of a network, and trying to understand them without denying legitimacy of their single cultural identities.

In many developing countries, the transition to a market economy took place suddenly, without creating the necessary conditions for the pre-existing social and economic organizations to adjust to the new situation. This has created serious problems, which can, in many cases, be overcome by promoting responsible tourism and sustainable development.

Co-operatives can organize different activities focused on protecting heritage and culture development, strengthening rural organizations as well as providing information to rural and urban population about issues on development.

The aim to promote a balanced economic growth and global development that does not over-ride fairness and social justice can be achieved by strengthening the network of tourism co-operatives, as tourism represents, for many developing countries, the most important form of income, sometimes the only one.

It is in the general interest that BITS and the cooperative tourism model can expend all its energy. People from developing countries will benefit from the improvement in the domestic market, while tourists will benefit from the contact with different cultures and lifestyles, looking at a different way to spend a holiday.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends

Our common belief is that social tourism is a very important tool, both economically and socioculturally, to promote sustainable human development and to further the economic and social progress of people, thereby contributing to international peace and security.

ICA works closely with all cooperative members, drawn from many cultures and linked by shared values, to achieve these goals, to fight poverty and hunger and to promote economic development and peaceful relations among people.

I believe that it is in the interest of BITS to increase the number of tourism co-operatives and, for this reason, I wish the TICA and BITS to continue their very profitable collaboration, and their commitment to promote better access to travel and holidays for all within the context of a sustainable development.

BITS and ICA can contribute to build a global network fighting poverty through the creation of employment, economic development and social cohesion.

Congratulations for BITS 40th anniversary and best wishes for a successful future

Thank you