



## ICA REGIONAL ASSEMBLY – WARSAW - THURSDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> SEPTEMBER 2004

### OPENING CEREMONY

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

*Mr. Deputy Prime Minister of Poland*

*Government Officials*

*Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Friends*

Firstly, dear Deputy Prime Minister, I would like to thank you for your speech. Your presence is a pleasure and a honour for us and represents an important recognition of the role of the co-operative movement in this country and in Europe.

I want to thank our friends from the Polish co-operation for their hospitality and the energy they have devoted in making this busy week of work pleasant and productive.

I would also like to thank the European co-operators for their important contribution in strengthening the International Co-operative Alliance, both at regional and global levels.

Many things have changed in the two years since the previous Regional Assembly, at a general level and as well, within the co-operative situation.

Co-operative enterprises are having to perform within a new and growing complexity. Like other European enterprises, they are involved in building a multicultural environment, assuming diversity as a priority factor in human resources management.

In no other part of the world, do so many different cultural identities co-exist – and continue to grow – within such a comparatively small place.

European citizens are ageing because of the low birth rate and the lengthening of our life expectancy, and Europe is becoming more of a 'melting pot' as a consequence of immigration from the African, Asian and South American countries.

European social organizations are called on to share responsibilities and initiatives necessary to build a fair and non-violent globalisation process.

In this context, Africa must be seen as a priority, because if this large continent (so socially distant but geographically close to ours) fails, the consequences for Europe will be particularly serious.

This becomes very clear when we consider that in a global economy "everything is connected" - economic development and peace; security and freedom; the fight against poverty and disease; the access to knowledge and equality of opportunities; the global and local dimensions; respect for differences and the fight against terrorism.

Now more than ever, the co-operative movement has to face challenges that are, at the same time, difficult, yet so exciting. Global competition entails a cultural dimension, as well as, an economic one. It is essential that all modify their way of looking at things, in order to be able to link global and local information and grasp the interweaving of basic and partial problems. The recognition that we must accept long-term responsibilities towards our planet, is now an imperative need.

These problems call for the action of governments, but, at the same time, cannot be ignored by social organizations, particularly by the co-operative movement, because of our characteristics, our history and our social aims.

In the reality of 21st century, the challenge to join together economic and social objectives must be dealt with at a local and global level.

The co-operative system is fully committed to successfully winning over this challenge, basing its involvement in economic development on becoming rooted in a territory, on self-determination, on the teaching of enterprise management and on the knowledge shared between the northern and southern hemispheres.

The way is quite different to that followed by multinationals which aim at a development

based on cultural homologation and a radical transformation of the social environment, with the consequences of a painful loss of identity and solidarity.

This difference in social and cultural rooting makes the co-operative system better suited to solve the real problems of our times.

To help build a more united Europe, able to act efficiently and responsibly within the global context, is an ethical duty for co-operators but also a way to preserve our system of values and to strengthen the opportunities for the development of co-operative enterprises.

Once the ideological differences, responsible for tearing Europe apart for decades, have been overcome, Europe will then have to focus on working out a system of values forming the basis of a civil co-existence and a sense of trust and hope for the future, shared by everybody, especially by the new generations.

Europe needs the citizens of its various member countries to feel that they are European citizens. This dual citizenship is a difficult goal to reach, as many feel that the European Union is still a far and “isolated” reality, and not the “domestic” environment which influenced for many years the everyday life of the people living and working in it.

Ladies and gentleman, dear friends,

This is where the management of co-operative enterprises and our reason to exist as the largest and most popular non-religious and non-political movement in the world are at.

This is the reason why there are so many great expectations of the co-operative system. All this pushes us towards constantly seeking the most suitable ways and conditions to allow us to successfully face and overcome the serious problems of humanity, today.

Understanding people and putting them in a “network”, recognizing the legitimacy of every single cultural identity; building a network of information, experiences and skills able to capitalize on knowledge and make it available to all, even to those who are at risk of being excluded due to lack of resources. The co-operative movement can provide an essential contribution in building a globalisation which brings together all citizens benefiting from its economic, social and cultural input.