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ICA Press Release

Co-operatives for Social, Economic and Democratic Development

Geneva, Switzerland, 25 September 2003, for immediate release -- Nearly 800 co-operators gathered in Oslo, Norway from 30 August – 5 September 2003 for the General Assembly of the International Co-operative Alliance and related events. Hosted jointly by Coop NKL BA, the Norwegian Federation of Co-operative Housing Associations (NBBL) and the Federation of Norwegian Agricultural Co-operatives (Norsk Landbrukssamvirke), the Assembly was successful in highlighting the role co-operative enterprise can play both in alleviating poverty but also in effectively organising economic activity even in the most developed nations of the world.

Keynote speakers underlined over and over the importance of the co-operative movement. *“Whether it is voice and representation in the community, creating jobs and reducing poverty, combining values and profits, or making globalisation more fair and inclusive, the co-operative enterprise, the co-operative movement, must be considered a central actor for more just, more productive, more balanced societies”* said Juan Somavia, Director-General of the International Labour Office in his inspiring address.

Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik of Norway commented too that, *“The co-operative movement has a long-standing record in contributing to social progress and social equality in Norway. Agricultural, fisheries, consumer and housing co-operatives have produced concrete results and have over the years made a difference in people’s everyday lives.”*, while former ICA President and now Minister of Agriculture of Brazil, Roberto Rodrigues, commented on the renaissance of the co-operative enterprise and its ability to respond to the changing needs of people around the world. Hilde Frafjord Johnson, Minister of International Development, Norway also noted that, *“The co-operative model has much to offer, in the developing as well as the developed part of the world. Not only have co-operatives contributed significantly to economic development, they have also been instrumental in promoting democracy and good government and governance.”*

Pledges were also made both by the United Nations and the International Labour Office to work more closely with the ICA in promoting co-operative enterprise. The United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan in his message noted, *“The International Co-operative Alliance, for its part, is a good and long-standing partner of the United Nations, and I look forward to continuing our common quest for the common good.”* ILO Director-General, Juan Somavia put forward a proposal for the ICA and ILO to develop a multi-year programme to promote and implement the ILO Recommendation 193 on the promotion of co-operatives which calls on governments to encourage the growth of co-operative enterprise.

ICA President, Ivano Barberini inspired participants in his opening address to the Assembly. *“Co-operation, by definition, is an undertaking together and on equal terms - a choice bringing together business and solidarity and therefore, useful and effective in our present situation, as was also the case at the beginning of the last century”* He reviewed the challenges facing our world underlining that today’s unprecedented economic growth lived side by side with poverty and hunger. He highlighted in particular gender issues, the challenging situation in Africa and involving young co-operators in building the co-operative movement for the 21st century.

The Assembly also included practical experiences from co-operatives around the world on how they were making development happen. Chaired by Rahaiah Baهران ICA Board Member and Vice-

President of ANGKASA (Malaysia), the session included presentations from the ICA Regional Directors, A.S. Kibora, Bernard Kadasia, Manuel Mariño, Shil Kwan Lee, and Gabriella Sozanski, as well as respected co-operators including Bernard Ouedraogo, President, Groupement NAAM (Burkina Faso), Héctor Cordova, General Manager, Federación de Cooperativas de Ahorro y Crédito de El Salvador FEDECACES, , Isami Miyata, President of Japanese Joint Committee, Shugo Ogura, President of Japanese Consumer Co-operative Union, (Japan), Lennart Hjalmarsson Director, Swedish Co-operative Centre SCC (Sweden), Vidar Kaperlund, Deputy Managing Director, Royal Norwegian Society for Development (Norway), and Nina Jarlbäck, Deputy-Chairperson of the Board, Coop Norden & President, Kooperativa Förbundet KF (Sweden). ICA's Director for Development, Jan-Eirik Imbsen, concluded reminding participants of the important work on the ICA in development and how it contributes to the Millennium Development Goals.

Important statutory matters were addressed by the General Assembly. Representatives approved the restructuring of the ICA based on recommendations made by a Task Force that reviewed the ICA structure and finances, and resulted in the need for modification of the ICA Rules and Standing Orders. A new set of ICA Rules was adopted in Oslo. The Assembly was also invited to fill vacancies to the Board and Audit and Control Committee. Ms Gun-Britt Mårtensson (Sweden), Mr Isami Miyata (Japan), Mr Pál Bartus (Hungary), and Mr Ousseynou Dieng (Senegal) were elected to the ICA Board while Mr Shugo Ogura (Japan) and Mr Roy Berg Pedersen (Norway) were elected to the Audit and Control Committee.

The Assembly also adopted a resolution on “Co-operative Development” in which it reminded members and partners of the important role of women in all development activities and the need to include a gender and youth perspective when addressing co-operative development. It called for a greater contribution by governments, international donor organisations and other development agencies to co-operative development and requested ICA members in the industrialised world to increase their efforts to promote development in the developing world. Finally, members affirmed their resolve to actively support ICA's development programme and the campaign against poverty.

The Assembly also invited young co-operators to participate actively in the activities of the movement. “*Another world is possible - and this is a start,*” was the message from the Youth Conference to Assembly. In recognition of the important role of youth in the present and future of the movement, the ICA Board invited a youth representative to attend all future Board meetings.

The events in Oslo also enabled ICA to discern a series of important awards. The ICA recognised two distinguished co-operators for outstanding lifetime service to the Co-operative Movement and granted them the Rochdale Pioneers Award. Francisco Luis Jiménez Arcila of Colombia and Lloyd Wilkinson from the United Kingdom were the 2003 recipients of this honour. ICA also presented a prize for the best .coop website to the Canadian Co-operative Association CCA.

The venue for the next ICA General Assembly in 2005 will be Cartagena, Colombia.

Texts and presentations delivered at the General Assembly can be found on the ICA website at:
<http://www.ica.coop/ica/ica/icaevents/ga2003>

The International Co-operative Alliance is an independent, non-governmental association which unites, represents and serves co-operatives worldwide. The ICA was founded in London in 1895. Its members are national and international co-operative organisations in all sectors of activity including agriculture, banking, industry, insurance, fisheries, housing, tourism and consumer co-operatives. ICA has more than 200 member organisations from over 100 countries, representing more than 760 million individuals worldwide.