

“Peace-building through Cooperatives”
Message by Juan Somavia,
Director-General of the International Labour Office (ILO)
on the occasion of the
84th ICA International Cooperative Day
12th UN International Day of Cooperatives

The ILO is pleased to join the international cooperative movement in celebrating the 84th ICA International Cooperative Day, and the 12th UN International Day of Cooperatives, as we focus together this year on peace-building.

The ILO is founded on the principle that “if you desire peace, you must cultivate justice.” The cooperative ideals of social solidarity, equality and democracy transcend boundaries including those of nationality, race, religion and gender. Cooperatives offer collective strength through organization, and organization for economic production and social protection based on fair distribution of risks and benefits among members. They serve as important agents in promoting social justice through the world of work. For this reason, the ILO has had a long and productive association with the cooperative movement.

We live in a world where many enjoy opportunity, reward and respect in and through the world of work. Yet too many still do not. Nationally and globally, social, political and economic exclusion, a growing gulf between rich and poor, rules that work against the weak, and systems that fail to protect the vulnerable, are the antithesis of human security and social stability.

And one of the biggest threats to human security today is the failure to deliver on the most fundamental demand of women and men for a decent job.

Cooperatives open up avenues for job creation and for the provision of economic and social services to members. They can link producers and consumers through fair trade relations. Effective at all levels of development, our own experience has shown that cooperatives can also be highly resilient in crisis and conflict and particularly valuable in building cooperation and solidarity and restoring dignity through self help initiatives in situations of tension and post conflict situations.

For example, an ILO project in the Balkans facilitated the establishment of an agricultural cooperative which has helped build a common bond between members of different and once warring ethnic groups. In Asia, we have promoted income-generating cooperatives among indigenous minorities. And in the Great Lakes region of Central Africa, a new ILO initiative will promote cooperative entrepreneurship among demobilized soldiers. In these and other cases, the cooperative approach is reducing tensions between groups, creating better livelihoods, and building peace.

Cooperatives rooted in local communities and globally connected, are key instruments in national and global strategies for fairness, equity and justice as the basis of stable communities and balanced societies.

The ILO is committed to continue working with the International Cooperative Alliance to harness the distinctive potential of cooperatives to promote decent work for social justice and peace.