

## **International Women's Day 2014 Declaration**

**Gender Equality Committee  
International Co-operative Alliance  
María Eugenia Pérez, Chairperson**

***"Equality for women: progress for all"***

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Like other global development bodies, the International Co-operative Alliance recognises that equality between women and men is an essential requirement in achieving human development, thus improving the lives and opportunities of people.

Over the last few years, the challenge of achieving equality between women and men has been incorporated as a development objective and strategy. Today we know that gender equity, understood as fair treatment for both women and men in accordance with their respective abilities and specific needs, is the main tool in facilitating access to progress.

In 1995 our commitment to equality was made manifest when we, the co-operators of the world, approved the Resolution on Gender Equality in Co-operatives at the International Co-operative Alliance Centenary Congress, thus setting it as a global priority. At that moment in time, we agreed that, "a better balance between female and male co-operators and employees would be a re-energising force and source of competitive advantage to co-operatives, that women and men must have equal participation and job opportunities, the same working conditions and equal pay for equal work, as well as equal training and educational opportunities, and that shared influence and shared responsibilities between women and men are key to co-operative excellence", and therefore, "equality between men and women in decision making positions and in the activities of the co-operative movement" is an essential aim for our Movement to move forward.

In addition to meeting a moral and ethical obligation, promoting gender equality in the co-operative movement also entails promoting economic growth based on the ability to make use of human talent, appreciating differences and diversity in order to maximise the impact of people in economic and social progress within local communities.

At the current time, the co-operative sector is facing the challenge of providing solutions to the economic and social crises, but also to increase the influence we can have on social change. We must strive for women and men to enjoy the benefits of development with equal opportunities regarding the benefits of development while also ensuring that they can freely make full use of their abilities. This requires men being included in these efforts, which must be scaled up in order to reduce the gender gap. Masculinity in its different forms must be included in our initiatives which bring about transformation and which call into question current cultural models.

On the occasion of the celebrations for International Women's Day 2014 and through the Gender Equality Committee, the International Co-operative Alliance recognises the efforts and initiatives of co-operative organisations around the world in closing social, cultural, economic and political gaps that are perpetuated by gender inequalities.

We stand firm before the world as co-operators committed to achieving the goal of ensuring the participation of women under equal conditions in the spheres of work, politics and social aspects. We are committed to achieving more inclusive economic development, strengthening the economic participation of women, improving current levels of representation on our boards, where women have scope for leading decision making on the future we want, bringing about a shift so that providing care is not a task which falls solely upon women, pulling down obstacles which continue to stand in the way of women joining the co-operative movement on an equal footing, while also improving economic and working conditions.

We are surrounded by attempts to correct inequalities, but at the same time we are faced with fierce resistance to change in some sectors which continue to divide up work between men and women

based on sex, a practice characteristic of bygone centuries. Our principles and values drive us to push for a paradigm shift in gender relations, raising our voices and emphasising the fact that we will only achieve progress for all if women can play their part in society under equal conditions as men and women who benefit from society to an equal degree.

Given that we are now in the Decade of Co-operatives, we are called upon to permanently keep a wary eye on equality and to defend this ethical concept at the workplace, in businesses, during economic transactions, in our human relations and in society. Furthermore, on a broader level we must maintain our identity as a co-operative and stand by our principles as the main strategy that underpins our work at all levels.

We are called upon this year to maintain our steadfast and collective action in consolidating a co-operative movement and a society which is led by men and women, providing recognition and working together for equality, solidarity, democracy and development.

**Colombia, March 2014**