



International Co-operative Alliance



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Speech to the International Summit of Co-operatives Quebec City, Monday 8 October 2012

Dame Pauline Green – President, International Co-operative Alliance

Ladies and Gentlemen, Fellow Co-operators

It is my great privilege and honour to have the opportunity to talk to you this evening, and I would like to take this moment to bring you the warm greetings of the International Co-operative Alliance, but perhaps even more importantly, the greetings and solidarity of your one billion fellow co-operators who own this great co-operative movement of ours around the world.

This International Year of Co-operatives has been a really rich gift from the United Nations. I have had the great privilege this year to join thousands of co-operatives around the world at different venues in different continents and share their celebrations, their pride and their enthusiasm for a model of business that they believe has given them and their communities a better life.

I won't forget the joy of the staff and members of the credit union I visited on the outskirts of Manila in the Philippines just a few weeks ago on a Saturday morning. There were desks squeezed into every corner of every room and the place was buzzing with members waiting to deposit or withdraw money, coffee and biscuits were circulating, and they showed me with such pride the 7 storey building that houses their school – built by the credit union, staff paid by the credit union – 650 students from the local community. And to cap that they showed me their single storey nursery building for pre-school children that allows their mothers to work and bring additional money to the family. And they showed me the small chapel that they have for members in distress – important in this very catholic country.

This is what our movement is about. This is why a billion people across the globe are members of this movement – to build a better world.

And as we approach the end of the Year what has been its impact on our movement. For me it is crystal clear. This Year has given a huge boost to the cohesion and the confidence of co-operatives around the world.

For the first time in our history, there is a shared sense of our own size, value and impact on every corner of this world. Last week, Dr Kim, the new Director of the World Bank in an interview with the Financial Times said that the World Bank will refocus on ending world poverty, and he added that he wanted to see any benefits shared across the developing society. We are with him on that – that's our space – that's the space we

have been operating in for the last two hundred years. Building social cohesion, embedding democracy, preventing conflict, teaching skills and expertise in local people, encouraging women into economic activity and leadership in their communities – all on the back of a member owned business model.

Colleagues, this is a great event. And I want to pay a personal and very heartfelt tribute to Desjardins for the massive effort that they have put into making this event such a huge success. Nearly 3,000 people from across the world. Co-operative businesses from 95 countries – an unprecedented gathering.

We must not waste this event colleagues. To have our largest and most iconic businesses meeting together in one place at this moment when our world is beset with half the world still suffering the effects of the financial collapse and recession, and the other half either still in need of urgent development support, or one of the airplane economies that are in rapid transition.

We have an unprecedented opportunity to make a qualitative step change in our profile and visibility in the global economy.

Over this year, the ICA has been arguing your case at venues across the world. From the European co-operative week in the European Institutions in Brussels, to the seminar run by the Obama Administration in the White House in Washington, to the conference in the Great Hall of the People in China with the Deputy Prime Minister of China and 300 officials from all departments of the Chinese government as they sought co-operative ways to help the 600 million Chinese living in rural poverty, and to individual meetings with Ministers, parliamentarians and officials in many, many nation states.

Our argument has been that co-operative businesses want to see a more diversified global economy. We believe that going forward, the world needs a global economy that puts people at the heart of economic decision-making not just the red blooded pursuit of profit at any cost.

We have a challenge today colleagues - you, because you the most successful co-operative businesses in the world. The ICA is the voice of our co-operative members, but you are voice of the one billion co-operators around the world.

So today, we have to decide. Are we going to clap each other on the back on the 31st December of this year and say – great year, and go back to business as usual?

Or are we going to build on the momentum of this great International Year? Can we continue to build on that sense of cohesion, confidence and enthusiasm and keep pursuing this agenda until our business model achieves the recognition it deserves.

We have to ask for instance, why it is that a business model that is owned by a billion of the world's people, employs 100 million across the globe, serves half the world's population, is present in diverse parts of the economy, supports local community, builds social cohesion, and merits the accolade of an International Year, why is it that there isn't a Co-operative economist on the Board of the World Bank; nor on the B20, the advisory group of businesses that advise the G20 – the 20 largest economies in the world. The G20 meeting in Mexico had a meeting of the B20 alongside it. I went through the list of participants at that event 125 businesses, and not one co-operative business amongst them. And yet, it is informal groupings like the G20 that is making decisions about the direction of the global economy; or when Prime Ministers and Presidents go around the world with domestic business leaders, looking for inward investment or business do they very rarely take co-operative business leader with them?

So our challenge this week colleagues, is to demonstrate that we are not going to cease our campaigning to end the marginalisation of our contribution to the global economy

and of discrimination against our business model. If a co-operative can make a sound business case in any sector of the economy why should it be denied access?

We have to face up to the fact that if we are to change these things then we – the world's co-operatives – will have to do it. And we have to be able to demonstrate that we walk the talk – that we are building a co-operative movement that our successors will be proud to inherit.

The ICA is asking you if it can continue to count on your support for our work on your behalf with the global institutions.

Colleagues, when one billion of the world's citizens have chosen to become a member of a co-operative there must be something really powerful going on. One billion people can't be wrong and they are not starry-eyed idealists – they are realists!

Those people joined a co-operative because it puts food in their children's stomach, or provides electricity to their village, or they live in co-operative housing, or get insurance from a co-op when the traditional insurance sector won't touch them, or they farm, or work in a co-op shop, or they save their money with a co-op bank or credit union and they can get loans to help their businesses, or see their children through their schooling. And so much more

At this moment it is co-operative enterprises that **are so often the lynchpin of the real economy**, keeping life going for so many at grass roots level in economies under stress.

Co-operatives can bring transformational change to the way business is conducted. **And they can help to build a global economy that puts people at the heart of decision-making, rather than as now, leaving people at its mercy.**

This Year has been incredible. For me it has shown the power of ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

Today in this room we have many of the key businesses in our movement, in just three weeks' time; the movement will have its closing event of the Year in Manchester, England at which we expect to see 10,000 co-operative activists from around the world. Within a month we will demonstrate the strength of our co-operative family – our businesses and our people.

In Manchester we will receive all the declarations, statements and recommendations that have come from the various events around the world.

The Board of the ICA has determined that it will do its best hopefully with your support to keep the momentum of this great Year going, and we will publish our Blueprint for a Decade of Co-operative Growth, which will help us all to ensure that this year is just the starting point of a reinvigorated, modern and growing co-operative movement. I hope you will join us on that journey.

Thank you.

Ends.