

COOPERATIVES UNITED
INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF COOPERATIVES
STATEMENT BY FAO DIRECTOR-GENERAL

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Dame Pauline Green, President of the International Cooperative Alliance, ICA,

Charles Gould, Director-General of ICA,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to the International Cooperative Alliance's third global expo, and to the great city of Manchester.

As many of you know, just two weeks ago, the Food and Agriculture Organization put the spotlight on co-operatives, during its World Food Day celebrations around the globe.

This year's World Food Day theme was "Agricultural co-operatives, key to feeding the world."

It was a well deserved recognition. Especially in 2012, the International Year of Cooperatives.

FAO sees co-operatives and producer organizations as crucial partners in the fight against hunger, malnutrition and extreme poverty.

Anywhere in the world, co-operatives follow core values and principles that are critical to doing business in an equitable manner; that seek to empower and benefit its members and the community it is inserted in.

This is especially relevant in poor rural communities, where joining forces is central to promoting sustainable local development.

In the case of agriculture, you help small and medium-scale farmers, fisher folk and others add value to their production, and gain access to local and global markets.

You open doors for small and medium producers that, otherwise, would remain closed. There is no other way forward for small-scale producers than organizing themselves in co-operatives and other forms of farmer associations.

Thanks to these organizations many producers are taking part, for the first time, in policy-making discussions that affect their lives. This is important from the local to the global level.

Co-operatives are an excellent tool for social and economic development.

Whether you are in the UK, Brazil, Kenya, Thailand or Nepal, cooperatives help to generate employment, boost national economies and reduce poverty.

This, in turn, helps to improve food security. This is a challenge all of us need to be involved with.

The latest figures on hunger, released by FAO, IFAD and WFP three weeks ago, show that the world has made some progress in the fight against hunger.

The global number of hungry people has declined by 132 million since 1990, and now stands at 868 million.

The proportion of the population in the world that is undernourished is also down, from 18.6 to 12.5 percent.

This means that the world may still reach the Millennium Development Goal of reducing by half the proportion of hungry people in the world. But only if we step up our efforts.

But this is not enough. Even if we reach the Millennium Development Goal, we will still have half a billion people undernourished.

They are men, women and children who go hungry every day, either because they don't have money to buy food, or they lack access to the natural resources to produce it.

We are seeing that different regions have different trends in reducing hunger.

In Asia and Latin America, the number of hungry people fell by almost 200 million.

On the other hand, we are losing the battle in Africa and the Near East. We now have 83 million more undernourished people in these regions than we had in 1990. That means a total of 275 million hungry only in Africa and the Near East.

This is not acceptable in a world that produces enough food for all.

The only acceptable number of hungry people in the world is "zero".

This is why we support the Zero Hunger Challenge, launched by UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon at the Rio+20 Conference.

This challenge means making sure that all food systems are sustainable. It means making sure that smallholders - especially women - can increase their productivity and income.

It means cutting down on high levels of food waste, and making sure that all people have year-round access to nutritious food.

If we do this, we can put an end to malnutrition in pregnancy and childhood stunting. We can put an end to hunger.

FAO has embraced this challenge. I urge the co-operative movement to do the same.

We can defeat hunger. But only if we join our forces. And by "we" I mean: governments, international organizations, civil society, private sector, farmer organizations, the academia and, of course, co-operatives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Co-operatives are already helping us to improve food security in many different ways. But we can do more.

FAO is committed to helping create the conditions that enable agricultural and food cooperatives to form, develop, and grow.

We are putting our support behind co-operatives in many ways.

Last May, FAO appointed two Special Ambassadors for Cooperatives, a farmer and global leader from Cameroon, Madame Elisabeth Atangana; and a world champion of cooperatives, Roberto Rodrigues of Brazil, who will receive today the Rochdale Pioneers Award.

On the International Day of Cooperatives last July, I inaugurated an office space for co-operatives and producer organizations, which the ICA is sharing with the World Farmers' Organization.

Also, FAO is a storehouse of technical knowledge on co-operatives and enterprise development.

We have developed a number of approaches, guidelines, methodologies and training tools on organizational development and policy support, for use at the country and regional levels.

All of us here have accomplished a great deal, during the International Year of Cooperatives.

We are now looking at how to use the momentum created to increase our collaboration.

As we look to the road ahead, I urge you all to contribute to the global plan of action which will come out of the International Year of Cooperatives.

The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs is leading the process to include principles and guidelines for action, a research agenda, and policy recommendations for the next ten years.

The Dunsany Declaration for Rural Co-operative Development offers a forward looking perspective and gives an important contribution to the global plan of action that will guide our work in future years.

At FAO, we will work to keep co-operatives on the international development agenda.

There are many possibilities to explore for future work. They include:

Support policies and legislation at the national and international levels. We will continue to encourage governments to support agricultural co-operatives through improved legal frameworks, policy support, and opportunities to participate in decision-making discussions.

FAO will also help to develop a network of experts that can support the role these organizations play in food security.

Build the capacity of co-operatives, and help them become more efficient in providing services like credit, market access and technical assistance to its members.

Promote co-operative to co-operative knowledge transfer. We already have North-South and South-South Cooperation. Why not have Co-operative for Co-operative cooperation?

The Expo organized here shows the diversity that exists in the co-operative movement and its cooperation potential.

FAO is ready to assist this process.

I believe these points form a broad, common agenda for FAO and ICA to tackle, together with partners like other UN agencies and the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I also want to highlight the direct link that exists between co-operatives and family-farming.

We are already exploring this link in the International Year of Cooperatives.

I hope that we can continue doing so in the future, especially in the International Year of Family Farming in 2014.

Before closing, I'd like to recall the message Pope Benedict XVI sent on World Food Day.

Reflecting on the choice to highlight the role of co-operatives in feeding the world, the Pope said, and I quote:

“It is not only a matter of giving support to them as economic and social organizations, but also, to consider them a veritable instrument for international action. The experience of many countries shows, in fact, that in addition to the impetus they give to farming, cooperatives are a means to enable farmers and rural populations to intervene at crucial moments and at the same time are an effective way to achieve this integral development, of which the person is both the foundation and the goal.” End quote.

I fully agree.

As you might know, last May the Committee on World Food Security endorsed the Voluntary Guidelines on Governance of Tenure.

The CFS will now discuss principles for responsible agricultural investments.

It is very important that these negotiations take place in the framework of the CFS.

Why? For one simple reason: the participation of governments, civil society, the private sector and other actors make the CFS the most participative and inclusive multilateral forum to discuss food security that we have in the world.

This way, we ensure that the committee's decisions consider the concerns and ideas of all parties.

These two sets of recommendations can have far-reaching impacts at the national and local levels.

But only agreeing on recommendations is not enough. We need to follow that up by implementing them at national level to have any effect.

That is the stage we are now entering with the Voluntary Guidelines on Governance of Tenure. I invite the co-operative movement to participate in this effort.

They can help protect the rights of rural and indigenous communities. And they will help ensure that the much needed investments in agriculture in developing countries help promote food security of the poor population, many of whom are members of co-operatives themselves.

I also want to welcome the proposal presented on behalf of ICA by Paul Flowers, Chairman of the Cooperative Banking Group and Global Development Cooperative, Paul Flowers, to create a global development fund to support cooperatives in the developing world, focusing on agricultural and rural cooperatives in Africa.

Let me leave you with one last thought:

When Roberto Rodrigues was nominated as FAO Special Ambassador for Cooperatives at FAO, he launched the idea that the cooperatives movement should be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

I say, given your contribution to economic and social development, your one billion members worldwide, and the ethos that guides your work, this certainly is an idea worth considering!

Thank you.