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*Message of the International Co-operative Alliance*

**85<sup>th</sup> ICA International Day of Co-operatives**  
**13<sup>th</sup> UN International Day of Cooperatives**  
**7 July 2007**

***“Co-operative Values and Principles for Corporate Social Responsibility”***

The theme for this year’s International Day of Co-operatives on 7 July is “*Co-operative Values and Principles for Corporate Social Responsibility*”. It celebrates the contribution co-operators have and continue to make as responsible corporate citizens in co-operatives throughout the world.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) seeks to address the issue of how businesses can better society through responsible behaviour, transparent reporting and accountability, stakeholder engagement, innovation and governance. While there is no universally agreed definition of CSR, it is generally understood to encompass voluntary actions that go beyond legal obligations in the areas of: community development; environmental protection; human and labour rights.

CSR is not a new discovery for co-operatives. Since their inception they have realised that their actions affect a wide range of stakeholders, including employees, the community and environment in which they operate. In many ways, the co-operative movement has been the pioneer in the development and practice of CSR.

Because of their member based democratic structure, they have always looked beyond merely financial returns. Values and principles have been at the core of the co-operative business model for over 150 years. Specific co-operative values include: self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others. Such values are the building blocks for any genuine long term commitment to CSR.

The increased recognition of the value of enterprises that take their wider social responsibilities seriously have encouraged enterprises of all types to embrace this essentially co-operative concept, establishing policies and reporting on their actions. However, co-operatives are increasing highlighting how CSR is at the heart of everyday co-operative business activity. Examples of these include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Mondragón Co-operative Corporation, Spain, is regarded as the world’s largest worker’s co-operative, in which each member owns a share of the organisation and the profits. It has benefited social causes through the creation of jobs, social security, opportunities and community empowerment. Co-operative values and principles are aligned with dynamism and innovation fuelling the corporation’s growth and ability to embrace change.

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- The Co-operative Group, United Kingdom, is recognised as one of the most trusted brands in the UK. The Co-operative Group's energies have been focused in five directions: climate change; social inclusion; tackling crime; food integrity; and modern co-operation. Owned and governed by its members, The Co-operative Group gave over 7.2 million English pounds, or 2.8% of pre-tax profit in 2005 to the communities in which it operated. A further £3.6m was raised by community organisations directly as a result of the Group's support.
- La Equidad Seguros, Colombia, has distinguished itself, throughout its 36-year history, by providing affordable insurance protection to vulnerable low-income populations and by contributing to public well-being through the promotion of a business solidarity model and training responsible co-operative board members. It has also runs programmes to promote young co-operative leaders, women's issues, the arts, culture and sport, and co-operative business development in other sectors. In recognition of its accomplishments, the Americas Association of Co-operative and Mutual Insurance Societies (AAC/MIS) awarded the first Corporate Social Responsibility Award to La Equidad Seguros in 2006.
- Amul (Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation), India is the largest food production organisation in India and have contributed their growth and success to their co-operative culture, co-operative networking, market acumen, respect for both producer and the consumer and their contribution to social integration among members of different backgrounds. They aim to provide remunerative returns to farmers and members. When the 2001 Gujarat earthquake struck, the Amul Relief Fund donated 50 million Indian rupees to reconstructing schools.
- Desjardins, Canada, is more than just a financial institution, due to its co-operative nature. It takes an active part in the economic and social development of the communities in which it operates. In 2005 Desjardins gave 58 million Canadian dollars as collective patronage allocations to members, of which 42.8% of surplus earnings were given back to community as patronage allocations, sponsorships, donations, student bursaries. Desjardins Venture Capital (DVC) invested \$159 million in new commitments in 143 businesses and co-operatives in Quebec.

Many others also have specific policies in place to further guide their activities taking action on issues including child labour, ensuring decent work conditions for their own employees as well as those of their suppliers, and promoting environmentally responsible behaviour of their enterprises and their individual members and a myriad of others.

The ICA calls on co-operators throughout the world to take the occasion of this year's International Day of Co-operatives to celebrate their success as the leading form of socially responsible business and provide more visibility to their actions.

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*ICA is an independent, non-governmental association which unites, represents and serves co-operatives worldwide. Founded in 1895, ICA has 221 member organisations from 85 countries active in all sectors of the economy. Together these co-operatives represent more than 800 million individuals worldwide.*