



Cooperative enterprises build a better world

**Message by Juan Somavia
Director-General of the ILO
on the occasion of the
90th ICA International Co-operative Day and the
18th UN International Day of Cooperatives**

7 July 2012

As we celebrate this International Day of Cooperatives in the UN International Year of Cooperatives, the ILO salutes cooperators and their organizations around the world.

Cooperatives are engines of economic growth offering a dynamic and flexible business model in production, marketing and service delivery. Globally, about 1 billion women and men are involved in cooperatives which generate some 100 million jobs. The three hundred largest cooperatives generated revenues of 1.6 trillion dollars in 2008, operating in diverse sectors, including in agriculture, finance, consumer, insurance and health sectors. At the same time, cooperatives also give the smallest of operators the opportunity to improve their output and income.

Guided by the compass of social justice, cooperatives are vehicles for promoting decent work and decent lives for all. As democratic, value-driven and locally-controlled organizations, they foster social inclusion. Organization brings strength and the organization and solidarity of the cooperative movement have been highly effective in enabling disadvantaged groups to gain voice, mobilize to pursue their economic interests and to secure social protection. Indigenous people, refugees, migrants, women in rural and urban areas, unemployed persons, the elderly, and the disabled have all found possibilities for social and economic participation and advancement through cooperative action and enterprise.

Rooted in the people and communities they serve, cooperatives are well-placed to serve as guardians of the environment and the conservation of ecosystems for the benefit of future generations. Agricultural and other rural cooperatives can play a key role in preventing ecosystem degradation and assuring food security.

In sum, cooperatives have a key role to play in the economic, social and environmental pillars of sustainable development. And the recent Rio+20 Summit reaffirmed the role of cooperatives in contributing to social inclusion and poverty reduction.

Clearly, with such an approach, cooperative enterprises are helping build a better world. Yet to thrive fully, they also need a supportive environment and the ILO's Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation (R.193), celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, provides sound guidance on creating such an environment. I urge all who wish to translate the cooperative ideal into action to make good use of this Recommendation.

The resilience of cooperatives, including in times of crisis, testifies to the sustainability and adaptability of the cooperative enterprise. Today, in confronting the widespread and growing income inequality, unemployment, underemployment and social exclusion that have been the corollary of prevailing inefficient patterns of growth, cooperative ideals and action are much needed.

As we celebrate this Day, the ILO reaffirms its commitment to its long-standing collaboration with the cooperative movement. Let us all join forces to help cooperatives build a better world – a world with social justice.

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