

## **Experts meeting on Co-operatives**

New York, April 22 2009

As all here are experts, the ICA's new Vision and Mission says all I need to say about ICA at this stage!

### *Vision*

*To be prized as the organisation of reference which provides an effective and efficient global voice and forum for knowledge, expertise and co-ordinated action for and about co-operatives*

### *Mission*

*The International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) unites co-operatives world-wide. It is the custodian of co-operative values and principles and makes the case for their distinctive values-based economic business model which also provides individuals and communities with an instrument of self-help and influence over their development. The ICA advocates the interests and success of co-operatives, disseminates best practices and know-how, strengthens their capacity building and monitors their performance and progress over time.*

I have just been to meetings in Manchester (UK) with the Co-op Group, the biggest consumer co-operative in the world. When I first started work with them in 1986 I was the only person working in the area of membership – promoting democratic participation. In 2009 there are nearly 100!

In 1986 their total turnover was £1 billion, now it is £12bn. In 1986 membership participation was zero, now it is massive with continuing development of good governance. The link being that acknowledgement of the co-operative difference, values and principles, is good business.

Today they are on fire. Values and ethics are at the top of the agenda and profits continually rise, even or especially in the current economic climate. And this is in Britain where recession has been as vicious as anywhere – and of course where the co-op started.

My point of course is that the co-operative form of business can and does thrive when its investor owned competitor does not, and particularly when its values of democracy, solidarity, equity, equality, self help and self responsibility are to the fore.

It also shows that co-operatives are not just for poor people or social purpose, but fully fledged economic enterprises who can and do compete at the very centre of global business.

You all know of the steadily increasing body of evidence:- 800 million Members; 100 million jobs; 1 trillion US dollars of turnover by the top 300; undeniable link between co-operative strength and economic stability. Even the latest Fortune 500 has a serious co-operative presence.

I am convinced that we must continue to stress the sheer size and scale of the co-operative sector - even in the fairly crude way that I have mentioned. If we want international organisations such as the World Bank, EU, UN and opinion leaders to take us seriously as alleviators of poverty, promoters of Fair Trade and employment creators, they need to know we can and do deliver.

This meeting will I hope therefore approach its work from the standpoint that we are business enterprise with a specific set of values and principles with which we seek to contribute to the resolution of the economic crisis, through people, rather than capital centred policies.

Our modest objectives for this meeting therefore are but a starting point. We must get to move away from our tendency to speak to the converted, so as soon as we have finished here we must proclaim our findings to the outside world:

- That is what the IYC could/can do.
- We use our findings and data from our ongoing research to show co-operatives are for both the rich **and** poor. Through self help, helping people help themselves out of poverty, creating jobs and improving food security
- And to convince ourselves as well as the outside world of our real strength and to see ourselves in our true global position.

It's a big agenda! And it's also the ICA's agenda.

Iain Macdonald  
DG, ICA