

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

MESSAGE ON THE UN INTERNATIONAL DAY OF COOPERATIVES

5 July 2003

The cooperative movement is one of the largest organized segments of civil society, and plays a crucial role across a wide spectrum of human aspiration and need. Cooperatives provide vital health, housing and banking services; they promote education and gender equality; they protect the environment and workers' rights. Through these and a range of other activities, they help people in more than 100 countries better their lives and those of their communities. And with hundreds of millions of skilled and dedicated member-owners, they are a key partner of the United Nations system and Governments at all levels in efforts to achieve balanced, broad-based economic and social development.

The theme of this year's International Day of Cooperatives -- "Cooperatives make development happen" -- highlights the contribution that cooperatives are making to global efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. The adoption of those goals expressed the resolve of the international community to free all people from the abject and dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty and hunger. As models of self-help and solidarity, cooperatives understand better than most that while such high-level political support is welcome and necessary, progress does not happen by itself, but rather through sustained individual and collective action.

The United Nations system has long supported the cooperative movement and will continue to do so. In 2001, the General Assembly adopted guidelines to help Governments create legislative and policy environments conducive to the establishment cooperatives -- and to help cooperatives themselves advocate and negotiate those very changes. The United Nations is a member of the Committee for the Promotion and Advancement of Cooperatives, the movement's central coordinating body. And the UN system's project activities have included the International Labour Organization's support for cooperatives in the Sahel region of Africa involved in village grain banks, irrigation schemes and natural resource management.

The Millennium Development Goals are not wishful thinking. They are certainly challenging, but they are also technically feasible, even in the relatively short time allowed. On the International Day of Cooperatives, let us reaffirm our support for the efforts of cooperatives to make their unique and invaluable contributions.