74th International Co-operative Day
Saturday, 6 July, 1996

Message from the International Co-operative Alliance

Co-operatives for Sustainable Development

The potential of co-operative enterprises to contribute to the alleviation of poverty through the creation of employment and to satisfy certain of society's needs more effectively than either public or private profit-making enterprises have been widely recognised by the United Nations.

One of the ways in which the UN demonstrated this recognition was by declaring, in 1995, that the International Day of Co-operatives should be celebrated every year by Governments in collaboration with their national co-operative movements.

In 1996, as the International Community celebrated the Year for the Eradication of Poverty, the UN will again draw the attention of Governments to the significant contribution of co-operatives to reducing poverty and to the need to form partnerships with the Movement.

Co-operatives have always had an impact in the communities in which they operate. Working at the grassroots level they help to bring about sustainable development in the community by empowering their members. The member movements of the International Co-operative Alliance also act globally through their apex organisation and have thus won increased recognition at the international level for their valuable contribution to the achievement of the economic, social and environmental goals of the United Nations.

Concern for Community, a new Co-operative Principle reflecting the impact co-operatives have in contributing to sustainable development within communities, was added to the guiding principles of the International Co-operative Movement in the new Statement of the Co-operative Identity adopted at the Centennial Congress and General Assembly of the International Co-operative Alliance in September, 1995.

Some of the Co-operative Principles have changed little since the movement began over 150 years ago.
The first three Principles: Voluntary and Open Membership, Democratic Member Control, and Member Economic Participation are the foundations on which the modern movement was built.

Principle four, Autonomy and Independence, has been proven as a necessary ingredient in societies where governments have formerly used co-operatives to enforce their own development programmes and economic plans often to the detriment of the co-operative values of self-help and responsibility.

Principle five, Education, Training and Information, has been acknowledged as being of primordial importance, not only for the co-operative members and elected representatives, managers and employees, but also for society at large, especially for those who govern societies, for opinion leaders and for the young people who will become the co-operators of tomorrow.

Co-operative Solidarity, or as stated in the sixth Principle of the Statement of Co-operative Identity, Co-operation between Co-operatives, is the potential strength of the international co-operative movement. It is a principle which is becoming increasingly important in the face of the contemporary global economic, social and political trends which societies everywhere are facing.

The International Co-operative Alliance calls upon its more than 760,000,000 members at grassroots level, and also upon co-operative enterprises and organisations at local, regional and national level, to consider not only how to improve their own situation, but also to devote significant energy to promoting new co-operative enterprises in their own and related fields. The ICA moreover calls upon its member organisations and specialised organisations in the fields of agriculture, banking, consumer co-operation, energy, fisheries, health, housing, insurance, trade, tourism and industrial and artisanal production, as well as its committees working in the fields of communications, human resource development, co-operative research and the promotion of equal opportunities for women in co-operatives, to work together to build a strong, united movement which can help make tomorrow's world a better place for future generations.