



# General Assembly

## GA/11164

Department of Public Information • News and Media Division • New York

Sixty-sixth General Assembly  
Plenary  
45<sup>th</sup> Meeting (PM)

### **UNITED NATIONS LAUNCHES 2012 INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF COOPERATIVES**

#### **General Assembly President Says ‘People-Centred’ Cooperative Movement Critical to Advancing Development Agenda, Promotes Equality, Social Integration**

Cooperatives — member-driven business enterprises that put people front and centre — offered a viable and vibrant alternative economic model, General Assembly delegates said this afternoon, as the United Nations launched the 2012 International Year of Cooperatives.

Opening the special plenary session, Assembly President Nassir Abdulaziz al-Nasser, said that enterprises organized around cooperative principles — self-help, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity — reduced poverty, created jobs and promoted social integration, and did so with a firm belief in the ethical values of openness, honesty, social responsibility and caring for others. Cooperatives offered a member-owned model of economic organization that reconciled the logic of a market economy with imperatives of social inclusion and ownership, particularly relevant in the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis.

In the same vein, Deputy Secretary-General Asha-Rose Migiro said that there were increasing demands for change in the ways we live and work — for choices and values that were sustainable, responsible and inclusive. In confronting those challenges, strength could be drawn from the cooperative spirit, which balanced economic viability with social responsibility. The International Year of Cooperatives provided an opportunity to raise public awareness of cooperatives, to promote their formation and encourage governments to establish policies conducive to their growth. It was also an opportunity to underscore the importance of cooperative values, including sustainability, solidarity and inclusiveness.

Gordon Brown, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, said that it was important to remember that mutual dependence was an increasing feature of modern life, but added: “We must do more than simply talk about our interdependence”. It was not “anti-wealth” to say that “wealth must do more than serve the wealthy”; it was not anti-competition to say that, without cooperation, competition might not lift us up, but pull us down. The nearly 1 billion people driving the worldwide cooperative movement had proved that the human principle of cooperation could make for a better economy.

Similarly, Dame Pauline Green, President of the International Cooperative Alliance, said that those enterprises contributed directly to improving the standards of living of half the world’s population. Indeed, cooperatives had “lifted millions out of poverty with dignity”, and had proven that such enterprises could compete effectively — and even thrive — in the marketplace with other forms of business. Nearly 1 billion people owned shares in cooperatives worldwide. The top 300 cooperatives around the world were worth an estimated \$1.6 trillion, she said, and they operated in some of the most competitive industries in the world. However, there was a need to raise awareness of the significance of cooperatives.

“More people in decision-making positions [...] should know about the size, scale and scope” of the cooperative business model, and should acknowledge it in public policy and regulation. Cooperatives were “values-led” businesses, and should be given equal promotion alongside the stockholder model. Further, cooperatives were “people-led”, and led in particular by young people,

similar to those presently seeking a voice in North Africa, on Wall Street and across the world. She hoped that, after the International Year ended on 31 October 2012, a pivot would be seen from a successful year to a successful decade of international cooperative growth.

When delegations took the floor, Myamarsuuren Bayarmagnai, Director, Department of Light Industry, Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry of Mongolia, which had sponsored the resolution on cooperatives in social development, proposed that a roadmap be developed to ensure the growth of cooperatives beyond 2012.

Speaker after speaker reiterated that cooperatives were a fundamental tool in achieving development goals as they tended to be community-centred, created jobs, including for the most vulnerable, promoted agricultural development and trade, and advanced the goal of a green economy as a matter of self-interest.

Guatemala's representative provided ample evidence of that fact, explaining that cooperatives had become his country's major producers of coffee and leading producers of organic cardamom. They also monitored impact on the environment, having planted millions of trees in the course of their work. Cooperatives had also discovered their capacity to enter into new areas of action; they had moved into the banking sector, created rural women's groups, and taken on other new projects. Moreover, he said, cooperatives were democratizing rural areas. Wealth was being distributed more horizontally as cooperatives gained greater influence. It was truly a kind of economy "with a human face".

Shatrughan Sinha, Member of Parliament of India, said that in the wake of financial downturn and ongoing economic uncertainty, there was a push for financial inclusion, promoting social protection and empowering small and medium enterprises and marginal farmers to act as levers against economic shocks. That movement had given a boost to cooperatives as a viable choice for social and economic action. The decentralized nature of cooperative structures, based on popular participation and a bottom-up approach, made it an ideal platform for local action.

The Assembly kicked off its events to mark the launch of the International Year in the morning with an opening session and an informal round table discussion on "Cooperative enterprises build a better world: Contributions to sustainable development."

In his remarks, Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs and Secretary-General of Rio+20, the upcoming United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, stressed the United Nations aimed to strengthen integration and balance among the social, economic and environmental pillar of development. "Cooperatives are one such way to achieve this goal," he said.

For his part, Jean-François R. Zinsou, of Benin, Vice-President of the General Assembly, said that the aim of promoting cooperatives was not to replace corporations. Their goal was profit, but they did not always share the prosperity. In that context, it was important to note that the International Year was being launched amid social protest over the excessive concentration of resources for the benefit of the minority. He also made closing remarks at the afternoon plenary.

Also speaking today on the International Year of Cooperatives was Finland's Chairman of the Finnish Cooperative Council.

The representatives of New Zealand, Argentina, Israel, Japan, Netherlands, Thailand, Brazil, Nigeria, United States, Ukraine, Malaysia and Bangladesh also addressed the Assembly.

The General Assembly will reconvene at 10 a.m. Tuesday, 1 November, to consider the Report of the International Atomic Energy Agency and fill vacancies on the Joint Inspection Unit. It was also set to conclude its consideration of the annual report of the International Criminal Court.

### Background

The General Assembly met this afternoon to launch the International Year of Cooperatives in 2012.

## Opening Statements

“People must be at the centre of the social and economic development agenda,” said NASSIR ABDULAZIZ AL- NASSER, President of the General Assembly, opening the plenary session launching the 2012-International Year of Cooperatives, whose theme was “Cooperative enterprises build a better world”. “No country can develop unless the people themselves are developed,” he continued.

Enterprises organized on cooperative principles — self-help, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity — reduced poverty, created jobs and promoted social integration, and did so with a firm belief in the ethical values of openness, honesty, social responsibility and caring for others. Having existed for over 150 years, in many countries, the cooperative movement, he said, had played a pivotal role in advancing the United Nations development agenda, including achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Cooperatives offered a member-owned model of economic organization that strove to meet its members’ economic needs and also were essential to meeting global economic and employment challenges, reconciling the logic of a market economy with the imperatives of social inclusion and ownership, particularly relevant in the aftermath of the global economic and financial crisis, he said. They revitalized disadvantaged areas, empowering whole communities and providing special support to disenfranchised groups such as the disabled, women and youth. In addition to providing affordable financial services to poor and low-income people, cooperatives have provided business assistance, managerial guidance, equipment and training. They contributed to food security, rural development and other social services. They provided productive employment to the marginalized and contributed technical assistance.

Critical to global peace and security, cooperatives had helped to rebuild post-conflict areas, providing financial services and linking people together to meet common goals, he continued. Developing countries had opportunities to promote their exports and get fair returns through international cooperative business networks. Cooperatives deserved more support and encouragement. Member States and their partners must ensure a legal and support environment in which cooperatives could thrive nationally, and also strengthen links among cooperatives globally, including improving statistics, the dissemination of information and technical assistance.

ASHA-ROSE MIGIRO, Deputy Secretary-General, said that the world was witnessing growing discontent over the ongoing effects of the financial and economic crises. There were increasing demands for change in the ways we live and work, for choices and values that were sustainable, responsible and inclusive. In confronting those challenges, strength could be drawn from the cooperative spirit, which balanced economic viability with social responsibility. Cooperatives contributed to their members and their communities. They helped to reduce poverty and create jobs. They promoted food security and inclusive finance, empowering youth, women, older persons, people with disabilities and indigenous peoples. They served as a significant social safety net.

The International Year of Cooperatives provided an opportunity to raise public awareness of cooperatives, to promote their formation and encourage governments to establish policies conducive to their growth. It was also an opportunity to underscore the importance of cooperative values, including sustainability, solidarity and inclusiveness, she said.

Focusing on the long term, cooperatives used local labour and capital and respected the environment, thus strengthening local economies while creating a sustainable future. They had strong community connections, concerned for the well-being of the community beyond their members. As self-help organizations, cooperatives were inherently people-centred, meeting the human need to participate proactively in one’s life. Moreover, she said, democratic decision-making processes and a focus on cultivating member skills offered a model for harnessing the energies and passions of all.

Noting that the International Year of Cooperatives coincided with the observance of the International Year of Sustainable Energy for All and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, Rio+20, she said that cooperatives presented values and structures ideally suited for addressing the challenges of our time. “We must leverage these advantages to produce not only better businesses, but to advance the broader imperative of sustainable development,” living up to the Year’s theme: “cooperative enterprises build a better world.”

Taking the floor next, Dame PAULINE GREEN, president of the International Cooperative Alliance, presented the outcome statement of the morning's round table discussion. Cooperatives were a reminder that economic viability and social responsibility could coexist, she said, noting that they were also important for combating poverty. "Cooperatives contribute directly to improving the standards of living of half the world's population", she said. Since their inception, cooperatives had not sought to simply maximize profits, but to meet the needs of their owners.

Nearly 1 billion people owned shares in cooperatives the world over, she stressed, adding that the principles of democracy and wider social engagement were "a core part of the DNA" of the cooperative movement. They built community cohesion and local leadership potential, and meanwhile helped to empower women. In effect, cooperatives had lifted millions out of poverty with dignity; they had also proven that they could compete effectively, and even thrive, in the marketplace with other forms of business.

The top 300 cooperatives around the world — known as the "300 List" — were worth an estimated \$1.6 trillion, she said, and were operated in some of the most competitive global industries, operating in 25 different countries. However, there was a need to raise awareness of the significance of cooperatives. "More people in decision-making positions [...] should know about the size, scale and scope" of the cooperative business model, she stressed.

Indeed, while the recent global economic and financial crisis had been devastating, the cooperative sector had continued to lend and had even grown, loaning to families and businesses. They were not beholden to profit-making, a point which had been stressed repeatedly during the morning's round table discussion. Another common sentiment had emerged among the speakers, she said; they had stressed that, regardless of size, each cooperative had a commitment to international development. That work would be made easier if the cooperative model were taken more seriously, she added.

She then highlighted three key points that had been raised at the morning's session. First, member-owned cooperatives were a serious business model "with scale", and should therefore be acknowledged in public policy and regulation. Second, cooperatives were "values-led" businesses, and should be given equal promotion alongside the stockholder model. Third, cooperatives were "people-led", and led in particular by young people, who presently sought a voice in North Africa, on Wall Street and across the world. Speakers this morning had also asked for a greater diversification of the world economy to ensure an equal playing field. She hoped that, after the International Year ended on 31 October 2012, a pivot would be seen from a successful year to a successful decade of international cooperative growth.

GORDON BROWN, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, said that he supported the 1 billion members of the cooperative movement. "They have shown that the principles of human cooperation make for a better economy," he stressed, adding that: "We are all part of a movement of men and women who believe in something bigger than just ourselves." "When the strong help the weak, it makes us all stronger," he said. In this International Year of Cooperatives, it was important to remember that mutual dependence was an increasing feature of modern life. "It's the hands of others that grow the food we eat, who sew the clothes we wear," he said.

Today, there were global problems that could not just be dealt with by bilateral action. Interdependence forced people to cooperate as a way of life, he said. "We must do more than simply talk about our interdependence" or about the moral sense that interdependence was good, he said.

It was not "anti-wealth" to say that "wealth must do more than serve the wealthy"; it was not anti-competition to say that, without cooperation, competition might not lift us up, but pull us down. By 2015, all possible efforts must be made to meet Millennium Development Goals, he said, turning specifically to the need to meet the education target by the 2015 deadline. Today, 70 million children were not going to school. As part of the International Year, he added, "let us make this year work for the children of the world", by bringing them education in all parts of the world.

He recalled the inaugural address of the United States President John F. Kennedy, who had said that a torch had been passed to a new generation. "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country," he quoted, emphasizing that that sentiment was at the core of the cooperative movement. He further called for cooperation to lead to the fair sharing of resources

around the world. "Divided we shall surely fail, but united there is nothing we cannot do," he said, again quoting the inaugural speech. An interdependent world, ready to face global challenges together, was humanity's common destiny.

### Statements

MYAMARSUUREN BAYARMAGNAI, Director, Department of Light Industry, Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry of Mongolia, said that cooperatives, as economic enterprises and autonomous self-help organizations, played an important role in fostering inclusive and sustainable economic and social development, poverty reduction, employment generation and food security. They promoted democratic and human values and environmental sustainability, and promoted social integration, empowering the poor and marginalized groups. Particularly in developing countries, they contributed to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Since becoming a Member of the United Nations 50 years ago, Mongolia had been endeavouring to contribute to the international community's common efforts by initiating, among other resolutions, a text on cooperatives in social development. The International Year encouraged the growth and establishment of cooperatives worldwide, he said, and proposed the development of a road map to ensure that such growth continued beyond 2012. To that end, the Government of Mongolia co-sponsored an expert group meeting in Ulaanbaatar in May where, among other things, a draft plan of action beyond 2012 was discussed. Mongolia had also approved a national plan of action for the International Year.

Currently, some 2,400 cooperatives, representing associations of people united to meet common goals through jointly owned, democratically controlled enterprises, were successfully operating in processing raw materials; production; savings and credit; sale, supply and procurement; services; and housing construction, among other areas. He said that agricultural cooperatives supported the more 37.7 per cent of Mongolians who relied on agriculture.

JIM MCLAY ( New Zealand) said that compared with other countries, cooperatives served a relatively large part of the New Zealand economy. Cooperatives operated in many sectors, most notably agriculture, but also in areas such as banking, financial services and retailing. The earliest record of a New Zealand cooperative went back to 1871 with the formation of the Otago Cooperative Cheese Company. The general principles adopted by that cooperative were typical of those that had prevailed in cooperative societies and companies through to the present time. According to Bloomberg, New Zealand's largest business, Fonterra Cooperative Group Limited, was the world's largest dairy exporter, accounting for about 40 per cent of the global trade in butter, milk powder and cheese, selling products in 140 countries. The scale and diversity of New Zealand's cooperative sector meant that such structures played a key role in contributing to the achievement of the Government's economic objectives.

Internationally, New Zealand's aid programme recognized that, in appropriate circumstances, cooperatives, in their various forms, promoted economic and social development and contributed to the eradication of poverty. The programme worked with, and accommodated, different types of cooperatives as found in different countries, including the association of pearl businesses in the Cook Islands and tourism associations in Samoa.

He said that his country would play its part during the International Year, with the New Zealand Cooperatives Association coordinating its relevant programme. New Zealand is also intended to participate in a cooperative research conference in June 2012, focused on the development of education programmes for professionals, such as lawyers and accountants, and other public events. The Government had also agreed to fund a statistical project which aimed to estimate the contribution made by cooperatives to New Zealand's gross domestic product (GDP) and employment to provide better information for future policy development.

OTTO MIKKONEN, Industrial Counsellor, ( Finland) said that, as the Chairman of the Finnish Cooperative Council, he welcomed the initiative to make 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives. Those cooperatives could work to improve social integration and fight poverty, among other key goals. Through them, consumers could buy their clothes more cheaply at local stores, and microcredit could be made available. The cooperative model had proved successful in several developed countries, he noted, and Finland was often known as the "most cooperative" among them. Almost half of all daily goods in Finland were bought in cooperative stores and more than one third of bank deposits were

made into cooperative banks; more than 80 per cent of the rural population were members of cooperatives. However, even in Finland, the cooperative model was still relatively unknown to the public. The country was working to increase that awareness.

“Cooperatives are also used as a tool for training entrepreneurs”, he noted, adding that students under the cooperative system learned to build their business and marketing skills. The programme had also been exported to several other countries. Finally, he emphasized, cooperative business in Finland was just that — business. It was practical and pragmatic. In the early 1990s, the Government had started a project to promote cooperatives in Finland, which had been experiencing a difficult recession at the time. Forming cooperatives had provided needed services and acted as a tool for self-employment. Since that time, he said, the number of cooperatives in Finland had more than quadrupled.

SHATRUGHAN SINHA ( [India](#) ) said it was befitting that the United Nations was taking leadership in raising awareness about cooperatives as a progressive model of socio-economic advancement. Considering the role that cooperatives played the world over in bringing about social change, rural development and raising economic productivity, such global recognition was long overdue. The cooperative model of development had met with remarkable success in varied socio-economic contexts in both developed and developing countries.

Yet its true potential as a means of socio-economic organization remained to be fully harnessed and the model itself to be better understood by the larger global development community. Indeed, the space set aside for a cooperative or people-centred approach in the global development discourse thus far was limited. With that in mind, he recalled that it had long been said that in every crisis lay an opportunity. And in the wake of financial downturn and ongoing economic uncertainty, there was a strengthened push for financial inclusion, promoting social protection and empowering small and medium enterprises and marginal farmers to act as levers against economic shocks. That movement had given a boost to cooperatives as a viable choice for social and economic action. “We must fully capitalize on the situation,” he said.

He said that the decentralized nature of cooperative structures, based on popular participation and a bottom-up approach, made it an ideal platform for local action. Cooperatives had long contributed to ensuring economic productivity, rural development, promoting social empowerment and cohesion, opening marketing channels for village and artisanal produce, and providing credit and input support to farms, consumers and workers. Their catalytic role in national advancement, in developed and developing countries, had been well recognized. India’s experience with cooperatives had been singularly successful.

Given that almost 70 percent of its people were dependent on agriculture, it was natural that India’s cooperative movement had an agricultural bias, both in credit and non-credit segments. India’s national priority for poverty eradication, inclusive growth, women’s empowerment, and self-reliance underpinned the fundamentals of the Indian cooperative movement. He noted that in India, the State had played a strong role, and cooperatives were the lifeline of India’s white revolution with milk production, making the country the largest producer of milk in the world. There were other success stories from the cooperative sector in India, in banking, sugarcane farming, fishery, urban housing, and social welfare. Given India’s success, he had taken steps to integrate it into the planning and development process. “We are living in uncertain times [...] We are compelled to do more with less resource. How do we do it?” he asked. The answer was in the cooperative movement.

FRANCISCO JAVIER DE ANTUENO ( [Argentina](#) ) said that inclusion and social integration were the direct results of cooperative business models, which democratized the economy and put business at the service of humanity. Cooperatives also improved social sectors, which were frequently vulnerable, and fought poverty. Argentina had established a regulatory framework for cooperatives, which created more than 500,000 jobs in Argentina. Cooperatives were then organized into over 3,000 democratic institutions that helped to promote the values of solidarity and cooperation.

In Argentina, that transformation could be seen in the growth of social inclusion, he stressed, as well as the growing percentages of cooperatives in the labour, farming, banking and other sectors. His delegation hoped that the International Year of Cooperatives would help to raise the profile of the “greatest promoter of people” in agricultural development, he concluded.

NOA FURMAN ( [Israel](#)) said that Israel had been built on the foundation of strong cooperative movements. Two of the world's most significant and successful cooperative business models — the kibbutz and the moshav — had been created in Israel. Accounting for 90 per cent of the country's agricultural production and 15 per cent of its industrial production, Israel's cooperative enterprises were global leaders in development, production and marketing of technologies that had revolutionized agricultural production, particularly in the realm of irrigation.

Israel's cooperatives continued to be at the forefront of its social development, she continued. By allowing rural populations to achieve standards of living that ranked among the highest of any rural population, the movement had virtually eliminated rural poverty. Meanwhile, cooperative agriculture enterprises helped to guarantee food security for the rest of the country. Israel's cooperatives were independent and member-owned, and promoted community self-reliance, collaboration and cohesion. They had also been at the forefront of advancing gender equity in women's empowerment within Israeli society, he said; additionally, they were significant employers, providing not only jobs for their members, but also for hired labour.

KAZUO KODAMA ( [Japan](#)) said cooperatives first emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in Japan. Since 1900, when the Industrial Cooperative Law was enacted, agricultural producers (or farmers), forestry owners, fishermen, and consumers had organized cooperatives across the country. Recently, cooperatives in Japan had been stretching their roles in the public sphere, including in fields such as medical care, welfare and childcare assistance. Such expansion was in addition to carrying out their traditional roles in economic fields such as agriculture, forestry, fishery, and banking. At the international level, Japanese cooperatives had contributed to sustainable development in developing countries. One example was the Institute for the Development of Agricultural Cooperation in Asia, established in Tokyo in 1963, which had been operating with funds raised from agricultural cooperatives in Japan and also with the support of the Japanese Government.

The earthquake that had struck eastern Japan in March had provided an opportunity to renew the important roles that cooperatives could play in post-disaster recovery and reconstruction, as was mentioned in the Secretary-General's report on Cooperatives in social development. Although cooperatives, especially agricultural and fisheries cooperatives, had been severely impacted by the calamity, through the spirit of mutual help, cooperatives throughout Japan had carried out relief activities such as the provision of food, drugs, and other necessities. They had also helped with the distribution of medical doctors, nurses and volunteers to the devastated areas.

HERMAN SCHAPER ( [Netherlands](#)) said his country had a very strong history when it came to the cooperative movement. Some of the largest companies in the Netherlands were based on the cooperative model. Cooperatives were market leaders in several agricultural subsectors. Examples were the dairy company FrieslandCampina, the flower auction FloraHolland, and the cooperative bank Rabobank. Both large and small entrepreneurs and farmers were members of the same cooperatives, all benefitting from economies of scale.

In the context of the Netherlands' policy objective with respect to food security, the country supported a program called "Farmers Fighting Poverty". That 50 million euro programme was meant to strengthen organizations and cooperatives of farmers, men and woman. He said the programme was being implemented by Agriterra, an agency established by the cooperative and farmer's movement. Through that programme, the Dutch cooperative companies supported their partner organizations and cooperatives in developing countries.

The Greenery, a leading international fruit and vegetable supplier, successfully introduced Ugandan horticulturalist associations on the AGF Fair in Rotterdam to European buyers. He went on to note that the Dutch Cooperative CR Delta assisted Rwandese and Indian farmers in cattle improvement. Employees of FrieslandCampina supported local milk chilling cooperatives in Kenya in the establishment of processing facilities. Agriterra was a member of Agricord, a platform of agriculture-related agencies from Canada, Belgium, France, Sweden and had affiliated members from the farmers movement in Finland, Spain, Italy and Portugal as well.

JAKKRIT SRIVALI ( [Thailand](#)) said his country had long recognized that cooperatives were important partners in the implementation of the development agenda. Thailand firmly believed that sustainable development was a key foundation for durable peace. The development agenda must be people-centred, he said. In keeping with that policy, as well as to carry it out in the long term, he said that Thailand reiterated its firm belief that community-level ownership must be promoted and special

attention must be paid to empowering the impoverished and the marginalized. In that light, self-help groups such as cooperatives provided an economic and social space for communities, where the impoverished and the marginalized gained access and became part of the cooperative system, thereby gaining employment, raising income and reducing poverty.

As 2015 approached, he said his country's hopes to achieve Millennium Development Goals would need renewed attention and enhanced collective efforts. Thailand would need to enlist help from all actors and promote greater public participation, especially by the impoverished and the marginalized, in order to achieve development targets in a sustainable manner and look beyond 2015. He said Thailand firmly believed that cooperatives could contribute towards that goal. He urged all Member States to take this unique opportunity to rediscover cooperatives as important partners in the country's development agenda in 2012 and beyond.

JOÃO QUINTAES ( [Brazil](#)) said cooperatives could be found at the early stages of Brazilian history. The country's long, successful experience with cooperatives provided a good example of how local capacities could be harnessed when the adequate legal frameworks and public policies were put in place to foster the creation and development of such enterprises. Today, Brazilian cooperatives were responsible for a significant part of GDP growth, and had a considerable participation in the economy, especially in the agricultural and microfinancing sectors. They also presented impressive results in creating jobs, distributing income and allowing for a more equitable participation in decision-making processes at all levels.

Cooperatives also played a critical role in achieving and ensuring food security. Through the "Brazil With No Poverty" Plan, launched in June 2011, the Brazilian Government purchased corn seeds from agricultural cooperatives to be distributed to people living in extremely vulnerable situations in the rural areas. He said that Brazil was the first country in Latin America to have a credit union, and today, it ranked thirteenth among the world's countries in hosting financial cooperatives. They were responsible for 17 per cent of Brazil's bank branches and constituted an important tool for granting access to formal credit and for a more inclusive financial sector to populations underserved by traditional commercial institutions.

In addition to Government support, there were various actions that could be undertaken by the international community, in particular the United Nations system, in order to assist cooperatives to exploit their potentialities. The World Food Programme's Purchase for Progress initiative provided a good example of a set of actions guided by the spirit of the World Summit for Social Development. Through that initiative, WFP supported agricultural cooperatives by promoting their participation in the procurement of food. She said that other United Nations agencies, funds and programmes could consider replicating this experience by facilitating purchases from local cooperatives in country's programmes, especially in the least developed countries, and countries emerging from natural disasters and conflict.

VIOLA ONWULIRI ( [Nigeria](#)) said that the launching of the International Year of Cooperatives, following the proclamation of 2012 as the year for raising awareness on the capability of cooperatives was a seminal event, and a milestone that was critically important in addressing socio-economic well-being of all people. At a time of global financial crisis, food shortages, fluctuations in fuel supply and environmental degradation, it was becoming increasingly challenging for the public sector to provide all the resources and lead all initiatives for national socio-economic development. In such circumstances, many nations, especially developing countries, had been compelled to undergo major reforms to address a dwindling financial sector.

She said that the major focus was in pooling resources across all sectors to address key development questions. Nigeria appreciated the steps the United Nations took to ensure the success of 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives, particularly in the area of agricultural and small trade cooperatives. It was vital that the United Nations entities charged with the responsibility for vulnerable groups, including women, should find the adoption of effective cooperative strategies useful in discharging their own mandates.

In Nigeria, at the national level, umbrella organizations for cooperatives existed, including the National Association of Cooperative Credit Unions of Nigeria. President Goodluck Jonathan's "Transformation Agenda" aimed to build an inclusive society with job creation, inexpensive and long-term capital, establishment of microfinance, removal of barriers to increased productivity, as well as improvement on the environment for doing business. At the continental level, the African

Confederation of Cooperative Savings and Credit Associations was undertaking the responsibility for promoting and empowering cooperatives. For centuries, farmers and traders used cooperative societies to promote development. The International Year provided ample opportunity to promote that traditional practice, and if properly channelled, would contribute to a better world.

JOAN PLAISTED ( United States) said cooperatives played a role in the United States, in areas such as finance, rural electrification, housing, and retailing, among others. State and federal government had regulated cooperative enterprises, but knew that they served their member's interests. Revenue from cooperatives exceeded some \$230 billion per year. The Department of Agriculture had 80 years of experience of implementing cooperative programmes. Cooperatives were a cornerstone of business development, for example, in the biofuels industry, or providing day care in rural areas. Cooperatives provided rural residents with enhanced health care and products which allowed them to compete in today's world.

In addition to domestic cooperative programmes, she said the United States provided international development assistance in cooperation with development organizations, drawing upon cooperatives' experience in economic development programs. Some examples included creating an international credit union movement, with more than 72 million members, providing electricity in Bangladesh, or establishing an Indian farmers' fertilizer cooperative. The United States was happy to participate in the launch of this Year of Cooperatives, which she hoped would raise the awareness of cooperatives.

YEVHENII TSYMBALIUK ( Ukraine) said that cooperative movements in his country had a long history, dating back as early as 1870. Now Ukraine enjoyed a large and developed cooperative sector which was considered as an important factor of economic development. The nation's consumer, credit and agricultural cooperatives, and the products they produced, provided significant employment and social benefits. Suffice it to say that Ukraine's cooperative sector employed nearly 1.7 million people, many in rural areas, and accounted for more than 1 billion Ukrainian Hryvnia in budget revenues.

He said that the cooperative unions and the Government recognized the importance of the International Year, and said it would be an opportunity to spread cooperative values at the local level. In honour of the Year, cooperative unions and executive authorities considered plans for promotional and publicity events to increase awareness of the contribution of cooperatives to employment generation and socio-economic development. They included an official observance ceremony, a scientific conference on cooperative movement in Ukraine, a media campaign, various exhibitions, as well as contests and charity initiatives.

As Ukraine moved into the International Year, the Central Consumer Union of Ukraine sought to better integrate into the world cooperative community, including through applying for membership in the European Community of Consumer Cooperatives. During the Year, he said, States must seize the momentum to promote the central idea behind the cooperative movement, and to better address the needs of humanity and build a better world. For its part, Ukraine would actively endeavour to give concrete substance to the motto of the International Year — "Cooperative Enterprises: Build a Better World."

RODOLFO OROZCO ( Guatemala) referred to the early "pioneers" of the cooperative movement, and noted that his delegation was honoured to be in the Assembly Hall recognizing and paying tribute to them. In the International Year, Guatemala saw both a challenge and an opportunity to helping to continue the work of such cooperatives worldwide. Guatemala had co-sponsored the resolution on the International Year, he said, noting that the text recognized the work that the promoters of cooperatives had done in recent years. The more than 1.3 million cooperatives in Guatemala represented more than 5 million Guatemalans, he said. Through their philosophy, those groups had been able to develop the economy and provide livelihoods to their people. Additionally, many of the members of cooperatives were women.

Year by year, he continued, Guatemala was changing its traditional way of doing things. Men and women, young and old, indigenous and non-indigenous were now working together. They had demonstrated the ability to pool their efforts and resources and to compete with other types of businesses. Guatemalan cooperatives had become the major producers of coffee and the leading producers of organic cardamom. They also kept a close eye to the environment, and had planted millions of trees in the course of their work. Cooperatives had also discovered their capacity to enter into new areas of action, moving into the banking sector, creating rural women's groups, among

others. Moreover, he said, cooperatives were democratizing rural areas. Wealth was being distributed more horizontally as cooperatives gained greater influence. It was truly an “economy with a human face”, he concluded.

HUSSEIN HANIFF ( Malaysia) said it was undeniable that broader livelihood and ecological changes had taken place in the world community following the disruptions in the food circle and energy security. In addition, there was an emerging generation that used social media in a very essential way. They collaborated with one another through social media and were temperamentally predisposed toward working together and connecting with one another — aspects of cooperation that were essential to what Malaysia wanted to achieve. Joining those two factors, the International Year was a well-timed event.

The 1995 World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen stood as one of the major achievements of contemporary international governance as it had brought together Governments to reach a consensus on the need to put people at the centre of development. While there had been some progress on implementation of what was agreed at that meeting and its follow-up, such achievements remained hostage to contemporary instability. The purpose of development was to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy healthy, safe and creative lives.

He touched on questions related to youth, ageing and disabled persons, and said the success of a nation was reflected not only in economic terms but in social development. In Malaysia, youth made up 43 percent of the population, and the Government ensured the full range of necessary support systems to enhance their participation and empowerment. On the issue of ageing, he said Malaysia took proactive steps in improving the status of its older persons. The New National Policy and Plan of Action for the Older Persons were expected to be implemented by the end of 2011. Malaysia was of the view that it was important to promote healthy families, disease prevention, family planning, nutrition and child development programmes, as well as parenting skills. Investing in the well-being of the people was equivalent to the act of investing in the future well-being of all societies.

ABULKALAM ABDUL MOMEN ( Bangladesh) said that the cooperative movement in his country dated back to the time of British influence. In more recent years, it had expanded to more industries, including fishing, microfinance and the social sector. Moreover, the success of the country’s cooperatives following its 1971 independence had been possible thanks to State patronization. State-mandated cooperatives were listed as one of the three official modes of business ownership, along with public and private ownership. Additionally, several types of cooperatives existed in Bangladesh and “huge investments” had been made in each of them.

He went on to say that there were an estimated 163,000 cooperatives across the country with some 8.5 million members and a working capital of \$260 million. Moreover, there were 21 national cooperative societies. The Government had a separate department for cooperatives and specialized officers existed up to subdistrict level, and the creation of Bangladesh’s 2011 National Cooperative Policy was under way. A Government focal point had also been selected to promote and oversee the implementation of the International Year, he noted, adding that the Year would allow for stocktaking and provide an opportunity to chart the future course of action.

\* \* \* \* \*

---

**For information media • not an official record**