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the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly:**

**Priority Theme: Inclusive and resilient recovery from
COVID-19 for sustainable livelihoods, well-being, and
dignity for all: eradicating poverty and hunger in all its
forms and dimensions to achieve the 2030 Agenda**

Statement submitted by the International Cooperative Alliance, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.



Statement

Rebuilding forward better towards a humanized economy

The International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) is an independent, non-governmental organization established in 1895 to unite, represent and serve cooperatives worldwide. It provides a global voice and forum for knowledge, expertise and coordinated action for and about cooperatives. ICA's members are international and national cooperative organisations across 112 countries from all sectors of the economy, including agriculture, industry, services, banking, retail, fisheries, health, housing and insurance.

Almost 12% of humanity is a member of a cooperative. No matter their gender, social, racial, political, economic or religious status, people across the world decide to join a cooperative in order to take charge of their social and economic empowerment by realizing their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations. As businesses driven by values rather than profit, cooperatives share internationally agreed principles¹ and act together to build a better world through cooperation. Putting fairness, equality and social justice at the heart of the enterprise, cooperatives around the world provide an economic business model that allows people to take ownership and democratically control their businesses, generating long-term jobs and prosperity for the communities in which they are rooted.

One billion people are part of the Cooperative Movement across the world; consequently, cooperatives constitute key stakeholders and actors in ensuring the achievement of the Agenda 2030, leaving no one behind².

The 2021 Report of the UN Secretary General on Cooperatives in Social Development³ acknowledges the importance of cooperatives as key economic and social actors in the global recovery strategy, urging for action towards policy and programming actions, as well as the enforcement of legal frameworks that will allow cooperatives to thrive.

Cooperatives, an economic actor of resilience to crisis

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the deep inequalities and structural imbalances in our societies, leaving citizens, businesses and local communities in a rather vulnerable position. While five million people tragically lost their lives⁴ and health systems across the globe have been put to the test, economic activities came to a global standstill for long enough, pushing people into poverty.⁵

As stated by the UN Secretary General (July 2020), business as usual is not sustainable anymore and the world needs a new social contract⁶. Looking at the multi-faceted layers of inequality and the threat that is posed to the wellbeing, the livelihoods and the dignity of people across the globe, the cooperative movement has

¹ International Cooperative Alliance, 'Guidance Notes to the Co-operative Principles', 2015

² United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD), UN DESA 'Sustainable Development Goals Report', 2016

³ 2021 Report of the UN Secretary General on Cooperatives in Social Development, <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3936566?ln=en>

⁴ UN Secretary-General, 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/11/1104532>

⁵ Oxford economics (2020), Coronavirus is crushing world trade. Research Briefing

⁶ SG Speech: A New Social Contract for a New Era, 18 July

reflected deeply and has taken appropriate actions in rebuilding forward together, publishing some key documents in the process⁷.

For cooperatives, the potential to facilitate a just and fair transition and overcome the Covid-19 crisis is deeply embedded in the values and principles of their enterprise model. The concepts of cooperation, solidarity and socio-economic resilience have been rather prevalent in all cooperative actions throughout this pandemic, while the 6th principle “Cooperation amongst Cooperatives” and the 7th principle of “Concern for Community” have led the adaptation strategies of cooperatives across the globe.

While many health systems are collapsing or on the brink of collapse due to the severe health crisis and the growing needs, cooperatives in the healthcare sector have been endeavouring to redress this malfunctioning by showing that through the flexibility that cooperative structures provide, they are able to quickly respond both to the emerging needs of their patients but also to those of their staff⁸. Ensuring equitable access to care and improved quality of health services, cooperatives have proven to be a key actor “in re-orienting health care policies, so they are better prepared for future pandemics”^[6]

With respect to global supply chains, cooperatives have kept protecting smallholder farmers’ food production and keeping the food value chain alive through economies of scale besides the increasing demands from consumers. Being rooted at local level, cooperatives have managed to shorten supply chains by establishing direct purchasing lines between producer and consumer cooperatives, reducing the risk of inflated food prices. This positive output for the wellbeing of people can further lead to the transformation of economies in the medium to long term toward more sustainable production and consumption patterns aligned with SDG 12. In the same direction, synergies amongst the Cooperative movement and the Fairtrade movement have proven crucial in ensuring a fair recovery to those highly affected.

As far as the right to food is concerned, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately exacerbated hunger and food insecurity for the poorest and most vulnerable, especially for women and girls. The 22nd session of the UN Human Rights Council has strongly expressed the correlation between women’s rights and the right to food. Cooperative organizations have taken measures to ensure food security and access to food aid towards their members by setting up solidarity mechanisms to provide food to those at risk. Food banks and distribution of meals; provision of seeds and capacity building to grow food at home; as well as financial support towards vulnerable groups with the provision of access to local producer’s markets, are just a few examples on this front⁹.

Committed to “defend the basic principles of dignity and equality in the new and emerging forms of employment”¹⁰, cooperatives, as employers, have been taking action towards the increasing rates of domestic violence. “Globally, 243 million women and girls aged 15-49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence perpetrated by an intimate partner”¹¹. By providing legal support, material for awareness raising, direct referral information to appropriate services as well by

⁷ The documents include, inter alia, [The World Cooperative Monitor 2021](#), co-published by the ICA and EURICSE, the paper on [European Cooperatives and the Recovery](#) published by ICA European Region Cooperatives Europe (2020) and the recent [paper on Gender](#) produced by the Gender Equality Committee of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA, 2021)

⁸ Develtere P., Papoutsi G. & Moxom J., 2020, [Rebuilding and realizing a resilient global society through cooperatives](#)

⁹ Ditto 8

¹⁰ ICA, 2018, [Declaration on Decent Work and Against Harassment](#)

¹¹ UN WOMEN, 2020, [COVID-19 and ending violence against women and girls](#)

creating safe spaces of exchange and direct communication for women workers, cooperatives have shown the strength of solidarity that they uphold as business models that put people first.

Decent housing is another human right that has been put at risk during the pandemic due to loss of people's income. With homelessness increasing, a clear manifestation of poverty and the reproduction of inequalities, housing cooperatives have proved their importance in providing secure shelter for all due to security of tenure and affordability. A recent study¹² by [UrbaMonde](#) and [We Effect](#) highlights the resilience of community-led housing at times of crisis, while calling for an effective strategy to meet the needs of deprived communities by preventing commodification, gentrification and touristification of cities and ensuring the social function of land and housing.

In comparison to conventional businesses many of which have been bankrupt during this crisis and earlier ones, cooperatives have shown another strong characteristic of resilience through worker buy-outs. This solution manifests the capacity of a cooperative to maintain the jobs and the income of workers following the decline of an existing business, while ensuring ownership and democratic control. The continuation of existence for local business allows for further domestic resource mobilization at local level, allowing individuals to ensure their livelihoods and prosperity.

All those actions and swift responses of cooperatives and their organizations to the needs of people during this crisis to secure their livelihoods, wellbeing and dignity, would not be possible if cooperatives were not operating in a legal, regulatory and policy environment that is conducive to their promotion. Although many governments have adopted and enforced ILO Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 (n°.193), adequate legal and regulatory frameworks are still missing in many places at national and regional level, restricting cooperatives to reach their full potential as agents of social protection and resilience for a just and sustainable recovery¹³.

Recommendations

ICA calls on governments to implement the recommendations of the 2021 Report of the UN Secretary General on Cooperatives in Social Development and to take further concerted action and accelerate their commitment in realizing the Agenda 2030 and a new social contract by:

- Acknowledging the role of cooperatives as well as the importance of the cooperative identity (definition, principles and values) in a global strategy for a human-centred and environmentally just recovery
- Fostering a supportive and enabling environment for cooperatives by engaging them and their representative organizations in policy dialogue, acknowledging and addressing their specific business model based on the ICA Statement on the Cooperative Identity and their impact on local communities, including towards vulnerable groups.
- Financing technical assistance and capacity-building to support the development of adequate legal and regulatory frameworks for cooperatives to thrive while reforming regulatory frameworks to improve access to support or recovery funds issued by donors.

¹² UrbaMonde & We effect, 2021, [Community-led housing: a concrete response to COVID-19](#)

¹³ Ditto 4

- Adapting existing support instruments for the private sector on cooperatives that promote inclusion and promote cooperatives' role in the resilience, self-sustenance and sustainable development of local communities.
 - Promoting capital formation in cooperatives, and in particular provisions to facilitate the constitution of indivisible reserves (namely reserves that can never be redistributed to members even in case of dissolution).
 - Adopting a rights-based approach and advocating for the right to food to gain greater priority in global forums, supporting farmers in their endeavour to achieve food sovereignty and grant them greater voice and agency through cooperatives.
 - Financing technical assistance and capacity-building to support the organizational development of cooperatives.
 - Promoting and financing a gender transformative approach in their recovery actions ensuring equity for all, especially for women and girls, preventing and addressing gender-based violence and harassment in the world of work – ratifying ILO C190.
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