



**89th ICA International Co-operative Day
17th UN International Day of Cooperatives
2 July 2011**

“Youth, the future of co-operative enterprise”

The theme for the International Day of Co-operatives 2011 highlights how the co-operative model of enterprise can successfully empower youth. It links to the celebration of the United Nations International Year of Youth, which concludes in August 2011, just prior to the launch of the United Nations International Year of Co-operatives 2012. The Year of Youth encourages dialogue and understanding across generations and promotes the ideals of peace, respect for human rights and freedoms, and solidarity.

The International Day of Co-operatives addresses the need for all co-operative stakeholders to promote the participation of young people in the co-operative movement. Too often young people are not aware of the co-operative model of enterprise; they do not learn about co-operatives in school, as co-operatives often do not figure in school curricula. Young people also may not realise that the products and services they use are provided by co-operatives.

Yet, co-operatives provide young people opportunities that address their practical and strategic needs. They offer them a model of enterprise to create their own businesses. They offer the opportunities to be employed with enterprises that address young people's concerns for more democratic, responsible and ethical business operations.

At a time when social media connect young people to an extent never seen before, co-operatives are seeing unprecedented opportunities. The co-operative is a model that embodies collaborative forms of action so appealing to this emerging generation.

Co-operatives provide opportunities to young people to gain professional employment experiences, to further their education and provide capacity building, encourage participation in decision-making in co-operatives or form their own co-operatives.

ICA's engagement with youth is long-standing. The ICA Board co-opted its first youth representative in 2003 to participate fully in the discussions of the Board, and in 2008 the ICA formalised the election by the ICA General Assembly of a youth representative as a board member.

Additionally, ICA has an active Youth Network, which aims to:

- help young co-operators from different countries to connect and to share experiences and ideas;

- provide an environment where young co-operators can learn more about the wider co-operative movement;
- involve young people from outside the movement through education and support;
- empower young co-operators to engage with the rest of the movement to both raise the profile of youth issues and to ensure the youth perspective is presented during wider discussions.

As part of its priorities for the International Year of Co-operatives 2012, ICA seeks to engage greater numbers of youth in the co-operative movement. ICA is organising an artistic competition open to young adults all over the world with the purpose of promoting the values and principles of co-operation among the youth: the Coop'Art competition. Participants will be able to submit their projects through a dedicated webpage from November 2011 to May 2012 and the award ceremony will be held in Manchester in November 2012. Any person between 16 and 35 years-old can participate. There are three different categories for the competition: music, video and photography. The aim is to promote the principles of co-operation in a way attractive to young people to raise their awareness about the co-operative movement worldwide.

On this International Day of Co-operatives, the ICA calls on co-operators throughout the world to engage young people in the co-operative movement and to invest in their future leadership.