

Global Cooperation:

Turkey is site of International Cooperative Alliance biennial gathering

BY EMILY M LIPPOLD CHENEY

Since 1895, the cooperative movement has coordinated on a global scale through its apex organization, the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA). The ICA was in the first grouping of organizations to receive formal consultative status with the United Nations in 1945, during its inaugural year.

Presently, membership in the ICA comprises both cooperatives and cooperative support organizations from just shy of 100 countries. The nearly 300 ICA members represent an estimated one billion individual members throughout the world. The ICA brings its members together on a biennial basis for its Global Conference and General Assembly.

In 2015, the gathering was themed, “Towards 2020: What will your cooperative look like?” and was held outside Antalya, Turkey, in an all-inclusive beachside resort. The weeklong gathering covered a lengthy list of activities, including:

- The Global Conference, consisting largely of panel discussions organizing according to the pillars of the ICA’s *Cooperative Blueprint: Towards 2020* document (<http://s.coop/luxxo>), as well as keynote presentations from Yochai Benkler and Raj Patel
- Meetings of the ICA board, sectoral organizations (e.g., International Cooperative Agricultural Organization), thematic committees (e.g., Gender Equity), and networks (e.g., Global Youth Network);
- A gala dinner with local entertainment and the presentation of the Rochdale Pioneers award to outgoing ICA president, Dame Pauline Green, for her contributions to cooperative activities; and
- The General Assembly of the ICA, during which changes were made to governing documents, resolutions were considered, and the election of a new ICA resident was held.

There were several reports and tools presented during the course of the events in Antalya:

- World Cooperative Monitor: a tool detailing the financial strength of the world’s largest (in terms of revenue) 300 cooperatives;
- ICA Guidance Notes to the Cooperative Principles: a nearly 100-page report comprised of papers elaborating upon the philosophy and practice

- of each of the seven cooperative principles;
- Cooperative Governance Fit to Build Resilience in the Face of Complexity: a report looking at maintaining true member representation in cooperatives;
- Better World Now: a global video marketing campaign for cooperatives; and



ICA members represent an estimated one billion individual members throughout the world.

- Working Together: a collaboratively created and moving video telling the stories of youth-led worker cooperatives throughout the world.

From South Africa to Turkey

Attendance at the events varies over the years for reasons relating to location—impacted by the associated costs (e.g., lodging) as well as the area’s political and security context. In 2015, 1,052 people attended from 79 different countries, in contrast to almost double attendance numbers at the 2013 gathering in South Africa. Obstacles to attendance in 2015 included the high cost of resort accommodations, the migration crisis in the region, and related visa difficulties for some nationalities, as well as security concerns stemming from reports of ISIS militants in the area (related to the G20 meeting scheduled the following week at an adjacent resort).

The event attendees, by and large, resemble a conventional international



Photos by Emily M Lippold Cheney

business gathering, with most attendees being upper-level staff and board members from cooperative institutions with large budgets. This gap between those who can afford to attend and participate in the strategy setting and decision making and those who can't is a perennial problem in the ICA space, one that can seemingly only be solved by individual members. Countries that receive some form of government support for their movement (e.g., Italy), often bring more diverse delegations of attendees, while other countries simply prioritize sending more "grassroots" and less-wealthy cooperativists from their constituency (e.g., Argentina). While some grassroots cooperative movement members, such as youth and worker cooperative members, do attend, they are in the minority.

U.S. attendees represented National Co+op Grocers (NCG), National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA), US Federation of Worker Cooperatives, and the USA Cooperative Youth Council. Representatives from NCG and NCBA served on three separate panels, while the Cooperative Youth Council led a participatory session that resulted in a statement on "cooperative leadership" delivered to the conference's closing plenary (s.coop/antalyayouth2015). At the day-long convening of the Global Youth Network, one of the USACYC representatives was elected to its executive committee.

In previous years, NCBA has coordinated participation of the delegation, which usually included a joint gathering with the Canadian delegation. Likely due to recent leadership changes within NCBA, the U.S. attendees were not coordinated as a cohesive delegation with funding, leadership, or formal communication. The level of coordination among delegates varies across countries—some are highly organized and hold side meetings of their national delegates to

discuss and share voting responsibilities.

Presidential politics

Some of the dialogues that rose to the top of conference chatter were those relating to the election of a new ICA board president. Dame Pauline Green had chosen to retire earlier due to an inability to finance the travel and participation costs relating to serving in that role. The ICA, a dues-funded organization, operates on a "pay to play" model (i.e., ICA board members must be sponsored by an organization or cover their own costs of participation in governance). This presidential election was the first competitive election in decades, which partially reflects the power the cooperative movement has gained in recent years and the legitimacy Dame Green has brought to the position.

There were four candidates for president, three from the Americas and one from Europe. Monique Leroux, president and CEO of DesJardins Group (Canada)—the largest associations of credit unions in North America—won the election with 407 votes. Ariel Guarco, a farmer and the uncompensated president of Argentina's cooperative confederation, COOPERAR, received the second-most votes with 205. The other two candidates from Brazil and France received 64 and 66 votes, respectively.

Many framed the choice between the top two candidates as one of institutionalization and neoliberalism versus grassroots-led movement building. This framing was based on the interest of Leroux to coordinate more closely with organizations like the International Monetary Fund and G20, while Guarco's platform involved moving centralized resources in the ICA to its sectoral groups while focusing on empowering workers and youth. These distinctions highlight a tension within the broader cooperative

movement and the strategies put forth within the Blueprint.

While the vote was not very close, it is a remarkable showing for a progressive candidate like Guarco, considering the aforementioned demographics of those attending the ICA General Assembly and holding voting power in the election. His relative success is an indicator of a growing political will within the cooperative movement. For comparison, when Dame Green was elected, she represented a relatively moderate position as a former Member of Parliament in Great Britain as part of the Cooperative Party. As her tenure wore on, she did become more explicitly progressive—she named neoliberalism as a foe of cooperativism in her address to the Global Youth Network in Antalya. Both the USA Cooperative Youth Council and the US Federation of Worker Cooperatives publicly endorsed Guarco's candidacy. None of the other U.S. participating organizations made a public endorsement of a candidate.

Another dialogue that played a prominent role in some of the conference proceedings involved criticism of the Turkish government—specifically, its decades-long oppression of the Kurdish people and recent violent manipulation of the country's independent media reporters. When holding an ICA Global Conference in a given country, there is some level of partnership struck between the nation's government and the ICA—typically resulting in a government official providing a plenary address (e.g., Mexican President Calderon at the 2011 Cancun event). Turkey's President Erdogan was scheduled to address the conference, but the minister of economy was sent in his place.

During the minister's address, a dozen conference attendees participated in an intergenerational and youth-led walkout demonstration while holding signs with messages such as "Cooperation with the Kurds" and "Cooperation Not Coercion." A statement on the walkout has since been issued elaborating on the reasoning behind the action and levying a challenge to the ICA and cooperative movement to consider the political implications of partnering with certain nation-states (s.coop/rojava).

The more participatory, political, and action-oriented aspects of the 2015 ICA Global Conference and General Assembly were refreshing, particularly in comparison to some previous iterations in which the proceedings were more perfunctory. Using the ICA Blueprint to orient discussion drove conversation in a more strategic direction, while the keynotes were provocative and utilized a systems-thinking framework.

Both the election and opposition to the partnership with the Turkish government brought

Smooth.



Once Again Nut and Seed Butters are Non-GMO



Peanut Butter Power Smoothie Recipe found at www.OnceAgainNutButter.com/recipes



www.OnceAgainNutButter.com
(888) 800-8075



General Manager

New Leaf Market Co-op is looking to hire an energetic, experienced and creative General Manager to oversee our soon-to-be two-store operation on behalf of our 6,000 active owners. We project \$17 million in sales annually, and our existing store is one mile from the Florida Capitol in the progressive city of Tallahassee. The store has been the cornerstone of the city's food community for more than 41 years, featuring a large variety of local and organic produce as well as a full-service deli. We are a member of the NCG and the board operates under a policy governance model.

Please visit our website newleafmarket.coop/about/career-opportunities for more details.

to the fore broader issues of the meaning of “leadership” in the context of our cooperative values and “neutrality” in the face of injustice. The youth influence on the space resulted in the integration of direct democracy into a historically conventional conference format and a calling out of complacency within the movement.

Based on the outcomes of the gathering in Antalya, it seems apparent that the ICA and the global cooperative movement will need to become increasingly participatory, political, and action-oriented if we are to achieve the Blueprint goal of cooperatives being the “acknowledged leader in economic, social, and environmental sustainability” by 2020. The next ICA global gathering will take place in Malaysia in 2017. □