

Looking to the UN's International Year of Cooperatives

BY DAVID THOMPSON

When the president of the United Nations General Assembly invited Dame Pauline Green to come to the iconic green marble podium, a billion proud cooperators walked with her. As she spoke in her role as president of the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA), she made history. The leader of the world's cooperatives was finally speaking to the assembled nations.

We are all Pauline Green, people who aspire for a better world and pursue their dreams through cooperatives in every nook and cranny of the globe. It was Oct. 31, 2011, and the occasion was the United Nation's kickoff ceremony for 2012 to be the "International Year of Cooperatives."

Green spoke for many people of all races and creeds, for people from many nations. She spoke about cooperatives and the International Year of Cooperatives. She was followed by Gordon Brown, former prime minister of the United Kingdom, and then ambassadors from many countries, all heaping praise on the contribution of cooperatives to their countries.

The UN General Assembly then launched 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives. A proud group of U.S. cooperators, including Walden Swanson of CDS Consulting Co-op and Robynn Schrader of the National Cooperative



Peter Marks (left), CEO of the U.K.'s Co-operative Group, and Jean-Louis Bancel, president of Credit Cooperatif of France at the launch of Global Development Cooperative.

Grocers Association saw it all from the balcony of the General Assembly. For cooperatives and cooperators everywhere, the year ahead will surely be our year.

Global Development Cooperative launched

On the evening of Oct. 31, the ICA invited all the UN participants to a reception that heralded the launch of the **Global Development Cooperative** (GDC). The GDC intends to raise \$50 million, which will then be lent to cooperative enterprises throughout the world.

Keynoting the launch was ICA's Green, who said, "It (GDC) will ensure that a positive and long-lasting legacy will remain from the

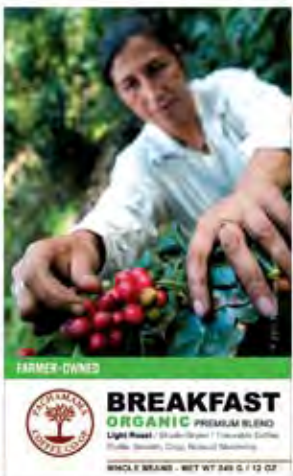
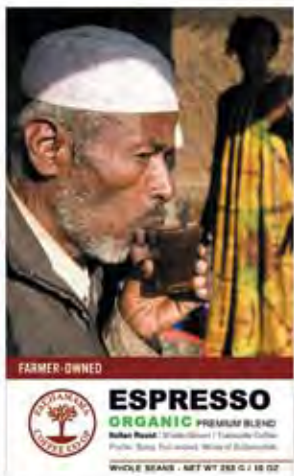
International Year, helping co-operators in the developing world. It will also continue our work to develop sustainable member-owned enterprises and embed civil society across the globe. We urge those with an interest in furthering social and economic development in developing countries to support the GDC."

Stepping forward immediately at the launch were Peter Marks, CEO, and Paul Flowers of the U.K.'s Co-operative Group and Jean-Louis Bancel, president of Credit Cooperatif of France. Both organizations committed \$250,000 each to the GDC. Other organizations looking at major commitments were Finland's S Group; IFFCO, the Indian Farmers' Fertilizer Cooperative; Chinese and Japanese cooperatives; Deutsche Bank; Rabobank; and Royal London Mutual Insurance.

Flowers, chair of Co-operative Financial Services (U.K.) has been appointed chair of GDC. Flowers's co-op has seconded Stuart Coe to GDC and committed to funding part of the startup, and the International Cooperative and Mutual Insurers Federation (ICMIF) will assist with the structuring of the program and the funds. GDC has a short, useful video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKtyhYke-f4.

Other major 2012 events

Imagine 2012, an International Conference on Cooperative Economics and International



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Summit of Cooperatives, will be held in Quebec, Canada, Oct. 6–11, 2012. Imagine 2012 is designed to bring together the leadership of the world's major cooperatives and economic thinkers. Imagine 2012 will provide a forum in which cooperative leaders and world-class economists can explore economic analysis that offers people around the world renewed hope for an economy that meets people's needs.

This will be followed by the 2012 **International Summit of Cooperatives** in Quebec on Oct. 8–11, hosted by Desjardins Group. Desjardins Group is the largest cooperative financial group in Canada and 6th largest in the world. Desjardins Group wants to provide cooperatives and mutuals with a forum where they can discuss their key business challenges and solutions that will promote their development, performance, and business model on the global political stage.

The closing event for the year will be held Oct. 31–Nov. 2, 2012 in Manchester, U.K. **ICA Expo 2012** is a key activity during the official closing of the International Year of Cooperatives. The trade fair unites co-ops from across the world to do business. The attendees hail from a diverse range of sectors and share a passion for the co-operative way of doing business.

The Manchester closing event will also see the grand opening of the Co-operative Group's new 20-acre "green" headquarters in Manchester and the newly reconstructed Pioneers Museum in Rochdale.

Let's use 2012, the United Nations' International Year of Cooperatives, to begin a "Decade of Cooperative Development." Let's get working. ■

For more events see <http://social.un.org/coopsyear>

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