

Opening Speech for the International Research Conference on Cooperatives and the World of Work

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Dear colleagues,

I would like to welcome you to Turkey and to the International Research Conference on Cooperatives and the World of Work as the Director of the Turkey Country Office for the ILO.

We are very happy to have this opportunity to host cooperative and world of work researchers from around the world and to benefit from their learning.

As many of you may know the International Labour Organization (ILO) is a specialized agency of the United Nations that is responsible for the world of work.

Our emphasis is the creation of decent work and the economic and working conditions that give working people and business people a stake in lasting peace, prosperity and progress.

When we talk of decent work at the ILO we mean rights at work, employment opportunities (not only more jobs, but also jobs with better terms and conditions), enhancing social protection and strengthening social dialogue on work-related issues.

Cooperatives are important to the ILO's mandate both as enterprises and organizations.

First, cooperatives are a part of the world of work as they are labour market institutions. They are private sector enterprises and also employers. They generate direct and indirect employment.

Second, as principle driven, member owned organizations cooperative values are conducive to advancing social, economic and environmental justice and workplace democracy.

I was encouraged to hear that the cooperative movement has adopted a Declaration at the International Summit of Cooperatives last year which includes a commitment on decent work.

Needless to say, at the ILO we welcome this commitment from the cooperative movement and look forward to working in advancing together in how cooperatives can and do contribute to more and better jobs.

This conference is indeed an important follow up to that commitment, which is in the realm of advancing the knowledge on the interface of cooperatives and world of work.

When I look at the programme of the research conference I am encouraged to see the strong emphasis on a number of issue areas ranging from cooperative and labour legislation, worker cooperatives, formalizing the informal economy and gender equality to sustainable development and future of work.

On the issue of cooperative and labour legislation: As a normative organization, the ILO has labour standards including a recommendation on the Promotion of Cooperatives, 2002 (No. 193). You may have seen as you are registering for the conference the ILO's cooperative legislative package which builds on Recommendation 193 and is intended for facilitating cooperative legislation reform that consists of cooperative. This package also aims to contribute to the legal framework pillar of the International Cooperative Alliance's Blueprint for a Co-operative Decade.

On the issue of the role of cooperatives in formalizing the informal economy: As you may know on June 12, 2015 ILO adopted a new Recommendation (No. 204) on transition from the informal to the formal economy at its International Labour Conference. This recommendation on transition from informal to the formal economy has three references to cooperatives identifying them as key pathways for the transition by creating economies of scale, allowing for representation and collective voice, and providing for social solidarity in communities. I see there are a range of papers on women's participation in cooperatives including from Turkey. And I think this topic is closely related to women's extensive involvement in the informal economy. This also reminds us the potential that cooperatives have in empowering women through generation of jobs for women from all segments of the society.

I think the numerous sessions on worker cooperatives reflect the rediscovery of worker cooperatives in responding to the crises – financial in nature or conflict or natural disaster related. We have seen community responses through cooperatives in the aftermath of the 1999 earthquake in Turkey. And we are looking into the possibility of utilizing cooperative strategies for resilience of refugee and host communities in our country.

I see the themes of innovation, sustainable development and future of work feature prominently in the programme of the conference. These are indeed topics close to the heart of the ILO's Director General as we approach the centenary of the organization in 2019.

In this context we are keen to gain a better understanding as to how cooperatives are faring in a changing world of work as generators of employment and income opportunities. In my opinion any discussion on cooperative advantage in a changing world of work has to focus on social and organizational innovation and their manifestations and will need to move beyond the role of technology and sectoral innovations like (renewable energy or care cooperatives).

With a total membership of 8,1 million people, organized in more than 84,000 cooperatives, functioning in 25 different sectors, cooperatives comprise the largest and strongest pillar of the

social economy in Turkey. We believe, with their strong potential in creation of decent jobs particularly for women and democratic management structure cooperatives can be an important player in the world of work. In this respect, their role in strengthening gender equality and empowerment of women is of crucial importance in Turkey.

I welcome the news that ILO and ICA CCR will have a specific volume from the conference. I also am happy to know that the International Labour Review, the multidisciplinary journal of labour market institutions and economics, will have a special issue dedicated to cooperatives and the world of work (currently scheduled as the third issue of 2017).

I know that our DG and his senior leadership who will be in Antalya later this week for the G20 leadership summit are looking forward to the priority action areas you will identify out of this conference to feed into the joint workplan of the ILO and the Alliance having only signed anew partnership agreement at the end of June this year that aims to contribute to sustainable development by promoting the role of cooperative enterprises in the context of the post-2015 development agenda. We will continue to closely follow up developments and provide our support to new initiatives to strengthen the role of cooperatives in the world of work.

I wish you all a successful conference and hope you will also take some time off from your deliberations to enjoy the beautiful city of Antalya and its environs.

Thank you.