

**COOPERATIVE FORUM ON
“ROLE OF CO-OPERATIVES IN TIMES OF NATURAL DISASTER”**

Theme: Cooperatives Build a Secured Society

Inaugural Remarks by Mr José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs

Executive Director, Employment Sector, ILO

at the 10th International Cooperative Alliance (ICA)

Asia-Pacific Regional Assembly,

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1. Dame Pauline Green, President of the ICA
2. Mr. Li Chunsheng, President of the ICA for Asia-Pacific
3. Mr. Akira Banzai, Chairman of the Japan Joint Committee of Cooperatives (JJC)
4. Mr. Tsuyoshi Saito, Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, Government of Japan
5. Mr. Toshizo Ido, Governor of Hyogo Prefecture
6. Mr. Tatsuo Yada, Mayor of Kobe City

Fellow Cooperators

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good Morning.

Thank you for your invitation to be with you this morning. I am very happy to be here with you and in the city of Kobe on the occasion of the 10th ICA-Asia-Pacific Regional Assembly and the 7th Cooperative Forum.

I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Dame Pauline Green, as the leader of this remarkable global movement, for the successes achieved in bringing cooperatives to the forefront at the international, regional and national arenas during this dynamic United Nations International Year of Cooperatives.

Our presence in Kobe is full of deep significance. The theme of 10th Regional Assembly, “Cooperatives Build a Secured Society”, and the focus on the “Role of Cooperatives in Times of Natural Disaster”, resonate strongly in a city and a country affected recently by several serious and painful natural disasters. And the cooperative spirit is particularly strong in this remarkable city. The great cooperator, Toyohiko Kagawa was born here. And another great cooperator, the first ILO Director General Albert Thomas, twice visited Kobe and its cooperative movement in 1928, starting the long tradition of strong partnership between the ILO and the cooperative movement.

After the Great Hanshin Earthquake on January 17th of 1995 the people and institutions of Kobe provided many lessons to the international community on how to respond to Natural Disasters and to secure society. And this was recognized in January 2005 when, in the wake of the Indian Ocean Tsunami, world leaders adopted here the “*Hyogo Framework of Action*”, the set of universal principles

and means of action which orient the efforts to build up societies more resilient to Natural Disasters through the promotion of Disaster Risk Reduction.

In the ILO we are very pleased to be associated with this process through the International Recovery Platform, whose secretariat is hosted by Kobe. The ILO is actively involved in the development and implementation of National Frameworks in all dimensions of Disaster Risk Reduction: **disaster prevention; disaster preparedness, and climate change adaptation.**

A report of the Asian Development Bank published this month mentions that people in the Asia Pacific region are “4 times more likely to be affected by natural disasters than Africa and 25 times more than Europe or North America” and argues that economic progress risks being seriously undermined by the rising number of floods, landslides and other natural disasters hitting the region. It is therefore quite appropriate that crisis mitigation and crisis response preparedness have become a first priority for the region and the cooperative movement has a fundamental stake in it.

We all remember how cooperatives were heavily affected by the 2005 Kobe earthquake: damages and losses were estimated at around JPY 50 billion. Cooperatives were particularly efficient in resuming activity. Their members initiated mutual help and volunteered to assist victims to supply basic goods (like food, water and blankets) and services to the homeless.

We all have recent memories of the tragic East Japan earthquake and tsunami of March 2011. On this occasion Japanese cooperatives, once more, promptly mobilized to support the victims with food, energy and care for self-sufficiency in the affected communities.

Cooperatives have a clear comparative advantage in crisis response.

- The cooperative value of **solidarity**, gives the cooperative movement a fundamental role to play in the post disaster **humanitarian response**,
- The cooperative values of **social responsibility and caring for others** enable cooperatives to provide solid social protection that **mitigates crises impact** on the most vulnerable groups,
- The **educational capacities** are also a powerful channel to promote and implement crisis **prevention and disaster risk reduction**, and
- Thanks to strong **organizational capacities** and proximity to the communities cooperatives are very well placed to build **preparedness** for further response.

More generally, because of their values and their widespread presence and diversification across sectors, cooperatives are very well placed to strengthen human security in all its dimensions. Agricultural cooperatives tackle food security problems. Housing cooperatives provide affordable and quality housing for their members. Financial cooperatives promote financial inclusion and are resilient during financial and economic crisis while other financial institutions struggle to survive. Health, education and insurance cooperatives are booming in ageing societies providing key services to the growing elderly populations. For instance, here in Japan, cooperatives are providing mobile shopping and meal delivery services as part of co-op's life support and welfare activities for the elderly who live alone.

Last but not least, consumer cooperatives exist in 124 countries, they set standards for consumer protection and for protection of the environment. Japan has a very large and well-developed consumer cooperative movement with over 14 million members. In understand that Co-op Kobe (コープこうべ) right here in the Hyōgo Prefecture is the largest retail cooperative in Japan and, with over 1.2 million members, and one of the largest cooperatives in the world.

An upcoming ILO publication, due for dissemination in early 2013, documents the success of financial cooperatives. We have published a paper documenting the experience of the Rokin Bank and earlier this week I had a session at the Bank to discuss the paper and the role of workers' cooperatives. The ILO regularly commissions research on cooperatives and works on the improvement of cooperative statistics as gathered by national statistics offices.

Cooperative services are also rapidly expanding into new and innovative areas from rural tourism to nano-technology, from recycling to renewable energy.

And cooperatives are playing a key role in the world of work, promoting more and better jobs for young people, for women, for workers in the informal economies, where workers in a range of activities from waste-pickers to street vendors and domestic workers are setting up their own cooperatives, allowing them collective voice and negotiating power with suppliers, clients and local governments.

The United Nations International Plan of Action that was introduced at the UN International Year of Cooperatives closing ceremony in New York outlines how the key UN agencies envision following up on enhancing the existing role of cooperatives to reach their potential in the years to come. In our respective institutions within the UN, we have our strategies as well. In the ILO, we have the

cooperative strategy for 2013-15 where we point out how we plan to address the multiple outcomes and priority areas of our institution from youth employment to informal economy through cooperatives.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ability of cooperatives to serve their members' needs toward securing societies cannot be achieved without an enabling legislative and policy environment. The normative framework at the international level is provided by the ILO's Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation, 2002 (No. 193) which celebrates its 10th anniversary this year.

We are pleased to report that in the last decade, the recommendation has inspired more than 70 countries to change their policies and legislation with the technical support and policy advice of the ILO. All cooperative laws adopted since have increased cooperative autonomy and self-reliance. The Recommendation itself has been translated into 34 languages, including Japanese. A third expanded and updated edition of the ILO's Guidelines on Cooperative Legislation will be available next month in English.

Cooperatives are everywhere we look. In this great city of Kobe, we can't help but be amazed and inspired by the great efforts and endeavors that cooperatives have contributed to in achieving successful recovery and building resilience.

Cooperatives in the Asia-Pacific region have been in the forefront of making societies more resilient across the dimensions of human security. Their exemplary adaptability, longevity, and breadth are testament to the sustainability of the cooperative business model.

Thank you and I wish you very fruitful deliberations in your meetings.