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Press Release

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UNITED NATIONS DECLARES 2012 INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF COOPERATIVES

NEW YORK, 21 December (Department of Economic and Social Affairs) -- The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives, highlighting the contribution of cooperatives to socio-economic development. In adopting resolution 64/136 on 18 December, the Assembly noted that cooperatives impact poverty reduction, employment generation and social integration.

A cooperative is an autonomous voluntary association of people who unite to meet common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations, through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. In general, they contribute to socio-economic development.

As self-help organizations that meet the needs of their members, cooperatives assist in generating employment and incomes throughout local communities. Cooperatives provide opportunities for social inclusion. In the informal economy, workers have formed shared service cooperatives and associations to assist in their self-employment. In rural areas, savings and credit cooperatives provide access to banking services that are lacking in many communities and finance the formation of small and micro businesses, promotes inclusive finance.

The cooperative sector worldwide has about 800 million members in over 100 countries and is estimated to account for more than 100 million jobs around the world. The strength and reach of cooperatives are illustrated in the following examples:

- under the umbrella of the World Council of Credit Unions, 49,000 credit unions serve 177 million members in 96 countries, and 4,200 banks under the European Association of Cooperative Banks serve 149 million clients;
- agricultural cooperatives account for 80 to 99 per cent of milk production in Norway, New Zealand and the United States; 71 per cent of fishery production in the Republic of Korea; and 40 per cent of agriculture in Brazil;
- electric cooperatives play a key role in rural areas. In Bangladesh, rural electric cooperatives serve 28 million people. In the United States, 900 rural electric cooperatives serve 37 million people and own almost half of the electric distribution lines in the country.

International Years are declared by the United Nations to draw attention to major issues and encourage action. To commemorate the Year, regional conferences will raise awareness of cooperatives and seek ways to leverage their contribution to socio-economic development and foster regulatory frameworks. A research agenda will be proposed and Member States are to form national committees that will serve as focal points for the Year's activities.

For more information, contact the Department of Economic and Social Affairs focal point on cooperatives, Felice Llamas, llamas@un.org, +1 212 963 2924.

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