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International Women's Day – 8 March 2005 “Gender Equality Beyond 2005: Building a More Secure Future”

International Women's Day has become a day to reflect on the situation of our world from a gender perspective. This year we celebrate under the theme, “Gender Equality Beyond 2005: Building a More Secure Future”. The theme recognises the close relationship between gender equality, security and development and stresses reducing poverty, protecting human rights and investing in sustainable development as keys to empowering women. It also emphasises that pursuing the goal of gender equality is integral to building a more secure and sustainable future.

A more secure future is the dream for millions of people around the world that ask what can they do to build a better future for themselves and for future generations. The uncertainties in our world destroy our sense of security and make us less trusting of what lies in the future. To ensure security for all we must not only eradicate war, conflict situation and poverty, but also tyranny and discrimination in all forms as these are often the roots of malaise in our world. Here, women and children are the main victims. We must work towards a culture of peace to fight insecurity and promote respect for diversity.

A first and main step to achieve the above is to fight discrimination at all levels, starting from discrimination against women in the family, in the workplace, in business and at a political level, in society as a whole. By doing this, we can lay the foundations to build a more secure future for all. It is for this reason that gender equality must become a responsibility of every international institution, every government, every business, every family and individual.

The ICA and its Gender Equality Committee acknowledge that advances have been made in women's rights, and in their increased participation in the economic, social and cultural life of societies in many parts of the world. Within the co-operative movement, the ICA Global Gender Strategy and the regional platforms have made considerable inroads in creating awareness and creating conditions for moving towards gender equality, increasing women's participation in co-operatives and their decision-making structures. However, we must also recognise that still much remains to be done.

Over and over the international community has demonstrated the importance of women's participation in successful initiatives to fight against poverty, to mitigate the spread of HIV/AIDS, to improve the destiny of children, and to make the world a better and more peaceful place. Within our movement, we have seen that women's empowerment is moving co-operatives into new areas of activity and co-operatives that have been most proactive are seeing the return on their investments both economically and socially. Gender equality in co-operatives is contributing to making our enterprises more sustainable and successful, more able to address the changing needs our members and creating economic security. We are convinced that working towards creating a better world is possible only if an approach of increased Co-operation can take root and grow with women playing a major role.

Today, we call on ICA members and co-operators around the world to continue to work towards giving women the opportunities to enable them to make a difference in our co-operatives and communities. ICA appeals to all its members to fully act according to the spirit of promoting gender equality to build a more secure future for all.

Ivano Barberini
ICA President

Vanda Giuliano
ICA Gender Equality Committee