

UN declares 2012 International Year of Co-operatives

Josep A. Pérez

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2012 as the International Year of Co-operatives, highlighting their contribution to the socio-economic development of the population. With this declaration, which was approved in Resolution 64/136 of 18 December, the United Nations is acknowledging the impact that co-operatives have on poverty reduction, employment generation and social integration.

The resolution, which was supported by 55 UN member states, calls upon governments and international institutions to support and foster the development and growth of co-operatives throughout the world and calls upon them to review their laws on co-operatives in order to guarantee their growth and sustainability.

Together with the international co-operative movement, the United Nations invites governments to “develop programmes aimed at enhancing capacity-building of co-operatives, including by strengthening the organizational, management and financial skills of their members, and to introduce and support programmes to improve the access of co-operatives to new technologies”.

The United Nations defines the co-operative as 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.

Currently, the co-operative sector is made up of nearly 800 million people from more than 100 countries and it is estimated to provide more than 100 million jobs. A 2008 report by the International Co-operative Alliance states that the three hundred most important co-operatives in the world have a turnover of 1.1 billion dollars, which is similar to the turnover of the entire Spanish economy.

The purpose of International Years declared by the UN is to draw attention to major international issues and encourage action. To commemorate the International Year of Co-operatives, international and regional conferences will be held and national programmes will be established to foster and develop co-operatives.

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Lecture at the University of Barcelona

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Dr. Ferran Sabaté, Professor of History of Medicine at the Faculty of Medicine of the University of Barcelona, invited Dr. Gerard Martí, trustee of the Espriu Foundation and Deputy Medical Director of the Hospital de Barcelona to give a lecture at the school on 16 December 2009.

The lecture, which was held as part of the study of the History of Medicine, covered the Espriu health care model and its evolution since its origins in medical insurance groups called *igualatorios* to its current form as a co-operative business group.

Dr. Martí explained the nature of the health co-operative movement in detail and placed it within the context of today's health care systems as a real system that is consolidated in our immediate environment. He outlined the main characteristics and gave a brief historical description, focusing on the figure of its promoter, Dr. Espriu.

The audiovisual presentation “The Right to Medicine in Freedom”, a documentary that covers the life and work of Dr. Espriu in homage to him, was also shown.

Finally, Dr. Martí spoke about the current situation of Health Co-operatives, describing their organizational model and socially-oriented business culture.



Dr. Gerard Martí during his lecture