

Director General of the International Cooperative Alliance Bruno Roelants
Intervention at the Committee of the Whole
Regarding the Centenary Declaration

Mister Chair, ladies Vice Chairs, delegates,

For almost two centuries, cooperatives have been growing steadily. Today, they are 3 million enterprises, they have 1.2 billion members and they provide employment to 10% of the world's employed population, without counting indirect employment. **The contribution of cooperatives to the GDP of the 10 largest economies is equivalent to the GDP of Italy.**

At the same time, the employment which cooperatives generate tends to last longer, and is better balanced between rural and urban areas, than the average. Cooperatives respond to people's basic needs (work, production, housing, health) while empowering them through democratic enterprises. At one end they help poor and marginalized people and communities be lifted out of informality, as recognized by ILO Recommendation 204. At the other end, they keep innovating in the world of work, like in the new freelancers' cooperatives, community cooperatives and cooperative platforms. They have an important clustering role for SMEs, as recognized by the ILO Resolution concerning SMEs. at the same time they have signed up to all the major labour standards through ILO Promotion of Cooperatives Recommendation 193.

While we fully support the Declaration, **especially its human-centred approach**, we consider that cooperatives' contribution to the future of work should be explicitly mentioned in it, as they are in the final report of the Global Commission on the Future of Work. **We think that the wider social and solidarity economy, of which cooperatives are the central pillar, could also be mentioned, provided cooperatives are mentioned in the first place.**

The International Cooperative Alliance has been cooperating continuously with the ILO since the organization's establishment one century ago. **For all that time, the ILO has had a cooperative branch.** On 24 June, just after the ILC, we will have a joint Conference on the Future of Work, where we will be celebrating this century of common work while looking resolutely towards the future.

Mr Chair, looking at their trajectories for almost 2 centuries, their very significant quantitative and qualitative importance today, and their still

untapped potential, cooperatives are bound to constitute a very substantial part of the future of work, and they will promote decent work as defined by the ILO. **We will be able to promote them better if they are mentioned in the declaration.**