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ICA GLOBAL CONFERENCE & ASSEMBLIES

Building bridges: cooperative
contributions for a peaceful world

The Panama Declaration

Panama, 17 September 2026

THE PANAMA DECLARATION

Building Bridges: Cooperative Contributions for a Peaceful World

Adopted by the International Cooperative Alliance Global Cooperative Conference in Panama City, Panama, on 17 September 2026

PREAMBLE

We, the participants and representatives of the global cooperative movement gathered in Panama, reaffirm our conviction that cooperation is a powerful force for peace, justice, democracy, inclusion, solidarity and shared prosperity.

We are a movement rooted in communities and connected across countries, regions, sectors and generations. Through millions of cooperatives, people come together to create economic, social, cultural and environmental value; improving the lives of members, strengthening communities, contributing to national and regional development, and collectively creating global impact. Rooted in local communities and connected through a global movement, cooperatives turn local action into global impact.

It is gratifying to see our members, partners, governments, international organisations and all participants gathered in Panama coming together to address this urgent matter and, importantly, to commit to turning reflection into action.

At this critical moment in human history, respect for the rule of law and international law is more important than ever. The erosion of the rule of law, disregard for international obligations and the weakening of democratic institutions have contributed to instability, conflict, violence and chaos in many parts of the world. We reaffirm the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, including the commitment to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, to settle disputes by peaceful means, and to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. We call on all countries to honour their obligations under the UN Charter and uphold international law consistently and universally, recognising that lasting peace, security and sustainable development cannot be achieved where the rule of law is weakened, international commitments are disregarded, or accountability is absent.

We recall the UN General Assembly's 2025 proclamation of the **International Year of Peace and Trust**, calling on the international community to promote peace and trust through political dialogue, mutual understanding and cooperation, and to strengthen the foundations of sustainable peace, solidarity and harmony. The proclamation was an important reminder of the urgency of the peace agenda. As we gather in Panama, however, the persistence and escalation of conflicts and other threats to human security make that call no less relevant; rather, they demand renewed commitment and action.

Our commitment builds on a long cooperative tradition. The ICA has addressed peace since its early Congresses, including the **1901 Manchester Resolution** on Peace and the **1913 Glasgow Resolution**, which recognised that organising social and economic life according to cooperative principles could help bring an end to international conflict. The ICA's 1939 declaration on the eve of World War II affirmed that **"Peace, Freedom and Cooperation are indivisible,"** while the 2006 ICA declaration recognised that cooperatives promote the cause of peace. In 2019, the ICA General Assembly in Kigali adopted the **Declaration on Positive Peace through Cooperatives**, calling on the movement to deepen its commitment and action for positive peace.

1. A WORLD AT A CROSSROADS

We meet at a time of profound global uncertainty and unprecedented challenges to peace. Wars and armed conflicts continue to cause death, destruction and displacement. Climate change and environmental degradation threaten livelihoods, communities and the future of our planet. Poverty and inequality persist and, in many societies, economic and political power is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few. Authoritarianism and the weakening of democratic institutions are eroding participation, accountability and trust, while shrinking civic space limits the ability of people and civil society to organise, speak and participate in decisions that affect their lives.

Rapid advances in artificial intelligence and other technologies bring enormous possibilities but also raise fundamental questions about who controls these technologies, who benefits from them, their environmental cost and their impact on work, livelihoods and human dignity. The prospect of widespread displacement of workers by machines, if not accompanied by appropriate policies and safeguards, risks deepening existing inequalities. At the same time, migration and displacement are increasing, driven by conflict, poverty, food insecurity, inequality and the effects of climate change.

As Pope Francis warned, we are witnessing a **“Third World War fought piecemeal.”** These realities compel us to acknowledge that, despite decades of international commitments to peace, development and human rights, we have not been sufficiently successful in achieving the objectives set by the international community.

While the cumulative crises facing the world may tempt us towards despair, complacency or inaction, the cooperative movement must instead see them as an opportunity to build more just, resilient and peaceful societies. The growing population of young people across the world represents a powerful source of energy, creativity and hope. Digital technologies have expanded access to information and knowledge, enabling people to connect, organise and participate in ways previously unimaginable. Advances in science, medicine and innovation offer new possibilities to address disease, improve health and respond to emergencies. Across the world, communities continue to demonstrate solidarity, resilience and creativity in the face of adversity, reminding us that even in times of crisis, people have the capacity to come together, find solutions and build a better future.

As we affirmed in the **2019 ICA Declaration on Positive Peace**, peace must not be understood simply as the absence of war. We must also address the conditions that allow tension, exclusion, injustice and conflict to take root and flourish. These realities call for cooperation rather than greater division, dialogue rather than confrontation, solidarity rather than exclusion, and collective action rather than fragmentation.

2. WHY PEACE MUST BE A PRIORITY

Positive peace means creating societies where people can live with dignity, justice, equality, security and opportunity; where differences are addressed through dialogue; where people meaningfully participate in decisions that affect their lives; and where communities are built on trust and solidarity. Achieving this requires addressing not only the immediate causes of violence and conflict, but also the root causes and structural conditions that allow conflict to emerge and persist, including poverty and inequality, exclusion and discrimination, lack of meaningful participation, weak and unaccountable institutions, violations of human rights, economic and political marginalisation and environmental pressures that undermine livelihoods and security.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development placed five interconnected dimensions at the heart of sustainable development: **People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships**. These Five Ps are inseparable: there can be no lasting peace without justice and inclusion, no shared prosperity without empowered people,

and no sustainable future without protecting the planet; and none of these can be achieved without genuine partnerships.

Peace is therefore not a separate objective to be pursued after development, nor something to be addressed only when conflict erupts. Peace is a foundation for sustainable development and a condition for achieving the entire 2030 Agenda. We therefore see the development of a peace economy as an essential part of positive peace: an economy that invests in dignified lives and livelihoods, reduces inequalities, expands meaningful participation, strengthens social and economic inclusion, builds trust and resilience and directs resources towards sustainable development rather than the drivers and consequences of conflict. Peacebuilding and cooperation must therefore be a priority for everyone: governments, the United Nations and other international and regional institutions, civil society, the private sector and the cooperative movement.

The cooperative movement has a particular responsibility and opportunity to help build such a peace economy. By bringing people together, expanding economic participation and ownership, creating livelihoods, promoting social justice and inclusion, strengthening local economies, building resilient communities and creating pathways for dialogue and solidarity, cooperatives can address many social and economic conditions in which conflict and division flourish. Working in partnership with governments, the United Nations, civil society, peacebuilding organisations and other stakeholders, cooperatives can help move from conflict prevention to peacebuilding, recovery and long-term development. Peace begins where people are empowered, communities are included, institutions are trusted, economic opportunities are fairly shared and societies work together for the common good.

3. COOPERATIVES: BUILDING POSITIVE PEACE

We affirm that **cooperatives are builders of positive peace**, rooted in our **Cooperative Identity** and guided by the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, solidarity, social responsibility and supporting the well-being of the community.

The seven Cooperative Principles provide the foundation and translate these values into action: **open and voluntary membership** promotes inclusion by bringing diverse people into one movement; **democratic member control** gives people voice and demonstrates that shared decisions can be made through participation rather than domination; **member economic participation** creates empowerment, livelihoods and shared prosperity; **autonomy and independence** safeguard member control; **education, training and information** empower people and build knowledge and understanding across generations; **cooperation among cooperatives** turns solidarity into collective strength across sectors, countries and regions; and **concern for community** connects cooperative success to wider social and environmental wellbeing.

These principles are more than rules for cooperative enterprise. They are practices that build trust, participation, solidarity, inclusion and resilience, the foundations of positive peace. Through their market-based, people-centred model, cooperatives create pathways to a peace economy by generating employment and livelihoods, promoting economic empowerment and inclusion, strengthening social cohesion and justice, providing essential goods and services, widening participation in economic life and supporting communities in times of crisis and recovery. Leadership is essential to turning these principles into action, with cooperative leaders at all levels leading by example, fostering dialogue, inclusion, integrity and accountability, empowering young people and women, building partnerships across generations and communities, and using their influence to advance peacebuilding, conflict prevention, reconciliation and sustainable development. Through responsible, values-based and purposeful leadership, cooperatives can translate their principles into practical action and become stronger agents of positive peace.

Our alpha is our Cooperative Identity - who we are, what we believe, and how we act. **Our omega is our vision for growth** and a strong, resilient cooperative economy that continuously expands its contribution to people, communities, society and the planet. Rooted in local communities yet connected nationally, regionally and globally, cooperatives provide solutions where people live and work, while the cooperative movement connects, amplifies and scales these efforts. Millions of local actions, united through a global movement, can become a powerful force for positive peace and lasting impact. We therefore seek to significantly grow the cooperative economy, working towards doubling its size by 2035 and expanding its economic, social and environmental impact for billions of people.

Cooperatives are equalizers: they can reduce development gaps by enabling people to participate in economic life, access collective solutions to their needs and share more fairly in the benefits of economic activity, including in partnership with governments according to the principle of subsidiarity. This makes the cooperative economy a practical vehicle for building a peace economy, one that places people, communities and the planet at the centre of economic development and helps address inequalities and exclusion that can become triggers of conflict. Cooperative practice is, above all, a cultural model, and we seek to strengthen a culture of cooperation worldwide because peace is built through cooperation.

We remain true to the **ICA Statement on Cooperative Identity** and to the values and principles that guide our movement.

4. FROM PRINCIPLES TO ACTION: PRACTICE, PROMOTE, PROTECT

The ICA Strategy 2026–2030 provides the framework for turning this commitment into action.

PRACTICE

We will put our values and principles into practice by promoting the welfare of members and communities, strengthening democratic and inclusive governance, advancing decent work and economic empowerment, promoting social cohesion and justice and protecting people and the planet.

We will integrate peacebuilding into cooperative action by supporting dialogue, inclusion, resilience, conflict prevention, conflict resolution, recovery and community-led solutions. Through initiatives such as the **Cooperatives and Mutuals Leadership Circle (CM50)**, which brings cooperative leaders together around shared priorities, and the **International Cooperative Entrepreneurship Think Tank (ICETT)**, alongside the work of the **ICA Youth and Gender Committees** to advance youth-led and women's-led cooperative entrepreneurship, we will strengthen intercooperation, generate evidence and data, and support informed policy and advocacy. In particular, these efforts will contribute to generating better data and evidence on youth-led and women-led cooperative enterprises, helping to inform policies, programmes and investments that strengthen their participation and contribution to the cooperative economy.

We will turn cooperation into collective action and greater impact through our initiatives and platforms, including the **ICA Development Platforms (ICADP)**, bringing together the skills, experience and knowledge of our regions to put people at the centre, respond to community needs and deliver measurable impact. We will also continue developing and rolling out the **ICA Cooperative AI Strategy**, ensuring emerging technologies are used responsibly to strengthen cooperatives, expand opportunities, reduce inequalities and contribute to sustainable development.

PROMOTE

Guided by the **ICA Communications Strategy 2026–2030**, launched in Panama, we will make cooperatives' contributions more visible, better understood and more influential by strengthening strategic communication, evidence, advocacy and partnerships. We will connect communication with effective advocacy to demonstrate how cooperatives contribute to positive peace, the SDGs and inclusive development, while supporting cooperative education grounded in sound research and evidence so that cooperatives can thrive and compete in ways consistent with their values and models.

Through initiatives such as the **Cooperative Cultural Heritage Programme**, our SDG policy and advocacy work, annual campaigns including the International Day of Cooperatives, legal engagement through our **amicus programme** and international law work, and our engagement in global policy forums and partnerships, we will strengthen the collective voice, recognition and influence of the cooperative movement.

PROTECT

We will **safeguard the Cooperative Identity, autonomy and democratic member control**, ensuring that cooperatives remain relevant, resilient and distinctive in a changing world. Through cooperative law and policy work, the Cooperative Laws Portal and international legal engagement, we will strengthen recognition and protection of the cooperative model. We will also promote responsible innovation, ensuring that new technologies, including artificial intelligence, serve people and communities, reduce rather than deepen inequality, and contribute to a sustainable future. Positive peace also requires intergenerational responsibility: cooperatives must act today as stewards of tomorrow, mitigating and adapting to the climate crisis so that future generations inherit not only a liveable planet, but a fairer, more inclusive and truly sustainable society.

Through the **2026–2030 Strategy**, the ICA will connect initiatives across our movement, amplify what works, strengthen our collective voice and scale our impact. **One cooperative may provide one solution, another a different one; together, they form a movement capable of doing millions of things for billions of people.** This is how our Cooperative Identity becomes action, and how local cooperative solutions contribute to **peace, prosperity and sustainable development**.

5. FROM COMMITMENT TO ACTION: BUILDING A PEACE ECONOMY

From Panama, we commit to turning the cooperative movement's contribution to **positive peace into concrete action**. We will move beyond statements of intent and help build a **peace economy** that addresses the root causes and drivers of conflict, prevents escalation, strengthens inclusive institutions and accountability and enables people and communities to live with dignity, security and opportunity.

We recognise that conflict does not arise from a single cause. Poverty, inequality and exclusion; unequal access to economic opportunities and resources; political and economic marginalisation; weak, unaccountable or ineffective institutions; violations of human rights; lack of meaningful participation; environmental degradation and threats to livelihoods; and the political economy that benefits from conflict can create conditions in which tension, violence and instability take root. Positive peace therefore requires action on these underlying conditions, not only responses after violence has occurred.

We call on individual cooperatives and cooperative members to make positive peace part of everyday cooperative practice. Cooperatives should use their enterprises, democratic governance and community relationships to bring people together across differences, strengthen trust and dialogue, prevent and resolve local conflicts, expand economic participation and opportunity and reduce exclusion and inequalities that can fuel tension. Where appropriate, cooperatives should partner with local peacebuilding and community organisations to support mediation, reconciliation and social cohesion. We also encourage cooperatives to create meaningful pathways for young people to participate in peacebuilding and cooperative development, including through training, apprenticeships, intergenerational cross-apprenticeships that facilitate learning between senior and younger generations, and youth boards and other leadership opportunities.

We call on cooperatives to work hand in hand with governments, the United Nations, international and regional organisations, civil society, peacebuilding actors, development partners, academia and business before, during and after conflict. Cooperatives can contribute to early action and prevention; support dialogue, mediation and reconciliation; maintain livelihoods, food systems and essential services during crises; and help restore local economies, rebuild livelihoods and strengthen community resilience during post-conflict recovery and reconstruction.

We call on the cooperative movement to develop and promote a practical cooperative contribution to the peace economy. This should include researching, mapping and documenting cooperative solutions that address inequality, livelihoods, food security, social inclusion and community resilience; developing guidance for cooperatives operating in fragile and crisis-affected contexts; strengthening partnerships with peacebuilding actors; and sharing evidence on what works so successful approaches can be adapted and scaled.

We call on governments to recognise cooperatives as strategic partners in peacebuilding and development and to create the conditions in which they can contribute at scale. This includes supportive cooperative legislation and effective implementation, access to finance and markets, decent work and social protection, investment in local and inclusive economies, support for cooperative research and education, meaningful participation of cooperatives in relevant public programmes, and inclusion of cooperatives in conflict-prevention, recovery and reconstruction strategies where appropriate.

We call on the United Nations and international and regional institutions to engage cooperatives as implementation partners in peacebuilding, sustainable development and recovery. We encourage the inclusion of cooperative enterprises and representative organisations in relevant policy processes, peacebuilding programmes, livelihoods and recovery initiatives, financing mechanisms and efforts to strengthen social and economic resilience. International cooperation should help connect local cooperative solutions with wider efforts to prevent conflict and sustain peace.

We call on all states to uphold the rule of law and honour their obligations under the Charter of the United Nations and international law. States must respect sovereignty and territorial integrity, resolve disputes through peaceful means, uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms, reject impunity and avoid the selective application of international law. We urge governments to strengthen accountable, inclusive and effective institutions, robust mechanisms for peaceful dispute settlement and meaningful participation, recognising that durable peace cannot exist where the rule of law is weakened, or international commitments are disregarded.

We call for greater investment in the foundations of a peace economy: dignified livelihoods and decent work; reduced inequalities; fair and inclusive participation in economic and public life; sustainable and resilient local economies; prevention and early warning; dialogue and a culture of peace; and institutions capable of upholding rights, resolving disputes and ensuring accountability. Resources should be directed towards the conditions that prevent conflict and enable people to rebuild and prosper, alongside efforts to reduce the economic incentives and benefits associated with conflict.

We commit to strengthening evidence of the cooperative contribution to positive peace and the peace economy, documenting results, measuring impact and using evidence to influence policy and investment. ICA and its members will promote the cooperative model in national, regional and global policy processes and advocate for its inclusion in strategies addressing conflict prevention, peacebuilding, post-conflict recovery, livelihoods, food security, inequality, climate resilience and social cohesion.

We call for these commitments to be translated into measurable action: more cooperatives engaged in peacebuilding and recovery; stronger partnerships with governments, the United Nations and peacebuilding actors; increased investment in cooperative and local economies; policies that reduce inequalities and expand participation; practical tools for cooperatives in fragile and crisis-affected settings; and regular reporting and sharing of results across the movement.

From Panama, we therefore call for action: to address the roots of conflict before they become violence; to build economies that create dignity, opportunity and inclusion; to resolve differences through dialogue rather than force; to uphold the rule of law and international obligations; and to place cooperation, solidarity and shared prosperity at the heart of peacebuilding, recovery and sustainable development. Together, we will build a peace economy and bridges toward a more peaceful, just, inclusive, resilient and sustainable world.