

Dear Colleagues:

Welcome to this very special conference that brings together cooperative researchers, educators, practitioners and advocates from organizations from across North America and around the world during the United Nations designated International Year of Co-operatives. In addition, we are thankful for the opportunity to hold this conference in conjunction with the Annual Congress and Annual General Meetings of the two national cooperative associations in Canada, the Canadian Co-operative Association (CCA) and the Conseil Canadien de la Coopération et la Mutualité (CCCM).

The theme that we have chosen for this special conference is “Co-operating for Change in the International Year of Co-operatives.” As we all know, the co-operative movement grew out of, and has a long history of involvement in social movements for freedom of association, economic democracy and social justice. Today, this theme of change has a particular resonance in the light of recent debates about the need for social and economic change. From the Occupy Wall Street movement that arose last year, to recent events in Quebec to the debates that are occurring around the Rio+20 Summit, a significant part of the population worldwide is calling for change, though not necessarily with one voice or one conception of the type of change that is desirable.

As researchers, educators, practitioners and advocates, we have the opportunity at this conference to critically reflect on the role of cooperatives in this change, including the possibilities, challenges, pre-conditions and pitfalls. Equally important we have the space to interact, discuss and collaborate on the work that confronts us. In our discussions, we should be inspired by the fact that most of our sessions will be in a building dedicated to UQÀM Professor Emeritus Pierre Dansereau who passed away last year after spending a life committed to the study and promotion of sustainability, ecology and ethics.

While the conference will feature many roundtables, panels and workshops incorporating a number of scholars and practitioners, it is necessary to highlight two very special guests: Linda Shaw, Head of Research, the Co-operative College in Manchester, who will provide our Keynote Address and Charles Gould, Director-General of the International Co-operative Alliance, who will participate in the Roundtable on Public Policy.

Throughout our conference you will meet a variety of co-operators from Montreal: from the worker owners who preserved a student-style meeting place through Cafe Campus to the our caterers who provide good food and employment opportunities to the many dedicated people who will share their stories during our coop tours on Wednesday. At the closing reception at the Montreal City Hall reception, you will have the opportunity to meet additional leaders from the province as well as the rest of Canada and beyond.

Of course, thanks are also due to a large number of people who have been involved in the organization of this conference, whom we cannot thank individually here, but will be acknowledged throughout different parts of the program.

Happy International Year of Cooperatives and welcome to Montreal!

The Steering Committee and the Organizing Committee