Co-operatives and Peace: Why and How they Connect

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What is peace?

• Not just the absence of war
• Acknowledging and bridging differences
• Fostering inclusivity – religion, ethnicity, ideology, class, culture
What is it in the co-operative experience that indicates how co-operatives have contributed – and can contribute – to the peace process?
Human beings are co-operative too!!!

• The dominance of competitive visions of human beings
• The renewed interest in co-operative dimensions
Perspectives from history

• Origins – the nineteenth century
• The 1840s and 1850s
• Concerns about social unrest and the class war
• Urban ghettos – poverty, bad food, bad housing, uncertain incomes ➔ Rochdale + consumer co-ops, housing co-ops, financial co-ops, worker co-ops
• Religious and political neutrality
• Rural poverty – out migration, deepening poverty, market needs ➔ marketing co-ops, rural co-op credit, supply and marketing co-ops
• Intentional communities ➔ rich Ohio experience (Quakers, Owenites, Fourierists, Mormons)
Perspectives from History – Revolutions of 1848
"But crown her Queen,  
And Equity shall usher in  
For those who build,  
And those who spin,  
And those the grain who garner in,  
A BRIGHTER DAY."

From the "Co-operative News."
The Co-operative Model

• The practice of democracy through board elections, member communications, member consultations, and associational activities
• The principle of openness
• The distribution of surpluses in proportion to member use
• The transparent conduct of all business activities
• The sponsorship of co-operative educational activities
• The encouragement of members to invest in their co-operative
• Contributions to the sustainable development of their communities
• Collaboration with other co-operatives to meet common objectives
• The fostering of further co-operative development
• The equitable treatment of stakeholders (employees, business associates, community partners)
Perspectives from History – Co-ops and International Peace

• The International Co-operative Alliance and the Search for Peace (1895 -1914)
• Co-operatives and World War One
• The Challenges of Totalitarianism
Perspectives from History

- Co-operatives and World War Two
- Co-operatives and relief (CARE)
- Co-operatives and Independence Movements
- Co-operatives and International Development
The three big themes

• Co-ops as a reaction to war, violence and social tensions
• Co-op movement and big issues of war and peace
• Impact of wars and violence on co-ops
The potential of co-operative networking

- Vision of international co-operative collaboration
- Insurance co-operatives
- Growmart
- Credit unions
- European integration
- Fair Trade
The responsibilities of size

• ICA ➔ 1,000,000,000 members
  ➔ top 300 = 20% more employees than multinationals

• United Nations ➔ serves 3 billions people

• More than 300 different kinds of co-operatives

• If we all share responsibilities for helping to build a more peaceful world......
Empowering communities

• Many of the causes of violence and tensions are rooted in poverty and inequalities

• Intentional communities, past and present, with deep commitments to peace issues: acceptance of diversity, food security, environmental sustainability, gender equality
Empowering women

• Roles of women in peace process demonstrably important
• Co-ops are effective in expanding women’s influence and capacities
Bridging generations

• A common cause of social tensions
• Frequent source of unrest when youthful population is growing and opportunities are not keeping pace
• Co-operatives can extend opportunities to youth through existing co-ops or through co-ops for and run by youth
And....

• Examples of co-ops within communities that bridge ethnic, religious, and political differences

• e.g., urban cores of North American cities, hispanic and black peoples, impoverished and divided rural areas
You.....

• What examples come to mind?
• What issues do you see?
Thank you!!!!

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