

For immediate release

International Year of Co-operatives to be launched across Canada on January 12 *United Nations General Assembly proclaimed 2012 the year to recognize co-operatives' global contribution*

Ottawa, January 4, 2012 -- Thousands of co-op and credit union members across Canada will be holding events on Thursday, January 12 to officially launch the United Nations International Year of Co-operatives.

A national launch event will take place at Ottawa's National Arts Centre from 11:30 to 1:30 EST, together with 13 regional launch events. The Ottawa event will feature a live webcast starting at 12:30 EST. The webcast will include remarks by Kathy Bardswick, president and CEO of The Co-operators (live from Calgary) and Monique Leroux, president and CEO of Desjardins (live from Lévis, Quebec) as well as the premiere of a co-operative musical work by the Montreal group Samajam, who will perform live in Ottawa. The webcast can be viewed at <http://s.coop/canada2012live>.

Participants across the country are also being encouraged to report on their events on Twitter using the hashtag #coop12jan.

In December 2009, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution proclaiming 2012 the International Year of Co-operatives, in recognition of the contribution co-operatives make to the social and economic development of communities around the world. The theme of the International Year is *Co-operative Enterprises Build a Better World*. The UN held its own launch of the International Year during the General Assembly session in New York on October 31, and several other countries, including the United Kingdom, are planning launch events for January 12.

"Co-operatives are about people, so we wanted to launch the year with events in which many people across the country could participate," said Claude Gauthier, president of the Canadian Co-operative Association. "This year offers an important opportunity to educate the public – and our own co-op members – about the enormous role co-operatives play in building communities, revitalizing economies and creating jobs here in Canada and around the world."

Media representatives are invited to attend all the events, which are expected to attract politicians and community leaders as well as co-operative leaders, members and employees. Some of the launch participants will include federal Veterans Affairs Minister Steven Blaney (in Lévis); Nova Scotia Premier Darrell Dexter (in Halifax); Keith Hutchings, Minister of Innovation, Business and Rural Development for Newfoundland and Labrador (in St. John's); and British Columbia MLA Jenny Kwan (in Vancouver).

National, regional and local co-op representatives will also be available for interviews before, during and after the launch events.

The launch events will take place in the following locations. The listed start times are the local times in each region.

Ottawa (national launch): 11:30 a.m., Fountain Room, National Arts Centre, 53 Elgin Street

Yellowknife, NT: 9:30 a.m., Northern Images Gallery, 4801 Franklin Avenue

Iqaluit, NU: 11:30 a.m., Baffin Room, Frobisher Inn, Astro Hill Complex

Vancouver, BC: 8 a.m., Visitor Centre, Van Dusen Botanical Gardens, 5251 Oak Street

Calgary, AB: 10:15 a.m., Calgary Farmers Market, 510 77th Avenue SE

Regina, SK: 11 a.m., The Bistro/Gard'Amis, 3850 Hillsdale Street

Winnipeg, MB: 11 a.m., Manitoba Legislative Assembly, 450 Broadway

Guelph, ON: 11:30 a.m., flag-raising ceremony at Guelph City Hall, 1 Carden Street; 12:30 p.m., reception at The Co-operators, 130 MacDonnell Street

Lévis, QC: 11:30 a.m., Lévis City Hall, 2175 chemin du Fleuve

Fredericton, NB: 12 noon, Crowne Plaza Lord Beaverbrook Hotel, 659 Queen Street

Halifax, NS: 12: 30 p.m., The Halifax Club, 1682 Hollis Street

Cheticamp, NS: 1 p.m., La Coopérative Artisanale, 15067 Cabot Trail

Charlottetown, PE: 4 p.m., Rodd Charlottetown Hotel, 75 Kent Street

St. John's, NL: 5 p.m., Newfoundland Independent Filmmakers Co-operative, 40 Kings Road

For more information about the International Year of Co-operatives and the launch events, go to www.canada2012.coop.

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BACKGROUND:

Co-operatives in Canada: Facts and figures

- Co-operatives have more than a billion members around the world and more than 18 million members in Canada.
- There are more than 9,000 co-operatives in Canada, with more than 155,000 employees and more than \$370 billion in assets (2011).
- Co-operatives operate in virtually every sector of the Canadian economy, including financial services (credit unions), retail, agriculture, housing, health care and energy.
- Co-operatives have existed in Canada for about 150 years. Agricultural and consumer co-operatives were created in the 19th century, and Canada's first credit union was established by Alphonse Desjardins in Lévis, Quebec in 1900.
- In 2008, the most recent year figures are available, the world's 300 largest co-operatives generated revenues of USD 1.6 trillion – equivalent to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the world's ninth largest economy. Eight of the world's 300 largest co-operatives are Canadian.
- Some of Canada's best-known co-operatives include Desjardins Group (financial services), Federated Co-operatives Limited (consumer); La coop fédérée (agriculture/meat processing); Agropur (agriculture/dairy products) The Co-operators (insurance), Mountain Equipment Co-op (consumer); UFA (farm supplies) Gay Lea Foods (agriculture/dairy products); Vancity (financial services), Co-op Atlantic (consumer), and Arctic Co-operatives Limited (consumer).
- Research shows that co-operatives are more durable than other types of businesses. Studies conducted in Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta have found that new co-ops are likely to survive longer than other new businesses over the same period of time.
- The Canadian co-operative movement works closely with partners in developing countries to help reduce poverty through the creation and strengthening of co-operatives. There are four Canadian organizations which focus on international co-operative development: the Canadian Co-operative Association, SOCODEVI, Développement international Desjardins and Rooftops Canada.