

**Notes for a speech by Monique F. Leroux
at the Launch of the International Year of Cooperatives
Lévis City Hall, January 12, 2012**

Esteemed Minister,
Honoured guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am deeply honoured to have been asked to say a few words to you on behalf of Quebec's 3,300 cooperatives and mutuels. I am even more pleased to do so right here in Lévis, where Desjardins Group got its start. Alphonse Desjardins, a Lévis resident, also played a role in the emergence and growth of the savings and credit cooperative movement across North America.

Cooperatives and mutuels today represent a very large sector of our country's economy. Their contribution to society deserves to be more widely recognized. In Canada, cooperative and mutual membership numbers 15 million—and in Quebec the figure is 8 million. It is estimated that some 70% of Quebecers are members of at least one cooperative. A total of 155,000 Canadians work for cooperatives—and 90,000 of them are in Quebec.

By proclaiming 2012 the International Year of Cooperatives, the UN General Assembly is giving us a golden opportunity to promote this business model that we believe in so wholeheartedly. And I am very proud to sit on the UN advisory group for this international year of cooperatives.

Desjardins Group will be lending strong support to the Canadian and Quebec *Conseils de la coopération et de la mutualité* in their activities planned for 2012.

Our contribution to this exceptional year will also be felt through our very active role in the organization of the International Summit of Cooperatives, set to take place in Quebec City and Lévis this fall, from October 8 to 11. We will be hosting this event in collaboration with the International Co-operative Alliance and Nova Scotia's Saint Mary's University.

This summit will bring together cooperative and mutualist leaders from all corners of the globe under the theme "The Amazing Power of Cooperatives."

We are expecting over 2,000 attendees and some 125 high-profile speakers, including several Nobel laureates. To further spark discussion, we will also be unveiling a number of groundbreaking international-level studies. Satellite events will bring together a number of organizations and associations taking advantage of the summit gathering. It will be a cornerstone moment of convergence for members of the worldwide cooperative movement.

Above all, the international summit will help to promote the advancement and recognition of this great movement. And we are very grateful for the support provided by the governments of Quebec and Canada to help ensure the event's success.

The world is changing.

Technology and communication tools are turning the vision of the “global village” into a reality. But this greater integration brings with it an enhanced interdependence. Going forward, we all share the same economic, financial, security, and climate risks.

And while it's true our world is changing, one thing remains the same: the way it changes and evolves is spurred by men and women, by people. Our world evolves based on the actions people take. And now more than ever before, our world needs to focus back on the needs of people—the central tenet of the cooperative movement.

Finally, let me share my special wish for 2012 with you: may the amazing power of cooperatives help us in building a better world.

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