

MINUTES OF THE 14TH MEETING OF ICA-AP REGIONAL ASSEMBLY ONLINE: 24TH FEBRUARY 2021

The online 14th ICA-AP Regional Assembly was held on Wednesday, 24th February 2021 from 11:00 to 13:00 hours.

AGENDA 01: OPENING REMARKS

The 14th meeting of the ICA-AP Regional Assembly was held to consider administrative issues and approve the postponement of the ICA-AP Regional Board elections. It was attended by more than 110 members from 18 countries – Australia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Jordan, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Palestine, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Vietnam.

Mr. Li Chunsheng, President of ICA - Asia and Pacific chaired the Regional Assembly. He welcomed all the delegates and said that 2020 was an unexpected year caused by the outbreak of COVID-19. The unprecedented event led to the loss of many lives, posed health challenges and risks to business due to restrictions imposed by governments. It is important, more than ever now, to practice the shared cooperative values and principles and continue with the fighting spirit of cooperatives.

AGENDA 02: APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Mr. Li asked for comments on the agenda which was circulated in advance to all the delegates. There were no comments, and the agenda was formally approved.

AGENDA 03: CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES OF THE 13TH MEETING HELD IN TEHRAN ON NOVEMBER 26, 2018

Mr. Li informed the assembly that the minutes of the 13th meeting of the ICA Regional Assembly held in Tehran (Iran) on 26th November 2018 were circulated to all the delegates and member organizations. No comments/ suggestions were received, and the minutes were confirmed.

AGENDA 04: IN MEMORY OF SETHU MADHAVAN, DR. T. PARANJOTHI, MR. PREM KUMAR, MR. KWEK KOK KWONG AND ROYAL PROFESSOR UNGKU A. AZIZ

Mr. Li said that 2020 was marked by the sad demise of Mr. Sethu Madhavan, Dr. T. Paranjothi, Mr. Prem Kumar, Mr. Kwek Kok Kwong, and Royal Professor Ungku A. Aziz. They showed the meaning of being true cooperators with their sincerity and dedication to the cooperative movement. He believed that their contribution will always be remembered and requested the members to observe one-minute silence in their memory.

AGENDA 05: PERUSAL OF MINUTES OF ICA-AP REGIONAL BOARD MEETINGS SINCE LAST REGIONAL ASSEMBLY

Since the last Regional Assembly, four meetings of the Regional Board were held in:

Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam: 16th April 2019

Kigali, Rwanda: 13th October 2019

Online: 19th May 2020

Online: 27th October 2020

The confirmed minutes of the four meetings were shared with all the delegates and member organizations. Necessary follow-up action on these minutes has already been taken and no further comments/ suggestions were received during the online assembly.

AGENDA 06: ICA-AP FINANCIAL REPORT FOR 2018 AND 2019

Mr. Balasubramanian Iyer, Regional Director, ICA-AP welcomed everyone to the first-ever ICA-AP assembly being conducted online. He shared some of the key activities since the last Regional Assembly in Tehran, Iran in 2018.

- **ICA-MAFF Japan Training Course** – The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (MAFF) has supported the ICA training courses for many years. Our member in Japan, the Central Union of Agricultural Coops (JA-ZENCHU) and their training arm, the Institute for the Development of Agricultural Cooperation in Asia (IDACA), have played an important role. Each year three courses are conducted on the capacity building of rural women, value addition to the agriculture value chain, and developing leaders' capacity in cooperatives. He thanked members for nominating their representatives to attend the training and hoped that the training has benefitted them, and action plans are being implemented. He shared the example of a women participant from Thailand who attended one of the courses and started an aloe vera processing and marketing venture.
- **ICA-EU Project** – The project started in March 2016 and was supposed to end in February 2021. However, due to COVID-19, it has been extended until August 2021. He said that Mr. Mohit Dave, Project Manager, ICA-EU Cooperatives in Development: People-Centered Business, will make a presentation later.
- **Activities by Malaysia Business Office (MBO)** – Mr. Iyer thanked ANGKASA and supporting member organizations for their continued support and said that he will present an update on the activities carried out by MBO.
- **Committee Activities** – The ICA-AP has 10 thematic and sectoral committees that have been conducting various activities. During the section on committee presentations, each Committee Head provided updates on their activities.
- **Training Programs/ Seminars/ Workshops** - He thanked members for supporting these events in their countries and said, "this is a reflection of cooperation among cooperatives and the emphasis that we put on education and training". He said that before COVID-19, each year ICA-AP was carrying out around 25-30 activities and it could be possible only because of the member organizations' continuous support.

He shared glimpses from some of the activities:

- **13th ICA-AP Regional Assembly in Tehran, Iran** – Mr. Iyer thanked the Iran Chamber of Cooperatives (ICC) for hosting the assembly and providing all support in ensuring its success.
- **ICA President Ariel Guarco's Visit to the AP Region** – President Guarco visited India, Vietnam, Thailand, Singapore, Japan, Korea, Indonesia, and China in 2019; and the Philippines and Malaysia in 2020. During these visits, he got the opportunity to interact with members in the region and get first-hand knowledge of the diverse activities being carried out. Mr. Iyer thanked the members for graciously hosting President Guarco.

- **2nd ICA-AP Cooperative Registrar’s Forum, 2019 in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam** – Mr. Iyer thanked Vietnam Cooperative Alliance (VCA) for hosting this event. The event had good representation from the Registrars and members from across the region who had engaging discussions on the legal and regulatory environment in their countries.
- **Membership Expansion** – Continuous efforts are being made to increase the number of members from across the region. Our members are concentrated in South East Asia, South Asia, and East Asia with limited presence in the Pacific, Middle East, and Central Asia. Efforts are underway to enhance membership in these regions. One such effort was the workshop conducted in collaboration with the United Nation Department for Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) in Fiji. Mr. Iyer also spoke about the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Conference organized in collaboration with ICA Africa Office to promote cross-regional efforts and expand the membership in the Middle East.
- **ICA-AP 60th Anniversary Celebration** - On 14th November 2020, ICA-AP completed its 60 years. On behalf of the Regional Office, Mr. Iyer expressed his gratitude to all members for their support and being continued members of ICA. Due to COVID-19, a physical celebration could not happen, but he hoped that during the World Cooperative Congress in November 2021, ICA-AP will be able to recognize and acknowledge all its members. To celebrate the occasion, ICA-AP organized a webinar and released souvenirs to present to members.

ICA-AP Financial Report

Mr. Iyer began his presentation by explaining the sources of income for ICA-AP:

1. **Membership subscription** – The subscription paid by members is shared among ICA-AP, ICA Global, and sectoral organizations. The region gets around 45% of the subscription amount.
2. **Projects**
 - **ICA-MAFF Japan** – MAFF has been a continuous supporter of ICA. The budget for this project which has been reducing over the years covers training costs of participants; ICA-AP gets a small percentage as an administrative contribution.
 - **ICA-EU Project** – The project began in May 2016 and will end in August 2021. The total budget of Euro 10 million was divided among ICA Global and the four regional offices. The amount disbursed was less in the initial years and peaked in the 3rd and 4th year of implementation to around USD 300,000 each year. The EU provides 80% of funding and ICA matches the remaining 20%. The 20% of project expenses are borne out of member subscription fees.
 - **Malaysia Business Office** – MBO is supported by four members organizations – All China Federation of Supply & Marketing Coops (ACFSMC), Japanese Consumers’ Cooperative Union (JCCU), National Agricultural Cooperative Federation (NACF), and Malaysian National Cooperative Movement (ANGKASA). ANGKASA hosts the office, has provided office space, and supports the operational cost of MBO. The supporting member organizations have seconded staff and contribute to activities.
 - **Members Contributions** – Members contribute either in cash or in kind for various activities that ICA-AP conducts like seminars, workshops, and exchanges. Though this contribution is not monetized and presented in the financial statement, it helps ICA-AP carry out the activities.

In total, the region gets around USD 1.8 Million each year. However, the entire amount is not the income for ICA-AP as it is shared between the three entities – ICA Global, Sectoral Organizations, and the ICA-AP Regional Office.

Mr. Iyer said that at the end of 2018, ICA-AP had a surplus of USD 5,646 and thanked members for their contribution. In 2019, we had projected a surplus but at the end of the year, we had a deficit of USD 2,413. However, these are not the audited figures and only reflect the trial balance. This trial balance is sent to the ICA Global Office by each of the three regional offices – Americas, Africa and Asia and Pacific, where a consolidated audit statement is prepared. Overall, ICA had a surplus in 2019 as well.

Mr. Iyer concluded that the office has carried out activities across the region and reached out to many members since the last Regional Assembly in Iran. This has been possible due to the two projects (ICA-MAFF and ICA-EU) and members' support. He said that the regional office has ensured that as a region we manage our finances well and continue to have a positive balance.

Mr. Li said that ICA-AP has conducted a lot of activities and the financial results are good. He asked the members for their comments and questions.

Mr. N. Satyanarayan from the National Cooperative Union of India (NCUI) asked - In 2018, the meeting revenue has come down from USD 55,000 to USD 16,580 which is almost one-third of the estimated budget, what are the reasons for that?

Mr. Amano Haruyoshi from JCCU asked whether the budget for gender activities contributed by the JCCU was included in the financial statement?

Mr. Ali Hassan from ANGKASA asked if there has been any progress on the development of the Asia Pacific Committee on Cooperative Housing which is being discussed with Cooperative Housing International (CHI)?

Mr. Garry O. Leonardo from the Philippine Cooperative Center (PCC) commented that the presented expense overrun is largely attributable to meetings and conferences, which he considers productive.

Mr. Iyer, in his response, said that in 2018, the Regional Assembly was held in Iran. Members usually attending in large numbers, could not attend due to various reasons and there was a drop in registration fee. He added that ICA-AP does not charge a flat registration fee to all members; it is based on the country ranking - low-income, middle-income, and high-income countries. Many high-income countries like Japan, Singapore, Korea, and others could not attend, leading to the shortfall. He thanked Iran for their support and bearing the costs of holding the Assembly.

Answering Mr. Haruyoshi's question, Mr. Iyer said that there is a discrepancy in the 2018 and 2019 statements and informed that each year JCCU contributes around USD 75,000 for consumer, women, and youth-related activities. In 2019, the full figure has been reflected, while the 2018 statement reflects only one of these contributions. He apologised for the incorrect figures and assured that the corrections will be made.

In response to Mr. Hassan's question, Mr. Iyer said that interest has been shown by CHI and CICOPA to form Asia-Pacific committees. We need to have a critical mass of members before we can put the issue in front of the Regional Board. He informed the assembly that ICA-AP in collaboration with CHI is hosting a webinar to promote housing cooperatives and encouraged more members to join.

Mr. Antonio Aranas from NATCCO, Philippines requested clarification on the subscription amount. He said that in the Regional Board Meeting held on 23rd February, it was informed that the membership contribution is divided among ICA Global, ICA-AP, and the ICA Sectoral Organizations and the region gets 45%. However, in the financial reports presented today by Mr. Iyer, the subscription status is indicated as 50%, so which one is correct, 45% or 50%?

Mr. Iyer clarified that from the total subscription 7% is kept for bad debt and 10% goes to the sectoral organizations. The remaining 83% is divided equally between ICA global and ICA-AP.

Mr. Aranas asked if there is a deficit in 2019 finances? Mr. Iyer answered yes, there is a deficit which was projected in January 2020. However, as informed earlier, the complete audit done in March by the Global office, shows that ICA-AP had a net positive balance.

Dr. P. A. Kiriwandeniya from Sri Lanka appreciated the progress and the positive financial situation. He said that as cooperators in the region, we are working in various sectors and are contributing to the region's economic growth. However, many countries focus mainly on the private sector or the state and neglect the cooperative sector while calculating the contribution to economic growth. He requested Mr. Iyer to present any information he had on the economic contribution by the cooperative sector to the region and whether as a regional organization it would be possible for the office to look into this.

Mr. Iyer said that it is important to consider the contribution of cooperatives to the economy. Governments in many countries are now mandating that cooperatives increase their contribution to the economy. He shared the example of Malaysia, where the government and the cooperative movement are working together to increase this contribution. He informed that ICA brings out the World Cooperative Monitor (WCM) every year that lists the top 300 cooperatives in terms of their revenue and the GDP per capita. He said, he is happy to see the increase in the number of cooperatives from the Asia and Pacific region in the WCM. In the latest Monitor (2020) there are 48 cooperatives from the region.

As part of the ICA-EU project, ICA-AP has released country snapshots which are available on the ICA-AP website. These snapshots, prepared with input from members, present the contribution of cooperatives to the economy, employment, and other indicators. Mr. Iyer said that in Japan, the Japan Cooperative Alliance (JCA) in its brochure, shows the contribution of consumer and worker cooperatives to the economy. In Iran, the Government has mandated that cooperatives should contribute around 20-25% to the economy. Initiatives are underway, but presently, we do not have all this data captured in one place. He said that this is a good study to be undertaken to see how cooperatives are contributing to the economy in different countries.

Dr. Kiriwandeniya suggested that it will be good to organize an online event to further discuss this issue, especially concerning poverty eradication. Mr. Iyer agreed to his suggestion.

Mr. Leonardo said that we claim that cooperatives contribute to 12 out of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In addition to quantifying the cooperatives' contribution to economic growth, it will be good, if we could try and put numbers to the SDGs to support our argument.

Mr. Iyer remarked that this is a good observation by Mr. Leonardo. ICA is also embarking on quantifying the contribution of cooperatives to the UN SDGs. He suggested that in each country, national apexes should try to collect this information. He appreciated that the Nepal Cooperative Federation (NCF) worked with the Government of Nepal and ensured that cooperatives were reflected in the government national monitoring plan. It has ensured that

information is collected for the mandated indicators and presented in the government's annual report on SDGs.

Mr. Iyer informed that every country once in every two to three years submits their Voluntary National Report to the UN. These reports present how their country has done on the 17 SDGs in terms of numbers, case studies, and involvement of stakeholders. He said that this is a good opportunity for us to engage with focal persons in each country responsible for VNR. The VNRs of Nepal, the Philippines, Malaysia, Japan, and Indonesia mention cooperatives. This is another way by which we can ensure that cooperatives are reflected at the highest level. He said ICA as an apex body has organized various events focusing on SDGs. However, we need to see how to quantify to get a complete picture of cooperatives' contribution to the SDGs.

Mr. Li remarked that the financial report showed that ICA-AP conducted many activities and members have been benefitted. It has promoted the cooperative movement in the region and contributed to a good financial situation. He expressed his gratitude to JCCU, ANGKASA, NACF, ACFSMC, and all other member organizations for their joint and continued support.

AGENDA 07: ICA-AP MEMBERSHIP SITUATION

Mr. Li requested Mr. Iyer to present the membership situation in the region.

Mr. Iyer started by thanking members for being continued members of the ICA. Since the last Regional Assembly in Tehran, in November 2018, ICA has added members from the existing countries like China, India, Iran, Korea, Philippines, Sri Lanka, and from new countries like Kiribati and Fiji from the Pacific region.

Since 2018, the following 15 organizations have joined ICA.

1. Uralungal Labour Contract Coop Society Limited (ULCCS), India
2. Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Cooperatives (MCIC), Kiribati
3. International Solidarity of Korea Cooperatives (ISKC), Republic of Korea
4. Department of Cooperative Business, Ministry of Industry, Trade and Tourism, Fiji
5. Tirumalla Tirupati Multipurpose Cooperative Credit Society Limited, India
6. Metro South Cooperative Bank (MSCB), Philippines
7. Taavon Insurance Company (TIC), Iran
8. 1 Cooperative Insurance System of the Philippines Life and General Insurance (1CISP), Philippines
9. Cooperative Work Agency (CWA), Palestine
10. CLIMBS Life and General Insurance Cooperative, Philippines
11. National Federation of People-based Cooperative Enterprise (INKUR), Indonesia
12. Jiangsu Supply and Marketing General Cooperative (JSMGC), China
13. Fujian Federation of Supply and Marketing Cooperatives (Fujian Coop), China
14. Department of Cooperative Development Cooperative Development and Registrar of Cooperative, Societies, Colombo, Sri Lanka
15. Matara Health Cooperative, Sri Lanka.

Over the past two years, the following nine member organizations have ceased to be members of ICA due to non-payment of the subscription fees:

1. Cooperative Global Sourcing Limited (CGS), China
2. Cooperative Union of the Philippines (CUP), Philippines
3. National Fisheries Federation (NFF), Sri Lanka
4. Central Union of Iran Animal Farmers (CUIAF), Iran
5. Nasinu Land Purchase & Housing Cooperative Limited, Fiji

6. National Consumer Cooperative Federation, India
7. Cooperative Societies Council (CSC), Saudi Arabia.
8. Kotikawatta Thrift and Credit Coop Society (KTCCS), Sri Lanka.
9. Vietnam National Industrial, Handicraft and Commercial Cooperative Enterprises Association (VICCA), Vietnam.

Currently, the ICA - Asia and Pacific has **111** member organizations from **32** countries.

Mr. Iyer said that there are a few regions where we need to work more like the Middle East. We used to have members who have now dropped out. Similarly, in Central Asia and Pacific regions, efforts are underway to increase the number of members.

He also said that we are saddened when any member organization ceases to be a member and understand that these are difficult times. ICA does its best to accommodate requests and support all its members. If there are any requests, those can be submitted to the membership committee and ICA will do its best to support them.

He requested members to encourage other organizations in their countries to become members of ICA. ICA needs the support of all its members in promoting ICA, as a member organization speaking about ICA is more impactful to other cooperatives.

Mr. Li asked for questions and comments from the members. There were none. He remarked that the membership situation is good in the region and as compared to the last Regional Assembly in Iran, it has increased by seven members. He said we should continue to make efforts to increase members. At the regional Board Meeting held on 23rd February, the board discussed setting up a sub-regional office in Egypt for the Arab region to encourage more organizations to join. He hoped that with these efforts, membership will get enhanced.

Mr. Hassan suggested that we can pull up a map of the Asia and Pacific region to show the distribution of our membership and recognise the gaps in each country. Mr Iyer agreed and said ICA-AP will share the readily available map.

The map can be accessed at [Asia Pacific Regional Members](#).

AGENDA 08: APPROVAL – POSTPONEMENT OF REGIONAL BOARD ELECTIONS TILL NOVEMBER 2021

Mr. Iyer informed the assembly that the current ICA-AP Regional Board was elected in 2016 and had a term of four years. The Board at its meeting on 13th October 2019, in Kigali approved that the 14th ICA-AP Regional Assembly and Board elections would be held in conjunction with the ICA World Cooperative Congress in Seoul in December 2020.

Due to COVID-19, the Congress was postponed to March 2021 and the ICA-AP Board had to postpone the Regional Assembly as well by a few months. The ICA-AP Regional Board in its online meeting on 19th May 2020, decided to hold the 14th Regional Assembly and Board election in conjunction with the ICA World Cooperative Congress in Seoul in March 2021.

Given the continuing fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic (increase in cases, impact on health and economy, travel restrictions), the ICA Global Board in its online meeting on 11th September, decided to postpone the World Cooperative Congress, till November/ December 2021.

The ICA-AP Regional Board wanted to hold the Regional Assembly and Board Election in conjunction with the Congress to save members the cost of travel and registration fees. Since the congress got postponed till November/ December 2021, the Regional Assembly and election would have to be postponed by a year.

Points for consideration for the ICA-AP Board were:

- As per ICA-AP rules, the term of office-bearers of the Regional Board is **4 years**. The term of the current board, which was elected on 18th November 2016, will end on 17th November 2020.
- The decision to postpone by Assembly and elections by a few months is within the purview of the Regional Board; but postponing the Regional Assembly and Board elections by one year needs to be approved by the Regional Assembly as it is the highest authority.
- Members in the region are holding their assemblies online and many have taken part in the ICA online Assembly on 3rd September 2020. However, these assemblies could only discuss administrative issues and the ICA by-laws do not permit online elections.

In October 2020, the ICA-AP Regional Board met and decided to have an online Regional Assembly in February 2021 to take care of administrative issues and have the Assembly approve postponement of Board elections to November/ December 2021.

In-person elections would take place during the Congress, giving members the opportunity to come together after a long gap. The election to the Board is the most important event for the region and it is preferable to hold it in person. The process and procedure will be similar to the one held in Delhi in November 2016 through an electronic system which the members have experienced and are comfortable with.

Motion: The Regional Assembly approves the postponement of the Regional Board elections to November/ December 2021 to be held in person in conjunction with the Congress.

Mr. Iyer requested every member to use the “Raise Hand” icon to show their approval for the proposal.

The assembly unanimously approved the postponement of the elections to November/ December 2021.

Dr. Kiriwandeniya requested to hold the in-person Regional Assembly after the 15th of November 2021.

Mr. Iyer informed the assembly that ICA Congress will be held from 1st to 3rd December and before that there will be two research conferences. The Committee events will take place on 29th November and Regional Assembly and Board elections on 30th November.

AGENDA 09: UPDATE ON EUROPEAN UNION PROJECT

Mr. Li remarked that the ICA-EU project is an outstanding example of promoting cooperative development and requested Mr. Iyer to share an update on the same.

Mr. Iyer requested Mr. Mohit Dave, Manager, ICA-EU Project to share the updates.

Mr. Dave thanked the President, Mr. Li and the Regional Director, Mr. Iyer for the opportunity to share the project progress since the last Regional Assembly in Iran.

The ICA-EU Partnership is a Framework Partnership Agreement signed between the European Commission and ICA along with its Regional Offices in March 2016. The Partnership titled “Cooperatives in Development – People-centered Businesses in Action” aims to strengthen the ICA and the Cooperative movement’s capacity to promote international development. In the region, project-related activities have taken place under the three strategic development priorities:

- Agenda 2030 for sustainable development
- Building an inclusive society with focus on youth
- Emerging structures of work and ownership

Mr. Dave shared the stream-wise highlights of the project.

Institutional Strengthening

The stream aims to strengthen the capacity of the ICA staff, members, and the office on issues of importance to the region. Under this stream, the following activities were highlighted.

1. Coopathon & Young Development Professionals’ Meeting (YDPM) - To inculcate the culture of cooperation among the youth, YDPM was held in February 2019 and Coopathon was held in December 2020. Coopathon was the first of its kind – an international online cooperative hackathon that received a good response from the participants.
2. Capacity Building Program on SDG-13: Climate Action – SDGs have been a focal area and Climate Action was the global theme of ICA in 2020. A capacity-building program was organized in Bangkok in collaboration with the member Cooperative League of Thailand. The participants received training from the German Cooperation (GIZ) experts on issues of agriculture and allied sectors.
3. Coop Mic – A focus area for ICA-AP is Work and Ownership. During the observance of the International Day of Cooperatives in 2019, a coop mic with Mr. Rajiv Khandelwal from Ajeevika Bureau, India was organized on the theme “Decent and Dignified Work Demands Action Now”. The team also worked with NCUI and the ILO, India to celebrate the day and advocate for the theme.

Research

The stream aims to conduct evidence-based research to back policy outcomes. Some of the highlights of the research work were:

1. Thematic research on ‘Cooperatives in Industrial and Service Sectors’ was released in 2019. It was undertaken in collaboration with the International Organization of Industrial and Service Cooperative (CICOPA), a sectoral arm of the ICA.
2. Mapping and legal framework analysis – The statistical figures of 20 countries have been mapped with support from country-specific experts. The reports are available on the [coops4dev](#) website.
3. Thematic research on youth – A global thematic research was undertaken on “Young People and Cooperative - A Perfect Match?” The report can be accessed [here](#).
4. Research Conferences – In 2019, the research conference was held in collaboration with the University of New Castle, Australia. In December 2020, the research conference was held online including the two Early Career Researchers’ Workshops.

Capacity Building

Some of the highlights of this stream were:

1. Workshop on Social and Financial Education for Co-ops in collaboration with Aflatoun International, headquartered in Netherlands, Europe.
2. Workshop on Cooperatives in Educational Institutions – Held in Kigali, Africa during Global Conference with ICA-Africa to understand cooperative models in educational institutions.
3. Global Cooperative Entrepreneurship (GCE) Training of Mentors & Ambassadors – This has been a key area of progress, the program trains experts on Cooperative Entrepreneurship and is led by the ICA Global. In the region, it had been piloted in India, Indonesia, and Malaysia.

Cooperative Networking

Some of the highlights of this stream were:

1. Cooperative development Conference for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) – Held in February 2019, in collaboration with ICA Africa, in Morocco. The conference discussed how cooperatives are contributing to SDGs and the legal frameworks of the countries in the MENA region.
2. Roundtable on Worker Cooperative Buyouts – ICA-AP held an online discussion with academicians and member organizations to discuss how Worker Cooperative Buyouts can be a solution to the challenges being posed by COVID-19.
3. European Development Days – In June 2019, the team collaborated with the Europe Cooperative Development Platform in Brussels to highlight the role of cooperatives in International Development. The Asia and Pacific office will explore a similar platform for the region.

Advocacy and Political Dialogue

Some of the engagements have been:

1. Forum on Development of Cooperatives in Pacific Islands – It was held in December 2019 in New Castle, Australia.
2. Policy Forum on Development (PFD - Global & Regional) – The team participated in PFDs held by the European Union. The Asia and Pacific PFD was held in Kathmandu, Nepal in September 2019 where members from Sri Lanka and Nepal participated.
3. Regional Cooperative Registrar's Forum – The team contributed to the 2nd chapter of the forum held in Vietnam.
4. UNDESA Workshop in Fiji – This was the last physical engagement held before the COVID-19 struck to look at the cooperative movement in Pacific Island countries.

Alliance Building with Civil Society Organizations

The stream focuses on building alliances and engagement with the CSOs.

1. Consultation on UN Decade of Family Farming (UNDIFF) in South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) – In 2020, the team developed a roadmap and action plans from 2019 to 2028 to achieve the UNDIFF's goals in the region.
2. Roundtable on Cooperative Training and Education – Held in collaboration with various academic institutions to reach out and understand how academia is facing the challenges posed by COVID 19.

3. Doubling Farmers Income: Exploring Pathways – Engagement with government, CSOs, Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and various Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in the eastern provinces of India to discuss the thematic issue.
4. Women Cooperatives Workshop – Engagement with Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in August 2019 in Gujarat, India focused on the issues of grassroots cooperatives in India.

Visibility and Communication

1. Aroundtheworld.coop – The global focus has been to promote the campaign of Around the World docuseries of cooperatives. From the region, cooperatives from Nepal, Malaysia, and Australia have been covered. Mr. Dave said it was inspiring to learn about these cooperatives through this campaign in a never seen before manner.
2. India International Cooperative Trade Fair – Held in 2019, it served as a platform to showcase and promote products of cooperatives from the region.
3. Aflatoun Annual Conference – The team collaborated with Aflatoun International during their annual conference in 2019 to discuss the cooperative movement's growing interest in young people.
4. Country and Sector Snapshots – 17 country snapshots and three sector snapshots are now available on the ICA-AP website and have been used to communicate about the cooperative movement in the region.

Project Management

1. Annual Review Meeting of the Partnership – The last meeting was held in March 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya with staff from all four regions to discuss the progress and way forward.
2. Result Oriented Monitoring (ROM) Review – The ROM reviews are carried out by third-party reviewers hired by the EU to monitor the progress of the project against different indicators. The reviewers then make recommendations to help better achieve the project objectives. Two such reviews have taken place till now.

Mr. Dave concluded his presentation by showcasing a short film on the feedback received from various stakeholders on Coopathon 3.0, a virtual cooperative hackathon organized in December 2020. He invited members of the assembly to join the webinar on 'Worker Cooperative Legislation Experiences from Japan'.

Ms. Anahita from Iran and Dr. Sunil Silva from Sri Lanka raised their hands for comments.

Dr. Silva said that their Health Cooperative started services in 1930 and this situation has given a good opportunity for all professionals, doctors, and members to study the International Cooperative Hospital System. He said that they had reached out to Japan and Canada earlier but due to the current situation it could not materialise. He said, very soon we will reach out to the Chairman, the Regional Director of ICA-AP, and to all the cooperative leaders to meet and discuss the development of the cooperative movement in Sri Lanka. Dr. Kiriwandeniya also asked this question about cooperatives' contribution to economic growth. This is troublesome for everyone as no figures are available at the national level. Dr. Silva said that they have been collecting data at an individual level, but everyone needs to contribute more as a social and economic endeavour for our countries.

Ms. Anahita shared that the pandemic has affected their business and schools. However, they have devised new solutions to cooperate among the teachers, students, and parents. She said she would be happy to share with others if anybody wants to know more about it.

Dr. Kiriwandeniya requested more information from the ICA-EU project. He said that they have started a Research Cell with the assistance of the Ministry of Higher Education in Sri Lanka, but it only focuses on the cooperative movement and its participation at the grassroots level. He said, he was not aware of the ICA-EU project and if they get more information, it will be a good partnership opportunity for them. In the cooperative education field, they have partnered with SANASA University, recognised by the Ministry of Higher Education in Sri Lanka, and running a research program on adult education. They call it work-based education and would like to explore collaboration opportunities with ICA-AP to strengthen their program.

Dr. Bao from VCA appreciated the idea of Dr. Kiriwandeniya and said that ICA-AP could use the budgets and resources from the projects for other activities also like, setting up a committee on statistics to assess the cooperative situation in the region. So that, we can have regular information on cooperatives in terms of their experiences and strengths in the region and share recommendations based on this with the governments for policy discussion. Set up an institutional committee that can update the latest legislations from different countries for the promotion of cooperative development and provide more experience and knowledge to new members. Mr. Bao suggested having a reform for the MBO operations and said that it could become a connecting point of cooperatives in the region. When COVID-19 will be controlled, VCA would like to connect with Malaysia, China, Korea, and Japan to promote trade development between cooperatives in Vietnam and the region. In the context of Industrial Revolution 4.0, he requested ICA-AP to set up a committee on Innovation and Reform. He said that our cooperative institutions are not only contributing to SDGs, but they also contribute to academic development, like in VCA, we apply technology and innovation for further development, and ICA-AP should consider this. ICA-AP should mobilise more resources to respond to the actual demands of its members and he expressed his will to support the resource mobilization process along with other cooperatives in the region. He requested updated information about Vietnam to share the best practices of Vietnam with others in the region.

Mr. Suroto said cooperative growth needs a good ecosystem on the legal front and we need to have a legal advocacy program that can steer economic democracy commitment. We also need to conduct research and organize campaigns to attract young people who have a future commitment to cooperative development, especially on the legal front. He suggested that ICA should put this in top-level discussions and recommendations.

AGENDA 10: MBO – Update

Mr. Iyer presented an update on the MBO. He said MBO was established in 2013 and is hosted by ANGKASA. The staff has been seconded by four-member organizations – ACFSMC, ANGKASA, NFUCA, and NACF. It is managed by the MBO Council with four members from ACFSMC, ANGKASA, NFUCA, and NACF and is overseen by the ICA-AP office. He said the MBO Council last met in person in 2019.

He presented a snapshot of the activities carried out by MBO. The MBO has focused on technology in cooperatives; enhancing value through value chain initiatives like Fairtrade products and developing sustainable supply chains; cooperative finance; and trade fairs in Malaysia, China, and India; and enhancing C-2-C initiatives.

He shared glimpses of some of the seminars and workshops that were organized by the MBO and said that more details have been presented in the MBO presentation which will be uploaded to the official website of the Regional Assembly - <http://regionalassembly.coop/>

AGENDA 11: SECTOR/THEMATIC COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Chairpersons (or their representatives) from the ICA-AP Sectoral/ Thematic Committees presented their report before the Regional Assembly.

ICA-AP Committee on Consumer Co-operation

Mr. Haruyoshi, Chairperson of the Committee said that the committee conducted many workshops and seminars. Some of the key activities were:

1. Regional Workshop for Leaders on “Social Contribution of Consumer Co-op” held in April 2019 in Guesan, Korea. It was attended by 11 member organizations and 58 delegates from eight countries and focused on learning from the business strategies of iCoop, Korea.
2. Regional Workshop for Managers on “Management of Consumer Co-ops” held in June 2019 in Singapore. It was an opportunity to learn about leading cooperatives in the region through merchandising of advanced consumer cooperatives. It was attended by eight member organizations and 21 delegates from six countries. Another workshop on the same topic was held in November 2019 in Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam and attended by 33 delegates from seven countries.
3. Training Programs for Managers of Consumer Coops in Japan held in July 2019 in Tokyo & Miyagi, Japan. This training program is conducted twice a year. In the summer program, five trainees from India, Korea, Mongolia, and the Philippines participated. In the winter program, held in December 2019, five trainees from Vietnam, Singapore, and Malaysia participated.
4. SDGs Seminar on “SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic growth” held in September 2019 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It was participated by 20 ICA member organizations and 70 delegates from nine countries.
5. The 53rd ICA-AP Consumer Committee Meeting and Seminar held in November 2019 in Tokyo, Japan. It had participation from four countries, eight member organizations, and 14 delegates.

In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, no planned programs could be conducted. An online exchange session between JCCU and iCoop was organized in December 2020.

Mr. Haruyoshi said that members from 13 countries and 19 organisations are affiliated with the Consumer Committee and encouraged the ICA members from Central and West Asia to join the committee. He also shared activities planned for 2021, that included,

1. Study on the Status of Consumer Cooperatives in Asia and Pacific is underway. Eight country reports for India, Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Korea, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Vietnam have been posted on the ICA-AP website.
2. Webinar for Consumer Co-ops in AP (Tentative)
3. 54th ICA-AP Consumer Committee Meeting in Seoul, Korea

ICA-AP Committee on Credit and Banking

Mr. K.K. Ravindran presenting the report said that last year was dedicated to the COVID-19 pandemic and the report is largely based on related activities. The RCBA is closely monitoring the impact of the pandemic on financial cooperatives in the region and particularly its member organisations. He presented highlights of the response of financial cooperatives:

1. Collecting institution and country-wise information on response and planning a seminar on the subject, in conjunction with the Regional Assembly scheduled in December 2021.
2. Financial cooperatives consisting of cooperative banks directly regulated by Central Banks and Non-Licensed Financial Cooperatives (NLFCs) played an important role in smoothening cash flows of households and MSMEs. The pandemic necessitated financial cooperatives to postpone loan recovery and extend new loans to existing and new borrowers. Due to stalled deposit growth and reduced borrowing avenues, cooperative banks depended heavily on borrowings from the Central bank to reduce the supply-demand mismatch in lendable funds.
3. Monetary and fiscal measures including an extension of Special Liquidity Facility to banks and financial institutions, the constitution of National Resilience Funds, Special Employment Schemes and Schemes for Rehabilitating Migrant Workers, measures to boost demand, Credit/Loan Guarantee Schemes for MSMEs, Tax Rebates, Moratorium on Loan Repayment etc.
4. NLFCs including credit unions showed better resilience to the crisis in most of the countries. The rate of decrease in savings and loans were less in credit unions as compared to banks and other financial institutions and so was the asset quality deterioration rate.
5. Fintech and digitalization solutions became useful tools to improve services and reduce transaction cost.

He said that small savings by the members are the strength of credit unions and other NLFCs. Therefore, NLFCs need to devise suitable products to facilitate frequent small savings. Crisis funds of credit unions helped members in a big way during this pandemic. There is a need for augmenting crisis funds at a higher rate during normal times to take care of abnormal times.

ICA-AP Committee on Cooperatives in Educational Institutions

Ms. Simren Singh, the Secretary for ICA-AP Committee on Cooperatives in Educational Institutions (ICEI) presented the report on behalf of the Chairperson, Dr. Mohd. Azlan Yahya.

She gave a brief introduction to the committee, its objectives, and its members. The committee has 15 members from 12 member countries of ICA-AP. The main activities conducted in 2020 included:

1. **Virtual Talk on Youth Engagement through Cooperative Entrepreneurship** - It was organized with ANGKASA to celebrate International Youth Day on 12th August. Three young speakers from Indonesia (Ms. Yohana Tamara Yunisa, Project Manager, Keling Kumang Credit Union), Malaysia (Mr. Zaiwin Kassim, Chairman, KOBIS and TEDx curator), and Pakistan (Mr. Ahsan Ali Thakur, Director of International Relations and Communications KCHSU, Pakistan; Chairperson, ICA Asia and Pacific Committee on Youth Cooperation; Vice-President, ICA Youth Network) were invited as speakers. They discussed the issues concerning youth in a post-COVID-19 world. The talk was attended by 60 international participants.

2. **Webinar on the Impact of COVID-19 on Education and Cooperatives in Educational Institutions in Asia and Pacific** was organized on 5th November to discuss the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educational services and campus cooperatives that suffered a huge loss. Four ICEI members - Dr. Azlan, ANGKASA (Malaysia), Mr. Shinichi Maita, NFUCA (Japan), Mr. Sim Seng Huat, SNCF (Singapore), and Mr. Kim Jongweon, KFUC (South Korea) discussed the impact of the pandemic on school and university cooperatives in their countries. The webinar was attended by 50 international participants.

Ms. Singh briefly shared the findings from the webinar. Malaysia reported an issue like school phobia and losses to campus coops. Japan reported reduced household income and networking opportunities; concerns for completing studies and securing jobs; dissatisfaction with virtual learning; and reduced operational turnover for university coops. South Korea reported concerns about the quality of online classes and reduction in the activity and sales of campus cooperatives. On the positive side, Singapore reported that cooperative clubs are engaging with school and university students through online workshops on cooperatives, awareness sessions, and training sessions on entrepreneurship.

3. **Short Film Competition on Cooperatives** - This was launched to engage with youth from educational institutions and was open for all ICA member countries in Asia and Pacific. Participants were asked to produce short films on the given topics. 10 entries were received from China, Malaysia, Japan, Palestine, and Sri Lanka. ANGKASA sponsored the cash prize worth USD 950 for the top three entries. Ms. Singh thanked ANGKASA for their generous gesture.
4. **Committee Meetings** – The committee met thrice in June, November, and December. The committee bid farewell to the former Vice-Chairperson, Mr. Shinichi Maita and welcomed the new Vice-Chairperson, Mr. Ichiro Nakamori.

ICA-AP Committee on Research

Professor Akira Kurimoto, the Chairperson of the Research Committee shared a brief report of the committee activities. He paid tribute to Dr. T. Paranjothi, former Vice-Chair of the Committee from 2012-2020. Prof. Kurimoto shared that Dr. Paranjothi actively promoted the network of Asian university/ campus cooperatives. He contributed chapters on the Asian youth cooperatives and the Indian agricultural cooperatives in “Waking the Asian Pacific Co-operative Potential” and had promised to write a chapter on Kerala Cooperative Hospital for another book. He was also the co-editor for “Cooperatives and Social Innovation” published by Springer.

Prof. Kurimoto shared updates from the **15th ICA-AP Cooperative Research Conference** which was held online on 17th and 18th December 2020 with the theme ‘Addressing climate change through cooperative enterprise’. The conference organized with the support of the Agricultural Co-operative Staff Training Institute (ACSTI), Government of Kerala, ICA Domus Trust, ICA-EU Partnership, and the Uralungal Labour Contract Co-operative Society (ULCCS) was attended by around 80 participants from 12 countries. The two Young Scholar’s Workshops were led by Dr. Y. Dongre (India) and Dr. Sidsel Grimstad (Australia). Dr. Mauritz Bonow Awards were presented to Mr. Abhishek Saxena, Institute of Rural Management Anand and Ms. Sreelaksmi C. C., Cochin University of Science and Technology.

He happily shared that last year, the committee published two volumes featuring Asia-pacific cooperatives:

1. Waking the Asian Pacific Co-operative Potential by Elsevier – it took six years to publish this book for which editing started during Regional Assembly in Bali. It contains thematic chapters and case studies of agriculture, consumer, and worker cooperatives.
2. Cooperatives and Social Innovation by Springer – This book is a compilation of proceeding from the Research Conference held in Seoul, Korea.

He said that by the mid-21st century, Asia will occupy half of the world's GDP but cooperative research lags. We need to build the capacity of cooperative research in the Asia and Pacific region in the Asian century. He invited Asia-Pacific researchers and practitioners to join research networks and contribute to a new book planned by Asia Pacific Cooperative Research Partnership (APCRP). He said that work on the second publication has already started and expressed his desire to reach out to potential writers to write best case studies from Asian countries. He informed the assembly that the next ICA-AP Research Conference will be held in Seoul during the World Congress in November 2021.

ICA-AP Committee on Trade and Business

Mr. Nasir Khan presented a brief report of the committee on behalf of the Chairperson, Dato Abdul Fattah Abdullah. The Committee started in 2016 and has been active since to promote trade and business development in the region. In collaboration with ANGKASA, the committee organized a Cooperative to Cooperative (C-2-C) Trade Seminar on Inclusive and Sustainable Economic Growth in November 2019 in Malaysia. The seminar aimed to make members aware of the existing and potential C-2-C collaborations within the Asia and Pacific region; to initiate a platform for experience and knowledge sharing on trade and business activities from successful cooperatives in the region; and to emphasize three different sub-themes, specifically identified as a good prospect for collaboration among cooperatives. The three sub-themes were:

1. Agriculture Agricultural Cooperative Food Security
2. Tourism Cooperative Promotes Sustainable Tourism
3. Consumer Economic Productivity in Consumer Cooperatives

The seminar was attended by 100 participants from 14 countries. He concluded that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee could not do much in 2020.

ICA-AP Committee on Women

Dr. Nandini Azad, Chairperson of the ICA-AP Committee on Women (Women's Committee) said that the Women's Committee is one of the most active committees in the region and thanked the partners and donors of the committee for the last 21 years. She said that the committee is one of the oldest and will soon be completing its 25 years. In 2016, the Women's Committee developed a new strategy to promote gender equality in cooperatives in Kobe, Japan and they have achieved the targets of membership, with 27 members from 17 countries. She said the committee envisions ensuring a minimum of 30-50% participation of women at all levels in cooperatives and to have members from all 32 countries of the region. The committee wants to institutionalise gender equality and equal opportunity for women at all levels of cooperatives and bringing in technical expertise to improve programs. The committee aims to institutionalise the collection and use of gender-disaggregated data in cooperatives.

Dr. Azad presented the following key milestones of the committee:

1. **Hanoi APCMC Resolution 2017** adopted during the Asia-Pacific Cooperative Ministers' Conference (APCMC) in 2017 in Hanoi, Vietnam to encourage and support women members' participation ranging from 30-50% representation in committees, bodies, councils, and other high-level cooperative structures.

2. **Second Tagaytay Resolution 2016** passed at the Tagaytay+20 (third Regional Conference on the Status of Women in Cooperatives in Asia and Pacific in 2016) to encourage supportive policies, laws and regulations for women's leadership in cooperatives.
3. **Gender is More Than a Statistic: Status of Women in Cooperatives (2015-2016)**, a study conducted by Dr. Nandini Azad, to map the status of women in cooperatives in Asia and Pacific through gender-disaggregated data. This has provided an important baseline for the committee.

The key activities of the Women's Committee included:

1. **Letter of solidarity** from the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson to all 27 Committee members appreciating them for braving the hardships bought by the COVID-19 pandemic and inviting them to a common platform to share the impact of the pandemic and best practices.
2. **Launch of the committee newsletter** - this was launched in March 2020 to present the activities of the committee to promote women's empowerment and gender equality and provide women space to voice their views on pertinent issues.
3. **Launch of Campaign for Change 2020-2023** in March 2020 asking members to pledge to identify and work towards one or more pressing issues and challenges faced by women. Member from Myanmar and the Philippines have shown interest in the campaign.
4. **Regional Webinar with Committee Members** to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on women cooperators in Asia and Pacific was held in September 2020. It was attended by 12 committee members from 11 countries. The key findings of the webinar were:
 - a. Reduced sales and revenue in cooperatives
 - b. Job insecurity and loss of wages for women in the informal sector
 - c. Dual responsibility of managing households - taking care of the elderly and children while managing work from home
 - d. Reduced access to nutrition
 - e. Increase in domestic violence
 - f. Mental health issues.

It was noted that women have been at the forefront in fighting the pandemic. The detailed country-wise findings have been shared in the committee's report uploaded to the official website of the Regional Assembly - <http://regionalassembly.coop/>.

5. **Training of Trainers (ToT) Program on Digital Financial Inclusion of Women Cooperators** at grassroots organized with Working Women's Forum – Indian Cooperative Network for Women with support from JCCU in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Dr. Azad said that during the national lockdown in India many women cooperators could not borrow credit, withdraw savings, or make payments due to travel restrictions. The training aimed to build the technical capacity of women and prepare them to use digital banking services in emergencies because our region is prone to many natural disasters. There were 65 participants including members, cooperative staff, Chief Executive Officers (CEO), WWF organisers and supervisors. The training was conducted in the local language; however, the English modules are also available. The training helped in building confidence among women. The participants expressed confidence in conducting digital banking and educating more women in their towns and villages.
6. **Virtual meetings of the Office Bearers** to plan and discuss committee initiatives supporting women cooperators at the grassroots.

She thanked the assembly and the region for supporting the committee. She informed the assembly that the United Nation's Commission on the Status of Women (UNCSW) has awarded the Working Women's Forum (WWF) and Indian Cooperative Network for Women (ICNW), a parallel session of 90 minutes on cooperatives. She said that in Asia and Pacific region, WWF-ICNW is the only cooperative to get this slot and invited everyone to join the session.

Mr. Iyer congratulated Dr. Azad for representing cooperatives at UNCSW.

ICA-AP Committee on Youth Cooperation

Mr. Ahsan Ali Thakur, Chairperson of the Committee made a brief presentation on the committees' activities. The committee recently added three new members from Iran and the Philippines. The key activities included:

1. **Go Green Campaign (GGC)** – It was initiated in 2018 and has been successfully running since then. In 2020, 17,000+ trees were planted in the Asia and Pacific region. This year, ICYC was joined by the youth networks of the Americas and Africa region. A short video explaining the significance and impact of the GGC 3.0 was played during the assembly. Mr. Thakur mentioned that GGC effectively took place even during the COVID-19 pandemic.
2. **International Youth Day** - This is conducted every year with the theme as decided by the UN to engage and empower youth in cooperatives.
3. **Capacity Building of ICYC members** – Members were informed about the higher education programs available on cooperatives that they can avail.

On behalf of ICYC. Mr. Thakur requested ICA-AP member organizations to nominate young candidates for the board elections. He thanked ICEI for supporting youth and education cooperative to propagate cooperative education in the region and said that ICYC looks forward to working with them. He announced that ICYC now has 50% women participation in the committee. He also expressed the need for collaboration among the committees for mutual benefit.

Mr. Iyer congratulated ICYC for a successful GGC and achieving gender equality in the committee.

Mr. Li remarked that a lot of good work has been undertaken by ICA-AP, the committees, and the MBO and thanked everyone for carrying out this work for the cooperative movement.

AGENDA 12: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Dato Fattah from ANGKASA informed the assembly that in May 2021, ANGKASA will celebrate its golden jubilee. One of the planned activities is, "One Million Tree Project" to support the Malaysian Government and Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources to launch the 'Tree of Life' Campaign started in January 2021 to make Malaysia a green nation. The campaign is to increase awareness of the importance of green areas and forests for the well-being and better quality of life, as well as to improve the Malaysian ecosystem and biodiversity. The campaign aims to plant 100 million trees in five years beginning in 2021.

ANGKASA will be participating in the campaign by launching the One Million Trees CSR Project. This project will be the cooperative movement's commitment to integrating SDG-13: Climate Action and support UN Decade on the Ecosystem Restoration (2020-2030).

He invited all the members to join the celebratory campaign and requested them to send their video messages to be included in the video documentary. He thanked those who had already shared their messages.

Mr. Li congratulated Dato Fattah on their 50th anniversary.

AGENDA 13: VENUE OF NEXT ASSEMBLY

Mr. Li informed the assembly that the next Regional Assembly will be held in conjunction with ICA World Cooperative Congress in Korea. He thanked NACF, Korea for their support and assistance.

Mr. Iyer added that on 29th November, committee meetings, related events, and the Regional Board Meeting will take place. The Regional Assembly and Board elections will take place on 30th November. He hoped that everyone will be able to meet in person after a long time and invited everyone to join the Regional Assembly, Board elections, and the Congress.

AGENDA 14: CLOSING REMARKS

Mr. Iyer apologised for the Assembly running over time and thanked members for their patience. He said that it was enriching to know the work being done by the thematic and sectoral committees despite the pandemic. He thanked members for their continued support.

Mr. Li concluded the assembly by thanking everyone for being there with each other throughout the difficult last year. He said that we are now standing at a new threshold and cooperation is now needed more than ever!