



### **The Charter of Fair Trade Principles – the shared values of a diverse movement**

I've been privileged to work with Fair Trade organisations since 1985 when I first joined Oxfam in Britain as Marketing Manager of their *BRIDGE* programme, which sought to connect producer and consumers through trade in handcrafts. Back then the term "Fair Trade" wasn't in common usage and we more often spoke about alternative trade or referred to the UNCTAD declaration of 1968 which adopted the "trade not aid" slogan.

Since 1997 I've worked within the FLO Fairtrade Labelling network, firstly at the Fairtrade Foundation in the UK and more recently as the Vice-Chair of the FLO Board. It was in this role that Carola Reintjes from IFAT approached me to help draft a document that would provide a reference point for the most important and unique principles of Fair Trade. This was proving a challenge because although our movement is very strong on principles and values, it is also supremely pragmatic. For decades, Fair Trade initiatives all around the world have been focussed on addressing the practical problems faced by producers, rather than trying to make a theory work in practice. Indeed this pragmatism may well be the defining difference between the dogmatic, neo-liberal approach to free trade that has dominated international economics for the past thirty years, and Fair Trade which needs to be a much more prominent part of the coming decades if the world is to secure genuine sustainability and social justice.

The result of this pragmatism is a wealth of diverse approaches to Fair Trade that I have always valued as strength of our movement. As we say in the Charter there is no one approach that is right for products from coffee to crafts, for countries from Mali to Mexico or across supply chains from farmer to factory worker. But the diversity of the Fair Trade movement clearly presents challenges for those people who are finding about Fair Trade for the first time. At a time when our work is coming under increasing scrutiny from all kinds of public institutions from corporations through the media to government and inter-governmental bodies its important that we make our work more accessible and easily understood. And at a time when there is a proliferation of claims and offers of "fairness" its vital that we ensure our core principles define the minimum level at which any approach can be called "fair".

I am delighted that the Charter was written speedily and adopted quickly by the General Assemblies of both FLO and IFAT/WFTO. I am also pleased that it has been well received by partners and stakeholders and looks set to perform its function of a useful reference document. But it should also be a living document that evolves to meet the changing needs of Fair Trade's primary stakeholders – producers in the poorer countries of the world. Our principles are constant and do not fundamentally change, but the way they are articulated must always be relevant if they are to inspire people with our vision of *"a world in which justice and sustainable development are at the heart of trade structures and practices, so that everyone can maintain a decent and dignified livelihood and develop their full human potential"*. I hope therefore that it will also inspire dialogue and debate among all those interested in Fair Trade.

Ian Bretman

Vice-Chair of the FLO Board

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