

Speech to Graduation Day at UWC Red Cross Nordic

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Dear Students. I am thrilled to see this beautiful crowd of newly certified Red Cross ambassadors ready to influence the world. In addition to IB graduates, you are also Red Cross Diploma Graduates and thus experts in Humanity and Impartiality. These are principles and skills that are highly needed in the world today.

The 2015 edition of the Global Risk Report from the World Economic Forum finds interstate conflict with regional consequences as the number one global risk in terms of likelihood. The next 4 on their list is extreme weather events (2), failure of national governance systems (3), state collapse or crisis (4) and high structural unemployment.

National Intelligence Councils report of Global Trends 2025 speaks about the rise of emerging powers and globalized economy, transfer of wealth and power from West to East, and a growing influence of nonstate actors. The players change, so do the scope of transnational issues. Aging populations in the developed world; growing energy, food, and water constraints; and worries about climate change will diminish what will still be an age of prosperity.

But who knows? The world can change into something completely different. What we as the Red Cross see no matter in what direction the world turns, is the need for ethical leadership. Ethical leadership based on humanity and impartiality.

One of the greatest RC shapers, Jean Pictet, highlighted essential humanitarian values that underpin the principle of humanity. These are mutual understanding, compassion and respect for all human beings, no matter what ethnicity, color, nationality, shape or form. This is your competence, dear students. You have been living this form of humanity every day for 2 years. Sharing rooms with 5 other students from different cultures, worked together in groups, in projects, helping a fellow student to climb the nearest mountain in a wheel chair. Some of you have been volunteers at the Haugland Rehabilitation Centre and some of you have been assistants and guides at Ridder Rennet, some of you have been first aiders. This is Humanity in concrete action.

But even if you have not been active in humanitarian and voluntary work, you have been trained in the principle of Humanity anyway, because Humanity is about human connection, learning how to relate to others in an open, curious and positive way. It is a two way flow of energy, thoughts, feelings, behavior. Being conscious about your effects on others and using empathy to truly understand the perspective of others will make you ethical leaders. Empathy is a skill or a competence desperately needed in the world today.

When it comes to impartiality, Pictet's clarification refers to a mindset and an action solely guided by needs, non-discrimination and objective decision-making without interference of personal preferences. Key underpinning values are: respect for diversity, tolerance and open-mindedness. To train an impartial mindset we need to strengthen skills like active listening, critical thinking and dropping bias.

Most of us make up our opinion about the other within the first minute. What is it: intuition, gut feeling or labeling? Cognitive education pushes us to break things down, put them into boxes and classify them. But you know better – and that's why you are so important to the world! You know you need to get to know people before you judge them. You know you need inner peace to create outer peace. You know that nothing good comes from violence and you know that the only way to be respected is to be truly and fully yourself. If you want to change the world, start with yourself and be the change you want to see.

The same holds for influencing change in the community. You have to create a space of trust, and key to this is active listening, interest and openness. We won't get there by imposing, labeling or judging. You will reach out to your community, raising awareness and understanding on non-discrimination, intercultural dialogue and social inclusion.

Addressing issues like discrimination or violence is energy-intensive. How do you engage in this without burning out? Having empathy for others is great but not to the point where you are overwhelmed by emotions unable to act. How can we enhance our resilience to cope with stress, peer pressure or resistance? To be able to do effectively humanitarian work in dramatic conditions, you have to build up personal resilience, a way of staying with inner peace.

To my knowledge, UWC RCN does not just open minds. It also develops ability to challenge assumptions, change your perspective and think in a different way.

You all know how the world looks today. Polarized, war, conflicts and distrust between nations and between religions. You see what happens in Ukraine, in Syria, in the Middle East, the refugees waiting to enter Europe from the Mediterranean Sea. There is so much to do, so many lives to save, so much good to be done!

And in the Humanitarian sector there are job opportunities. ICRC has currently 11,000 staff working in 80 countries, helping people affected by armed conflict and violence. You can be one of their staff in the near future.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) is the world's largest humanitarian network that reaches 150 million people in 189 National Societies through the work of over 17 million volunteers.

As a network, or Movement, we act before, during and after disasters and health emergencies to meet the needs and improve the lives of vulnerable people. We do so without discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions.

And you can be making this difference! You know what tolerance is, what an unselfish act is, what love is. Use it! Influence the world with your heart, your mind and your action! Focus on what you have and what you can do. Alongside the distrust, the conflicts and the wars there is also great love, trust and hope. Build on this perspective – find similarities rather than differences. Take a stand, make an action. Everything you can imagine exists and everything you can visualize is possible.

You have all heard the story of H.D, The Suisse founder of the Red Cross after his dramatic experience in Solferino in 1859. First his immediate humanitarian action, then his idea and his book created the Red Cross that became the world largest Humanitarian organization.

You are all capable of making a change. It doesn't need to be a world organization or a world peace march. It can be just to lower tensions in a family, a community or influence your nearest peers. Sticking to an honest, giving, positive, caring, and grateful attitude will make a difference in all aspects of your life.

And do remember; it is nice to be important, but it is much more important to be nice

Dear students, On behalf of the Norwegian Red Cross, I wish you the very best of luck.

Thank you!