

## Alumni Presentation – 9<sup>th</sup> August 2015

It is a pleasure and privilege to welcome your generation of alumni and other guests on behalf of the community here at Red Cross Nordic.

I am going to start with a metaphor of the Norwegian salmon.

The salmon is an extraordinary, powerful, and totemic fish. Born in a Norwegian river, it migrates out to the Nordic seas, stretching from the Lofoten Islands to Iceland until, years later, its sensory hairs surrounding the magnetite particles in its lateral line trigger the navigational circuits in its brain to head southwards in search of its natal river. The salmon responds to this call of the wild, this call from its birthplace – and, following the recognisable and unique river scent, it enters the fresh water and begins its journey upstream in order to contribute its genes, its DNA to the next generation of salmon – a gift to the river that gave it birth.

The returning Flekke salmon heads east into Dalsfjord before switching south into Flekke fjord, past the landmark of the College and into the Flekke river system, with its **journey's** end at Harefossen, a powerful and spectacular waterfall upstream.

In part there is something magical about the Flekke **salmon's** loyalty, navigational instincts, and sense of homecoming - and applicable to our alumni community gathered here today. We hope, as part of our teaching and the UWC philosophy, that through your lifelong migrations you have retained and continue to retain that vital connection with both your home country and with Red Cross Nordic – both responsible perhaps for giving you the initial confidence and strength to explore uncharted waters beyond our shores.

EM Forster, the **writer urged in his novel, 'Howards End', that we should 'only connect'** – and this has been at the heart of our thinking here at RCN over the course of the past three years. We have concentrated on connection with our alumni community – with around 1900 RCN alumni worldwide – through the development of our website, Facebook page, RCN alumni database, a monthly newsletter to the RCN community and through regular alumni events. Last September, we organised an event at **the Danish Ambassador's** residence in Reykjavik for our Iceland-based alumni and supporters and, in November, we held an event for alumni in Hong Kong – and we are currently planning an event in Stockholm in parallel with a Board Meeting in early December.

September 2015 marks the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the opening of UWC Red Cross Nordic and provides us with the opportunity to celebrate the history of the College and its commitment to peace and a sustainable future. We are planning two events between now and the end of the year to celebrate this Jubilee year. Her Majesty Queen Sonja has kindly agreed to attend the main event planned for Monday 21<sup>st</sup> September 2015 to celebrate

the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary in tandem with the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Norwegian Red Cross – alongside UWC Day and the International Day of Peace as observed across the world. In essence, it will be an opportunity to celebrate the shared history and the day-to-day activities which take place here at Haugland under the Red Cross banner. Our new Centre for Visitors will be officially opened by Her Majesty Queen Sonja as part of the celebrations.

I have my own experience and understanding of the power of a UWC education, the calibre of the students and the dynamism of the alumni body following a transformative time as a teacher at Waterford Kamhlaba, the United World College of Southern Africa. In my first three years as Rektor at RCN, I have met so many engaging and engaged members of our alumni community – with so many asking how they can give back in a tangible and helpful way. Many of you are involved directly in National Committee work across the world and in events promoting the UWC movement.

For example, in June, we collaborated with one RCN alumnus David Sengeh (from Sierra Leone) and sent a joint delegation to attend and participate in the EdTech Europe Conference in London - a conference which seeks to bring industry, innovators and investors in education together.

**At the heart of the new design for RCN's Strategic Plan is financial sustainability** – as the College moves into its third decade, we need to lay important foundations for the future development of this College. Each UWC has its own distinctive identity, character and atmosphere – and it is important that we work together to ensure the future of the unique educational opportunities RCN offers to students from across the world. All this, however, comes at a cost and the reality is that as a College we receive in income from the Nordic region less than we need to spend to offer a first rate UWC educational experience to the next generation of students.

At an event in Hong Kong last November, a parent of a former student kindly gave me an envelope with a cheque inside and asked me to direct the donation to something special. After consulting student representatives, we decided to spend the money on buying Christmas presents for all students unable to go home for December and who were on our Winter Programme. The Christmas before, the College received a card from a Malaysian **alumna with some Norwegian bank notes tucked inside with a note saying: 'note for alumni: don't forget what RCN gives you and try to give back when you grow up'.** Both examples illustrate the willingness of our network to support the College and its projects – but it is imperative that we enable financial support of the College by providing a coherent and coordinated fundraising programme.

With valued input and encouragement from RCN Council members including alumni **Bjarki Bragason and Linnea Ericsson at this year's meeting, we have decided to create an**

RCN Jubilee Fund. We have been encouraged and inspired by the genuine enthusiasm for UWC RCN and its future that is shared by alumni, parents, former staff and supporters.

With this in mind, we are establishing the RCN Jubilee Fund with a view to providing financial support for some key projects. Marianne Andresen, a dedicated supporter of the College since it was founded, has generously offered to launch the Jubilee Fund by donating a building to partner the Silent House in the wilderness area on the south side of the campus; this building will contain a baking oven and will be an educational resource – and a source of enjoyment - for our students, Red Cross summer camps, and other visitors.

Our current fundraising priority is financial support for a Foundation Year for those from conflict / refugee backgrounds who are unable to complete the IB programme in 21 months due to disrupted learning and / or language difficulties;

If you are interested in making a gift or connecting with us in a different way, please do speak to Arne and myself over the course of this weekend. Every contribution really makes a difference and is vital to our success – and your support will have an immediate impact on the lives of our students.

We have helped to put together a programme for the biennial alumni gathering centred on the principle of connection so that it provides you with opportunities to connect with each other, to connect with memories (some still fresh and some in a state of temporary hibernation), to connect with staff (both support and education teams), to connect with the campus and this unique landscape, and finally to connect with students embarking on their own personal UWC educational adventures.

We have a small cohort of summer course students here on campus as part of a three week prologue to the launch of the academic year with the emphasis on language acquisition and confidence building. We continue to recruit students with spark and potential from a diverse range of backgrounds – and this course is an essential lift-off for a percentage of our students. We have discussed at this end how important we feel it is for you and the summer course students to meet – with, we hope, shared nationalities, languages and experiences at the centre of your connections. The summer course students are looking forward to meeting you at lunchtime. The shared experiences and conversations amongst and between cultures is, I believe, part of the magic of Red Cross Nordic.

All first year students will be invited in the Student Introduction Week to write a letter addressed confidentially to themselves, in a language of their choice, to outline their hopes, fears and ambitions for their two years at RCN. The envelopes shall be sealed and we shall hand them back at the moment they take the stage at graduation.

We ask you to rewind and consider the thrill, excitement, trepidation and dreams when you too embarked on your first few days here. I wonder what you will discover when looking back through your own personal and unique RCN kaleidoscope over the course of this weekend.

On Monday, I have asked Arne to give a presentation on developments – including the draft strategic plan. 2015 marks the end of the time period for the current RCN Strategic Plan. We are in the midst of a consultation phase essential for the drafting of a strategic **plan and to ensure that it complements the development of UWC International's strategic** plan. Alumni representatives on our Board and Council have provided insightful and helpful feedback.

I have asked Arne both to introduce you to the thinking behind the strategic plan and to discuss with you concrete ways that our alumni community can helpfully engage and connect with RCN. We are a unique college within the UWC, with our Nordic heritage and international vision - and it is important that we work alongside all constituencies, including the essential contributions of our alumni, to establish a plan which preserves the values, traditions and spirit that distinguish the community but, at the same time, prepares the College and the students for the demands of a new world. We look forward to your feedback.

The annual report, as a printed encapsulation of our work here at RCN, is also available at Reception and in the Kantine – and serves both as a reflection on the year gone by and the direction in which we are going.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of staff – Arne, Joakim, Kathini, Barbara, Arne Ophaug, and many members of our Support Staff – who have worked tirelessly on the logistics behind a gathering of this size on campus - and to the alumni reps and Jean Paul Ginestier for their invaluable **contribution to this year's event**.

I started this address with the image of the Flekke salmon returning home and shall finish with reference to another familiar sight along this fjord.

On leaving the Admin building, I sometimes find myself casting my eyes towards the heavens (as Rektors sometimes do) and, on two occasions this summer, I spotted a sea eagle, spiralling and then soaring above the campus.

Some of you will have noticed we have our own stuffed sea eagle as a talisman in the entrance to Admin, omnisciently watching over generations of students, staff and alumni.

The sea eagle - '**Havørn**' as it is known in these parts – is a huge grey brown eagle with a white wedge-shaped tail, and heavy yellow bill and a seven-foot wingspan– and is very

much a bird of the fjords and yet can also be found distributed across different parts of the world - from Greenland to Persia, from India to Japan.

I take it as my final metaphor today.

The great African educator, Dr Kwegir Aggrey used to refer to the African proverb that says **'it's each and every feather that makes the eagle soar'**. This draws on the reality that the **eagle's success in flight is both characterised and enabled by the very different shape, sizes, textures, functions and colours of the eagle's feathers operating in concert together.**

Each and every feather contributes to the take-off, to give the eagle the lift, the magnificence of flight until it soars overhead.

We too, with all the constituencies represented in this room, must work together in **partnership to sustain the flight of UWC Red Cross Nordic. 'It's each and every feather that makes the eagle soar'.**

Thank you, as alumni, for your continued support of the College – you act as our ambassadors, our network, our voice beyond the fjords, soaring across different parts of the world. We sincerely hope you continue to lead rewarding and fulfilling lives and that, for the years to come, you will continue to contribute to the architecture and future of RCN and to hold an open hand of friendship and understanding to fellow humans everywhere.

Part of what sustains us here at RCN is the immeasurable impact you are all making in the world at large.

We are delighted to be hosting you here on campus in our Jubilee year and to hearing about your adventures, your friendships, your projects and your futures.

Larry  
Rektor