

Queen's Speech

Your Majesty, it is a great pleasure and honour to welcome you back to UWC Red Cross Nordic in your capacity as our patron. You have been a supporter of the College since it started - and we hugely appreciate your ongoing commitment. You have remained committed to and an advocate of our UWC mission and values – and a champion of education in a changing landscape in Norway.

You will, I hope, be pleased to hear that our first Jubilee event to celebrate twenty years since the opening of RCN was held on the evening of the 17th June at a reception at the Norwegian Ambassador's Residence in London – a place I discovered of real historical significance both to Norway and the Royal Family.

For those unfamiliar with Norwegian history, 10 Palace Gardens, London, served as the seat of the Norwegian government-in-exile from 1940 to 1945; King Haakon VII and the cabinet met in the dining room for the weekly State Council Meetings – Statsråd – and the building became the heartbeat to the Norwegian resistance movement. It was there that the king scripted his BBC World Service radio broadcasts which served as a rallying cry to occupied Norway – and which also served to transform the King into the foremost symbol of the Norwegian people's will to fight for a free and independent Norway.

In 1947, the Norwegian people raised the funds and presented the King with a Royal Yacht on the occasion of his 75th birthday. It is this yacht that is anchored at the entrance to Flekke Fjord this evening.

Thank you, Your Majesty, for coming in the Royal Yacht 'Norge' to our Jubilee – adding an exciting and spectacular new marine dimension to the event and the Fylkesmann team's logistics.

We remain deeply appreciative of your work as our patron - raising public awareness of Red Cross Nordic – and we are extremely grateful for the supportive engagement, warmth and generosity of spirit that Your Majesty continues to bring into our world.

It is also great privilege to welcome - on behalf of all the students and staff at RCN - our other guests to this landmark Jubilee event, including members of our founding team, former rektors, and supporters both local and from across the Nordic region.

Today provides us with the opportunity to celebrate the history of the College, its ongoing commitment to education for peace, the 150th anniversary of the Norwegian Red Cross – alongside UWC Day and the International Day of Peace as observed across the world.

Tomorrow, we have put together a programme which focuses on the partnership with the Norwegian Red Cross. The Red Cross definitely remains an important part of our identity – with shared values and philosophy at the heart of our work.

With one family foot in Southern Africa, I am going to turn for inspiration not to my usual touchstone, Nelson Mandela - Former Honorary President of UWC - but to someone you might, at first, find a surprising choice for this speech: Cecil Rhodes.

In April of this year, the world was gripped by riots and demands for the statue of Cecil Rhodes to be removed from the campus of the University of Cape Town - the Empire was striking back in a fresh wave of anti-colonial protests. Rhodes, an imperialist and diamond mining magnate, and his legacy were under attack in the press, on campuses throughout Southern Africa and through renewed demonstrations of 'Rhodes-rage'.

In a distinctly unorthodox way, I would like momentarily to take this opportunity to champion his enduring legacy as an educator. He wrote a last will and testament in 1902 centred on the provision of scholarships - indeed he dreamed of improving the world and promoting international peace through the distribution of leaders motivated to serve their contemporaries, and broadened by their acquaintance with one another and their exposure to cultures different from their own.

This sounds distinctly familiar – the deliberate diversity of culture at the very heart of UWC's educational model.

Lester B Pearson, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, former Prime Minister of Canada, and driving force behind the founding of our sister College in Canada, asked in his 1957 Nobel acceptance speech: 'How can there be peace without people understanding each other, and how can this be if they don't know each other?'

Heresy to some but the founding of UWC 53 years ago was not revolutionary in its model - Rhodes' will envisaged that the ethical leaders of tomorrow would come together to live and study side by side but the selection of these scholars was based on the geopolitical criteria of his era. His vision was for scholars to be drawn from the wide colonial empire - from South Africa to New Zealand - and the superpowers of the early twentieth century including the US and Germany. They needed to be bachelors with a 'moral force of character' who would seek to understand each other's cultures and to forge global networks.

There is at least one Rhodes scholar here tonight amongst our guests.

Rhodes was simultaneously an educational visionary and very much a man of his time - and recent history does not judge him too kindly with excrement smeared on his statue overlooking Cape Town.

Over time, the trustees of his legacy have sensitively reinterpreted his will with the first female Rhodes scholars arriving in Oxford in 1977 and the introduction of the Mandela-Rhodes Foundation in 2003. 7000 scholars have benefitted since the introduction of the scholarship. However, as one journalist wrote, the scholarship needs to move again with the times with the majority of the scholarships awarded to Africans - a return of intellectual capital into the continent Rhodes so ruthlessly exploited.

A challenge of redefinition to the Rhodes Trust.

And so UWC needs to move with the times and to the challenges ahead – and within the federal framework of UWC, so must Red Cross Nordic.

Here at RCN, we believe in the integrity of difference and strive to provide education for a deliberately diverse community - expressed in terms of geopolitical, cultural, gender and socio-economic diversity – and, differing to Rhodes' original model for a new world, we seek to promote inclusion and equality.

In tandem with the Norwegian Red Cross and as part of an educational cooperation between all Nordic countries and governments, from westerly Greenland to easterly Finland, our College has produced just under 2000 graduates in twenty years – forged in the Nordic region and heading out from the fjords as ambassadors for the United World College movement, for Nordic values, and for the Red Cross.

However, we need to be wary of the demons of self-congratulation within UWC – and constantly to question our strategic priorities and, most importantly, our relevance in the world today.

The desperate and haunting images of the migrant and refugee crisis in Europe remind us on a daily basis of the need for international and intercultural understanding and education for peace – and we hope to remind Norway that our College has the ability and the expertise to serve and support those in need.

Thor Heyerdahl, the Norwegian explorer and UWC International Patron, - and honoured here this afternoon - was invited to give the inaugural speech at the official opening of the College in 1995. In his address, he invited members of the RCN community to hold out ‘an open hand to fellow humans everywhere’. This message has, I understand, been very much at the heart of our teaching for every generation of students.

As one second year captured so perceptively in her letter of introduction to the Davis Scholarship Programme earlier this year:

‘Here is where we have students who are truly interesting and interested, staff who are really inspiring and inspired, and together we create an engaged and engaging community that actively cares and supports each other’s dreams and ambitions, for ourselves and for the world’

This is perhaps the finest articulation I have come across of the strength of this College and which stands at the heart of UWC RCN’s Strategy 2020 which we have launched today.

We are a unique college within the UWC, with our Nordic heritage and partnership with the Red Cross – and, through a nine month consultation phase, we have worked alongside all constituencies to establish a strategic plan which preserves the values, traditions and spirit that distinguish the place but, at the same time, prepares the College and the students for the demands of a new world.

At the heart of the new design for the 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.

A month ago, we launched the Jubilee Fund with a view to the provision of 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. Please support our fundraising campaign if you can: every gift from every individual really makes a difference and is vital to our success.

I am delighted to announce that, at the end of last week, Ove Høegh – a longstanding supporter of the College - wrote to inform me that the Høegh Foundation would be donating one million kroners to help launch the Jubilee Fund.

I am going to finish this Jubilee Address with a little detour through Norse mythology.

The Norsemen visualized the universe as a tri-centric structure. The axis of the world was Yggdrasil, a timeless ash tree so vast that its branches spread out over the whole world with its roots providing sources of destiny, spring water and wisdom to the three worlds of gods, giants and men. Known as the guardian tree, it sustained all - and was seen as the greatest and best of trees.

The sagas reveal Yggdrasil's recurring power to nourish and sustain but, at the same time, the tree silently suffers at the hands of those it sustains - from dragons to squirrels, from stags to wolves, which feed upon its barks and roots.

In many ways, I see RCN as a form of traditional guardian tree providing care, sanctuary and I hope wisdom to each generation of RCN students - and it suffers greater hardship than many perhaps realise as it seeks to sustain those in its care - and we all, gathered here tonight, must work hard together to ensure that it flourishes in the future.

Those of us working as staff and at Board and Council levels, are the custodians charged temporarily with the responsibility of developing the College and taking on the challenges of our time.

Ben Okri, the Nigerian writer, reminds us at the end of the poem 'Turn on your Light' that 'Our future is greater than our past'. A trumpet-call to collective contribution, to new voices and to new global potential for prosperity, peace and a sustainable future.

Here at RCN, we are proud of our short history – and today is about celebrating twenty years of Nordic Cooperation and the enduring spirit of this College. The students have designed an evening of entertainment for you all which we hope re-introduces you to the diversity and the magic of our world. Many of our guests in this room have contributed in their own way to the success of this College – individual and unique thumb prints in the creation and development of UWC Red Cross Nordic and we thank you for your many meaningful contributions to our past. We sincerely hope that, for the years to come, you will continue to contribute to the architecture and future of RCN.

For, with the ambition, vision and spirit of our founders in mind, 'Our future [must] be greater than our past'.

Richard D A Lamont

Rektor

UWC Red Cross Nordic

21st September 2015

