

Address to UWC International Board – February 2016

It is a pleasure to welcome the members of the UWC International Board and other guests, on behalf of all those at UWC Red Cross Nordic. Our first years and staff are with us this morning with our second years engaged in the final day of their mock exam week.

For the benefit of the students, the UWC Council gathers once a year and the International Board three times a year at different locations across the world. Our archive reveals that the last time the International Board gathered here was twelve years ago. Tove, the Chair of RCN's Board took the initiative to invite the International Board to a meeting here on our campus.

Part of the challenge was to come and visit our College in mid-winter and we are delighted to receive visitors here today from all across the world – from Mexico to Hong Kong, from Armenia to India – representing different key stakeholders in the UWC movement – from the International Office to national committees, from sister colleges and schools to alumni and other supporters of UWC.

We have designed the programme surrounding this International Board Meeting so that it provides our guests with opportunities - through presentations by students, lesson observations, guided tours and other events and adventures – to connect with the students and staff of our College and the spirit of the place.

We appreciate that the main focus of your time here will be on your agenda – as you seek to question and establish UWC's 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 it with pride that we read of the work of the members of our International Office who seek to forge new partnerships in order for UWC schools and colleges to increase their commitment to providing education, a safe haven and a tangible future to those students of refugee backgrounds.

We are also delighted to welcome representatives of other schools and colleges who are seeking approval for UWC membership – and the respective Task Forces charged with the role of evaluating these applications. This afternoon, we have placed in the itinerary a Question and Answer session here in the auditorium for those interested in learning about the development of other schools.

It is important to us that we also introduce you all to RCN and its distinctiveness. 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.

You have braced yourselves for a few days of Norwegian winter and, in return, we would like you to have a truly Nordic experience: from an introduction to the wonderful world of gammaldans to a candlelit meal in a hytte on campus, from cross country skiing with students on our Survivors of Conflict programme and their partners-in-adventure, the Knights, to learning how to navigate the icy contours of campus.

When the Heads were at Mahindra last May, we were each given a beautifully coloured *kurta* by our hosts to wear to a dinner one balmy evening. With this in mind, I asked a couple of members of staff and some younger members of our community, last weekend, to exhibit some recommended essentials for our campus in mid-winter.

We trust you packed sensibly – as the Norwegians say, ‘there is no such thing as bad weather, just bad clothing’.

You find the College having had a wonderful Jubilee year. 2015 marked the 20th anniversary of the opening of RCN and provided us with the opportunity to celebrate the history of the College and its commitment to peace and a sustainable future.

At RCN, we are hugely fortunate to receive royal patronage - Her Majesty Queen Sonja has served as our patron since the founding of the College twenty years ago and attended our Jubilee event on campus on UWC Day on 21st September. Queen Sonja has remained committed to and an advocate of our UWC mission and values – and a champion of education in a changing landscape in Norway - and we remain deeply appreciative of Her Majesty's work as our patron: raising public awareness of Red Cross Nordic and UWC and for the supportive engagement, warmth and generosity of spirit that Her Majesty continues to bring into our world.

On this special occasion, Queen Sonja chose to visit the College in the Royal Yacht ‘Norge’– adding an exciting and spectacular new marine dimension to the event. The students designed an evening of entertainment which introduced our guests to the diversity and the magic of our world. After the show, HM Queen Sonja and the crew of her motor launch were given a spectacular send-off with 200 students stood on the shoreline holding aloft 200 flaming torches.

We also took the opportunity to launch UWC RCN's Strategy 2020 at our Jubilee. We are a unique college within the UWC, with our Nordic heritage and partnership with the Red Cross and the Rehabilitation Centre with which we share a campus – and, through a nine month consultation phase during 2015, we 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.

In early January, the news came through that Tom Gresvig, one of the founding team of our College, had passed away. We draw great comfort from the fact that Tom was strong enough to attend our two day Jubilee in mid-September in the company of his sons and their wives (one a Chinese alumna of SOS Children's Villages and our College). They undoubtedly must have been hugely proud of what Tom had achieved here at RCN.

I visited Tom in hospital in early December - his voice was barely a whisper but his handshake was firm and his eyes simply sparkled as we discussed developments at the College between the main jubilee event (his last visit to the campus he loved) and the end of term.

Without his immeasurable contribution, RCN would simply not exist – and we shall miss him enormously.

Lawyer, educator, gentleman, international traveller, dreamer and friend.

One of the most seminal and significant meetings of Tom's life was with Kurt Hahn at Salem. Tom, a student of German A-Level at Atlantic College in Wales in the mid-1960s, had secured a meeting with the retired Kurt Hahn in his rooms at Salem and I like to think it was this meeting, his formative experiences at Atlantic College and his belief in education as a force for peace that prompted him to set out on the road to establish a United World College in the Nordic region in the 1980s.

I think Tom would be delighted to hear the breaking news of this week - that RCN has been invited for the first time to be an integral part of the local Red Cross Førstehjelpsgruppe / First Response Team. This means that our trained Red Cross second year first aiders and key staff will be part of the local emergency services available in term time to serve the local community in a possible time of a need. This is very much in the tradition of Kurt Hahn and it will serve as a core component of our developing partnership with the Red Cross.

I like to think that the 'fourth' pillar of RCN is 'friluftsliv' – which translates as 'free air life'. Part of the RCN experience for students and staff is to connect with the nature that surrounds us – from the unparalleled beauty of the fjords to the flora and fauna.

On leaving the Admin building, I sometimes find myself casting my eyes towards the heavens (as Rektors sometimes do) and, on two occasions this term, I have spotted a sea eagle, spiralling and then soaring above the fjord. Ibsen, our dog, unaware of the threat of the predator above, carries on exploring regardless as we traverse the campus.

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

The sea eagle - '*Harv-urn*' 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.

On the December night in 2013 the world was informed about the death of Nelson Mandela (the then Honorary President of UWC), a powerful storm came across the sea and through the fjords – with the College enveloped in fresh snow, students reported the symbolic sighting of a lone sea eagle on the Friday, flying low and repeatedly around the campus.

I take the '*håvorn*' 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. 'It's each and every feather that makes the eagle soar'.

Thank you, members of the International Board and other guests, for your continued support of our College – you act as our ambassadors, our network, our voice beyond the fjords, soaring across different parts of the world.

I remember my history teacher at school astutely pointing out to us that the First World War did not take place in black and white. With this in mind, the video about to be shown invites you to explore, through the seasons, our energetic, magical and colourful world in miniature - and proves, that contrary to belief across the UWC movement, we are not always snowbound and plunged into eternal darkness here at Red Cross Nordic....

Richard D A Lamont
Rektor
25th February 2016