

Alumni Presentation August 2017

On behalf of the community here at Red Cross Nordic, it is a pleasure and privilege to welcome all our alumni and other guests – it is also wonderful to have so many children here.

We are particularly excited to be hosting our first double reunion on campus.

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 five years. We have concentrated on connection with our alumni community – with over 2000 RCN alumni worldwide – through the development of our website (including the regular profiling of alumni in our 'People of RCN' column), our Facebook page, the UWC Hub, a monthly newsletter to the RCN community and through regular alumni events across the world.

As well as our biennial reunions on campus, we have also organised events for alumni and other supporters in London, Helsinki, Malmö, Reykjavik, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Oslo, Stockholm, Singapore, Bergen, Costa Rica, and Åland in recent years. We were delighted that over 40 RCN alumni and former members of staff attended the UWC Congress in Trieste last October with many representing their respective National Committees.

At the start of this year, Mostak took on the new role of RCN's Alumni and Development Officer – and it has been a pleasure to observe him working alongside alumni including year reps and former staff reps to develop engagement in its many forms.

During my time as a teacher at Waterford Kamhlaba and over the past five 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.

I really enjoyed meeting so many of you on Saturday night and hearing about your projects and your futures.

Many of you are involved directly in National Committee work across the world and in work and events promoting the UWC movement and mission. Thank you for your continued engagement and support.

In June, we were invited by an RCN alumnus, Wille Walve, to a meeting with the Prime Minister of Åland and other cabinet ministers with the aim to strengthen the partnership between the College and this member of the Nordic region.

At the heart of RCN's Strategy 2020 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.

Our current fundraising priority is financial support for a Foundation Year for those from conflict / refugee / and other backgrounds who are unable to complete the IB programme in 21 months due to disrupted learning and / or language difficulties. Our focus is on providing genuine and supportive access to RCN in order to deliver the deliberate diversity at the centre of the UWC Educational model – and to encourage other UWCs to do the same.

We have helped to put together a programme for this 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 deliberately diverse range of backgrounds – and this course is an essential lift-off delivered by teachers and alumni volunteers. 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 have been looking forward to meeting you. The shared experiences and conversations amongst and between cultures is, I believe, part of the magic of Red Cross Nordic.

We ask you to rewind and consider the thrill, excitement, trepidation and dreams when you too embarked on your first few days here – some of you as the first students to step onto the campus. I wonder what you have discovered when looking back through your own personal and unique RCN kaleidoscope over the course of this weekend.

I have asked Arne and Mostak to give a presentation on developments after this – to introduce you to current projects and to discuss with you concrete ways that our alumni community can helpfully engage and connect with RCN.

Her Majesty Queen Sonja has kindly agreed to attend UWC Day this September and we are currently in the process of building a programme centred on 'Inclusion in Education'. Our aim is to be recognised as a 'lighthouse for inclusion' in our region and beyond – and, with this in mind, we are working with the Sogn of Fjordane Education Committee to co-design the programme and to invite other local schools to participate and to contribute.

We shall also take this opportunity to show Her Majesty Queen Sonja the latest building on campus.

Marianne Andresen, a dedicated supporter of the College since it was founded, generously offered a donation towards a new building to partner the Silent House in the wilderness area on the south side of the campus; this building, currently under construction, will contain a baking oven and will be an educational resource – and, we hope, a source of enjoyment - for our students, Leirskule children, patients, Red Cross summer camps, and other visitors. There is something deeply symbolic about baking and breaking bread across cultures in a Nordic setting – and this resonates with our educational mission.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of staff – Arne, Mostak, Leonora, Jonny, Svein Peder, Kathini, Barbara, Sven, 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 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, at the beginning of last week, a colleague and 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.

Larry

Richard D A Lamont
Rektor
UWC Red Cross Nordic
14th August 2017