

Introduction to Constitution Lecture: 30th September 2015

Delivered as part of the 20th anniversary celebrations of the opening of UWC Red Cross Nordic

This year for the first time, we have incorporated into our calendar three lectures focused on the three pillars of the College: the Thor Heyerdahl Lecture on the environment, the Nelson Mandela Lecture on humanitarian concerns, and the Constitution Lecture on the Nordic World.

The inaugural Constitution Lecture was given in 2013 by Kåre Willoch, the former Norwegian Prime Minister, and last year by Sven Mollekleiv, the President of the Norwegian Red Cross. We were delighted when Professor Geir Lundestad – former Director of the Norwegian Nobel Institute – accepted our invitation to deliver this year's Constitution Lecture.

Last year on Friday 10th October at 11am, it was announced by the Nobel Institute that the Peace Prize for 2014 had been awarded to Malala Yousafzay (Pakistan) and Kailash Satyarthi (India) for their struggle against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education.

In considering last year's recipients of the prize, hardly ever has there been a winner in the shape of Malala more relevant to our own UWC cause: to make education a uniting force.

I read *I am Malala* - part memoir, part manifesto – on my way to the annual UWC Council Meeting held last October at our Canadian sister college and was deeply struck by this story of personal courage, determination, unconquerable spirit, and resolve to champion universal access to education and equal rights of women. Malala poignantly dedicates her book '*To all the girls who have faced injustice and been silenced. Together we will be heard*'.

Named after Malalai of Maiwand, one of the great heroines of Afghanistan, who sought to bring an end to British colonial oppression and exploitation in the second Anglo-Afghan war of 1880 – and who tended the wounded on the battlefield in the same way Henry Dunant (founder of the International Red Cross and first recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize) did at Solferino 21 years earlier. The poet Rahmat Shah Sayel of

Peshawar wrote of Malalai of Maiwand that 'your poetic words turn worlds around' – and so her namesake's words, in turn, have shaken the modern world into turning and listening.

We feel here at RCN especially close to Malala with a strong tradition of Pakistani students here at the College and other students who identify with Malala's story: '*I tell my story, not because it is unique, but because it is not. It is the story of many girls*'. Her two friends Shazia Raman and Kainat Riaz – both caught in the crossfire of the assassination attempt on the school bus in October 2012 – were offered scholarships to study as UWC students at Atlantic College and were invited to the Prize Ceremony to support their friend last December as she became the youngest Nobel laureate.

RCN has been extremely fortunate and privileged to have been given by the Nobel Institute five places for students plus one member of staff for the Award Ceremony in Oslo since the College was founded in 1995. Many students apply each year internally through a written selection process to attend the ceremony as representatives of our College. Last year, we selected students from Pakistan, India, Singapore, Sweden, and Brazil plus a South African teacher to attend this very special occasion.

A few days later a much larger group of first year students who stay with us here in Norway for the month of December visited the Nobel Peace Centre in Oslo to see the exhibition that told the story of Malala and Kailash's fight for children's rights.

They will, I hope, have noticed the inscription above the entrance to the Nobel Peace Centre - *Broadmindedness, Hope and Commitment* – which resonates with UWC's mission and the statutes of this Nordic College.

Peace and a sustainable future are at the heart of our work – and at the heart of the Nobel Institute in Oslo. In fact, many meetings took place at the Nobel Institute in the late 1980s as group of Norwegians sought to establish a UWC in this country. I have the paper Thor Heyerdahl delivered in 1988 at a seminar in support of the project at the Nobel Institute on the desk in my office. In many ways, the meeting rooms of the Nobel Institute helped to forge the future of this College.

Looking back to the first award in 1901, the Nobel Institute has recognised many individuals and organisations committed to peace and associated with the UWC movement – from Nelson Mandela, our former Honorary President, to the International Committee of the Red Cross, from Lester B Pearson to Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

Coming with the territory of this award, the Nobel Committee has sometimes courted controversy in its appointment of laureates – and Professor Lundestad has had a unique insight into these appointments over the past 25 years which he reveals in his book published at the beginning of this month.

The world turns its attention to the announcement of the recipient each year – a prize which is both dynamic and potential political dynamite in the sphere of foreign affairs. The Nobel Committee seeks to recognise on an international stage those individuals who inspire others, as captured in the penultimate line of Kailash Satyarthi's acceptance speech, to '*march from darkness to light*'. We here at RCN seek, in our own small world and in the words of Malala, to '*build a better future right here, right now*'.

Since 2011, RCN has been honouring the Peace Pledge that was signed in the European Parliament and this term's RCN Peace Conference has included workshops, candlelit processions, and shared stories on personal, community, environmental and political peace. Today's Constitution Lecture – planned for the exact date twenty years ago of the opening of this College – is part of our ongoing commitment to peace. Looking forward, I understand that students have recently placed personal pledges for peace in this time capsule which is to be opened in twenty years' time.

It is a great privilege to welcome Professor Lundestad – Norwegian historian, university professor, former director of the Norwegian Nobel Institute and former secretary to the Nobel Committee – to deliver the third Constitution Lecture here at UWC Red Cross Nordic – '*What can the Nobel Peace Prize achieve?*'

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