

**Speech for the Ambassadors
21st September 2016
UWC Day**

Ambassadors and special guests, it is a great pleasure and honour to welcome you to UWC Red Cross Nordic.

We first met on Monday 6th October 2014, when the General Secretary and Chair of the Nordic Association hosted a reception in Oslo as a prelude to the 20th anniversary of our College. This was a fine way of bringing together different stake holders within Nordic co-operation; for the College, it was an opportunity to express our gratitude to representatives of Nordic countries and also to initiate dialogue about the road ahead. By chance, the reception was held on the date of Thor Heyerdahl's centenary anniversary – one of the founding team of our College.

After the lunch, an open invitation was given to the ambassadors to visit our campus and to connect with our students and staff – and we are extremely grateful to Erik Lundberg, the Finnish Ambassador to Norway, for taking up this invitation and coordinating this trip for his colleagues.

We are proud of the development of our Nordic Pillar over the past 21 years. 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 over 2000 graduates in twenty one 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.

Our founders envisioned a campus environment where Nordic students connected with fellow Nordics and explored connections, distinctions and even eccentricities - and where the Nordics met representatives from the world beyond.

We hope that all our students and staff – wherever they come from – develop a lifelong love and respect of the Nordic region.

Today provides us with the opportunity to celebrate the Nordic cooperation which underpins our community, and the College's ongoing commitment to education for peace – alongside UWC Day and the International Day of Peace as observed across the world.

With this in mind – and as a culmination to Peace Week on campus – we initiated this afternoon’s Symposium on Nordic cooperation in a global context with special emphasis on education and migration – a highly stimulating and insightful discussion.

As a College, we need constantly to question our strategic priorities and, most importantly, our relevance in the world today.

The inspiringly perceptive speech given by His Majesty King Harald at the garden party in Oslo on the first day of the month highlighted the changing demographics of Norway:

‘Norwegians come from North Norway, Central Norway, Southern Norway – and all of the other regions. Norwegians have immigrated from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Poland, from Sweden, Somalia and Syria. It is not always easy to say where we are from, what nationality we are. Home is where our heart is – and that cannot always be confined within national borders.’

He could well have been speaking of the changing human landscape of many of the countries within the Nordic region.

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 not only Norway but our partners across the Nordic region that our College has the ability and the expertise to serve and support those in need.

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 we seek to promote inclusion and invite students and staff alike to engage meaningfully with the three pillars of the college – environmental, humanitarian and Nordic.

Each year we invite a guest speaker to deliver a lecture on each of our three pillars.

This evening we have invited Axel Wernhoff (Swedish Ambassador to Norway and formerly Swedish Consul General based in Jerusalem) to give the RCN Nelson Mandela Annual Humanitarian Pillar Lecture – and he has chosen the title of “Can the Middle East be Fixed?”

We hold this annual lecture, in celebration of UWC’s former Honorary President. Mandela’s life was an inspiration for the UWC movement and its values of peace and

sustainability – and indeed he was, in many ways, the embodiment of our mission statement - perceptively and memorably reminding us all that *'education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world'*.

I, in particular, am very much looking forward to listening to Axel's perspective as a diplomat on the Middle East. Over a year ago, I accidentally ended up in the front row of a lecture at the Nansen Peace Academy in Lillehammer with Axel giving a lecture in Swedish – thankfully this evening's lecture will be in English.

Here at RCN, we are proud of our short history – and today is about celebrating the enduring spirit of this College, twenty one years of Nordic Cooperation, and offering a home away from home for all our students – for 'Home is where our heart is'.

We have a couple of student performances for our guests as a prelude to the lecture and to thank them for their ongoing, supportive and generous engagement with our College.

Richard D A Lamont
Rektor
UWC Red Cross Nordic
21st September 2016