

THANK YOU, LARRY!
Hans 20/5/17

Flekke,
20 May 2017

Moving On

“The end is in the beginning and yet you go on!” Mysterious words from Samuel Becket, the great Irish novelist and poet.

I am glad I can be in Flekke again at this important moment when you have indeed come to an end and you are looking forward to moving on to a new beginning. This beginning will eventually also end and join another beginning. Let me stop confusing you, the class of 2017.

You have come to an inter-section in your life. You have worked hard to earn a marvellous and precious gift from UWC: ‘choices’, choices you did not have before coming to Flekke. With the new beginning comes also fear because you are moving from what is familiar to you here to something that is unfamiliar somewhere ‘out there’. You may not even know yet the location of the new beginning. You may be worried because you are unsure whether you are equipped to meet the challenges in an ever changing world. There is nothing unusual about such feelings. I know because I had them!

I suggest you drop your worries and concerns and look forward with excitement to the new opportunities that await you as Flekke discharges you into a world which is rapidly growing together, a world in which there is room for everyone, whoever we are and wherever we come from.

“There is a world with room for all of us” I just said. I have to qualify this and say: Our world of 7.5 billion people, the world of towns and villages, of forests, rivers and lakes, mountains and valleys, a world of sounds and of silence, of warmth and cold, of rain and sunshine, can only be the world in which everyone can enjoy her and his physical and mental space provided we all practice what we have learnt.

What have we learnt? We have learnt to ‘respect human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, gender, language and religion’. Do you remember these words from your MUN? They belong to the UN Charter which in its preamble refers to “we the peoples”. You, we all, belong to the ‘we the peoples’ and therefore have the privileges enshrined in the UN Human Rights Declaration of 1948. In fact during your years at UWC-Nordic, you have already benefitted from two key human rights: the right to an education and the right to the full development of your personality.

As you have grown together, you are ahead of most of your generation around the world. I have no doubt that you will be among the architects for a better world of tomorrow. Anastasia Osipova, a Russian student at UWC-Dilijan recently was asked which five words came into her mind when thinking about UWC. Her answer: challenge, diversity, intensity, discovery and happiness.

What a beautiful answer!

Let me once more refer to human rights. During my 32 years in the United Nations living in countries that are all represented here (Ghana, Pakistan, India, Botswana, Turkey, the US and at the end in the country of Mohammed and Sara, Iraq) I have always felt, deeply felt, that the creation of the United Nations as a custodian for justice and rights has made the world a much richer place.

However, there is a 'but'. There is an anomaly. There is something missing. Something that disturbs me: Why is there a Universal Declaration of *Human Rights* but there is no Universal Declaration of *Human Obligations*? Should you and I only have rights and no obligations? Is it really unreasonable to argue that the more we enjoy the right to education, the more we have the obligation to use what we have learnt not just for ourselves but for others as well?

Selfishness is no fit for a UWC mind! The great Indian, Mahatma Gandhi, put it this way: I shall pass through his world but once. Any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now...and not defer it, for I may not pass this way again. Arrogance of status is also something that does not belong to UWC graduates. Humility does. A Malaysian saying makes the point: The taller the bamboo, the lower it can bend. The UWC spirit rejects prejudice. An Arab proverb puts it right: Do not judge anyone before you have walked a mile in his shoes. And lastly, a proverb that brings it all powerfully together – it is a South African (Zulu) proverb: I am what I am because we all are!

In this spirit I wish you, the class of 2017, a safe journey for the life that is ahead of you.

Hans-C. von Sponeck, UN Assistant Secretary-General (ret.)