

## **United World Colleges**

Farewell remarks to the UWC community  
Dilijan, Armenia, 2018-10-27

**Sir John Daniel**

Chair: UWC International Board 2013-2018

Thank you for those generous tributes. Serving the UWC as chair of the International Board for the last six years, during a busy and productive time for the movement, has been a great privilege. I am particularly proud of the continued evolution of our governance arrangements, of the new colleges and schools that we have opened, and of the dedicated performance of our colleagues who serve the whole movement from the International Office.

However, rather than reflect on those developments. I want first to take time to thank the many wonderful colleagues with whom it has been such a pleasure to work.

I start with the vice-chairs of the International Board during my tenure, Jill Longson and Pål Brynsrud. These two Atlantic alums exemplify the huge impact that our founding college continues to have on the movement. Both Jill and Pål have complemented my own role perfectly. No-one expresses the UWC spirit as fully as Jill, who also gave the Board some relief from my robust style of chairing meetings.

Pål's vast experience of management and governance has been of huge value. Without his skilful chairing of the Nominating and Governance Committee over recent years UWC's governance would not be in the excellent shape that it is today. I have also had the great good fortune to have had the backing of two first-rate Treasurers in Wayne Yang and Colin Habgood.

I pay tribute to all the international board and council members who have served with me since 2013. I thank you for your tolerance of my tightly structured approach to chairing your meetings. I hope that you all felt that you had the opportunity to express your views and that our decisions reflected thorough discussions of each issue.

In thanking the Council members, I express special gratitude to my two vice-chairs, Fayyaz Nurmohamed and Pär Stenbäck.

In offering thanks to the thousands of people who serve UWC in a volunteer capacity, I must single out the board chairs of the colleges and schools. One of the encouraging features of UWC's development in recent years has been increased cohesion within the movement. Nowhere has this increased cooperation been more marked than within the group of board chairs. It has been very rewarding to watch them come together and, through their discussions, for each of them to come to a better appreciation of the diversity and strength of UWC.

The heads were already meeting regularly when I joined the movement, but I observe that their meetings too have become more productive and have exercised increasing influence on the movement as a whole.

The heads and the chairs now have regular joint meetings and these express well the ‘unity in diversity’ within UWC that I will comment on in a minute. I have greatly enjoyed working with Tove Veierød and Christian Hodeige as chairs of the chairs and Arnett Edwards and Laurence Nodder as chairs of the heads.

During my tenure, I have visited each of our 17 institutions at least once and each time I came away newly inspired by the culture of learning and tolerance that the chairs and the heads create on their campuses.

Mention of the heads brings me to the paid staff of the UWC movement, especially those at the International Office. It has been my privilege to work with two excellent executive directors, each very different, but each just right for his times. Keith Clark, perhaps unwittingly, fired the starting gun on a period when the number of colleges and schools expanded briskly. Jens Waltermann is carefully strengthening UWC’s organisational, financial and strategic foundations to support that expansion into the future.

Kate Turner has been near the centre of most of the good things that have happened at the IO in my time. I know that you all join me in wishing her strength and courage as she copes with her serious illness.

I live in Vancouver, so I have not had the chance to visit the London office as frequently as I would have liked. Fortunately, through the more frequent calls that Jill and Pål have made, I have kept myself informed of the brilliant work of the IO staff through changing and sometimes difficult periods. I thank them warmly – as I thank all those participating in the governance and management bodies that I have not mentioned.

Let me finish with a few words about some challenges for the future.

Our website states that: ‘At the heart of UWC’s distinctive model of education is deliberate diversity’. Later it comments that: ‘Each of our schools and colleges has its own distinct character and identity, influenced by its host country, its specific setting, its cultural context and its community’.

It is both heartening – because imitation is the sincerest form of flattery – and disheartening – because excessive use of a term debases its currency – that ‘deliberate diversity’ has become a cliché. Search the web today and you will find dozens of institutions claiming to practice it.

Our chief response, when other international schools copy our mission and methods is to implement them even more effectively ourselves. Therefore, as ‘deliberate diversity’ becomes a common catch-phrase, we must be lucid about how we apply it within UWC.

In this spirit, I suggest that we should be more cautious in applying the term to one of our distinct features and less cautious in applying it to the other.

Where should we be more cautious? Recent experience has taught us to set limits to the diversity of our student bodies on some dimensions of the human condition. Spending two

years, far from home, working on demanding academic and co-curricular programmes in a residential school with classmates from all over the world is a tough proposition.

Students need reserves of resilience to cope with it. We do no favours, either to the individuals or to their classmates, by admitting students who do not have the psychological robustness to prosper with us.

I believe that I am preaching to the converted. The movement has learned the hard way that we are not hospitals. At the very least, each head must have enough information to make judgements about the suitability, for the UWC experience of each student that the admissions process proposes to send to them.

Where might we be less cautious about encouraging diversity? My second quotation from the website said: ‘Each of our schools and colleges has its own distinct character and identity, influenced by its host country, its specific setting, its cultural context and its community.’

During my tenure as chair of the International Board I have officiated at the openings of six new UWC institutions. As applications to join the movement multiplied, the Board realised that in fairness to the applicants – and to the existing UWC schools and colleges – we needed clearer criteria for joining. That has proved helpful, not least in filtering out unsuitable candidates.

We also monitor, more formally and for longer, those new institutions that have been accepted as UWCs. That seems to help them. It also gives the UWC movement as a whole, through the International Board, the chance to ensure that any conditions we impose on a new institution complement positively the school’s –quote - ‘distinct character and identity, influenced by its host country, its specific setting, its cultural context and its community’.

As the number of UWC institutions grows and host countries and cultural contexts become ever more diverse, we must be flexible and clear-minded in encouraging and treasuring this diversity. That will not always be easy. Traditions of governance vary greatly across the world.

This is one aspect of our wider challenge. We are a free association of legally autonomous institutions that have agreed to work together on a common mission.

The stability and success of UWC will always depend on striking the right balance between the autonomy of each school or college and the collective will of the movement to rally around particular objectives.

UWC would fragment quickly if each institution were to go overboard in ‘doing its own thing’, just as it would stultify if movement-wide policies were to become a straitjacket.

I believe we have got the balance more or less right at the moment. Today’s tensions within the movement are broadly creative rather than destructive. This means that we can benefit from the growing diversity of the schools and colleges while continuing to present ourselves to the world as the **United** World Colleges.

Students from our diverse institutions will meet later as university students. If they find themselves spontaneously drawn to each other because of their common UWC experience, we can count ourselves successful.

I wish you every good fortune in continuing to strike that balance and I thank you for the privilege of leading the governance of UWC International for six exciting years.

On January 1st Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro will take over as chair of the UWC International Board. It is an honour to be succeeded by such a distinguished global leader. I wish her and you every success in guiding this great movement into the future.