

UWC Weekend Celebrating the Opening of the Robert Bosch College in Freiburg
20-21 September 2014

Launching into a Different World

Sir John Daniel
Chair, UWC International Board

Good morning! You will find, as you get older, that speakers who say they will be brief never are, so I shall simply make five points.

Congratulations

I congratulate you warmly on the creation of the Robert Bosch College. It is marvellous that 50 years after your compatriot, Kurt Hahn, helped to establish Atlantic College and launch the UWC movement, you have founded this College in his native land not far from the school in Salem where he developed his vision of education.

This College is a great achievement of collaboration between German UWC alumni, the National Committee and the Robert Bosch Foundation. I congratulate you all and commend you on choosing such a wonderful site, where the most modern school sits on the site of a medieval Cistercian monastery that has seen numerous uses over the centuries. The buildings are a stunning blend of the strikingly modern residences and theatre and the sensitively restored classroom block.

A different world

This College starts life in a very different world from that of the earliest UWCs. They were created against the backdrop of the post-WWII consensus that the world must never again relive conflicts like the two world wars. That consensus produced the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which underpinned, in pragmatism and idealism, commitments to the peaceful resolution of disputes, the respect of territorial integrity and the encouragement of decolonisation.

In brief, and despite the rapid emergence of the Cold War, it was a time when states around the world paid at least lip service to the ideals of the Enlightenment and the four essential liberal values of respect for everyone, suspicion of concentrations of power, belief in progress and peaceful management of the conflicts that inevitably arise.

Kurt Hahn had confidence that young people had enormous capacity to further these ideals and values if they received a challenging education that developed their personal autonomy.

Today's world

We have a different world today. The ideology of many states and organisations is antithetical to the liberal consensus. The attitude that might is right has produced

territorial incursions that are only weakly challenged and, in the name of security and the prevention of terrorism, most governments are reducing the freedoms of their citizens to move and to share information.

This is not the hopeful future that Kurt Hahn and his colleagues envisaged, but the UWC system must adapt to this future at both the local and the global levels.

UWC local

As regards the local level I simply observe, after nearly two years as chair of the UWC movement, that countries with the privilege of having UWC institutions in their jurisdictions have more difficulty than others in balancing off the respective interests of the alumni, the institution and the national committee. I am sure that you will be able to rise to this challenge in Germany, but you will need to address it deliberately.

UWC global

Meanwhile the UWC movement must continue to evolve globally. The creation of the Robert Bosch UWC with its special emphasis on sustainability is a splendid step in that process. We are adding other new institutions and encouraging a variety of models alongside the traditional two-year college offering the International Baccalaureate Diploma.

This will also help us to overcome the challenge of success. Over the years since Atlantic College was established the rest of the educational world, observing the glow of the UWC movement, has adopted many of our innovations, such as the International Baccalaureate, community service and outdoor activities. Moreover, thanks to the movement of people many ordinary public schools in countries like my own Canada, which still welcomes immigrants, match UWC institutions in the racial, national and religious diversity of their pupils. How can the UWC movement remain the leading example of international schools? What innovations should we pioneer now?

The UWC movement is increasingly a system. Cybernetics is the science of systems and I leave you to reflect on the Law of Requisite Variety, a key element of systems theory. It states that in order to deal properly with the diversity of problems that the world throws at you, you need to have a repertoire of responses that is at least as varied as the problems you face.

I leave you to reflect on that, I congratulate you again and I wish the Robert Bosch United World College every success.