



OPENING SPEECH

Charles Beer

Geneva State Chancellor in charge of the Department of Education

Secretary General of the World Organization of the Scout Movement (Eduardo Missoni)

Members of the World Scout Committee

Representative of the Jacobs Foundation (Bernd Ebersold)

Members of the Scientific Committee

Chairman of the Commonwealth of Learning (Sir John Daniel)

Ladies and gentlemen;

It is a pleasure and an honour to open the World Scientific Congress of the World Organization of the Scout Movement, which is celebrating its centenary this year. I bring you warm greetings from the Conseil d'Etat and I look forward to celebrating this great anniversary with you that you are taking advantage of in order to grow further. Some remain self-satisfied: you prefer movement and a continuous dynamic of reflection to support your experiences and your future.

The contribution of the Scout Movement throughout the 20th century is considerable and particularly noteworthy. First of all, we must acknowledge 100 years of pedagogical innovation in the area of nonformal education. In effect, Scouting invented the pedagogy of intercultural encounters as early as 1907. Today, we talk of a “dialogue of cultures”. This pioneering aspect deserves our full admiration as, while this theme seems obvious today, it was not necessarily so at the time.

As a forerunner, Scouting also invented environmental education, favouring outdoor activities whereas, at the time, education was practised more “indoors”. Here again was an innovative step that has since been emulated elsewhere. Finally, Scouting encouraged taking responsibility through the team system – which is leadership education.

One hundred years of educational practices have influenced and enriched the educational methods and even the reforms of educational systems in some countries. Many Scout leaders are teachers in their professional lives, or even officers or high-level civil servants in charge of education.

I applaud the challenge of the World Organization of the Scout Movement in organising a confrontation between the academic and Scouting worlds. In fact, Scouting practices will be the object of exploration, dissection and dissertation! They are going to be scrutinised by, and be the subject of a real “analysis” for academics. And this is the whole challenge of the debate over the next two days: you are going to hear opposing perspectives. The Scientific Committee has taken good care to select academics who (for the most part) have no connection to Scouting. By organising this tough, bold and positive confrontation between two universes, the Scientific Committee will, I am sure, give rise to academic research projects on Scouting and fascinating questions. I appreciate this initiative that aims to be a rich confrontation and a meeting of two worlds. This is how one can progress: by opening new windows on the future, by opening the doors wide to constructive criticism so as to progress together in the general interest.

The themes that will be tackled over these two days show how much Scouting is in phase with current world issues: employment, sustainable development and intercultural education. I am glad that representatives of the UN system of organisations have been invited. Scouting practices will be “analysed” by experts, with varying perspectives. In effect, UNAIDS will be invited to analyse Scouting practices in terms of HIV/AIDS prevention; as will be the case for other organisations in the UN system, such as UNICEF, ILO and UNESCO.

The presence of numerous non-governmental organizations involved in general education through practising non-formal education is enriching for this Congress. Enriching by sharing practices and experiences, but also enriching through the questions and innovative perspectives that will certainly emerge during the debates.

One should already think about disseminating your work to as many institutions, NGOs and governments as possible; to reaffirm the strength and relevance of Scouting 100 years after its inception. This congress will be a special opportunity to analyse how far Scouting is in step with today’s world; this congress is a chance to develop a new culture of partnerships between the Scout Movement, governmental and local institutions, and civil society as a whole. I look forward to this mosaic that will work without taboos to strengthen its effectiveness. This ambition may lead Scouting to even more new perspectives, in line with its tradition of creativity and innovation.

This congress should also be a new opportunity for the whole educational community to enable the outcomes of this education for any human society to gain recognition. Your work will also be very useful to the Swiss educational system: your educational methods, your pedagogical intuitions, which have been validated by both academics and experts in the international community, should be of interest to our pedagogical programmes and teaching. The Geneva state school system is involved in a process of reform, re-establishing its foundations and positive self-questioning. The state school system is also passionately grounded in the times and is mindful of integrating new possibilities that will help each

student to find his/her own place, to situate him/herself in his or her environment and to understand it. Enabling young people to develop their capacity for analysis in a world that is chaotic, changing and that sometimes feels insecure is dear to all our hearts.

At the beginning of this 21st century education is sometimes synonymous with competition, a race for qualifications and the elimination of the weakest. It has to be stated clearly: education needs to integrate people and bring them together, and not leave anyone behind. Scouting pedagogy makes a precious contribution to a certain idea of education as a vector of integration. We all need to fight against exclusion. We must offer young people multiple and varied access routes. "A better world is possible", as Baden-Powell was already saying in his own way in 1907. Let us be faithful to this creed. Let this conviction inspire us to enrich our knowledge, sharpen our pedagogical tools, and keep targeting education that is intelligent, rigorous, generous and that facilitates integration. I am very happy to note your spirit of intellectual openness and exploration. I applaud your will to unite all the competencies and expert views without preconceptions for the benefit of youth and progress in ideas.

On behalf on the Conseil d'Etat of the Republic and Canton of Geneva, I wish you a congress that is rich in exchanges and dialogue. I hope that it will be the start of an in-depth reflection for you on the values of non-formal education so as to affirm the quality and originality of your engagement. A value to which you have been faithful for 100 years and that deserves the greatest praise and gratitude.

Charles Beer

Geneva State Chancellor in charge of the Department of Education