



OPENING SPEECH

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At its last meeting in Tunisia, in September 2005, the World Scout Conference, the governing organ of the World Organization of the Scout Movement, composed of all National Scout Organizations, agreed that one of the initiatives to be developed during the centenary year would be an international colloquium : the Scientific Congress that brings us together today; the last world event in the celebrations of the first hundred years of the Scout Movement.

In fact, the Centenary presents us with an extraordinary opportunity to communicate to the world the relevance of Scouting in today's society.

The contribution of Scouting to peace has been the focus of the centennial celebrations and initiatives.

Through hundreds of "Gifts for Peace" Scouts have shown how they can tackle local issues and make a difference in their local communities. Scouts worldwide are engaged in managing conflict without violence, challenging prejudice and encouraging greater solidarity. The projects are being coordinated at a national level and engage Scouts in a wide range of social issues including bullying, child soldiers, child labour, working with marginalized groups, religious intolerance, street violence and gangs, peace conflict resolution, health awareness and working in support of human rights.

One hundred years after the first experimental camp that Baden Powell organized on Brownsea Island in August 1907 with 20 boys, the World Scout Jamboree, the largest World Scout event which takes place every four years in a different country, gathered some 40,000 girls and boys and their volunteer adult leaders in the United Kingdom at an unique educational event to promote peace and understanding among young people from all over the world.

An enormous variety of other initiatives have been taking place at regional, national and local level, reaffirming the role of Scouts in making a constructive contribution to society.

Thanks to our communication strategy and the tools that we put into place over the last three years, together with intensive activity to create or consolidate a great variety of partnerships, we have definitively increased the level of public recognition of Scouting worldwide. This has opened doors and created new opportunities for Scouts and their National Organizations at all levels.

Too often however, when looking for support, especially from some international institutions, doubts are expressed about the “lack of evidence” about the real impact of Scouting, and by extension of non-formal education. In fact, a systematic scientific validation of Scouting contribution to society, whether from a pedagogical, socio-cultural, managerial or leadership-building perspective, is still lacking.

Furthermore, we have sometimes had to face resistance from some of our member organizations, who challenged the organization of this World Congress, missing the link with our mission and questioning its priority.

A lack of vision was generously compensated for by external partners and all those who responded positively to the call for contributions, who were able to see how Scouting and non-formal education could enormously benefit from the increased credibility deriving from scientific evidence.

Here I need to thank the Jacobs Foundation, not only for its considerable financial contribution, but also for having positively challenged us to pursue the participation of top-level speakers. We must also extend our thanks to UNESCO, whose support underlines the relevance of the role of non-formal education in the wider strategy for human sustainable development in pursuing the Millennium Development goals. For the support to the youth event that preceded the Congress let me also thank the Council of Europe, with whom we collaborate in the campaign “All Different, All Equal”.

Our hope is that the dialogue between researchers and field practitioners in Scouting and other NGOs, will also help us to better define quality in non-formal education programs, and initiate a process for a tighter long-term collaboration.

Lord Baden-Powell warned us: “Scouting is not a science to be solemnly studied, nor is it a collection of doctrines and text”, in fact it can only be fully understood through direct experience. Nevertheless, a better understanding and publicity of its impact on personal development, and of the contribution it may give to a more just and inclusive society, will certainly add credibility to the daily educational work of millions of committed adult volunteers and facilitate the development of Scouting worldwide.

Reaching the final goal and the overall impact on society will fundamentally depend on the capacity of Scouts to live up to their Promise and remain loyal to the principles and values they committed themselves to, even when facing the toughest challenges posed by a lack of ethics of today's society and of an intolerant and unjust world.

Only educating young people to “be” Scouts, rather than offer experiences “in” Scouting will really contribute to creating a better world.

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