



Your Majesty, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a real pleasure and an honour for the International Baccalaureate Organization to be associated with this very special occasion, and to join with Atlantic College and the United World College movement as a whole. But this is as it should be. The partnership goes back over thirty years to the birth of the IBO when the relationship with Atlantic College – described so vividly by Alec Peterson in his classic account “Schools Across Frontiers” – was one not just of cooperation, not even of collaboration but, to use a much abused word, one of synergy.

Atlantic College needed the IB and the IB most certainly needed Atlantic College. Indeed the decision by Atlantic College to abandon national qualifications in 1972 in favour of the IB Diploma Programme was a turning point in the development and growth of the IBO. After that it never looked back.

Today the UWCs are educating about 2,000 IB diploma students. Worldwide, the IBO, in our diploma programme, our middle years and our primary years programmes has a responsibility for about 200,000 students in 115 countries. But despite the growing difference in size I do not anticipate any dilution in the relationship. Let me explain why.

“To receive a UWC education is to win first prize in the lottery of life”. I quote, or rather misquote, Cecil Rhodes, who actually made that comment about being British! But Rhodes had a point: there is a huge element of chance that determines the opportunities that come to us in life and that applies to those chosen few who are selected, against all the odds, to be UWC scholars at one of the ten colleges. Statistically it is a drop in the ocean but what the IBO can do is to take the example of the international education developed by the UWCs, borrow your staff as examiners, writers, curriculum developers and mentors and extend the message across the globe. Our present rate of growth will take us to about a million students in ten years’ time. Whatever the numerical contribution of the United World Colleges, I am confident that their example will continue to be an inspiration to all of us involved in the practical challenge of international education.

Atlantic College was opened when the Cold War was in its most frightening period. That threat has been lifted but it has been replaced by new terrors which feed upon cultural ignorance which leads to cultural misunderstanding and then to cultural antagonism. The need for an international education has never been more urgent and the combined example of the IBO and the United World Colleges has never been more relevant.

Your Majesty: I am reminded of the words of Robert Kennedy who describes the cumulative impact of the actions of individual young people working towards the common aim of a just cause. They were spoken to students in South Africa in 1966 at the height of the apartheid regime; they are now inscribed upon his grave.

Each time a person stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, that person sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance

Atlantic College has been educating young people to become centres of energy and daring for more than 40 years and the International Baccalaureate Organization has been proud to help multiply those ripples of hope across the world.

George Walker
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