



Address of Dr. Eduardo Missoni Secretary General of the World Organization of the Scout Movement

12th Africa Scout Conference - Mauritius September 2004

Chers soeurs et frères scout,

Queridas hermaas y hermaos escuteiros,

Dear Sister and Brother Scouts,

A little over a year ago I received an email from a person until then unknown to me. He said he represented a global executive search company - "headhunters" - with an apparently brilliant career in the highest ranks of the corporate sector.

My name had been suggested by people in UNICEF, and he asked if I would be interested in competing for the post of Secretary General of the World Organization of the Scout Movement.

I would have erased the message quickly, and considered it "spam", electronic garbage, had I not seen the word "Scout".

I answered saying that, if that was not a joke, it was a great honour for me to have been contacted. I sent him my CV.

I did not hear from him for over three months, then he wrote to say I was among the first 105 candidates and I was invited to an interview.

Just over a month later, and after the interview process, without having ever applied for the post, nor even having dreamt of it, I found myself for the first time facing the World Scout Committee. I had been selected and now I was being asked to confirm my acceptance to serve as the Secretary General of world Scouting.

Clearly, this was a Higher Sign. Once again I said: "Yes", accepting the challenge.

The great Latin American poet José Martí once wrote: "The place of a man is where he is most useful", let me hope that God (and the World Committee) made the right choice. Now for me that place is here.

"Do you want to become a member of the great Scout family?"

It was the 7th of July in 1965 when, in front of the Rome 24 Scout troop, with my left hand on the group's flag and my right hand in the Scout salute I pronounced for the first time that word: "Yes", committing myself, on my honour, to be a Scout "God willing, forever".

After becoming a medical doctor, I was inspired by the famous Swiss doctor Albert Schweitzer who devoted his life to care for people with leprosy in the village of Lambarané in the Cameroon. I decided to follow his example and I prepared to leave for Africa as a medical volunteer.

But as "destiny waits in the hands of God", I ended up not in Africa, but in Nicaragua, in Central America, in a rural area where the living conditions are not dissimilar to those existing in most parts of poor rural Africa.

The decision to become a medical doctor and to serve through my profession those who suffer illness and disease was deeply rooted in the Scout promise and the values we all share, and so was the new decision to take care "of the poorest of the poor".

Thus, I left the Scout group where I had been for 15 years, where I had served as a leader both in the Scout and in the Rover sections.

Departing on my new mission, I thought the time had come to put away the Scout scarf forever. Nevertheless, as promised, I would remain a Scout forever.

In Nicaragua, Scouting was now for me the challenge of reaching, on foot or on a horse, isolated rural communities, which had never before received medical attention. Scouting was now to share their work, their food, their homes, their concerns, their hopes.

Years later, Scouting was my commitment to do my best as a UNICEF officer, in Mexico, as well as dedicating extra time during the weekends to volunteering as a medical doctor in the slums of Mexico City.

Later on, I served for 16 years in the Italian Development Cooperation, at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responsible for health and social development programmes with Latin America and the Caribbean, and many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa. As a Scout, I unfortunately had to fight not only against poverty and diseases, but also against my own bureaucracy for assistance to be appropriate, transparent, efficient and effective.

I was driven by the Scout spirit when I became an assistant professor at the prestigious School of Management of the Bocconi University in Milan, recognizing in this new task a service to future generations of international leaders.

Finally, here I am, as a Scout (but now once again with the Scout scarf around my neck!), to share with you the legacy of our Founder B-P, to do our best to leave this world better than we found it. Committed to the Scout Movement (and again in the Movement) towards a future of peace and full social justice.

I am with you and the millions of Scout sisters and brothers of the world to build a global society where all may have the right and the concrete opportunity to actively and fully participate; overcoming all types of prejudice and sectarianism, breaking all those cultural, social, economic and political barriers, that in the present society promote conflicts.

Scouting has given me a unique experience. When I recently visited Nyeri in Kenya, I paid a visit to the grave of B-P and Olave. There, at the end of their path, I initially felt that I could only pronounce two words: "Thank You". But Scouting was now presenting me with a new, enormous, challenge. Therefore I prayed: "Help me".

We have, sisters and brothers, a great responsibility. The outcome of our effort will depend on the quality of the education - the quality of Scouting - that we offer to our girls and boys, our young women and men.

But how do we measure the quality of our work at local, national or global levels? Not by the increase in membership. What if we register millions of new Cub-Scouts every year and the same children are lost one year later?

If we want to make the difference, we need to develop "autonomous, supportive and responsible individuals who are capable of contributing effectively to the development of society". It is our Mission.

We can expect this to be accomplished only at the end of the complete personal progression envisaged by the Scout method, possibly from the age when children are able to cooperate within a group (this is 6-7 years of age) to the age when young people enter into adulthood (20-22). But the most critical period remains from adolescence to early adulthood.

It is the number of young people who complete the programme and leave the Rover or Explorer sections and remain a "Scout forever" in their human, professional, social and political commitment, that will be the measure our success and a possible indicator of our impact on society.

To be effective in applying the Scout method, at all ages, we need trained and motivated adults. With a comprehensive approach through all ages of Scouting and a renewed investment on the senior sections we may retain more of them as Scout leaders. This may offer part of the solution, but it will take a long time, too long for the challenges we are facing.

It is vital to also attract and recruit other young adult volunteers, intensively committed with values and methods from the Movement. People of this quality usually are in great demand in the community. We must find and convince them that Scouting is the place where their leadership can make a difference.

"We are a Movement, not an organization," B-P told us, concerned with the bureaucratic evolution of Scouting. But to thrive, the Movement - Scout units and groups everywhere - need to be supported. This is the task of national Scout organizations, and of the World Organization of the Scout Movement, especially of the World Scout Bureau. I believe that more emphasis should be put on the strategic priority "An organization for the XXI century".

An important step is the creation of common criteria for the modernisation of our associations. For the Movement to grow globally, it is necessary also that its member organizations progress.

As I was able to see, in various World Scouting regions, many of the problems often have their roots in the lack of organizational culture and good administration. This may need some more direct and sustained assistance from the regional office of the World Scout Bureau, for national organizations in difficulty with the implementation of their national plans according to the approved Development Plan for Scouting in Africa.

Elevating the organizational and functional standards of our associations will also lead to a better inter-regional coordination and exchange. In this respect the existing African-Arab cooperation is just one of the many possible beautiful examples. Let's expand and intensify these kinds of initiatives.

Also at the level of World Scout Bureau we are presently dealing with innovation and restructuring.

Notwithstanding a high degree of decentralisation with clearly defined levels of responsibility and accountability, we are putting emphasis on the unity of our organisation. We want it to be younger, with an increasing number of young executives, and an extensive participation of youth representatives in decision-making.

A modern, solid, dynamic, efficient and especially effective organisation, capable of quickly reacting to the continuous transformations of scenario in the context of the globalization process, but at the same time deeply rooted in tradition and values, which make Scouting unique.

An organisation that serves the Movement in order to offer to an ever growing number of young people the extraordinary educational experience of excellent quality Scouting.

We want to improve our capacity to listen and interpret the new concerns and aspirations of the youth of today, offering them answers for their future.

Almost 100 years ago, B-P said that every Scout is a "citizen of the world", a real protagonist of change, a builder of peace.

Peace is the focus in the preparations for the 100th anniversary of Scouting. So, be prepared with your Gifts for Peace.

More and more today, a "global citizen" is one who carries out projects starting from a full social, economic and political involvement in her or his local community.

It is a process that starts involving Scouts in community development initiatives as an integral part of our programme - an area where the African Region is a leader.

It is a process that must include, wherever possible, children and young people in difficult circumstances: children who society has excluded, rejected, leaving them in the street, alone, pushing them into violence and crime. Several remarkable examples, especially in Africa, show that Scouting can help them.

Let's follow B-P's advice: "In a great Movement, with a great objective, there is no space for minor personal efforts; we need to abandon small ideas and join our arms as a "team" that allows us to face the whole effectively. Cooperation is the only way if we want to reach success".

The World Scout Bureau is in the best position to serve as a link between experiences, to facilitate the sharing of acquired knowledge, to appropriately channel solidarity among regions and national organizations, to optimise existing resources and even to mobilize new resources within and outside the Movement.

Planning and implementation of a comprehensive resource mobilisation system is now among the highest priorities of the WSB.

To this purpose it is fundamental that national Scout organizations help, providing all possible information on existing or planned cooperation initiatives, to share ideas and information about projects.

The financial support pledged by the Jacobs Foundation for specific parts of the development plan of African Region is a first result in this direction.

To widen the network, the new World Scout Bureau will work with inter-regional strategic teams and will proactively look for the participation of volunteers with the required competence and a number of Scout-related organizations and institutions that may be accredited as World Scout Collaborative Centres.

For the creation of a cooperative environment and to ensure the best internal communication in the Movement, we must know how to take advantage of modern technology of information and communication.

But, within this context, as Scouts, we want to be pioneers, leaders, to open new frontiers, exploring and adopting technologies that are appropriate for our tasks and that are widely accessible, reflect our principles, and values. The creation of a WSB policy on the adoption of open-source, open-standard software, is an example of the direction we have taken.

I am committed to assure maximum transparency in the administration of resources, clearly linking budget to strategy, objectives, outcomes and activities. A new Strategic Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation unit has already been established at the WSB.

If we want our voice to be heard, it is necessary to communicate our achievements. Raising the profile of Scouting is one of the priorities of the Movement. That is why one of the first decisions I took was to strengthen the external communications area of the World Bureau and we are now planning a comprehensive communication strategy.

Again, the primary source of information is national organizations, and it is vital that they systematically report their achievements and help us to build an international network of Scout reporters.

At the same time we will need to work together in order to identify former Scouts working with the national and international media and with them establish a strategic alliance to promote positive information on Scouting.

Finally, to accomplish our mission, we also need allies among other international and global actors, especially programmes and agencies of the United Nations that are closer to our issues and share our concerns, as well as other civil society movements and organizations that share our vision; an example being the alliance of CEOs of the so called "Big 7" youth organisations and movements.

We are already credible partners with many organizations of the United Nations system. During my first visit to this region I signed a memorandum of understanding with UNEP to facilitate collaboration at various levels. A similar framework agreement is under way with UNICEF, not to mention the high interest shown by UNAIDS in ensuring follow-up to the already very successful "Dakar initiative", or the growing interest of World Bank to collaborate with us.

But we need to explore the collaboration also with other sectors of society: such as the academic world, public administration and the corporate sector. We must stress that investing in Scouting is investing in the future of humanity. Obviously, we must be very selective in choosing our allies: we have to care for the respect of our values and our image and apply rigorous ethical standards in the selection of partners, including especially those who offer us financial contributions.

We can change the world, and we will have to do it before the present world changes us. There are many challenges and a long path forward. But as Scouts we are prepared, we know how to face difficulties "singing and whistling" and why not, dancing (sega, kudu, samba, tarantella, tango...).

Only preserving this joy, this spontaneity, sharing our cultures, uniting our energy and enthusiasm... all together we will be able to leave this world a little better than we found it.

Here in Africa where our Founder was first inspired and where he decided to remain forever, here are the greatest challenges for humanity, here is where the highest commitment is needed, here is where also we as Scouts have to make the greatest effort.

Sisters and brothers of Africa, once again: I promise I will do my best, and with your help and trust, even more.

12/9/04 MC