

**European Council of International Schools  
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**Remarks by Ms. Patricia O' Brien,  
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**Introduction**

Thank you for your welcome. It is an honour to have been invited to meet with you and to deliver this address.

I thought I might begin with the words of the UN Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-Moon. He often recounts his experience of life as a young boy in the 1950s in the aftermath of the Korean war. His words are those of someone who knows better than most the value of education and who, as a result, is especially strongly committed to doing all he can to bring its benefits to as many people as possible.

He recently said and I quote: "Education has shaped my life and the history of my country. I grew up in a society ravaged by war and mired in poverty. Schools had been destroyed. My classes were held in the open under a tree. We had no desks, chairs or other basic necessities. The Republic of Korea was on its knees, but education enabled the country to stand tall again. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other international partners provided books and school supplies to help pave the road to recovery. Someone provided me with a

textbook to help me to learn. At the back of this book it said words that I will never forget: 'Please study hard, because UNESCO has given you this book.' I will never forget the hope that these basic tools gave us."

I have highlighted his words for two reasons. First, to convey to you the profound personal belief of the head of the United Nations, which I fully share, in the importance of education, the vital work to which all of you commit your professional lives. And second, because it is the Secretary-General who appoints the Board of Trustees of the United Nations International School – known as UNIS – in New York. It is, therefore, an honour that he asked me to serve as the Chair of the UNIS Board. And it is this capacity that I have been invited to meet you today.

The linkages between the UN and the School are close and numerous. These linkages are evident in many ways, big and small. Every day the distinctive blue UN ID badges, which all staff wear, proliferate at the UNIS gate as parents leave their children to school. The linkages are evident on special occasions, too, such as the annual graduation ceremony which takes place in the wonderful UN General Assembly Hall. And at tough times the relationship between the School and the UN endures. For example, late last year, in the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy, the School basement was flooded causing damage and a total loss of electricity. Colleagues at the UN came together to provide whatever resources they could to ensure the school would reopen quickly. And as soon as the School re-opened the Secretary-General paid a visit to show his solidarity with the community. You can imagine this was a great encouragement at a time when the School was recovering. I know, too, that the Secretary-General was greatly lifted

when the students greeted him with a song in Korean. The enthusiasm and affection the students show toward the Secretary-General is palpable, and he clearly enjoys their company. Indeed, he met with a large group of them just last month in the UN General Assembly Hall for the annual UNIS-UN Conference.

Before I speak about the truly special school that UNIS is, and the work of the Board, I thought it might be useful to tell you a little about my position at the UN and about the Organization itself.

## **The United Nations**

Today's UN is made up of 193 Member States. Almost every country on earth now takes a seat in the General Assembly. The 51 original members from 1945 have been joined by 142 others since then - most recently by South Sudan in 2011.

UN Peacekeeping Operations are of course, a key element of the UN's global efforts. The budget for UN peacekeeping operations is nearly US\$7.3 billion. In 2012, this budget funded approximately 114,000 military, police and civilian personnel serving on 15 peace operations led by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations - directly impacting the lives of hundreds of millions of people on four continents. It seems like a vast project - and it is.

While some critics might argue that the Organisation falls short of meeting the challenges it faces, it is crucial to remember just how important the UN is for so many States. In this respect, I am reminded of the former United States Vice-President Adlai Stevenson's comment

that "the whole basis of the United Nations is the right of all nations - great or small - to have weight, to have a vote, to be attended to ..."

Many States are small or developing and do not have the advantage of coming from a stable region with well established regional and institutional arrangements. More than 100 of the UN's Member States have a population of less than 10 million. So, the bulk of the States at the UN - with all that this implies - are small. The UN allows them an opportunity to be seen and heard, which they might not otherwise receive.

The UN is also a place where States, large and small, arrive to make their own contribution. President Kennedy's words to the General Assembly in 1963 remain true today almost five decades later: "the task of building the peace lies with the leaders of every nation, large and small, for the great powers have no monopoly on conflict or ambition".

### **Office of Legal Affairs**

I am now in my fifth year as the UN Legal Counsel. Before joining the UN, I spent the main part of my career in this part of the world where I was the legal adviser at the Irish Foreign Ministry and, earlier, the legal adviser at the Ireland's representation to the European Union in Brussels.

As the UN Legal Counsel, I head the Office of Legal Affairs. The Office employs almost 200 people on a full-time basis and effectively acts as in-house Counsel to the Secretary-General, to the senior management and the wider UN system. Much of our work is, understandably, carried out quietly and behind the scenes. We cover a range of issues of public

international law which many people would associate with the UN – for example, advice on the law applicable to war, Peacekeeping Operations, Oceans and Seas, international criminal justice, as well as the internal administration of justice for a staff of more than 60,000. My Office undertakes work on procurement where we provide legal support and assistance for contracts, with an aggregate value of some \$4 billion.

My task as the Legal Counsel is to support the Secretary-General's commitment to the strengthening of the rule of law, the pursuit of justice and the determination to end impunity for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and other serious violations of international human rights law.

The Charter of the UN is the fundamental legal basis and primary law of the UN. In the preamble of the Charter the Peoples of the United Nations expressed their determination "*to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained*". Since 1945, the Organization and its Members have striven to give practical meaning to this resolve and to develop legal bases for peaceful relations between States.

My office plays a central role assisting states in the negotiation of international legal texts which have become milestones in the field. More recently, the Office has devoted particular attention to issues which also have significance at the national and the global level. The protection of human rights, the promotion of the rule of law and the consolidation of democracy are among the most salient features of this contemporary approach to the promotion of justice and respect for international law.

Promoting the rule of law at the national and international levels is at the heart of the UN's mission. Establishing respect for the rule of law is fundamental and essential for a number of reasons, including firstly: prevention of conflict; secondly, achieving a durable peace in the aftermath of conflict; thirdly, the effective protection of human rights; and also, of course, sustained economic progress and development.

Some examples of situations in which my Office has been very engaged during my time as Legal Counsel will give you a sense of the variety of the issues we face:

- The status of Palestine at the United Nations;
- Situation in Middle East, Gaza, Libya and now Syria;
- Maritime Disputes around the world and particularly in Asia;
- The building of a culture of accountability for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, which has included:
  - a) The establishment and support for international criminal tribunals for Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, as well as Sierra Leone and Cambodia and Lebanon; and
  - b) Gross violations of Human Rights around the world including places like the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sri Lanka;
- Piracy off the coast of Somalia and the challenges of prosecution;
- Coups and unconstitutional changes of Government in different parts of the world

We also deal with situations which, at first glance at least, have perhaps less to do with international peace and security. A brief example of less

obvious work: for instance, the film and TV industry regularly seeks to portray the United Nations in its movies and programmes. This involves my office in protecting the use of the UN name and emblem. These are very precious representations of the Organization and they must be guarded.

If we do authorise the use of the name and emblem of the Organisation, the script of the film or show must be approved.

If the UN premises is being used, for example for a film or recording a video, we have to work on issues relating to costs, insurance and liability. I recall, for example, last summer, my office being busily engaged on legal aspects of the preparation for the filming of

I do not hesitate to say that it is a great privilege to do this job. Like those of you who work in busy schools, one can never be sure what is going to arise on a daily basis. Often the best laid plans can be interrupted by a new crisis, as the urgent replaces the important work on my desk. However, I suspect that, in situations such as these, you, like me, just have to re-prioritise, move forward and take it in our stride – treating it as a normal part of the work we are fortunate to do. Striking a balance between the issues and the people clamouring for our attention.

I often mention to people a corner of the street opposite the United Nations, a place where people from all over the city and from all over the world convene to protest - to make their voices heard outside the United Nations, in the hope that they can have their voices better heard inside the United Nations.

On this corner is an engraving of a quote from Dag Hammarskjold, the second Secretary-General of the United Nations. It reads: "Never, for the sake of peace and quiet, deny your own experience or convictions".

In my office, as lawyers, we are often called upon to give the green light to policy decisions. There is always a long list of reasons why we may want to say "yes", but sometimes the single reason to say "no" may overwhelm all the others – we have to be true to the law.

These instances give rise to situations where one must strike a balance between taking what might be the path which suits most – or nearly all - of the interested parties and taking a lonelier path which leads to the best place to be.

I will give you an example from my experience:



## **Democratic Republic of Congo**

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, the United Nations was asked to unconditionally support Congolese armed forces to protect the civilian population. However, when evidence came to light that a government contingent was involved in violating human rights, the United Nations could not continue supporting such a contingent without undermining its integrity, its commitment to human rights and the rule of law.

This episode highlighted for us the importance of establishing a Human Rights Due Diligence Policy, which now applies across the Organization. It requires any United Nations body to ensure that its support for security forces is consistent with our Charter and international law. If we believe those security forces are committing grave violations of international law, we must intercede to stop the violations, but if they don't stop, we must stop our cooperation.

This demonstrated the important role of lawyers. Too often, we are seen as naysayers waiting to tell others why the law constrains them from acting. However, when we do our jobs right and we do our jobs well, we can convince our clients to be mindful of their long-term interests in complying with the law rather than focusing on their short-term interests in moving ahead with a particular course of action, albeit a worthy one.

But in order to do this, we must have the courage to stay true to the law, and to never deny our own convictions, even for the sake of peace or quiet or an easier time.

And, of course, there are other instances where striking a balance is important – not to the same degree as in the Congo case I have just mentioned, but, nonetheless, in ways which leave their mark.

## **Rwanda**

This occurred to me in a small personal way during one of my first overseas missions as UN Legal Counsel.

I was taught my manners growing up. Always be polite. Please and thank you. And always take the hand of someone who extends theirs.

I thought about that when I travelled to Rwanda almost four years ago.

Before I joined the UN, I had read “Shake Hands with the Devil,” the compelling memoir by General Roméo Dallaire, the Force Commander of the UN peacekeeping operation in Rwanda, about his experience during the genocide.

General Dallaire described how, “In just 100 days, over 800,000 innocent Rwandan men, women and children were brutally murdered while the developed world ... sat back and watched the unfolding apocalypse or simply changed channels.”

This indifference allowed the génocidaires to rain so much bloodshed on Rwanda that the rivers overflowed with dead bodies.

When I arrived at the Rwanda Tribunal fifteen years later, the government officials took me to the prison. This is customary to show that conditions are humane and comply with international standards.

And so, I found myself face to face with one of the suspected war criminals at the door of his cell.

He reached out his hand to shake mine.

What should I do?

I had never refused anyone's hand in my life.

Part of me thought - and my instinct impelled me - to go with the flow.

It was not for me to forgive, but forgiveness is part of our credo and a way of moving forward.

It is not as though anyone would have known the difference.

Shaking his hand would have resolved an awkward social moment.

But it would have created a much bigger problem. It would have haunted my conscience.

I do not pretend it was brave to refuse his hand. I do not say I was right or wrong. I am just very glad I did not shake his hand.

He was later convicted of genocide.

## **Cambodia**

- Another area of my work in which the question of striking balances plays an important part relates to the pursuit of justice and the maintenance of peace.

Freedom from fear is what all people in conflict and post-conflict societies around the world long for. They all desire what the United Nations was founded to maintain. They all want peace.

It is less obvious but equally valid that people in conflict and post-conflict societies want more than peace. They also want justice, and deserve accountability.

We know that accountability matters for peace. Therefore, it is our duty to fight impunity. We are seeking to establish and consolidate the emerging culture of accountability which we have been progressively building over the last two decades. The perpetrators of international crimes, of war crimes, crimes against humanity, and the crime of genocide and serious violations of international humanitarian law must be held accountable.

Another aspect of this question is whether the passing of times should influence the pursuit of justice or lessen its legitimacy. The case of Cambodia is a relevant example. It is also an example of how the way in which one's personal and professional lives intersect – even after many years and across different continents – can be telling.

I spent four years of the early part of my childhood living in Cambodia. Little did I know that, decades later, my UN position would bring me into often daily engagement on Cambodia and cause me to visit Phnom Penh on a number of occasions.

The reason for my visits was the Extraordinary Chambers of the Courts of Cambodia. This is the court established, with UN support, to try the

most senior and most responsible members of the Khmer Rouge for the terrible crimes committed in Cambodia during the late 1970s.

My family had left Cambodia before Pol Pot and his comrades commenced their "Year Zero" and the crimes perpetrated in its name.

The brutality of the horrors he visited on his country and his countrymen defy description. The way in which the Khmer Rouge targeted teachers as a particular group to be eliminated is shocking at so many levels.

They regarded traditional education with complete hostility. Education was a great threat because of its potential to influence the development of society. After the fall of Phnom Penh, they executed thousands of teachers. Some of those who had been educators survived by hiding their identities and their profession.

All this, even though Pol Pot had been a teacher of French literature and history - even though his wife was also a practicing teacher. It has always struck me as a grotesque irony that, while he prepared for his rampage, Pol Pot made his living doing the very thing for which people would later be executed and by teaching students he would later massacre.

So it struck me quite forcefully that, as part of my role as UN Legal Counsel in the building of a culture of accountability in international justice, addressing the crimes in Cambodia was very much part of my agenda.

This court in Cambodia has meant an enormous amount to many people there. During its first case, every day more than 15 bus loads of Cambodians travelled long distances from the provinces and villages to

the Court to attend the public hearings. Tens of thousands have visited the Court so far.

And, in advance of the court's first verdict, more than 10,000 people indicated to the court that they would like to attend the passing of judgment on the first accused, a man by the name of Kaing Guek Eav, also known as "Duch", who had been a jailer at the notorious Security Prison 21, S21- the former high school used by the Khmer Rouge to kill up to 20,000 people, including many teachers and academics.

The Court likened S21 to a "factory of death" and Duch's crimes there as "undoubtedly among the worst in recorded human history". He was jailed for life.

Hundreds of Cambodians, including monks, packed the courtroom to witness the verdict. On that day, one of the very few people who survived S21 said: "I can't forget the scars, the broken teeth, the torture. But this is perfect justice for me. I am 100 per cent satisfied with the sentence."

During my first visit to the Cambodia as UN Legal Counsel, the place I had left decades earlier as a carefree young girl, I visited the notorious S21 Prison 21. It is now a museum which serves as a testament to the crimes of the Khmer Rouge. It is what some have labelled a "school of atrocity" where today you can look at photographs of the victims, visit the classrooms which were transformed into prison cells and the graves of a small number of victims in the playground.

It is not lost on me that my daily work includes the complex task of addressing questions relating to the pursuit of justice of people who

prioritised the killing of teachers. And that at the same time I am also chair of a school board with close links to the United Nations which seeks to end impunity for such atrocious crimes.

## **UN and Education**

It is in countries which have endured such profound conflict and where poverty levels are often high that the UN is seeking to make a difference. We try to do this in many ways, for example, through enhancing respect for the rule of law or assisting people in lifting themselves out of poverty. Undeniably, education is one way to make progress toward these goals.

It is for this reason, that the Secretary-General has made education one of the top priorities of his second term. His reasons are straightforward. His own personal experience, which I recounted to you earlier, has obviously influenced him deeply. And, also, as head of the United Nations he has the chance to travel around the world and to meet with communities who are suffering through terrible circumstances. He always takes time to ask them, "What can the UN do to assist you?" The first response from parents and children alike, even in war zones, is usually the same: Education.

Even in the worst circumstances, education helps to give children confidence to face the future. The power of education to transform lives is universal. And parents understandably want their children in school.

Education is a universal human right, enshrined in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In 2000, governments adopted a bold global agenda for education, with concrete targets to be achieved by

2015. Remarkable gains have been made during the past thirteen years, especially in increasing access to primary education. Gender inequalities have been significantly reduced also.

However, the UN is deeply concerned that education is slipping down the international priority list. The pace of progress has waned on many fronts. Therefore, last year the Secretary-General launched the Global Education First Initiative as part of an effort to answer the call of parents everywhere for the education, which their children deserve – from the earliest years to adulthood. The UN believes that we must place education at the heart of our social, political and development agendas. In order to achieve a breakthrough and give the final push to our global education by 2015, we will need an unprecedented mobilization of partners through a common thread. This what the Global Education First Initiative is doing. The initiative has three overarching priorities:

- Putting every child in school
- Improving the quality of learning
- Fostering global citizenship

This is not a matter of choosing education over other issues of great importance. Our internationally agreed development goals are a complex tapestry, and education is an indispensable thread. Educated mothers are more likely to have healthy children who survive. Educated families are less vulnerable to extreme poverty and hunger. And educated nations are more likely to enjoy vibrant economies, political stability, rule of law and a respect for human rights.



Education is not simply a moral imperative; it is the smart choice. Every dollar invested generates \$10 to \$15 in returns. Yet worldwide, some 61 million children are still not in school. Our shared ideals are simple. We want all children to attend primary school and to progress to secondary school and relevant higher education. We want them to acquire the literacy, numeracy and critical-thinking skills that will help them to succeed in life and live as engaged and productive global citizens.

### - **Benefits of education**

Education is at the heart of poverty-reduction and sustainable development. Education is not a “silver bullet” to end poverty, but it is probably the closest we will get. If we fail properly to deliver education to children in the world’s poorest communities, we will return time and time again to help the “children of the children” who we failed to help in the first place.

Beyond the economic benefits of education, education has the power to promote new behaviors, attitudes and values – such as tolerance, citizenship, and respect for the planet and the environment.

### - **Achievements**

Globally, there has been good news in the education sector during the last decade. Substantial progress has been made in education, reflecting not only improvements in the expansion of educational opportunities but also in the equity of access to education for girls and boys. Across the globe, primary school enrolment rates have risen and drop-out rates are falling. The number of children out of primary school dropped from more than 100 million in 1999 to about 60 million in 2010. And the

improvements in educational outcomes have been particularly marked for girls; gender gaps have decreased, and in some regions have even reversed.

## - **Challenges**

But, even though we are witnessing improvements, the statistics clearly tell us that we face enormous challenges. There is much to do, and there are obstacles in our path. The main challenges are persistent inequalities due to socio-economic factors. Poverty, gender, disability, religion and ethnicity remain strong markers of disadvantage. We need to step up our efforts on children and young people who have been left out. We must strive to give all children equal educational opportunities. Despite the progress in narrowing gender gaps, girls and women still need additional support. We continue to see obstacles in the entrenched mindsets that still treat women and girls as second-class citizens. And there are some terrible human stories of struggle to access education. We all saw it last year in the attack on three school girls in Pakistan. The main target - Malala Yusufzai - is an inspiring young woman who advocates for education.

In her words and I quote: "I know the importance of education because my pens and my books were taken from me by force. In January 2009 the Taliban restricted my education and told girls they weren't allowed to go to school anymore. I can't tell you how saddened I was by this. This was the worst point in my life. But the girls of Swat aren't afraid of anyone. We continued with our education. The Taliban has restricted education so that girls were only taught up until year 4. But me and my

friends were in year 5 and 6. We decided that we would go to school with our books hidden under our shawls. And we would pretend that we were in year 4.”

Wise beyond her years, she is a champion of girls’ education and girls’ rights, including at a children’s assembly organized in 2011 by UNICEF. She is truly courageous -- determined not to be silenced even as she knew the very real risks of speaking her mind. The attack on her was abhorrent and cowardly. The terrorists showed what frightens them most: a girl with a book. Nowhere in the world should it be an act of bravery for a young girl to go to school. The global outpouring of support for Malala shows that this is a shared struggle that resonates widely.

These deep inequalities can be found not only in access, but also in the quality of learning. Half of all children in the poorest countries who have completed Grade 2 cannot read anything at all. Of the world’s adults, an estimated 16 per cent — 793 million people, of whom two thirds are women — still lack basic literacy skills. There is an urgent need to address the quality and relevance of education.

The dual imperative of “raising the bar and closing the gap” requires that we improve the overall performance of all students and at the same time improve access and outcomes for the most disadvantaged. In the context of diminishing resources, progress will require scaling up of proven interventions and applications of innovative approaches drawn from all sectors.

**UNIS**

Educational challenges are worldwide, even in the most developed countries and in the most successful schools. No school, including UNIS or, I imagine, your schools can claim to be an exception. Although, I am very aware that UNIS is privileged to have plentiful resources, access to technology and excellent teachers and administrators.

As you will know, the UN has a strong, long and special relationship with UNIS. The School was established in 1947 by a group of United Nations parents to provide an international education for their children, while preserving their diverse cultural heritages. What began as a nursery school for 20 children in the New York City borough of Queens, which was the first home of the United Nations International School, quickly grew, adding grades, students and faculty.

The rapid growth of the School demanded new and larger facilities. By the 1950s, the School had two campuses in New York City – one in Manhattan and one in the borough of Queens, and broadened its student base to include the UN community, the Diplomatic Corps, the non-governmental international sector, and local New York Families.

Today, approximately 60 per cent of the student body comes from the UN-related community and 40 per cent from New York families which are made up of international families and New York families. Of course, many of these come from an international background while others come from American families who have made a deliberate decision to embrace all that the School represents.

UNIS was one of the founding schools of the International Baccalaureate and was among those awarding the first diplomas. The comprehensive curriculum, K to twelve, prepares UNIS students for the IB and to go on

to study in top colleges and universities in the United States and worldwide.

Today, UNIS has two campuses, one in Queens housing K-8 grade and one in Manhattan, situated along the East River, housing K-12 grade. The School is chartered by the New York Board of Regents as an independent, not-for-profit school and is also accredited by today's hosts, the European Council of Independent Schools.

The School aims to provide an environment for optimal learning and teaching in an international setting that fosters understanding, independence, interdependence, and cooperation.

We have 1,575 students from 122 countries speaking 120 languages. Our 330 faculty and staff represent over 57 countries. Approximately 80 per cent of them have taught abroad and speak two or more languages. It is this interaction of cultures and identities among students and staff which provides the basis for real exploration of internationalism creating a truly unique educational experience.

It also creates the basis to develop students who are committed to the spirit of the UN Charter; who benefit from an international education; who strive for academic excellence and who feel they should be part of a caring community.

When one visits UNIS, it is like visiting a village, with its population of approximately 1,800 people. Except this is truly a global village. It is a global village which existed before the author Marshall McLuhan coined that term in the 1960s, when he wrote of how technology and

information flows were making the world a smaller place. Simply to stand at the School entrance is to watch the whole world and each of its continents go by. I do not exaggerate when I say that it is inspiring to witness.

I should also add that the alumni are very much part of this global village. We have 26 alumni parents on staff - which include three alumni couples – as well as 10 alums on staff. This includes our latest very valuable recruit, the Assistant Executive Director, Salvador Uy, who not only is an alum, but whose father worked for the United Nations.

### **Being appointed Chair**

As I mentioned earlier, UNIS maintains a strong – one might even say special - relationship with the UN through its governance. The Secretary General of the UN appoints the 18 members of the UNIS Board of Trustees on the recommendation of a Committee of the Board. The Board is comprised of parents, alumni, UN officials, and other members of the community.

Traditionally, the Chair of the Board of Trustees is a senior official of the United Nations. This reflects a practical, modern day link between the Organisation and the School. It also represents an acknowledgement of the School's history and provenance.

When the Secretary-General asked me in 2011 to replace the outgoing Chair, I was honoured and excited by the prospect. I would be less than honest if I did not say that the honour and excitement was tinged with

some trepidation. As a parent of three children who were educated in Brussels and Dublin, including some at the main international school in Ireland, I am very conscious of the expectations and trust that parents place in schools and in all those associated with running them. Whether they are the faculty and staff who work on the ground on a daily basis, or the Board of Trustees whose role is one of vigilant oversight. As someone whose job is very demanding and who is required to travel quite frequently, I worried if I might struggle to manage the Board's business.

However, I know, too, from personal experience the great worth of education – the richness it provides to our lives; the perspective it gives us; and the character it builds in us. I know this from my own experience as a student, from my experience as a mother of three students and as a teacher of third level students at law school in Canada. The opportunity the Secretary-General was presenting to me was one that I felt I should not miss, given my own strong belief in education and the progress it heralds. I know that, in my own case, education has opened doors and removed obstacles that have allowed me to achieve things beyond my dreams.

I am very happy to report that I have never had a moment's regret about accepting the role of Chair of the UNIS Board of Trustees. It has been enlightening, demanding, rewarding and, at times, very challenging to be associated with a School where such levels of energy, passion and diversity are the order of the day.

It has also been a privilege and an education to work with a group of such extraordinarily committed and talented Board members. None of us

could have imagined the challenges that we would face over the past 18 months. But, like a good education it has provided us with knowledge, given us a wider perspective and has built stronger characters in us all. It has been instructive that, whatever the issue, big or small, the Board has always looked out for the interests of the students. As we see it, their interests are not just one of the items on our agenda. Instead, these interests must be - and are – the priority of our agenda.

The role of the Board though must remain in perspective. The heavy lifting is carried out by a remarkable group of staff and faculty who demonstrate on a daily basis their dedication to the School, its students and its motto “A Better World”. The School also benefits from an especially committed Parents’ Association, at both the Manhattan and Queens campuses. As Board Chair it has always been a pleasure to work with their representatives who strive for the best for their children, seek balanced outcomes and interact with energy and courtesy.

Many of you will be aware that, very soon after I took on the role of Chair, the Board and the wider School community faced a major challenge with the sudden resignation of the Executive Director.

And, only a few months later, during the summer of 2012, the wonderful man who the Board selected to serve until the end of the current school year as Acting Executive Director, David Shapiro, had to retire because of a sudden illness. These distinct events understandably caused upset at many levels.

The Board, together with the entire School community addressed these different set-backs in the most open way possible, discussing with



parents, faculty and staff the best way to move forward for our shared interest – the students and their education. However, and there is no point denying it, in relation to the resignation of the Executive Director, one of the balances we had to strike was quite how much information to share. We had to strike a balance between transparency and legal and reputational issues.

The loss of the Acting Executive Director was a great blow and a challenge for UNIS, as the School had just recruited a new Deputy Executive Director who had not yet taken up duty. As you can imagine, the Board met quickly to assess and address the situation. If I may say so, I could not have expected the Board to act in a more organised, mature and generous way. The same can be said of the four UNIS Principals, the newly recruited Assistant Executive Director and the parent body.

Before David Shapiro's illness struck, the Board had already started the search process for a permanent Executive Director with a start date of summer 2013 in mind. We quickly decided that we would maintain our time line. We felt that any attempt to rush the process might deprive us of the best possible candidates – some of whom would not be available before the end of the current academic year. It was not a hard decision to take, but it required thought and then explanation to the School community.

With that decision taken and widely accepted, the Board also needed to address how best the School could be managed on a day-to-day basis while the search for the new Executive Director continued.

The Board took the unusual and - in hindsight – correct step of establishing an Interim Leadership Committee. This Committee, which is composed of three Board members with different management expertises, has acted as a liaison between the Board and the faculty and staff. In the circumstances, this plan has worked very well. The Committee members have been careful not to insert themselves in the daily running of the School. However, they meet with the School management on a frequent basis and they make themselves available at any time to offer advice on a range of issues.

This approach has the advantage of giving the Board a more focussed picture of developments at the School. More importantly, I believe that the sustained effort of the three Board members has helped to generate a sense of solidarity and better understanding among all of the School's constituents.

This has been another case of where I, along with the three extraordinarily devoted members of this committee, have had to determine how and where to strike the right balance. How far do we step back or forward? When do we do so? And with whom? The reality has been that we have had to make case-by-case judgments in striking the delicate balance between responsible governance and possible undue interference. I like to think we have got that balance right.

It would not be, in any way, true to suggest that the Board wanted events to take the path they have taken. However, presented with the situation with which we were faced, the outcome has been positive. The daily running of the School has not been hindered and, crucially, I believe that the quality of education has been maintained.

Meanwhile, another Board Committee was established to search for a new Executive Director. It carried out its intensive work with the close involvement of the full Board and the wider School community.

The Board decided that the search process should be as consultative and transparent as possible. We wanted to involve the Staff Association, the Parents' Association and the students directly in the process, so that they could have an opportunity to meet any candidate who the Search Committee recommended to the Board for interview. This resulted in a number of candidates spending a few days visiting the School's two campuses and engaging in discussion with any members of the School community who wanted to meet them. The Search Committee subsequently followed up with those who had met the candidates to gather their feedback.

It will come as no surprise to you to learn that the process was detailed and lengthy, with the ups and downs that are inevitable in these circumstances. What was clear throughout the process was the great attractiveness of UNIS to those who lead international schools. Equally evident was the passion of the UNIS community to identify a candidate who would carry forward the School's mission and who would develop the School further.

Along with the other Board members, I am delighted that Jane Camblin, who currently serves as head at the French American International School in San Francisco and who is present here today, will this summer take up duty as the UNIS Executive Director. Those of you who know Jane will be aware of her formidable record of achievement and the great mix of skills she brings with her. We are very much looking forward to

her arrival in the summer and we believe that a positive, new and forward-looking chapter is opening for UNIS.

While UNIS was one of the first truly international schools and was a pioneer in the early 1970's of the International Baccalaureate, it has now been joined by 100s of schools around the world and even in New York City where many other schools also offer the IB. That growth is both a by-product of globalisation and a testament to the critical need for an international education. UNIS has not only produced many international servants. More importantly, it has produced young people who, in what ever field they choose – from finance to the arts – carry with them appreciation and understanding for the universal values found in the Charter of the United Nations. On a more practical level, UNIS graduates are at home the world over having acquired an innate appreciation for diversity of culture and thought. I know that some of those most attached to UNIS like to think of the school as a beacon of international education, given its location and its close association with the United Nations. It is a sense which I very much hope will continue. From my experience as Chair of the Board I am confident that it will.

Allow me to underline my gratitude for the invitation to speak here today. It has been an honour. I know that I will later be involved in a follow-up session. I look forward to meeting some of you there and hearing your views on the issues of interest to you.

Thank you.