

IBO Director General's Report to the Council of Foundation

Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland 5 May 2003

President, council members, honorary council member, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen:

I intend to say very little because, of everyone present here today, I shall probably have the greatest opportunity to speak during the next two days. However, what I want to say is important because I wish to place these next two days into a wider context.

Let me start with the *Annual review & financial report*, in which I have already had my say: it is my report to the Council of Foundation. It has a new look this year and a particular theme, which is significant: *partnerships*. So the **first part** of the context I have just mentioned is my belief that the future growth of the organization will depend upon its ability—I actually mean *our* ability—to work constructively with other like-minded organizations. We have taken important steps during the past year, but we still have a long way to go.

On this occasion last year I mentioned the way the IBO had allowed me to achieve a number of lifelong ambitions—I quoted the example of walking on the Great Wall in China. But it is now clear that I shall never achieve one particular ambition, that of flying on Concorde. Although 30 years old, this beautiful aircraft never fails to attract our attention when we see it in the sky. It represents the very peak of quality design and engineering. But when it is retired from service in about six months' time, it will leave behind no legacy whatever. There is no supersonic successor to Concorde and there is little evidence that Concorde has influenced the design of more realistic aircraft, the kind that you and I travel in. Concorde has made a huge impact on our imaginations, but very little impact on travel.

I need not explain the metaphor. The IBO's programmes, its development of the curriculum and its assessment, its relationships with schools and its professional development all add up to high quality education. At the moment about 1,200 schools are flying with the IBO which represents impressive growth but it also presents our greatest challenge: how to expand our influence so that the IBO, and what it stands for, has an impact on the kind of schools that you and I attended. I say that in the confident knowledge that each one of you believes that *the IBO and what it stands for* has become even more important this year than it was last year.

But I will let someone else speak on our behalf by quoting from a recent communication from Professor Howard Gardner of Harvard University (incidentally, a former Peterson lecturer).

He wrote to me:

I am not sure that the IB originally saw itself as one of the best hopes for international/intercultural understanding but it is clear that you have been thrust into that position.

So the **second** part of the context of this meeting is the responsibility of the position that we are in; if you like the position that you and many others like you have put us in by your dedicated hard work.

The challenge of growth and of influence has never been far from the IBO's debates. Exactly 25 years ago, the then President of Council, John Goormaghtigh, speaking at a conference in London (attended, incidentally by Piet Gathier and Gérard Renaud) and I quote from the minutes:

stressed the special interest of the IB for the developing world which time had not allowed him to discuss adequately

Some years later, Alec Peterson looked back on that London conference with the following comment:

From the beginning there have been different opinions within the IBO about our policy of expansion varying from (the) original concept of an "experiment" limited to a dozen schools, on the one hand, to a complete "open door" policy on the other. The (London) conference recommended "a carefully controlled expansion" but the principles on which control was to be exercised were not spelled out.

This, then, is the **third** part of the context of this meeting, the management of growth and we shall be examining it in through the important work we have been doing with McKinsey and Company. Some of you here today were part of our launch meeting in Washington last November. I believe we are being presented with a unique opportunity to take some very important decisions that will establish the medium-term strategy for the IBO.

McKinsey have found us to be in pretty good shape: financially, organizationally, intellectually and morally. This is precisely the moment, therefore, to consider our future because success today is no guarantee whatever for success tomorrow, unless it provides a springboard for serious long term thinking and planning. So this is the **fourth** part of the context of this meeting: future change. I do not anticipate dramatic change, rapid change or painful change, but I do anticipate change because we do not have the option to stand still. Fortunately, as you will hear later in the meeting, we do have some choices in the directions we can take.

To sum up, then, I have identified four interconnected features that make up the context to this meeting: our ability to form partnerships, our responsibility in the field of international education, our management of future growth and our capacity to undergo change. I believe these are the ingredients for an unusually stimulating meeting.

Some very dedicated people will be leaving the council after this meeting: Greg Crafter, Mabel Mary Manzitti, Niall Nelson, Luz Maria Edwards and Malcolm Lamb. I want to thank them, on behalf of the IBO, as well as Bob Pearmain who has remained this past year to take the minutes of the council meetings—a vital task.

For two colleagues, Helen Drennen and Jeff Thompson, this will be their last council meeting as IBO directors. Their contribution has been enormous and I want to thank them, too.

I wish you all a very worthwhile experience over the next two days.

George Walker, IBO director general