

18th December 2023

### Christmas message from the Rektor

For Christians, Christmas is the festival where the birth of Jesus Christ is celebrated. In Christian and several faith-based and secular societies, Christmas often is associated with the giving of gifts and the warmth of human relationships. In the society from which I come, Christmas is described as a season of goodwill. What often is overlooked is that Jesus is described as having been born while his parents were following the instructions of the political overlord to travel from their home to a different place. Soon after his birth, Jesus and his parents became refugees. I wonder to what extent the circumstances of the early life of the person that Christians consider the Son of God resembled that of the lives of people today who are ‘internally displaced’ (language has a way of smoothing out, of normalizing situations of deep distress and danger), and of refugees? Two millennia ago, weapons of war were far, far less developed than today, but the capacity for human cruelty was not.

This is my final Christmas message as Rektor (I retire this coming summer), and I will take a little license. To me, the tension between Christmas being a season of goodwill and yet Jesus being born into unattractive and dangerous circumstances, reflects part of the dilemma inherent within UWC. Can and should our active goodwill in any meaningful sense extend institutionally beyond the immediate confines of our school community and our service partners? Most reading this message will know that UWC Robert Bosch College welcomes students from a ‘deliberate diversity’ of backgrounds. Quite apart from recognizing that not all parts of any society are thriving (while recognizing that some individuals thrive under the most challenging circumstances – something which UWC National Committees also try to reflect in their selections of students), deliberately we also welcome students from countries and societies experiencing some of the hardest circumstances. At a naïve level, as students and staff arrive and start forming community, we call on the principle of ‘goodwill’. Naturally, I hope that students who come into this UWC from situations of great distress experience more than ‘goodwill’; I hope that they experience friendship, professional support, and an institutional steadiness that, over time, allows them to thrive in this school. Certainly, much effort is put into making this a reality. This school provides platforms for us to hear each other’s stories, and an academic framework to understand better the world in which we live (including, positively, understanding societies that over time have flourished). The UWC Robert Bosch College community sometimes collects humanitarian support to support people ‘back home’, generally arising from student initiative. But, as a school, by design we leave it mainly to our graduates to choose whether and how to become active and partisan in specific struggles. The same might be said around sustainability and the climate crisis: UWC Robert Bosch College provides, I hope, a deeper awareness and understanding (including academic understanding) of the challenges and opportunities, but only limited tools to reduce our institutional carbon impact.

How I have reconciled myself to this tension is to come to accept that education is a ‘long game’. By investing in the robust (and, we hope, transformational) education of bright young students, together we transform the potential and lives of individuals including through their experience of human solidarity. And we keep hope that, through them, the world will experience more goodwill and less cruelty and damage – including

the cruelty and damage that arise out of ignorance – at both personal and systemic levels.

Please accept my best wishes for this Christmas period even as I recognize that for too many, this also is a time of pain, distress and danger.

Laurence Nodder

Rektor  
laurence.nodder@uwcrobertboschcollege.de