



UIA Union Internationale des Avocats
International Association of Lawyers
Unión Internacional de Abogados

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Dear Friends:

It is an honor to be here in front of you. I would like to start by thanking all who have worked intensely to make possible this congress in the most beautiful city of Florence.

Mark Twain said that no matter how many languages a man may speak, when he cuts his face while shaving in front of a mirror, he always returns to his mother tongue.

I believe that to honor old Twain and not be betrayed by the emotions that I feel by being in front of you, with the help of our translators I will continue in Spanish, my mother tongue.

My grandfather... My grandfather arrived on a ship to the little country where many years later I would be born.

On a ship... with more dreams than money in his pockets like many others.

I wanted to begin these words bringing up my grandfather to help me express the first concept of this speech, that will be nothing else but a testimony of my gratitude.

And the first concept is: "it is possible"

"It is possible", is much more than an expression often utilized in political speeches.

"It is possible", always begins as a wish and it becomes a hope that encourages practically the entire course of our lives.

When we are convinced that "it is possible" we achieve the majority of our goals.

The fact that this man is here in front of you, is nothing more than a testimony that "it is possible"

But, so that "it is possible" it is necessary to work. And it is as important to be grateful, as it is to work.

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And in my case, the list of those whom I am grateful to is so big that it must also include the captain of that ship that crossed the ocean with my ancestor.

In moments like this... In moments like this, one cannot resist the temptation of remembering his story. Inevitably you remember a boy, a student, and the first years in the profession...

Here and now I am lucky to have an audience of attorneys.

It means that it is easier to share views when we share above everything else, a common feeling.

It is the same feeling that in this very moment makes many of you smile because you remember your own beginnings, the steps you had to take to reach this incredible meeting in Florence.

Many years have gone by and I must confess that each day of my life I admire more this “our art” as I like to call it.

Because the vocation for justice continues to be the art to fight for what is good and just, the desire to do good for good men... a philosophy of life.

Being born in Uruguay has helped me to understand justice and law because they are the only possible guarantees for the protection of people and countries, above all those smaller and vulnerable.

Most often life gives human beings the possibility to be grateful. In my case, I speak of the possibility to give back to this profession what this profession has given me.

When I am told a humorous story or read a joke about attorneys, it always prompts the same question, a question that I have made many times and that I believe that today and here is the best moment to express it: what would have happened to those forgotten by history if an attorney would not have been there to defend their rights?

And who but an attorney to raise his voice in defense of the rights of the most vulnerable, who are in most cases, the most oppressed?

It is inevitable to keep adding questions such as: what has been the role of the Law in the consolidation of the democracies? What is the role of the legal community represented by those who are present here?

The answer to these questions is our reason to exist. It is what made us dream, what makes us work day in and day out for a better world, more just, a world of acquired rights.

Fortunately, we all know the answers to these questions so we will only focus on the commitment that we accept in front of the UIA.

A commitment... A commitment to continuously improve the legal community, in the understanding that we will defend the future and are contributing to the affirmation of democracy.

It has been a long journey, learning about the organization, not missing a single meeting or request, participating actively, organizing events...

Travelling great distances, very often for just 24 hours in a faraway country and many of those present here know how difficult it is to convince our wives, husbands or children.

A long, long journey. But it is a journey that continues since to believe that we have reached our objective could confuse us.

And we must be very attentive since sometimes the joy of holding a position in the most important attorney organization in the world could distract us from the task of “keep doing”.

A few minutes ago I talked about “it is possible”, now we need to talk about “keep doing”.

“Keep doing” is for example to continue strengthening the international judicial system. Because if we achieve an international judicial system based upon solid foundations, we will allow nations to navigate with a “fairer wind” when they go through economic, social or political crisis.

Let me tell you that more than the will to do it, the attorneys gathered under the UIA have the responsibility and the obligation to “keep doing”.

To contribute to the international judicial system is one of the responsibilities of the UIA.

Allow me to tell you what follows for me as attorney and President.

I do not want a UIA that we remember once a year to go to a congress or to pay our dues. I want a live organization that gives me a feeling of belonging of which I can be proud.

Because I believe my friends, that associations such as ours, do not have to be good just for its members.

They are good if they are good for society as a whole. If it is not so, they are not.

I believe that we are in the best position for the task of contributing to society.

Why? Because we are different amongst us, because we came from different cultures, because we speak different languages, because we were formed in different judicial systems.

And this is the true wealth, or I would say the great strength that allows each one of us to illuminate with the light of an idea.

To capitalize in the richness of the UIA is the road we need to travel.

I believe this is the way.

It is the path of the fight against exclusion, of the work on behalf of the rights that unite us, of the effort to maintain our identity in a spirit of union and brotherhood, humanism and tolerance.

Yes, because if we achieve this we will avoid intolerance, sectarianism, hatred and exclusion that are the ills brought upon by tyrannies.

On this journey... On this journey we will listen to those in need. It is our mission to listen. To listen to the attorneys of the world with problems, to our colleagues defenders.

Defenders independent of their philosophical thoughts or technical position, facing the problems that concern us all.

Defending the “defense of the defense”, women, children, those who are most vulnerable and very often the most oppressed.

Because this is the way our Union was constituted and it is our identity as an International Organization.

On the occasion of the opening of an earlier event of the UIA we reflected on the true revolution led by the information technology.

This development has grown to such an extent that frontiers have practically been brought down.

Today, the “word” travels almost in real time throughout the whole world.

And with the “word”, we should never forget, travels the complaint that later on the communications take care of amplifying.

Therefore my friends, to defend the “word” is to defend the complaint.

To defend the “word” is to defend the right.

The words of those that are not allowed to speak in a very loud voice, the words of those whose voices have been silenced.

My dear friends, this Organization has become a part of my life and I want to place my modest capabilities at its disposal.

I need to thank those that preceded me and also those who will succeed me because I do not want to let the joy that I feel now separate me from the collective to which I belong.

That is why I embrace the outgoing President Stephen Dreyfus, my successor; Jean Jacques Uettwiller and the Vice President elect Laurence Bory.

I take this challenge with my feet on the ground but always defending a dream.

“To defend a dream” might be the synthesis of a legacy. Three words that all of us would like to and should tell our children: “defend your dreams”.

I am a fortunate man because here, in this auditorium are my children. I would like to ask you for a moment to invite them to join me.

Having asked them to join me on this stage has a special meaning because I want to tell them why Dad very often was absent for an appointment, why he was not there when they lost a tooth or why he could not take them to school.

Because Dad was travelling.

Agustina, Miguel, José... Dad was “defending a dream”

You will excuse me for this, but I am sure that you will have the opportunity to talk to your children when you are back home.

You will be able to tell them that at this Convention of the most prestigious attorneys in the world three children received the advice from their Dad: “defend your dream”.

Such is life my dear friends!

I started my speech by saying “my grandfather arrived on a ship”.

And I also told you of his suitcase of dreams.

I come from the smallest country of South America.

A republic that is named after a river: “Uruguay”

A country which biggest wealth is a long tradition of principles, tolerance and rights.

I arrived on a plane, not on a ship and I bring a suitcase that is not that of my grandfather, but I also bring a dream.

This moment is part of this dream.

And you, my friends, have made it possible.

That is why I wanted this speech to be nothing but a testimony of gratitude.

A feeling that I would like to turn into a grateful embrace. A real embrace.

A humane and committed embrace from a man who in front of you has come to thank life and the privilege that he has been granted, to be an attorney.

Thank you very much.