

Opening Address

Dace Melbārde, Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Latvia

Excellencies, Laureates, ladies and gentlemen. It is my great pleasure to join you in your celebration today and welcome all of you to the National Library of Latvia, which is called by our people also Castle of Light. I'm very pleased that this year, World Cultural Council's José Vasconcelos World Award of Education and Albert Einstein World Award of Science are being presented here in Latvia. For centuries, education, science and culture have served as building blocks of our statehood, which was founded 1918, and in 2 years we will celebrate the centennial of the foundation of independent Republic of Latvia.

Hence, any acknowledgement of this humanitarian feast of life is very dear and close to us, as we truly understand their importance for development and the well-being of the people of the world. We share the aims of the World Cultural Council and its justified pride in the many eminent personalities around the globe that have, through their work and dreams, earned the honour to receive World Cultural Council's Awards.

Tonight's event is a celebration, a celebration of passion in research, devotion to what one is doing, and the belief and the goodness of humanity. I'm very happy that this year's prize winners that we have the pleasure to welcome and award in our home are Professor Edward Witten of Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton in the United States of America, and Professor Kalevi Ekman of Alto University in Finland. Both are distinguished personalities who are doing truly inspirational work of world significance in different fields. Yet, both are linked by their commitment, persistence and strong spirit.

Professor Edward Witten's visionary research expands our knowledge and awareness beyond the disciplinary boundaries of mathematics and physics. Professor Kalevi Ekman promotes a humanistic approach to education and has developed an outstanding creative education methodology, the Design Factory concept.

With all the current turbulence and unrest in the world, never has such leadership and thought be more important than today. Our world needs a change in the mindset of the people. We need to promote a mindset that is inquisitive, one that listens and brings innovation into action, thus enabling communities to benefit from scientific research and all the technological possibilities.

We need scientific research and evolution of thought that brings not only simple progress to mankind but also peace in the minds of all humans.

For this, science and education need culture, and not just for the sake of beauty, pleasure or visual stimulation as it is often mistakenly being presented, but for the sake of increasing creativity, mutually shared well-being and having a cause and a reason. Cult culture is often the key that unlocks never-before-imagined ideas. It encourages brand-new approaches and methodologies. And most importantly, it is the cultural environment that often directs various fields of research and interests. Latvia, too, many scientists, more and more, embody these values. The courage to go beyond the limits of one discipline, curiosity to learn from others, devotion to discover new patterns and regularities, expanding the fields of research via cross-cultural research, and much more. I'm sure that one day there will also be World Cultural Council award winner from Latvia and possibly from the Riga Technical University.

To conclude, I especially wish to thank the Riga Technical University and its rector Professor Leonīds Ribickis, who is also a member of World Cultural Council Interdisciplinary Committee for hosting this outstanding event. I also wish to congratulate the Riga Technical University on its 154th Anniversary, which is being celebrated today on October 14th. This makes the oldest technical university in the Baltics. And I would also like to thank once again the two award recipients. It is a privilege and an honour to have you all here today.