WORLD CULTURAL COUNCIL
2016 AWARD CEREMONY
Salutatory Speech Dr. Rafael Valero
Riga Technical University 154th Anniversary

Friday 14th October in Ziedonis Hall, National Library of Latvia

Distinguished President of the World Cultural Council, Sir Colin Blakemore; honorable Rector of the Riga Technical University, Leonīds Ribickis; laureates 2016; dear guests, ladies and gentlemen.

I am grateful to all the scientists, educators and artists who have accompanied us, as members of the World Cultural Council, for over three decades. I am also thankful for all the universities and academic institutions throughout the world, which have year by year sponsored the award ceremonies. I convey my warmest appreciation to the Rector, **Leonīds Ribickis**, and to the faculty and staff of the **Riga Technical University** for hosting this memorable event, and for an ongoing relationship; although one stage of it has been crowned, we hope that it will grow and prosper even more in the future.

The current world situation faces many crises. The pursuit of wealth has led to failings in the monetary system in many countries while in others it has led to extremes in prosperity and poverty. World leaders continue to accept a state of war and conflict because self-interest does not permit them to agree on the path to peace. Families, who have been forced to flee their homes, live in hopelessness and desperation due to our limits in accepting others, who look, speak or think differently. At the core of all these challenges lies an ethical vacuum. Missing, is a moral compass, which can help our citizens and leaders navigate a fair and compassionate path as we wrestle with these challenges.

We have seen how history has repeated itself over the ages for the same reasons: hatred, intolerance, injustice, inequality, envy, and ambition for wealth and power. Today we observe exactly the same scenarios. The current crises are the upshot of deep ideological differences, and centuries-old prejudices and suspicion towards what is different. Repression, hatred and violence in any of their manifestations can never be the basis of a healthy, free and democratic society.

The problem, however, lies within the person. Which person? Well, all of us, within each one of us living on this planet. If we want a progressive society, an enlightened world we must all, or at least, the vast majority, rise above our base tendencies.

Crises will find solutions in wisdom and this is where higher education plays an essential role. By education we do not mean training experts or technocrats but humanists, sages and leaders with a vision. At the basis of individual and social improvement is education. What concerns us in particular – is that the world today has outgrown the old educational system. Appropriate education is the cornerstone on which a great, progressive society can be built. We must carry on in our educational work, changing and fine-tuning it day by day. This takes time, as time is needed before one can harvest the fruit from any seed. Education is a powerful weapon for social good, which is not yet used to the full. It is in these times of crisis that we must use it intelligently. Education is the guiding light in the building of great and highly developed societies.

We must consider the existing difficult juncture as an opportunity. We live in one of history's great periods of transition, in which we have the possibility to lay the foundations for the rise of more compassionate human beings – more evolved in social awareness, more in tune with the times and expressing higher doses of altruism. The effort required to better serve mankind implicitly entails an evolution of our consciousness.

As educators we have the right to think that the true and steadfast solution is to prepare the leaders of tomorrow, those who will emerge from university campuses not only as competent professionals but also as exemplary citizens with a **deep sense of ethics**.

As an inspiration for these future leaders, today we have the great privilege of recognizing remarkable individuals who through hard work, persistence and creativity have risen to the top of their professions. The award-winners present today, **Prof. Edward Witten** and **Prof. Kalevi Ekman** are amongst those visionaries who have been able to combine a great heart with a brilliant mind. Individuals of their standing bear faithful witness to the fact that we are making progress. They are the demonstration that, despite the dark clouds looming over us, we can forge ahead with the optimism that this world and mankind will outlive its shortcomings.

In my view, this is how we will fulfil our role in overcoming the crisis and in the birth of nations able to contribute to world peace.

Thank you very much.

Dr. Rafael Valero
Founder and President Emeritus of the WCC