



VOLUNTEERING FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

**24th IAVE WORLD CONFERENCE
20th CEMEFI ANNUAL MEETING
Mexico City. November 7-10, 2016**

Opening Remarks at the 24th IAVE World Volunteer Conference

By Kylee Bates, IAVE World President

Buenos Dias Volunteers and Friends, I would like to especially acknowledge the following people:

[List dignitaries / VIPs]

I also bring greetings from Margaret Bell, IAVE World President from 1996 to 2003 who says "there has never been a time in the world when there has been a greater need for us to dedicate ourselves to being men and women for others, congratulations to all those IAVE members in Mexico are there to be just that" and she wishes us every success for the best ever IAVE meeting ever.

So I would like to reiterate the thanks given last night at the outset to those who provided the tools so that it may be so:

- Jorge Villalobos and the entire CEMEFI team
- The great team at AMEVOL
- The IAVE Secretariat Team – Kathi, Kenn, Ramona, Jessica, Lorrie, Raaida and Monica and fellow board members for their support and contribution
- The 17 local co-operating organizations and 19 global co-operating organizations that have all reached into their networks to help identify speakers, encourage attendance and get people here today. All of these people have worked incredibly hard for many, many months to get us to this week and I think we have a fabulous conference in store for you as a result. I am delighted to be here in my capacity as President of IAVE, or as we sometimes like to say IAVE's 'Chief Volunteer Officer'. Viva Mexico! I am sorry that I have failed my board colleague, Iraida Manzanilla, who challenged me 2 years ago to learn

Spanish before coming to Mexico City. Having now attempted language classes in French, Spanish AND Arabic I have realized that new languages are perhaps not my forte. It is lucky for me then that volunteering can – and does – transcend any language.

Who can believe it's just a little over two years that we met on the Gold Coast Australia? If time flies when you are having fun, then I think it flies at the speed of a shuttle to Mars when you are volunteering.

Welcome to Mexico City and the 24th IAVE World Volunteer Conference.

I am so glad to see you all here, already engaged and attentive, knowing that there is a bit of an event happening today, in a country a little north of here, that I suspect will potentially be the cause of some distraction throughout the day.

It is so fabulous to be back in Latin America for a global IAVE event. We were here in 2011 in Barranquilla, for the 2nd IAVE World Youth Volunteer Summit and in 2008 in Panama for the 20th IAVE World Volunteer Conference and there are three things that I will guarantee you will experience: very warm hospitality from strangers who will soon become friends, a strong desire to share and exchange knowledge, ideas and passion with you, and – if my memory of Panama serves me well and last week's Youth Volunteer Conference in Puebla is anything to go by – some truly memorable social and cultural events.

This year's conference is more than a single event – rather it has served as a nucleus from which multiple other events have radiated from the core.

We had the 3-day Youth Volunteer Conference in Puebla State – the first time an IAVE Youth Volunteer Conference has been held in a separate city from the World Volunteer Conference.

In Puebla, almost 600 young people from 22 countries gathered to learn from peers, share with peers and be inspired by peers to mobilize and be mobilized as volunteers in their own countries and communities.

You heard from Agnetta and Antonio last night and heard the strategic agreements emerging from that event. I urge us all to take seriously their call to action. Although the mantra of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda

urges us to “leave no-one behind” I fear that if we do NOT take seriously the views, aspirations and demands of the world’s nearly 2 billion young people, the rest of us will almost certainly be left behind.

In addition to the youth conference we have also had a number of pre-conference convenings among IAVE’s own networks.

We’ve had a two-and-a-half-day workshop of leaders of national volunteering leadership structures reviewing our global research project on this topic. Today members of our Global Corporate Volunteering Council (or GCVC) were able to convene to share information and collaboration opportunities in relation to their global employee volunteering programs; and on Thursday, IAVE is convening a special meeting of over 20 global volunteer-involving organizations.

As well, a number of international organizations have taken the opportunity to link to, align with, leverage off this global event.

- Good Deeds Day have hosted a pre-conference conference of their own global network,
- The Conference Board’s Global Social Investing Council planned their meeting to coincide with the conference and earlier joined with GCVC for some of the time in a shared meeting – providing rich soil for cross-fertilization of ideas;
- The Association for Junior League International planned their board meeting in Mexico City so that board members could attend the conference,
- Co-operating organization Habitat for Humanity are hosting a meeting in conjunction with the conference;
- The global ‘Google Giver’s team are having their annual staff meeting in Mexico City and we’ll have around 20 ‘Googlers’ from around the world coming to the conference; and
- We have organized delegations expected from the following locations: Bolivia, Cameroon, (China) Ecuador, Guatemala, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Nigeria, Panama, South Korea, Sudan and Taiwan
And these are just the formal meetings that I know about – there are undoubtedly other informal groups that will take the opportunity to meet while here together.

The very fact of these meetings serves to highlight the importance of IAVE’s

value as a convener of leaders, and networks of leaders, in volunteering, and testament to a lot of hard work from a small team over the last 12 months in particular as they've reached into their networks to bring these things together.

I don't think I need to convince anyone here of the intrinsic value of volunteering – we are after all at a volunteer conference!

And everyone here believes that volunteering is something that benefits the volunteer him or herself and has enormous capacity to make change in the world,

And everyone here I think would appreciate the opening words of the Universal Declaration on Volunteering first adopted at the 16th IAVE World Volunteer Conference in Paris in 1990 and updated in 2001 which reads

Volunteering is a fundamental building block of civil society. It brings to life the noblest aspirations of humankind – the pursuit of peace, freedom, opportunity, safety and justice for all people.

So, in reflecting on the two years since we last meet on the Gold Coast, Australia at the 23rd IAVE World Volunteer Conference, and being elected World President of IAVE, I immediately recalled the words of the Opening Speaker in Australia. The Hon Michael Kirby, a former justice of the High Court of Australia and one of my country's, and I think the world's, great human rights' champions urged us to recognize that "it is the duty of volunteers to work in bad times for unpopular people and causes, because this is what tests us as volunteers".

A year later, in September 2015 the 193 countries of the United Nations agreed to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda – a set of 17 global goals that present a plan of action for people, planet, peace and prosperity that seeks to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions.

As a result of hard fought advocacy from groups such as IAVE, and unlike in the Millennium Development Goals, the role of volunteer groups were recognized as an important means of implementing the plan of action and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030.

With that important acknowledgement provided it is our duty as leaders of volunteering to step up to ensure that this role for volunteers is realized and their impact is maximized, because right now volunteers throughout the world are being tested every day.

Perhaps the most sobering personal example of this that I have heard firsthand was only a month ago in Bonn at the IVCO conference. As part of an effort to highlight the importance of hearing directly Volunteer Voices, a young United Nations Volunteer, 19-year old Amir from Aleppo Syria, now living in Germany as a refugee, recounted to delegates his experiences of life in Aleppo since the conflict began when he was just 14.

Staying in his city to try and finish school, he saw quickly the suffering that his people and city had begun to experience and that the need to help others was urgent and could only come from those within the city itself. So with schooling often interrupted due to bombings and roadblocks, at the age of 15 to volunteer at the hospital.

He told us that some days when he arrived it was to help the nurses, some days he was needed to help the doctors with various things if the nurses were shorthanded, and on other days... his volunteer work involved matching limbs to human remains lying in body bags after bombings.

Now that's being tested.

In developing IAVE's new Strategic Direction 2020, finalized in April this year, we consulted widely with our members and stakeholders, seeking to ensure that we had a contemporary understanding the trends and challenges for volunteering globally.

Although our network is diverse, the things we heard were common. The overwhelming message was that volunteering is being impacted by unprecedented global forces. Issues such as:

- The mass movement of people around the world on a scale unprecedented since the Second World War;
- Increased conflict and fragility of states with only 10 countries rated as 'peaceful' by the 2016 Global Peace Index;

- Rapid demographic changes with a growing number of young people and an estimate that the world's population will achieve 8 billion by 2030 and the pressures that this is placing on both our environment and communities;
- Increasing levels of marginalization and exclusion for some groups;
- A pace of technological change that at times feels as though it might throw us into an orbital spin; and
- Growing instances of civil society suppression or limits being placed on volunteering

Were commonly identified as the factors that created the challenges, and provided the opportunities for volunteering.

This last issue of 'limits being placed on volunteering' is something we have in effect seen play out as part of this conference already. Despite having obtained valid invitation letters, passports and visas for Mexico, we have heard of a number of conference delegates – including two IAVE board members – either being denied boarding at their departure points because they did not have a transit visa to cover them for the two hours they would need to change gates at a European airport (despite earlier enquiries that indicated these were not needed) or for other reasons that we remain unclear about. And that is after some of these delegates have had to make multiple trips to a neighboring country in order to meet the requirement of making the visa application in person.

Another of our board members from Venezuela and one of our advertised speakers from the same country, respectively left their home country earlier than necessary to be sure to arrive for this conference here because the state of political unrest provided a state of uncertainty about whether she would be able to get out, or in Lorenzo Mendoza's case could not reasonably leave because their company and home was surrounded by the Bolivarian Intelligence Service.

While these are specific instances and are not alone likely to prove catastrophic to volunteering today, if recognized leaders in volunteering and social responsibility, including some who have joined us at previous conferences, are not able to come together to share, exchange and work in solidarity with others to promote, support and celebrate volunteering throughout, it seems clear to me that it is not just volunteers who are being tested, but volunteering itself.

Therefore, this is the time that we must resolve collectively to stand together to work in partnership or collaboration to promote, support and celebrate volunteering in all of the myriad of ways it happens throughout the world.

More than ever we need to mobilize people to volunteer for the issues reflected in the 'the peoples' goals' – the SDGS.

More than ever we need to work harder than we've ever worked to show the impact that volunteers have in their communities and on the issues that so challenge us.

And more than ever we need to advocate for volunteering, for the right of for the right of people to volunteer freely and safely and without constraint, for the right of people to exercise their humanity.

And we need to be more assertive in reaching out to those who do not yet believe in or value volunteering the way we do.

I know we have the capacity to do these things and we must do these things.

If 19-year old Amir from Aleppo Syria, having been helped to refugee status in Germany by other volunteers, and after all he has seen and experienced can say with calm, dignity and respect that "having been a volunteer and having been helped by volunteers I admire the power of volunteering" then I think it's the very least we can do.

Muchas Gracias.