

SECRETARY GENERAL'S SPEECH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2012

"ROOTS AND LEAVES"

It is a privilege and a pleasure to gather together with you at our most important annual meeting. My purpose today is to share with you three aspects :

1. "Roots and Leaves" – some reflections about the title of this GA,
2. The SG's 2011 report and
3. The work plan (or the YE Strategy Implementation Plan)

Part I. ROOTS AND LEAVES

I have always found it fascinating to reflect about the symbolism of trees.

Despite of the many varieties of trees, there are several elements that are common : all trees have roots, trunk, branches, leaves... You can find these same elements in a Polish common oak, in a Greek sweet chestnut, in a Scottish pine or in a silver birch in Sweden. The shapes, nature and history of all those trees are totally different. They are either part of large forests or they stand tall and lonely in the middle of a field or in the side of a mountain. They may be part of a beautiful and esthetic garden or struggling to survive in an urban context. We can find huge trees able to provide shade, fruits and shelter to different species, including us the human beings. But there are also trees able to stand out from a cliff in a dramatic way, only attached to the land by its roots.

They all are rooted in their own land. They all have branches and leaves. They all have a history and a reason why they are there. They are visible, quiet but full of life, silent observers and still extremely important for nature balance. Each of them is relevant.

I invite you to think about yourself as a tree. Think about your own personal roots, your history, the persons that surround you and your

cultural background. The uniqueness of your history built after generations in your particular social, religious, cultural context. How many persons are you able to reach directly with your branches? Think about yourself as someone able to provide unity and coherence to all the branches into a common trunk and still allowing those different “arms” to grow in different directions and forms.

Reflect about the leaves that your tree is able to produce or to grow. As a visible part of your personal tree, those leaves are relevant for your own branches and also for others. How do you react to the falling of the leaves every year and how do you receive the new leaves when they appear?

I know that there are several psychologists (or future psychologists) in this room today and we all know that those doctors sometimes ask patients about the type of tree they identify with. The answers can give them clues about personalities, attitudes and states of mind. Of course, I will not ask you that question today but I still invite you to think about the kind of tree you are and about the connection among your roots, trunk, branches and which are the leaves and fruits you are more proud of.

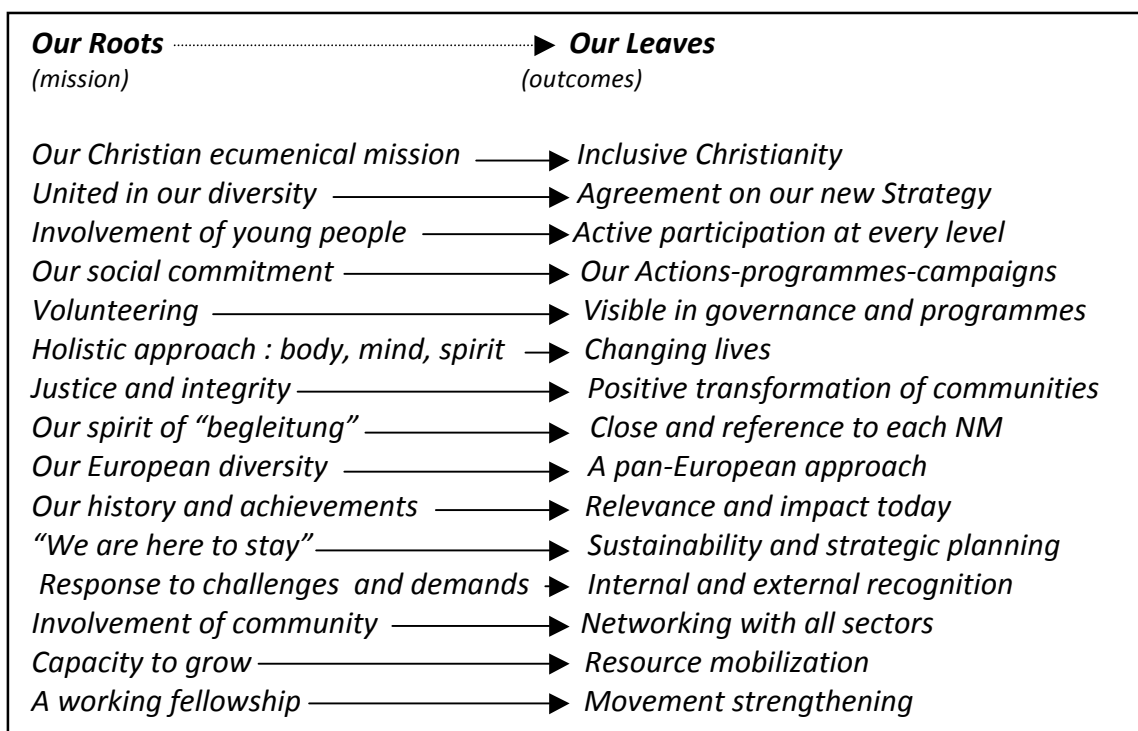
Let us look at your YMCA as if it was a tree. Again, think about the roots of your local or national YMCA, the history since it was founded and the context in which it has grown in your community or your country. I often think about our movement as a tree. Our roots are the reasons why we exist – the same ones in the minds and hearts of our founders, young people, back in 1844 in London. Our roots are also our historic development across Europe and the world. Roots – in plural tell us that there is diversity in this word when we think about the natural differences in our European YMCA realities. The roots are not always visible in the tree as they are under the ground but the whole tree would not exist without them. They were the first element to grow and they make the tree sustainable and strong. The tree is fed through its roots. This is like our YMCA mission and guiding principles. Taking our roots as a reference and constantly feeding them, we guarantee that our common tree is healthy and coherent.

Also branches and leaves are plural and diverse. But both extremes of the tree – the roots and the branches with the leaves - have one single, common trunk. The trunk unifies, provides consistency to the whole tree. It is visible and generally upright. The trunk does not survive if the roots

are ill or damaged and the branches cannot provide shelter or fruits if they are separated from the trunk. Yes, the leaves may fall and be renovated every year because of the effects of the seasons changes, the temperature or unexpected storms. But they grow again, fresh and strong, providing that unique colourful beauty that trees have. The leaves and fruits are the right ones that the tree needs. Each tree has its own leaves according to its type or to the land where it grows. They are renewed following the nature's cycle and no one else can influence that process. It is the perfect, balanced combination between land and fruits, a harmony that only nature can provide.

Just like in our YMCA. Our common trunk stays solid and so are our branches, always prepared to hold leaves and hopefully to give the fruit that is expected from a movement like ours.

I am sharing with you some reflections about the relation between our YMCA Europe's "roots" and "leaves".



One year ago we approved the new YMCA Europe strategy. It took us some time to agree on what kind of "trunk" we needed according to our roots and the diversity of our branches. We wanted to be inclusive and relevant for all. Then we decided the number and type of leaves that our tree needed and together described a number of aims and objectives.

Through our plan, we gave ourselves 12 aims and more than 50 objectives spread in 3 strategic priorities and 3 signature programmes. Those were the leaves. They were the leaves that our tree needed according to your own expectations and the social reality in today's Europe. Yes, we are proud of our these young shining leaves and we are taking care of them, making them visible, facilitating their growth and multiplying them through our work and initiatives.

Dear friends, I am coming to an end of this first part of my sharing with you about the reason behind this year's title for the GA. Our tree is now ready. The wind is gently waiving its branches filled with green leaves and it has already given us some good fruits. I will be very happy to report to you about those results now, but first let me ask you to continue taking care of our common tree, providing the needed ingredients that our roots and leaves need. Your participation, support and caring makes our tree healthier. Also your questions, doubts and non-conformism are required.

Thank you.

Part II. The SG's 2011 report.

Since we met last year at the GA, we have focused on implementing our Strategic Plan. It has been a "one year" exciting journey and I am thankful to those of you who shared your comments and reflections in order to put in practice the changes that we announced in the frame of our new Strategy. I also thank you and our Executive Committee for helping me to discover the complex - but inspiring - nature of our platform and of the European movement. Combining that knowledge process with the daily office work and planning, has "kept me awake" throughout the year!

I want to share a special note of appreciation and recognition to each member of our staff. Also for them this was a very demanding year and their contribution was crucial to define the best way to put in practice our plan.

It has also been another challenging year for Europe. We all have in our minds the dramatic episodes of terrorism across our continent – some of them in totally unexpected countries or cities. We continue facing the most dramatic financial and economic crisis in decades. Millions of young people still demonstrate in the streets and squares of our major cities,

desperately asking for answers. The levels on unemployment – again especially among young people – continue growing. Many of our countries have faced or are now facing elections processes, trusting that the new administrators are able find solutions to the current situation. The radicalization of some sectors of our community and the extremism of some minorities bring back to our continent dramatic moments of our past history that we thought that were totally eradicated.

Of course, this context has an impact on our European YMCA movement. In my visits and meetings with you over the past 12 months, you have shared your daily struggling, facing economic challenges as you still increase your efforts to reach the most vulnerable people around you.

May I take this opportunity to sincerely thank you for sending your “country reports” and for allowing us to include them in the working documents for the first time, together with the rest of reports from our working and task groups. Your information about the recent developments and future plans confirm how vibrant and diverse our movement is. Congratulations!

Looking around us, we realize how accurate and providential our new YE Strategy is. It is realistic and achievable from the Preamble to the last Objective. We can affirm that our success on its implementation means a huge contribution to challenges that affect our communities and youth today. We must say that out loud everywhere we go representing the YMCA!

And we must also be proud of putting young people in the centre of our initiatives. We are here with and for young people. Our strategy is aligned with WAY’s aim to empower youth and we constantly seek for creating spaces and opportunities for open participation such as the YES Seminar that took place here just a few hours ago involving more than 30 young people from all over Europe.

I now present a summary of my report followed by the proposal for the work plan and I will be very glad to open the floor for questions afterwards.

I will include the concrete actions under each of the objectives of my first year in office and details of each action can be found at the GA working documents (SG report, pages 17th to 29th).

Objective : To participate at the planned activities/programmes across Europe.

Actions :

- SG participated in 17 programmes and/or initiatives under invitation of NM or international platforms and institutions. 8 of those programmes focused on young people, involving them as active participants.

Objective : To follow up the performance of YMCA Europe staff at each activity and field of work in which they were involved.

Actions :

- SG took part in 4 programmes designed and developed directly by YE staff.
- SG led 3 staff meetings.
- Monthly reports about field staff's performance were sent to SG.
- Since February 2012, all staff (including SG) shares their monthly reports among each other.
- New protocols related with staff's operation, performance and contracts.
- Joint work between President and SG.
- Joint work between SG and Deputy Secretary General.

Objective : To share YE reality and goals with key persons within our movement (volunteers and professionals)

Actions :

- SG took part in 29 forums (platforms within the YMCA or external, Field Group meetings, events, visits, seminars and workshops).

Objective : To increase the presence of YE through communications to member movements, partners and the WAY, identifying their main expectations towards YE.

Actions :

- SG met personally with a total of 18 NGS from NM across Europe.
- SG met personally with 6 top representatives of YE partner organizations.
- SG met personally with 6 Field Group and Programme Group leaders.
- SG took part at 2 Global Staff Team meetings led by WAY.
- SG provided input to 2 draft documents designed by WAY and opened for consultation to the Areas.
- As member of the TC Board in Litomysl, SG took part at 3 meetings.
- SG directly followed up and monitored developments and/or challenging situations affecting 4 NM.
- SG addressed messages to NM regarding different matters including expressions of solidarity and country's social-political issues.

Objective : To follow up the financial situation of YE, focusing on a proper financial and budgetary control.

Actions :

- Joint work with Treasurer and Financial Secretary.
- Management of budget (especially office costs and travel budgets)
- Follow up of 2011 accounts and adjustments in 2012 budget.

Objective : To identify potential partners and donors, approaching NM, individuals and institutions in order to increase YE financial stability and the development of new initiatives (both at YE and at specific NM).

Actions :

- SG Connected NM and potential donors with specific needs of 5 NM.
- Fundraising efforts through personal approach to NM and individuals.
- SG designed 1 application to potential donor.

Objective : To design and present to our Executive Committee the bases for the Strategy Implementation Plan.

Actions :

- Joint work with President.
- 3 performance reports (including proposal for YE Strategy Implementation Plan) were presented to ExCom by the SG.
- Joint work with YE staff.

I will be very happy to answer your questions about the mentioned objectives and the actions developed in order to achieve them. I must also clarify that these initiatives must be completed with the work developed by each member of our staff throughout the year. You will find the input and outcomes of our core and field staff in different reports included in the working documents.

Part III. The work plan or the YE Strategy Implementation Plan.

At our YE Staff Meeting last February in Le Rocheton (France), we discussed the best and more effective way to design the Implementation Plan for our Strategy.

The conversations with you and the feedback you provided were instrumental to set the bases for our technical work. We wanted our implementation plan to be : useful, technically viable, measurable, sustainable, innovative, coherent and easy to visualize.

The key elements that provide the base for our Implementation Plan are :

1. A new Staff Structure, designed for the full achievement of the aims and objectives expressed in the Strategy. It is my pleasure to introduce each of the members of the staff, their positions and a brief comment about each of their responsibilities.
 - Michal Szymanczack. Senior Executive Secretary.
 - Eva Tschornova. Office Manager.
 - Martina Hudcovska, Finance Executive Secretary

- Sarka Cihakova, Accountant
 - Adam Rychlik, Executive Secretary – Programmes Department
 - Vardan Hambardzumyan, Executive Secretary – Programmes Dep.
 - Marius Pop, Projects Manager – Programmes Department
 - Radek Hlavsa, Communications and Marketing Manager
2. The creation of the Programmes Department with a special focus on our signature programmes (Peace/Justice/Democracy; Healthy Living ; Inclusive Christianity).
 3. A new way of planning, monitoring and evaluating our programmes and initiatives, improving our tools and working methods. We use the log-frame model and you can already visualize this approach in pages 46th to 48th of our GA working documents. Each of our 12 aims included in the Strategy are now put into this log-frame model and the final document is what we – staff – start calling YE Strategy Implementation Plan. It is an annual plan that we shall bring to the GA and consult with you, asking for your feedback and support. On behalf of the ExCom, the SG will not only report about the last year but also submit to you the plan for the coming year (just like we do with our budgets and other proposals).
 4. A new approach to our actual working platforms and task groups, reinforcing their identity, aims and impact in the frame of the 3 priorities and 3 signature programmes stated in our Strategy. This is still “work in progress” and I invite you to read the details included in the report from the Movement Strengthening meeting held two months ago in Berlin (GA working documents, pages 39th to 45th).
 5. The addition of new working platforms (formal and non formal groups) that will facilitate the full implementation of the Strategy. Consultations with NGS’s and a logic way of moving forward, tell us about the need of creating the National General Secretaries Forum. During this GA, we will formally announce the first meeting of the Forum that will take place in Brussels in early November with a double objective : internal work with NGS and external work meeting with representatives of key European institutions.
 6. Our Communications and Marketing Manager is working on a new Communications Plan, defining objectives for internal and external

communication, promoting the information platforms available at YE and establishing a timetable for specific actions throughout the year.

7. Focus on our administration and budgetary control, including new formulas of designing and following up our budget (core, field and programmes), adding that information to the log-frame format used for our actions and programmes.
8. The continuous resource mobilization campaigns, including a new approach to potential new partners in the public and private sectors. I invite you to join the 2nd Fundraising Campaign that will take part in Madrid in July (22nd -25th).

Dear friends, all these technical changes have only one objective : the full implementation of the Strategy that you accepted last year.

I encourage you to continue helping us growing and building the YMCA Europe we all dream of. Exciting times are ahead of us. In less than 15 months thousands of people will gather here in Prague ready to share and eager to live a “life changing” experience at our Festival. Bring young people to Prague and also whoever wants to be inspired by this unique opportunity and, then, willing to inspire others in your city, your community... the world!

You have just elected a new Executive Committee that will carry on the responsibility of leading our common platform in the next years. Together we still have many things to achieve, taking care of our wonderful tree and helping others to grow...

Just like young people grow at YMCA and help the YMCA to grow. They are in the roots, in the trunk and in the branches of our tree. The visible, extraordinary result of their participation and input are the leaves... especially the leaves.

*“And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations”
Revelation, 22 : 1-2*

Thank you!!