

**Italian Diplomatic Academy
Closing Ceremony of the Academic Year 2017-18**

“Towards the Future We Want”

A Brief Message to the Students

from

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Verona, 10 June 2018

Dear Students,

Last month, I received a very kind invitation to deliver a Keynote Speech at the Closing Ceremony of the Academic Year 2017-18. Unfortunately, because of prior commitments, I was not able to travel to Verona from my country Sweden. The Diplomatic Academy reverted to me with a request for a brief message that could be read out to you on this occasion. This is my brief message.

Let me start by congratulating you not only for your results during the past academic year but also for your engagement in the future of the world. You represent an active constituent of the young generation and you have an important role to play, not least through your advocacy.

Let us now look to the future and towards the world we want. For my part, based on my ten years as a judge in my country (1962-72), my twelve years as the Chief Legal Adviser to three Ministers of Justice and three Ministers for Foreign Affairs in my country (1981-94), and my ten years as the Legal Counsel of the United Nations, three years with Boutros Boutros-Ghali and seven years with Kofi Annan (1994-2004), I see an obligatory common denominator for attaining this future world we want, namely the rule of law. In Italian you say *stato di diritto*.

Time does not allow me to engage in a detailed definition of this concept. My brief summary would be the following four components: (1) democracy, (2) proper legislation respecting international standards in particular in the field of human rights, (3) the institutions necessary to administer this law, including impartial and independent courts, and (4) the individuals with the necessary knowledge and integrity for the proper administration of these institutions.

I have actually come to the conclusion that there is a parallel between navigation on our globe – the Earth – and navigation to reach a particular goal in the administration of our global society. This applies in particular when we address the many challenges in the future, be they related to poverty, over-population, disease, environmental degradation, transnational crime, corruption, etc. This common feature is the great circle, in Italian *il grande cerchio*.

When I was a young student, I wanted to see the world. There were no backpacks in those days, so I signed on ships in the merchant marine. Some 60 years ago, during four summers, I sailed the seas both in the northern hemisphere and in the southern hemisphere. On board the

ships I learned that the shortest route between two points on the surface of the globe is not a straight line between the two points on the chart. It is a circular line, called the great circle. There are three points in this circle: the point where you are and the point where you want to go. The third point is the centre of the globe. You can see the same phenomenon on the chart when you are travelling long distances by air.

Later in life, and in particular after my experiences from serving in the United Nations, I have come to the conclusion that there is a great circle also when we administer our society. The point where we are and the goal we want to achieve. Irrespective of the subject matter, the third point is the rule of law.

Let me stress that the rule of law is not only something in which lawyers are engaged. It is something that everyone must understand in our society. It must permeate society. Among the 17 Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 there is in my view one goal that is a precondition for reaching all the other goals, namely Goal 16 on equal justice for all, with the targets rule of law and anticorruption.

In 2008, I was asked to assist the annual meeting of the InterAction Council of Former Heads of State and Government. The focus of the meeting that year was restoring respect for international law. When I started talking about the rule of law in the meeting, former Chancellor Helmut Schmidt of Germany, 90 years old at the time, softly asked: I wonder if politicians understand *their* responsibility for the rule of law. This question gave me the idea of contacting the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law at Lund University in Sweden, and the Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law in The Netherlands, asking them to prepare a short guide for politicians on the rule of law.

This guide was published in 2012. It is some 40 pages and is now freely available on the web for downloading and printing in 24 languages.¹ Just google *Rule of Law – A guide for politicians* and you will find it immediately! It is also available in Italian: *Stato di diritto Una guida per i politici*.²

My advice is that you study this guide carefully and spread the message.

On 24 September 2012, a high-level meeting of the United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on the rule of law at the national and international levels. The first operative paragraph in the resolution reads:

We reaffirm our solemn commitment to the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations, international law and justice, and to an international order based on the rule of law, which are indispensable foundations for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world.³

¹ *Rule of Law – A guide for politicians*. A Guide elaborated under the auspices of the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law at Lund University, Sweden, and the Hague Institute for the Internationalisation of Law (HiiL), the Netherlands, available at <http://rwi.lu.se/2017/03/rule-law-guide-politicians/>.

² See <http://rwi.lu.se/app/uploads/2014/02/Stato-di-diritto.pdf>.

³ *Declaration of the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the rule of law at the national and international levels*, UN Doc. A/RES/47/1*, available at http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/67/1.

Precisely! And for this we need statesmanship. Statesmen and women who realise that we need an international order based on the rule of law and who can look to the future with determination based on this conviction. This is where you have an important role to play in the future.

Thank you for your attention!