



President's Report to the WBF Congress WROCLAW, 2022

Mr. José Damiani, WBF President Emeritus, dear Delegates, dear Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Friends, good morning and welcome to Wroclaw for the celebration of the WBF Congress.

Four years have passed since our last in-person Congress held in Orlando, where we celebrated the 60th Anniversary of the foundation of the WBF and where we approved the new Statutes and By-Laws providing a more solid base to our organisation to guarantee its further development and consolidation. Two years have passed since our last Congress, unfortunately celebrated virtually on-line because of the cursed pandemic that turned the whole world upside down. Now we are here in Wroclaw coming to the end of this legislature and preparing to start the new.

Before starting our work, I want to extend an affectionate thought to all the friends who were with us at the time of the 2020 Congress and who unfortunately left us: David Birman, Grattan Endicott, Patrick Grenthe, Sue Picus, Edwin Kantar, Maureen Hiron.

All of them were great friends, great champions, eminent and unforgettable personalities, extraordinary people who worked with enthusiasm, dedication and passion for the organization and development of our discipline, whose memory will be with us and all their bridge friends everywhere in the world for the rest of our lives.

To these Friends and all the others who sadly passed away, we pay tribute with gratitude and fondness.

Dear Friends, the Congress represents the pinnacle of our organization. This year the Congress assumes even greater importance because, from now on, our Statutes are fully applied and in force. With the election of three new members today the Executive Council is installed for the entire quadrennial term of the legislature.

The legislature that is now ending began in the best way-with the inclusion of bridge in the Asian Olympic Games held in August-September 2018. Michael Bambang Hartono, Ekawahyu Kasih and Esther Sophonpanich, greatly supported by the President of the Indonesian Olympic Committee, Rita Subowo and by the President of the Olympic Committee of Asia, my personal friend Sheik Al Sabah, did an outstanding job to achieve this great result. We have to be proud, because it was not a simple, accidental and lucky episode, resulting with Bridge being a confirmed part of the Asian Games, including

subsequent editions, starting from that of 2022, originally to have been staged in Hangzhou, China, but now updated to next year due to the pandemic, unfortunately still present in that area. Let me repeat, once again, that we owe a debt of gratitude to them as they helped us to open a big window that represents the first step to reach our dream to be part of the Olympic Games.

2019 was a truly splendid year for us with the great successes achieved in the Opatija Youth Championship and in the Wuhan National Teams and Transnational Championships. Not forgetting the equally great success achieved by the Seminar organized in Singapore in cooperation with Asia Pacific Bridge Federation.

During the year the Executive Council and the Management Committee undertook a great deal of administrative work to prepare the events of following years when suddenly, without any warning, we found ourselves in the midst of the cataclysm of COVID19 where the situation developed so rapidly, infecting and upsetting the whole world, causing tragedies and grief, bringing the economy to its knees and practically eliminating all social relations.

Two entire calendar years, 2020 and 2021, had perforce to be cancelled, nullifying all the work done, taking away all our projects, our dreams, our hopes and leaving us only a great suffering, a great despair and infinite insecurities and uncertainties about a future that suddenly seemed so bleak.

All this has had an impact on our Zones, on our National Federations, on you dear Friends, on our Clubs, the vital and essential part of our organization. Activity came to a halt, Clubs closed, registered members in dramatic decline and lost. Several bridge players found a lifeline in online play, but this did not bring any help to our clubs which have sadly remained closed and for many of them it was very difficult if not even impossible to reopen. In my Report to the 2020 Congress and in my subsequent writings and messages, I have dwelt at length on this sad topic and I don't think it is necessary to add more. However, it should be emphasized that what happened cannot be erased from our minds.

At the beginning of 2022, although the pandemic has not been completely eradicated in some areas, we have at least seen some light at the end of the tunnel. This was enough to give us new impetus (the strength and the will never failed) to start again with unchanged enthusiasm.

Unfortunately, as if it was not enough to have to deal with the pandemic, another tragedy has hit us. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia and Belarus with all the tragic consequences that resulted. When the Latin playwright Plautus in 465 after Christ coined the phrase "Homo homini lupus" in his "Asinaria", he was unfortunately a good prophet! There is a clear risk of falling into the cliché in saying that the atrocities of the Second World War and the subsequent territorial wars produced a terrible warning, unfortunately unheard, because it was bent on sinister and petty personal interests!

I will never tire of repeating that, if facing natural disasters sometimes we are powerless, facing human actions we must fill sorry for ourselves. We continue strongly to believe in our motto Bridge for Peace. It is a point of pride for us to affirm and continually repeat aloud that in order to defeat hatred we play the Card of Peace. It is a matter of pride for us all to carry this message forward into the future.

A message that very sadly is not received by some radicalized States that still impose discrimination on their athletes who, without any fault, are forced to desert or abandon international events, including high-level ones, in order not to incur serious measures against them when they return home.

Unfortunately, in addition to the natural and human calamities, we had to face another appalling and unacceptable situation due to the explosion of the online cheating. Immediately, as already announced in the 2020 Congress, the Management Committee reacted with a statement, reaffirming the strong revulsion, unwavering rejection and firm condemnation of this kind of aberrant and unacceptable behaviour which, wherever it occurs, causes great harm to bridge and threatens its credibility. The Committee reiterated its full support for the players in the fight against cheating and improper behaviour, adopting all measures needed to prevent and to repress these actions. In addition the Committee reiterated that participation in all WBF Events is subject to the approval of the Credentials Committee which considers all submitted requests taking note of any suspicious circumstances wherever they may have occurred.

This cannot remain a simple declaration of intent, because we are firmly convinced that the fight against the cancer of cheating in bridge, wherever it occurs, is a primary mission for the WBF, the Zonal Conferences and NBOs. For this reason a Committee has been appointed and specific rules provided to allow us to act and to sanction. The image of bridge cannot and must not be damaged by this and the regularity of the game cannot and must not be infected by these vile behaviours. But to win the war we need total and committed support from all of you, the NBOs. All together, linked by a common goal we can (indeed we must) achieve the desired result.

Dear Friends, as I said in my Opening Speech of these Championships, we consider 2022 the year of resurrection, with two World Championships, a Youth Transnational Championship together with Zonal events. It has been an exceptionally busy year but we have the joy of coming together again round the table, enjoying our great game of bridge

In Salsomaggiore Terme, Italy, we had the World Bridge Teams Championship from 27th March to 9th April and the World Youth Transnational Championship from 7th to 14th August.

The first event started with great enthusiasm, despite the anti-Covid restrictions that we had to adopt. For the first week everything went well without any problem, unfortunately in the second week some cases of Covid arose, despite all the precautions taken and the strict observance of sanitary procedures. These cases obviously created some concern, and required strict compliance with medical and health checks but fortunately they did not affect the regularity of the major championships. Unfortunately, on the other hand for safety reasons we had to suspend the consolation championship, in full agreement with the participants. The Championship happily went to the end and proved to be successful. We received the appreciation from the participants who perfectly understood the situation and shared all the procedures adopted.

The Youth event was really a great success with a greater than expected participation of 62 Teams and 148 Pairs, achieving a record in Under 21 with 22 Teams and 56 Pairs. For the first time in a world championship we registered the attendance of the Under 31

players. Finally no restriction measures had to be adopted, the championship was played with absolute regularity and no health problems were recorded. With their exemplary behaviour and irrepressible enthusiasm the young players greatly contributed to the success of the championship. We have to be proud and take care of these young players, they are a priceless treasure, because they ensure a bright future for our discipline.

Now here in Wroclaw the 16th World Bridge Series is in progress. I want to thank the Polish Bridge Union, the City of Wroclaw and the Local Organising Committee for having given us the opportunity to hold our championship. We are really proud and honoured to be here in Wroclaw, for the second time after the very successful 2016 World Bridge Games. I am sure that this very beautiful city of Wroclaw will, once again, offer a great welcome and hospitality to all the participants. I am confident that, once again, this will be a truly memorable event, despite the fact that some countries are unable to attend due to their government's regulations in force because of the persistent pandemic.

I offer our special thanks to all the delegations, to all the players and accompaniers coming to Wroclaw and in particular to those coming from non-European Countries overcoming the difficulties of such a long journey, marking the importance of the attended events.

Dear friends, as I stated at the beginning, we have reached the end of the legislature and the beginning of a new one. Despite all the difficulties encountered, I am pleased and proud to say that the position of the WBF is solid, from an organizational, administrative and economic point of view. We live in a world in continuous rapid and extraordinary evolution that regulates and conditions our relationships, our lifestyle, our way of being, with new models suggested daily by technology. But we can face the future with tranquillity and serenity, aware that we are ready to face all the challenges that await us.

This belief is also reinforced by the fact that I had the opportunity on more than one occasion to visit all the Zones, many NBOs and several clubs. Everywhere I was warmly welcomed with friendship and I found passion, enthusiasm, professionalism and dedication, which showed that our movement is alive and has tremendous potential.

I personally have come to the end of my wonderful adventure, as for the last time after three terms in office I preside over the Congress and at the end of the year I will leave the chair to the new President who will be elected tomorrow by the Executive Council.

When I was elected in Sao Paulo in 2009 and when I took office in Philadelphia in 2010 I was aware of receiving the baton from the giants who had preceded me, Jimmy Patiño, Bobby Wolff, Ernesto d'Orsi and José Damiani who had made the history of the WBF, with whom I had the privilege of collaborating and from whom I was lucky enough to learn. Although I felt ready to take the position, I did not know if I would be up to the task assigned to me.

I was fortunate indeed to have a great team right from the start and for the duration of my mandates. I am convinced that in these twelve years we have done a great job from a legislative, executive, administrative and organizational point of view. We have given solid form and structure to our organization with laws and regulations adapted to the needs of a large Federation recognized by the Olympic Committee. We have consolidated our championships, introducing new ones and above all paid great attention to the standards of comfort and safety, adopting and continuously adapting the tools at our disposal as technological advances. We have given high priority to youth bridge, its development and

consolidation: today bridge teaching in schools is a reality in many countries of the world; virtually all Federations either have or are developing a youth sector with great commitment and attention.

A lot has been done, but there is still a great deal to do and it will be the task of the new President and the new Council, to whom I think to have left a good starting point. We need new ideas, new blood and I'm sure we'll be in good hands.

I have had great teachers, from whom I hope I have not been an unworthy pupil. I had a great team and extraordinary collaborators with whom I worked with great satisfaction. But let me say that above all I am happy to be able to say that I have had two great friends, two real brothers, who have always been by my side, in joy and pain, sharing successes and failures, generous with advice, always supporting me and showing me the right path, often restraining my impulses. José Damiani, my mentor, linked by a forty-year friendship and Marc De Pauw, continuously with me since 1999 when we were elected President and Treasurer of the European Bridge League.

Before closing my report I want to express my thanks to my colleagues of the Executive Council and the Committees during my presidency, to Alvin Levy our 1st Vice President who ended his term, Jan Kamras, our Hon. Secretary, David Harris, our General Counsel, Anna Gudge, Marina Madia, Arianna Testa, Maurizio Di Sacco who are my closest collaborators and practically assist and support me daily, armed with great patience, not forgetting Carol Von Linstow and Simon Fellus and last but not least to our fantastic Championship Staff: all of them have done and are still doing a very good job, enabling the WBF to realize its programs and achieve its objectives.

I want to thank you, the Federations, for your friendship and cooperation. Let me say, once again, that if the WBF is able to achieve any result it is because of you, because you have to be aware that you are the WBF and we are at your service. Let me repeat that you are the sophisticated car, we are simply the privileged drivers.

If I was able to live this wonderful adventure I owe it only to my wife Cippi who agreed to share with me all the sacrifices that this choice of life entailed.

Dear Friends, you will remain always in my heart, I tried to do my best and I hope to have been up to the task assigned to me for this fantastic race.

Thank you for the attention a huge abbraccio.