

# **Welcoming Speech Connecting the dots – ITM Congress**

**9<sup>th</sup> of October 2019**

Your Majesty,

General-Director, dear Marc-Alain Widdowson,

Former General Director, dear Bruno Gryseels,

Professors,

Collaborators,

Global partners,

Dear students,

A **healthy life for everyone**. Regardless their country of origin or income. With **accessible, affordable and high-quality care**.

Can an institute's vision be **more ambitious**?

Your **presence** and your **inspiring words**, Your Majesty, show again your sincere interest in and strong commitment for the health and well-being of every single person.

And more specifically for the **most vulnerable** person in **dire need**. For the person in **search for good care** for him or herself, for a sick child, parent or other loved one.

For the scientists, researchers, employees and students of ITM, **Your presence** underlines Your **great interest** in **science** and **education** as the main levers to achieve the aforementioned **vision**: a healthy life for everyone.

For this reasons, ITM is **profoundly grateful** and appreciative to you, Your Majesty.

**'Switching the Poles'**. This was and is the meaningful **slogan** used by ITM, to cover a **crucial paradigm switch** that has started to be implemented about 8 years ago, under the inspiring leadership of prof. dr. Bruno Gryseels.

His conviction was clear and straightforward: more than ever before, **resources** for **development cooperation** will be transmitted **directly** to the **partners** in the **'South'**.

From there, they will reach out to the best **possible partners**, according to them, to help -if needed- to overcome their healthcare and health policy challenges.

That way, the focus shifted even more outspoken to **excellent**, impactful and relevant **scientific research**, to **inspiring education** and as impactful **scientific** and **societal services** here and elsewhere. It is the best, if not the only strategy, **to be and remain attractive** and wanted by the **partners in the South**.

What once started, in a colonial context, as a **training institution** for the additional education in **tropical medicine** and hygiene for doctors, nurses, and technicians who wanted to start to work in Africa, developed into a **world-class beacon** in **tropical diseases** and **health care**.

This was and is made possible by engaged and outstanding **scientists, teachers, employees** and students.

In addition, a **sound understanding** and **knowledge** of **tropical infectious diseases** and the so-called non-communicable diseases in low- and middle-income countries can be of **vital interest** for the more **affluent countries** as well.

**Migration, climate disruption, antibiotic resistance and pandemic risks...** More than ever, we are **interconnected** and thus **dependent** on each other. Not just the **poles**, but **relationships too, are switching. Reciprocity and mutual interdependence** have never before been as **intense**.

With a **new mission** and **vision** comes a **new governance** structure.

Since a short while, the **Board of Governors** consists of 12 independent, complementary members, appointed by the **General Council** after a rigorous selection procedure. They **govern** ITM in good interaction with the General Council.

This **unique stakeholders meeting** with **representatives** of amongst others, Flemish departments of Education, public health and science, the federal administrations for science, development cooperation and public health, the Flemish universities, the French-speaking universities, the city and province of Antwerp, partner institutions in the South, the alumni, the employees and the students, **keeps** the **Board of Governors** sharp, they **fuel** and **support** us in order to **fulfil** ITM's **mission** and **vision**.

Also in this way ITM is **unique**.

Do they **still exist**: institutions or boards where, in the **most beautiful sense** of **multi-level governance** and **quadruple helix**, all policy levels, boards, governments, as well as students, employees, partners and alumni meet each other around one shared objective?

**Structures** are just **subservient**. **People make** the **difference**.

On behalf of the **broad ITM-community** and the **various** boards of governors, I thank **Bruno Gryseels** most heartily for his **visionary leadership**.

From time to time, things could collide and conflict a little bit,

Bruno, but the **path you completed** with **ITM** is **impressive**.

You leave **large shoes to fill**, in even more **complex times** and with **relatively scarce resources**.

I thank all the **staff members**: professors, researchers, the medical and paramedical staff, and all the people from the supportive services and administration, and last but not least the students.

**Thanks** to you all, **ITM** continues to put our unique **country, city** and **province** on the **world map**. That ITM has become a great name globally, is mainly your achievement.

When the **Bill** and **Melinda Gates-foundation** as well as the **Belgian Directorate-General for Development Cooperation** selected ITM as evident partner for the **elimination of sleeping sickness;**

when **president Félix Tshisekedi** from the Democratic Republic of Congo **educates himself profoundly** during his visit at ITM about that ambition and how ITM wants to accomplish it; when we attract students from all over the globe;

when our alumni play **leading roles** in the **healthcare** systems of their **respective countries;**

the highly valued **impact of your work** is obvious and proven.

Now that we are, in a certain way, among us, and now that we have a **clear picture** of the **challenges** and **expectations**, and now that the **strategic policy** plans are **finalised**, I dare to **summarise** our **main concern** like this: our **assignment**, **plans** and **ambition** seem to reach far **beyond** our **financial resources**. This is **regrettable**. After all, don't we have the **people**, **expertise**, **experience**, and **eagerness** to **meet** the **high expectations**?

Of course, we are most grateful for **the subventions from the Flemish and the federal government**. But extra margins and **opportunities** would create and develop more **clout** for our new **director Marc-Alain Widdowson**. **Clout** to make an **even greater difference** in the **spearhead sectors** which he will present in detail later on today. We wish him every success, professional fulfilment, and a lot of luck in Antwerp as well.

He earned his spurs and connected many dots throughout the world. We are very pleased that his path brought him here, in Belgium, in Antwerp, at ITM.

With full **confidence**, we look forward to the steps he will take, hopefully within **the best preconditions**, with and for ITM, in order to contribute even **more efficiently** and **effectively** to the **realisation** of the challenging **ambition**: a healthy life for everyone, with focus on **poverty-related diseases** in low- and middle-income countries.

I wish you all a **fantastic congress** and a **strengthening** of the **friendship relations** with and between all our partners all over the world. May you continue to feel at home in a **flourishing network** of **colleagues** and friends, all around the globe, driven by a shared goal and with **ITM** as the **connecting link**.