

Fourteenth United Nations Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice
Kyoto 7th March 2021

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates,

Today, as you gather in Kyoto for the Fourteenth UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice—just half a century since my late uncle, Prince Takamatsu, joined you for the previous Congress held in Kyoto—it is indeed a great pleasure and honour for me to extend my heartfelt words of welcome and congratulations to you all, especially to those of you from abroad. I know that it cannot have been easy in these challenging times, and I thank you for your commitment.

I would like to take a moment to convey my condolences to those who have lost loved ones, and my sympathies to all those suffering in some way from the effects of COVID19. At the same time, I would like to recognise the amazing efforts made by so many people in their chosen fields to get us through this crisis, and to facilitate our adaptation to a new norm.

2020 turned out to be a year like no other, but it has also provided us with an opportunity to reassess our values, rethink our lives and reshape our lifestyles. COVID19, especially at the onset, appeared not to recognise any of our social hierarchical stratifications. It was a great leveller. Seemingly dangerous only to elderly people and those with pre-existing conditions, we now know that it has affected the more vulnerable sectors of society. But even then, it is rare that the world is presented with a chance to press the “reset” button.

There are many things that are not “right” in our world that nations must unite to rectify. Now that the pandemic has forced all nations to pause for a moment, we have, at last, the opportunity to address global issues on a more level footing than has been possible in the past. Today, we are united in having to fight a common foe—COVID19. Let us remain united, to tackle the other issues that need us all on the same side. I believe that I am speaking on behalf of many people, when I say that the strong messages sent out by the Secretary-General of the UN, for instance regarding climate change, or humanitarian issues, are most encouraging, and push us into thinking on a global scale.

I have said that COVID19 was a leveller, and, indeed, it is. But it has also brought to the surface the weak aspects of each of our societies. No good will come of leaving these weaknesses to fester in the foundations of our societies. There are fundamental changes that must be made, so as to ensure the realisation of a more tolerant, more inclusive society, both globally and locally—a society in which vulnerable people are not left behind.

We have here today, policy-makers, practitioners, academics, and community volunteers from nations throughout the world. Your unwavering commitment to building safe and secure societies is a beacon that shines the way for all the victims of social or criminal injustice. Once you have taken on the role of a beacon, however, it is your duty to ensure that the light is not turned off. The legal system is a balance, clearly defining “right” and “wrong,” when, as we all know, socio-economic, cultural and humane considerations need to be taken into account. I do so hope that the beacon lights will be warm and that the path it lights up will be wide, for the legal system should not be about words, it should be about people. It should not be about being clever, it should be about being humane.

I would also like to acknowledge the wonderful work done by the youth participating in the Kyoto Congress Youth Forum, the outcome of which will be presented today by representatives. These young people are the torchbearers for the future, and I hope that they will have discovered the importance of dialogue, of seeing things from different perspectives, and of finding common ground, as these three points are at the basis of international understanding, and world peace. In the future, I trust that the youth participating in the Youth Forum will become beacons, shining the way towards peace and justice in the international community.

Before concluding, I would like to thank all those who were involved in organizing this Kyoto Congress, in these particularly difficult times. I hope that all the participants will have time and occasion to foster new partnerships and forge strong friendships during their stay.

It is my sincere hope that Kyoto Congress will see constructive discussions on crime prevention and criminal justice, and that it will contribute in great measure towards achieving safety and security for all sectors of society.