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Closing Ceremony 2021
Address by the President Ambassador Cristina Ravaglia

Dear Graduating Class of 2021 – our *secondi* – dear first-year students – our *primi* – dear Rettore, dear teachers and staff members -

Dear parents, families and friends, who are watching this Closing Ceremony from around the world -

Today's ceremony may seem rather peculiar – just like the last year and a half have been for us all. It would have been an immense pleasure for us to open the college's doors and bid a warm and joyful welcome to the families of our graduating students, most of whom would have visited for the first time the place where their sons and daughters arrived two years ago as teen-agers and which they are now about to leave as young adults, ready to go out into the world.

Your two years at UWC Adriatic – dearest secondi – have taken place at a momentous time and, as difficult as they have undoubtedly been, I sincerely believe that they have also been all the more transformative, as I am sure you all agree.

For this reason, on this solemn and moving occasion, I urge you to feel both proud and thankful.

Proud because you've made it! And because, in spite of the restrictions due to the pandemic, you experienced the spirit of *Adriatic* and succeeded in keeping it alive. Of course, there have been times in which you have faced great difficulties and sadness – such times are inevitable in life even in less eventful times. And yet you never let these difficulties stop you from being proactive, vibrant, joyful even. In the past few months I have been unable to come to Duino for long periods of time as I used to and I have to say I have missed you all immensely. However, I have been in continuous contact with the Rettore, with Valentina, with teachers and staff members. The news they have shared with me and your emails informing the community about student activities, initiatives and events have really impressed me for the lively and vibrant atmosphere of the College that they conveyed.

As I have said, I believe you should also feel thankful. Before the end of February last year and throughout this academic year you have always been <u>together</u>. Together as peers and with your teachers, sharing your daily lives, benefiting from in-person lessons and CAS activities. I am well aware that since your return to Duino in August 2020 everything has been quite different and that the health restrictions must have been hard to live with. Still, you have had one another and have faced it all together and this is an enormous privilege. I am sure that you have heard from your friends outside the college all over the world how frustrating these months of mostly online-learning have been, sitting alone in front of their PC and unable to meet friends and teachers in person. You therefore have much to be grateful for and all of this has been possible thanks to your own resilience and to the tremendous dedication of *UWC Adriatic* Rettore, teachers and staff.

Now is the time for me as well also be thankful, and pay a public tribute to them all, starting from our Rettore, Will Turner. You must not forget that when the events of February 2020 took place he too had only just arrived in Duino – one could almost say he somehow was a "primo" himself!
There is no doubt in my mind that without him at the helm, without his ability to take difficult and urgent decisions, without his vison and leadership, none of the many positive experiences you have all had at *Adriatic* would have been possible.
Throughout those difficult months Will has been wonderfully supported by the unremitting dedication of the college teachers and staff. Therefore, to each and every one of them goes my most heartfelt gratitude.

Among those I wish to thank I cannot omit the maintenance and the cleaning staff and… our lovley mensa ladies Alba, Angela, Barbara, Elena, Emanuela, Marina, Raica ("Raiza") and Sonia your "*Adriatic* moms", whose presence is even more important in challenging times. They know your tastes so well, advise you wisely about what to eat and even do their best to cheer you up – aware as they are of how food is not just nourishment for the body but also for the spirit. A special word of thanks to all of them!

Allow me also to bid good-bye to those staff members leaving the college at the end of this Academic Year:

To Joanna Wdzienkonska, the College Librarian, retiring after 30 years at this college*: Bardzo dziekujemy, Pani Joanno, i wszystkiego najlepszego!*

To Steve Coughlin, the College Deputy Head Pastoral, a key position, as I am sure you are all aware, particularly in this pandemic: our warmest thanks, Steve – you have been truly amazing!

To Jill Harkness, Head of Library and Learning Resources, University Counsellor and Steve's wife: *un grande ed affettuoso grazie*, Jill!

To Steve, Jill, and their one and a half years old son Joe, born in Duino just before the pandemic and who has not yet been able to travel to Canada to meet the rest of the family: our warmest wishes for your future and that you may fully enjoy your return home.

Although this closing ceremony may be rather different this year, it will once again feature an award that is very dear to me: the award that will be given to the best students of Italian as a foreign language for the three levels taught at this college. Aside from being very curious to find out who the winners are (a very well-kept secret, I assure you), I would also like to sincerely thank the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation and the and CRTrieste Foundation for providing the prizes and making this award possible.

A few final words to our students now.

To our *secondi* – who will now go out into the world, be it for university or for a gap year and – before then – back home after such a long time – I wish to say that I hope there will always be a special place in your hearts for UWC Adriatic and Duino. The transformations that these two years have brought about in your personality – as you faced both the initial, inevitable difficulties of settling down so far away from home, and the subsequent, unexpected issues caused by the pandemic – will become permanent traits that will enable you to become changemakers, bringing positive change to the world in many different ways, inspired by the values you have been exposed to at this College and which the world so greatly needs. To all of you my warmest *in bocca al lupo*. I hope you will come back to Duino eventually and meet again in easier circumstances.

To our *primi* – who still have a few weeks of life at the College ahead of them – I want to say that I hope that after your well-earned vacations you will return in August full of energy for the new Academic Year, hopefully in an easier situation. I also wish that over the summer you may have the time to assimilate all the extraordinary new experiences you've been through at the college and share them with relatives, friends and peers back at home. See you again in August – in person, fingers crossed – older, wiser and full of energy.

During the demanding and challenging times you have lived here at the College, all of you, dear students, *primi* and *secondi*, have had to be especially responsible both to preserve your personal health and to keep the whole community safe.

The point of personal and collective responsibility, which is so crucial in a UWC education, makes me think about the words of an important Italian female scientist and Nobel laureate, Rita Levi Montalcini. Words she spoke not far from where you are now, at the University of Trieste on 17 May 1991. The title of that most important lecture was *Human Rights and Duties on the Threshold of the 3rd Millennium*, the 30th anniversary of which will be celebrated in a few weeks' time. Our first-years will be involved and we have also had a Project Week group dedicated to the *Trieste Declaration of Human Duties – a Code of Ethics of Shared Responsibilities.* This *Declaration,* made in 1993, was inspired by Rita Levi Montalcini's vibrant appeal – on the one hand, to the international scientific community to adopt a kind of *Magna Charta of Duties,* and, on the other, to young generations whom she invited "to rightfully participate in the implementation" of her message.

The *Trieste Declaration*, adopted by international scientists among which many Nobel Laureates, called upon "scientists, with support from politicians, to identify the duties, i.e. the responsibilities, that mankind must assume in light of the turbulent scientific progress and the subsequent technological innovations which may put the planet's survival in jeopardy if no shared international protocols are adopted", as written by the then Dean of the University of Trieste, Francesco Peroni.

Given that rights and duties are the two faces of the same coin my special wish to you all, dear students, is that from these privileged but complex years at *Adriatic* you may bear very clearly this in mind: a right, or a privilege, is and must always be accompanied by a sense of duty, and of personal and collective responsibility, as well as by the desire to give back what you have received.

Before I give the floor back to our Rettore I absolutely have to thank warmly all who contribute to the College's operation, development and facilities: the Friuli Venezia Giulia Autonomous Region, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Municipality of Duino Aurisina, our public and private donors and the college *alumni* and friends, all of whom have been more generous than ever in these demanding times. A final word of thanks to all the local families who last summer hosted some of the College students who were unable to fly back home.

Without you all UWC Adriatic would not be what it is today.

Thank you.