

**SPEECH OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE WVF AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF
THE WORLD VETERANS CONGRESS AND THE 29TH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF
THE WVF IN PARIS, FRANCE 2019.**

Your excellences

Dear delegates

Dear guests

Ladies and gentlemen

First of all, I would like to thank all our delegates, distinguished guests, observers and all participants for your presence at this first World Veterans Congress which also includes the 29th General Assembly of the World Veterans Federation.

For those of you who have attended our previous conferences, you will have noticed that with almost 150 participants present from more than 35 countries, and in addition international organizations like Battle Brotherhood from Russia, Arab Veterans Union from the Middle East and Soldiers of Peace International Association we all represent veterans from over 75 countries.

This is one of the largest assemblies of veterans, victims of war and officials in the recent history of the World Veterans Federation. My colleagues and I are very pleased indeed with this achievement and we would like to thank each and every one of you for your support of this congress which, as you know, is the only one of its kind in the whole world.

Before I proceed further, I must admit that in our planning, we did not anticipate such many challenges involved in the planning. As a result of this miscalculation, we were faced with some last-minute logistical problems most of which we were able to solve eventually.

There were, however, a number of issues which we were unable to resolve at the last minute such as lack of staff, transportation and document translations.

These, I am sad to say, may have caused some inconvenience to a number of participants. To those affected, I would like to tender our apology and sincerely hope that they will bear with us. At the same time, I also wish to state that as President of the World Veterans Federation, I take full responsibility for all the shortcomings at this Congress.

Your participation at this Congress indicates your strong desire to improve the well-being of your own veterans and victims of war by learning the experience of others and by sharing your own experience with them. To assist you in your mission, we are providing you with a sizeable international forum. We have here in this room, representatives from many tens of millions who are involved in veteran affairs.

The Executive Board has decided that we in our 29th General Assembly should open up for observers and guests to also be able to attend our General Assembly in order to gain a better understanding of our issues and challenges.

I hope our members and delegates show off their best side to our guests. And that we all share our experiences throughout the conference, especially during the coffee breaks and during the free time here in Paris.

This should also be a forum for creating new contacts and building networks to exchange experiences we can all take home with us.

As part of this Congress we are also providing you with a team of veterans and experts in veteran affairs who will give us all inspiration and useful information on international veteran work.

They will also be conducting the proceedings of the Peace and Security Session and Health and welfare Session. In short, we have done our very best to set the stage for your benefit and we would like you to make full use of it.

This conference would not have taken place without the support, assistance and collaborations of a number of individuals. Therefore, before I return to my seat, I would like to make some acknowledgements on behalf of the World Veterans Federation.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have to say that our friends in Soldiers of Peace International Association has been extremely supportive in our Congress and they have given us all the assistance we need. In addition, I would like to congratulate and to thank all members of the Preparatory Committee of this Conference, under the chairmanship of Col. Bjarne Hesselberg for their fantastic effort in making it such a great success. I have to say that all those involved are basically volunteers who have given a lot of their time and their expertise for the benefit of us all.

Our appreciation and our special thanks go to a small group of people who have taken on such a big task of providing us with all the logistics of this international conference. The group I am referring to is none other than our Staff under the direction of Col. Hesselberg, You will agree with me that they have done a tremendous job for us all. Also, a big thank to our generous sponsors of this event, Ipsen Foundation and Vfonds. Thank you so much.

Most important of all, our gratitude goes to you, all of you. You have provided us with an excellent quorum without which we would never be able to hold this Congress. So, thank you all.

Finally, keep in mind during this Congress; show respect for each other and stand tall. We are all in the same mission to make it better for our veteran sisters and brothers.

Dear friends, I wish you all a successful Congress and enjoy your stay in Paris.