

## **Open Letter to Members of the World Scout Committee**

Copies to:

- National Scout Organisations
- Chairmen of Regional Scout Committees
- Regional Directors

From the NSOs of:

- Austria, Greece, Indonesia, Japan, Sweden, Thailand, UK, USA

15<sup>th</sup> October 2007

**Dear Fellow Scouts,**

We are writing to you to share concerns that we have, and to ask for your action in addressing them, which we believe will result in better support for National Scout Organisations and a more transparent World Organisation.

We are committed to seeking a clear, unified and coherent vision of what the WSC and the WSB can provide together for the benefit of NSOs, and to ensuring that such a vision is underpinned by governance and management that is seen as “fit for purpose”.

We are also keen to ensure that the forthcoming World Scout Conference focuses on supporting NSOs for membership growth and development, rather than once again being focussed on internal issues.

### **Some Specific Issues That Concern Us:**

There is presently an increasing emphasis on control rather than enabling or supporting NSOs. Actions and projects appear significantly to be increasingly WSB-centric rather than NSO-centric. For example:

- There is an emphasis to centralise to the world office, rather than to decentralise through placing activity and resources in regional offices where regional teams and networks can be more effectively focussed on supporting individual NSOs.
- There is increasing emphasis on the role of the voluntary regional framework being to implement central decisions, rather than being a forum for the development and support of NSOs and for fostering democracy and peer support in the Movement.
- The WSB has failed thus far to provide adequate support services to NSOs especially on issues to directly help with growing the Movement.
- Whilst we can see the positive benefits of developing a unified World Scouting brand and visual identity, the branding strategy appears to focus far too heavily on central control. The emphasis on raising revenue through licensing is a major disincentive for NSOs to take up and develop the brand in their own areas. The role of the WSB should be to support NSOs in the delivery of the world brand and visual identity within their national settings.
- The recent proposals and subsequent reported decisions on the new Guidelines and Basic Requirements for NSOs organising World Events appear very one-sided, and have been written without NSO consultation. Rather than focussing on how support could be given to those NSOs that require it (such as Mozambique for the recently-cancelled World Moot), the appearance is of a central office seeking to interfere without accepting responsibility, promote its self-interests, and impose additional unjustified financial charges.

## **Governance Issues**

There has been no open and transparent evaluation of the performance of the WSC and WSB, and it there is no evidence that even the limited internal evaluation has resulted in any meaningful change. This good governance practice exists in many NSOs and we expect likewise for our own world bodies. Other examples of governance issues that can be addressed without waiting for the decisions of the World Scout Conference include:

- There has been no evidence of openly addressing serious Membership and Fees issues for large NSOs in the APR; indeed, the Fees Task Force has only recently been convened for its first meeting, more than two years since the World Scout Conference that identified the issue, and less than one year ahead of the next Conference, and still there has been no consultation document for NSOs to consider.
- Financial controls appear weak and suspect as independent audits are late (up to one year from close of accounting period), budgets are prepared and confirmed late (several months into the accounting period), and obligations appear entered into without proper decision-making processes. Such practices would not be accepted in many NSOs, and better standards should be expected of WOSM. In the absence of independent audits for major decisions, there must be a concern that regulatory requirements may not be met.
- There appear to be questionable processes and preparation for financial and policy decision-making. The frequency of comment from members of committees and task forces regarding late and insufficient papers is significant. Such inadequate preparation leaves us to question how members can be properly informed or effective when making any decisions referred to them.

## **Management issues**

There is a significant increase in comments and judgements of there being “no confidence” in the practices or skills of senior management in the WSB. This is of great concern. Issues that contribute to this situation have been identified as including:

- The use of WOSM assets for capital projects that appear to be committed without transparency, without business plans and without cost-benefit analyses; the most significant of these projects brought to our attention are for the Picarquin site in the Inter-America Region, and for the proposed new office development in Geneva. These have been undertaken with poor or no two-way communication with NSOs, yet they entail significant policy issues, allocation of human resources, and future liabilities.
- The response to cash shortfall appears to be to “raise the fees income” instead of to review costs, whilst at the same time many NSOs themselves are having to cut their own membership services in order to avoid budget deficits

We believe that these issues of concern are systemic and institutional; we do not believe they just relate to one or two personalities, although the actions of individuals are exacerbating the problems

## Improving the Position

We consider it to be very important for members of the WSC to act quickly to restore confidence in itself and to address these concerns.

Such actions should include:

- a) Immediate steps to improve and rebuild relationships with the WSF.
- b) Address any shortcomings identified from your self-evaluations, and to introduce external evaluation consistent with what is now considered to be best practice.
- c) Commission an external forensic audit of the Picarquin project (to audit not only the actual financial situation past, present and projected, but also to audit the lines of decision-making and responsibility).
- d) Introduce clear financial systems and accountability, with the provision of prompt and on time budget preparation and financial management of WOSM
- e) Commence greater transparency of decision-making within the organisation, and more open consultative communications with NSOs.
- f) Commence consultation, and seek input, from NSOs on major capital and human resource proposals.
- g) When investigating the proposed relocation of the WSB central offices, extend the review this to include moving out of Switzerland to a cheaper location and publish an externally conducted cost-benefit analysis for the principal options
- h) Ensure that the format, agenda and working method for the next World Scout Conference in 2008 focuses on (i) Membership Growth and Development and (ii) achieving good governance. Individual members of the undersigned will be happy to work with the Organising Committee in this respect if it would be helpful.
- i) Demonstrate a commitment to focus resources on supporting Scouting through NSOs, rather than on the centralisation of controls etc.

In writing to you in this manner we have sought to clearly identify those areas that concern us all, and to be constructive in highlighting some of the specific actions that we consider necessary.

These are not new issues: they have been raised more discretely over the past months with several senior members both of the WSC and WSB. Over that period, we had hoped to see improvement; instead, however, the concerns appear to be escalating in scope and impact.

We hope that by us now formally recording our considered analysis and proposals, the issues can be addressed with appropriate positive actions, and that together we can regain the unity of Scouting, regain confidence in the WSC and the WSB, and help our Movement to move into its second Century with confidence and being properly "fit for purpose".

Yours faithfully

Signed by the NSOs for:

**Austria, Greece, Indonesia, Japan, Sweden, Thailand, UK, USA**