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President Elect's Message

26th General Assembly of the International Federation of Catholic Universities

Dear colleagues, it is indeed a great honor to have been elected as President of the Board of the International Federation of Catholic Universities. I am humbled to have received your support and pledge to work over the next three years to modernize the structure, place accountability at the heart of the operation, work transparently to empower the Federation and make it a convincing voice of Catholicity in higher education. This election, which for the first time, had more than one candidate is an expression of IFCU's transformation. Different, and yet not opposed, perspectives on the role of IFCU were presented and you were able to make an informed choice. Let me first greet Dr. Fernando Sanchez Campos, thank him for the dedication to IFCU and say that as President of IFCU, I look forward to working with the Catholic University of Costa Rica to develop the Common Good Observatory, he so wonderfully presented to us a few days ago, and count on his collaboration with the Board.

But in fact laying out the seeds of IFCU's renovation was the work of our outgoing President Fr. Pedro Rubens. With his calm but determined manner, wisdom and diplomacy he has steered the Federation over the past 6 years and guided its transition. These are very big shoes to fill. His task was defining for us today to be able to discuss renewal and professionalization. I will work to widen the doors you have opened. Let us all thank him warmly and give him a round of applause. I also wish on this occasion to thank the outgoing members of the Administration Board for their service.

And what is to be done now? Let me start with a metaphor. Michelangelo left unfinished a group of six statues built for the grave of Pope Julius II, that art historians have given the name 'I Prigioni', the slaves or the prisoners. They capture unfinished figures that thus seem to emerge from the marble blocks, unsuccessfully. Michelangelo's slaves are perhaps an inspiring image to the work of Catholic universities, they represent a struggle, the suffering of creation seeking completion, but also the dream of being whole. They represent in fact the rich potential of the labor of universities. Because a university is always a set of possibilities. We are Catholic universities, and this identity is not one of the pillars of the university, but it is substantive to the university itself. As with the *Prigioni*, we will never be done with asking the question of what this

means for us, - what it means to be a Catholic university - we will never be complete or whole, but our mission is to keep asking and reflect that question in all our actions.

Nowadays, universities are facing tremendous challenges. They are the focal point of a new economic model that is no longer simply based on manufacturing and commodities but is driven and led by those who own intellectual capital. This clearly requires stronger links with stakeholders in the community, be they NGO's or businesses, foundations and cultural institutions, citizen initiatives and institutional strategies. It means that stakeholders in the community will increasingly tap into the resources available in universities more effectively and universities must be flexible in catering to these changing demands. Our edge is that as Catholic universities, we will act to meet these demands by means of a value-driven education.

A Church that goes forth requires universities that go forth, that are on the move. This means precisely articulating the local with the global, leveraging our local presence with a wider international network of universities, bound together by their identity institutions, and committed to jointly create impact in a world that increasingly needs institutions that create value for society (be it economic, scientific, social and cultural) informed by values.

To 'act in concrete terms', as the Pope Francis challenges us to do, means to take up challenges where they are diagnosed. To act in concrete terms, then, also means to take up the challenge and the noble mission of representing and working with IFCU, reinforcing its global voice, and providing spaces for its many internal voices to be heard. It means addressing the different development stages of its member universities in a spirit of sustainable solidarity and with focused initiatives, so that the power of a few may be the strength of many. Across it all, stand our commonly shared values: a Catholic identity that binds us to respect human dignity, a commitment to an education driven by values, but also the pursuit of excellent science advancing the borders of knowledge. We need to be at the vanguard of development, because only thus may we labor towards research, unwaveringly committed to the common good and not to the profit of the few.

On these occasions, a candidate, now elected usually speaks of her track record. I have an internet path that can be easily googled and will not go further in this regard, but I may wish to say two things. One is that I understand my election is transformative in more ways than one, specially

as the first woman to lead IFCU. I come from an institution that has a tradition of empowering women. I'm the second woman rector and have implemented a strong leadership agenda which makes us a university with a circa 45% representation of women on Boards. It is wonderful to see many women rectors in this Federation and I look forward to having you all inspiring young women to take up the responsibility of working with IFCU in the great work of higher education. And secondly, I come with baggage, I have the great privilege of leading a remarkable university, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, which has some of its prestigious *alumni* in this room today. I leave you with a short video made for the celebration of our 50th anniversary and thank you warmly for your trust. I am committed to affirm a full dialogue with society, deeply passionate about the mission of universities to solidly empower the youth and driven to contribute to strengthen IFCU's role as an acknowledged voice of Catholic higher education.