

**WORLD CULTURAL COUNCIL
2024 AWARD CEREMONY
Salutatory Speech Professor José Estrada
McGill University – October 22, 2024**

Distinguished authorities of McGill University, respected laureates, dear guests, ladies and gentlemen,

The world is going through a deep crisis. The solution does not lie in increased intellectuality, but in a pursuit of goodness and desire to serve others. The answer must involve strengthening peoples' values, integrity, and virtues.

We have seen how conflicts repeat themselves throughout history for all-too-common reasons: intolerance of those who are different, injustice towards those who have less power, and unbridled ambition for wealth and influence. Today we observe exactly the same scenarios.

At the core of all these challenges lies an ethical vacuum and this is **where higher education can play an essential role**. By education we do not mean training narrow experts or technocrats but humanists, sages and leaders with a vision. At the foundation of individual and social improvement is education. What concerns me in particular – is that the world today is outgrowing the traditional educational structures. A system in which authorities, scholars, and experts pass on their fundamental knowledge, viewpoints, and wisdom. This is often replaced by influences or acquaintances who have viewpoints, opinions and narrow experiences but with only shallow foundations.

True education is the cornerstone on which a great, progressive society can be built. This takes time, as time is needed before one can harvest the fruit from any seed. Education is a powerful weapon for social good, which is not yet used to the full. It is in these times of crisis education is the guiding light.

As an inspiration for future leaders, today we have the great privilege of recognizing remarkable individuals who through hard work, persistence and creativity have risen to the top of their professions. **Professor Eske Willerslev** is a great scientist and a leader amongst his peers. Yet, he is also an ambassador for science who takes time to communicate the richness of science to youth and lay people. **Mr Cónal Creedon**, through his writings and creative works brings color to our imaginations and helps us appreciate beauty in day-to-day interactions. Our previous winner, **Professor Omar Yaghi**, who is stepping in for the role of WCC President, is demonstrating how basic science can serve humanity by offering solutions for clean water, clean air, and clean energy which impact our health, happiness, and future.

These award winners represent visionaries who have been able to combine a great heart with a brilliant mind. They give hope that, despite the dark clouds looming over us, we can forge ahead with the optimism that this world and humankind will outlive its shortcomings.

I warmly congratulate this year's award recipients.

Thank you very much.

Professor José Estrada
Founder and President Emeritus of the WCC