

**Stavros Niarchos Foundation's
Seventh Annual International Conference on Philanthropy
Opening Remarks
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Kalimera, Goodmorning,

Thank you for joining us for the Stavros Niarchos Foundation's *Seventh Annual International Conference on Philanthropy*. On behalf of all of us at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation (SNF), we offer you a very warm welcome!

When the SNF held our first conference in the summer of 2012, we did not envision it would develop into the annual gathering it has become. By that time, the severe effects of Greece's economic crisis were apparent in virtually every sphere of life. To say it was "disruptive" could of course be already a gross understatement. We organized the first conference to gather people and institutions interested in exploring how the philanthropic sector could help alleviate—and effectively disrupt—the socioeconomic turmoil then ravaging the country. Since 2012, the SNF Conference has grown and developed into a forum for the Foundation to bring together our extended family of partners/grantees, friends and new acquaintances to discuss a wide range of issues and questions we grapple with in our work on a daily basis and that are fundamental to the times in which we are all living.

We have grown from almost 200 in 2012 to welcoming almost 1,000 participants this year. The conference has gone from being a two-day conference to three full days, including this year more than 80 speakers and performers. Throughout the years we have welcomed on stage and in the audience, participants from all over Greece, from the US and Canada, European partners from Germany, the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Spain and Netherlands, as well as representatives from Ghana, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel and Palestine. We have brought under the same roof world-class academic experts, doctors and scientists, ambassadors, ministers and chess masters as well as artists, photographers, musicians, activist youth and students.

This is the second year we are hosting the conference at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Center (SNFCC) as part of the annual Summer Nostos Festival. As many of you know, the SNFCC remains the Foundation's single largest grant to date, with an approximate cost of USD 850 million. It is the new home to the National Library of Greece (NLG), the Greek National Opera (GNO) and the beautiful 40-acre Stavros Niarchos Park you see outside. In February 2017, our Foundation formally donated the SNFCC to the Greek people. Prior to that time, we worked hard towards helping the SNFCC establish strong roots so that it will thrive for many decades to come. One of my favorite sayings is this about what good parents are

expected to do for their children, first give them a strong base, and then give them even stronger wings so that they can fly safely away on their own when the time comes. We continue to follow the SNFCC's path closely and to support its programming and operations on a targeted basis.

The public's enthusiasm for the SNFCC that is hosting us this week has exceeded all of our hopes and expectations. It was a personal bet that we seemed to have won early on, both in spirit and in actual numbers, it has been a very satisfying journey for all involved and a very successful endeavor, not only for Greece but on a global basis, of a truly successful public-private partnership. Since our first summer festival here in 2016 before we had even completed and turned over the SNFCC to the Greek people, through the start of our summer festival this year, we have had more than 5.5 million visits at the SNFCC; and this in a country of 11 million citizen inhabitants. I am delighted that Renzo Piano, the architect of the SNFCC, a Board member of the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins University, and a cherished personal friend and a friend of our Foundation and all of Greece, is here with us today and can see his vision fully brought to life.....from that first drawing on a napkin to what we have today. Perfection and beauty in simplicity. Earlier this year, we learned that the SNFCC has become the second most visited site in Athens, behind only the Acropolis.

We realize this perhaps sounds self-congratulatory. I say it though to highlight that despite the highly polarized times in which we live, and perhaps because of them, people have an enduring desire to come together and connect. People appreciate quality, and show respect when and where respect is shown to them.

The creation of the SNFCC sought to provide positive disruption in Greece both over the short- and long-term. It offered economic stimulus and hope at a time in which it was badly needed. It is an unprecedented public-private partnership in Greece that in many ways has disrupted the public's perception of government-run institutions. The SNFCC is the country's largest cultural and education project ever undertaken. It has disrupted, we feel in a positive way, how the NLG and GNO operate and engage with the public, and it has disrupted the way visitors' understand what constitutes a truly public space. The design itself is disruptive. It is totally open to all, including being handicapped accessible throughout, which is still quite rare in Greece. It is also one of the world's most sustainable building complexes of its size.

Each June, the SNF returns to the Cultural Center for one week to host the Summer Nostos Festival—seven days filled with more than 100 musical, artistic, educational, and athletic acts and programs from around the world. The festival aims to inspire feelings of homecoming, belonging, joy and vitality

that often come along with summertime. In many ways, the goals of the conference are in fact quite similar to those of the festival—to bring people together in an open and inviting way that draws out the best in all of us.

So here we are. The theme of this year’s conference is “Disruption.” I think it may be our most ambitious topic yet. Clayton Christensen, a renowned Harvard Business School professor, introduced the term “disruptive innovation” in 1995. His theory describes the phenomenon whereby “a small company is able to successfully challenge established incumbent businesses” by introducing products and services in overlooked areas of the market or by establishing new markets altogether. When these innovations develop strongholds that compete with established businesses for mainstream customers, they have proven disruptive.

When the concept of “disruptive innovation” is applied in the world of philanthropy, its definition is by necessity much broader. In philanthropy, “disruption” extends beyond the strict economic framework that governs business and must include examination of a wide range of dynamics that influence human wellbeing—and ways these systems can be influenced both for the better and the worse. This task is a daunting one.

Over the next three days, we will try to explore the definition of disruption, identify areas in which it appears to be occurring, and brainstorm and evaluate how philanthropy can accelerate or even generate the type of disruption that is hopefully constructive and beneficial. The term “disruption” has all too often morphed into an empty buzzword. Its use often lacks specificity at best or meaning and usefulness at worst. With this in mind, let me begin by framing what I mean by “disruption” in two ways, as it relates to philanthropy.

The first may align with your intuition. By this, I mean a stimulus or change that poses a significant challenge, and often threatens the established structures and systems that underpin a thriving civic society. They come in myriad forms. They can arise suddenly or can develop over time until they reach an inflection point. They can threaten entire populations, or sub-communities within a broader group. In many cases, disruptions can benefit some while harming others. The types of disruptions we will discuss over the next several days span this gamut—from extreme inequality, to youth unemployment, and environmental degradation. Regardless of how these disruptions have emerged or precisely whom they impact, they have proven worthy of much further analysis.

The second type of disruption is in large part a reaction to these societal shockwaves. It is what I like to call “disrupting the disruption.” Philanthropy can observe negative forms of disruption and has the opportunity to try to successfully take action to try to interrupt these socially destructive forces in those instances. We will have an opportunity to explore ways in which philanthropy has made successful contributions in this regard in a variety of areas, including through the arts and within the criminal justice system.

These two framings, however, leave out a critical part of the conversation. What I have been describing is straightforward—that “disruption” is a significant, negative force impacting society and where philanthropy can play a role in at least diluting the negative consequences. In some cases, perhaps it is that simple. However, in most cases, the story is much more complicated. Often, it can be difficult or impossible to discern ahead of time whether a “disruption” will lead to healthy innovation or is the first thread of social unraveling, fragmentation, and ultimately even breakdown. Sometimes both occur at the same time. In these instances, it is much harder to decide when philanthropy can or should intervene and what its role should be. For example, it is quite apparent that technology is an area filled with questions of ambiguity, nuance and unknowns, many of which we will delve into, including artificial intelligence, big data, and social networks.

Those of you who attended last year’s conference know that a year ago, our Foundation and Johns Hopkins University announced our partnership to establish the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins—a USD 150 million multidisciplinary institute committed to promoting civic engagement and civil discourse, and addressing the negative effects of excessive polarization throughout all levels of society. Since last year, a lot has happened to put the initial structures of the Institute in place.

Just yesterday, the Agora Institute hosted its first ever public event on the topic of Disrupting Polarization as part of the SNF’s monthly Dialogues Series, which I hope many of you were able to attend. The conversations were a critical first step for the Institute to begin engaging the public and modeling productive dialogue on critical and complex issues.

More recently, in March of this year, the Foundation signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Greek Government announcing our commitment to fully support a series of major infrastructure and education projects that will enhance the country’s Health sector. The Health Initiative has an initial budget of around 300 million USD and has the potential to provide positive disruption to Greece’s highly troubled health care sector, including

through hospital designs that will introduce a new philosophy in Greece for harmonizing treatment areas with the natural environment. The Foundation is very happy to be working again with Renzo Piano and his team.

With these potentially disruptive initiatives close in mind, I ask you to approach the conference with a growth mindset. May we be open to hearing a new perspective, reevaluating how we understand an issue, and making new acquaintances that may expect us to deepen our understanding and be more nuanced in our views.

In closing, I wanted to share with you what I often keep reminding myself, what I try to share with my children. I am respectfully borrowing from Martin Luther King's August 28th 1963 'I have a dream' speech, when he spoke about hoping that his children one day will not be judged by the color of their skin but instead on the content of their character. I humbly expand by saying that it is not the color of your skin, it is not your sexual preferences or your political affiliations, it is not your social or economic status, it not about anything else other than the content of your character. It is all about the content of our character, and no matter what each one of us is trying to achieve it should all start from trying hardest to develop a good character.

Thank you for being here with us this week, thank you for engaging with us as we try to contribute to a better society for all.