

**Opening Remarks by Andreas Dracopoulos, Co-President of the Stavros Niarchos Foundation**

Distinguished guests,

On behalf of all of us at the Stavros Niarchos Foundation, I would like to welcome you to the *Third Annual Stavros Niarchos Foundation International Conference on Philanthropy*. When two years ago we held the conference for the first time, many of us thought that it was going to be a one-time occasion. The conference occurred at a time when Greece and a number of other European nations were under the grip of a severe socioeconomic crisis, and it was motivated by a desire and need to discuss and debate the role of philanthropic institutions during such troubling circumstances. That inaugural conference provided us with a message about the need to continue the dialogue and the debate, since all of us are constantly trying to address multiple and complex issues. It also highlighted the importance of networking and providing grantees with an opportunity to share ideas and best practices, leading to the conference becoming an annual international gathering.

Franklin Delano Roosevelt in his State of the Union Address on January 6, 1941, stressed the importance of the Four Freedoms in helping ensure a better life for all the people around the world. His Four Freedoms included the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom of Religion and worship, the freedom from want, and the freedom from fear. Four essential freedoms that today, although at times taken for granted by many, are still essential and imperative to fight for, if we want, indeed, to ensure a better life all around the world for all of us and for our children. As a 21<sup>st</sup> century global society we still need to be reminded of the importance of such freedoms. Freedoms enjoyed by many, yet again, freedoms needing to be secured for many more.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that caring for others, for our fellow human beings is what makes us all human, while Aristotle said that “Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all”.

The notion of a Social Welfare State has been compromised. The need for a truly Social Welfare Society, a fair, dynamic and viable society, where all members, from all sectors including Public, Private, and Philanthropy (the latter always complementing and never expected or able to replace the State), have to contribute towards creating a healthy society able to defend itself against today's many and complex challenges, able to provide for its citizens the basic needs for life itself, to provide for decency, dignity, civility, and opportunity to dream and to make dreams become reality, opportunity for a better tomorrow. All positive forces have to collaborate towards this end. Let us not forget that only a healthy and strong Society can itself reject extreme phenomena of all kinds.

This year's themes—youth unemployment, ethics and philanthropy, and creative assets as engines of prosperity and growth—are indicative of the conference's continuing evolution

into a forum for debating contemporary, critical issues. At a first glance, one may argue that the three themes are rather disparate, but there is a common thread running through all three of them.

In his book, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence has Declined*, Steven Pinker, the distinguished cognitive scientist, argues that we are in the process of experiencing the single most important development in human history, the decline of violence. According to Pinker, “today we may be living in the most peaceable era in our species’ existence.” Empathy, moral sense, self-control, reason are some of the faculties that direct us away from violence, towards helping each other. But does the dominance of what Pinker calls the *better angels of our nature* and being good mean that we also do what is right? Do our altruistic tendencies mean that there are no questions to be asked? As philanthropic institutions, does our inherent mission and tendency to help society mean that we should not keep challenging and questioning ourselves about everything we do.

The conference’s middle theme, philanthropy and ethics, anchors the other two and raises a number of critical questions that should occupy us these two days. How do you address youth unemployment at a scale that makes a meaningful impact? If efforts focus on training educated young people and providing them with skills to match sectorial needs, how do you help impoverished and rather uneducated young people? Why do we focus on young instead of old people, who are more vulnerable? To whom we give, how much and for what reason? How does one negotiate the common ground where private, public and philanthropic interests intersect? How do you navigate providing support within a corrupt landscape? Is art and culture a priority during times of extreme social and economic duress? Who determines policy and does philanthropy reserve the right to do so? These are just few out of many questions that all of us ought to be asking ourselves. All of us in the philanthropic world, whether in the receiving or the giving end, we are concerned with doing what is good. But as are dealing with an increasingly complex and challenging environment, we should be equally concerned with doing what is right.

I would like to thank our Founder, the late Stavros Niarchos, for giving us this opportunity through our Foundation to be able to play a hopefully constructive role in trying to solve today’s problems and contribute to a better tomorrow. Equally, I am honored and privileged to work with my great colleagues at our Foundation. Working with them towards achieving our mission makes it a very fulfilling experience indeed.

Thank you all for being here, and I do hope you all find the two-day conference a productive and enjoyable experience. Thank you.