

Arie Brienens Congress speech 2012

Fellow UFI members, good morning. It is really wonderful for us to be able to welcome you all here. For a record number of you to have joined us this year in Abu Dhabi is a clear indication that our association and, by extension, our industry is in good health. Although I am still President the rest of the Congress, this is my last chance to speak to you about substance of what has happened since we met in Valencia. Obviously, I would like to extend my thanks to everybody who has given me such great support over the past year. I have had a wonderful opportunity to meet members around the world in many places from China to the USA to Plovdiv in Bulgaria and, of course, my home town, Utrecht where we hosted the Executive Committee and two Focus Meetings in April.

This has certainly been a challenging year for many of our members and for our customers. The continued instability of the global economy is making the lives of many quite difficult. However, our industry is proving itself to be very resilient. Both our UFI research and what we hear from our members tells us that, while many of you are still a bit concerned, your businesses have held up to the pressure very well. That says something important both about the quality of UFI members and of the value provided by our industry.

When I talked to you a year ago about my main themes for the year, I spoke of evolution, not revolution. At a time when there is much instability in the business environment, I still think this is right. The fact that we now have record membership numbers and attendance at this Congress does suggest to me that what UFI is offering you is something of real value.

At the heart of this is our global membership and I made one of my priorities a focus on maximising the UFI network. You can see it in action here in Abu Dhabi and we said that we need to find new ways to ensure that you can interact with each other at UFI meetings and throughout the year.

Our new UFI Education Centre is one of the most important initiatives towards empowering far more individuals in this network of over 600 companies. If you haven't already done so, take a look at the Centre while you're here in Abu Dhabi. The UFI team has a booth in the coffee break area outside and will be pleased to demonstrate for you what we've been doing.

Our new Diamond sponsorship programme has played an important role in providing us with the resources which allow us to do this. Thank you to TCEB for their important support, kicking off the UFI Diamond sponsorship programme. Kuwait International Fair will come on board as our second Diamond Sponsor after having supported our Middle East office over the past two years. Without these additional resources, we wouldn't be

able to invest in the people and technology needed to get the Education Centre off the ground.

Although we always do so with a focus on quality, we have been continuing to grow the UFI network. We have welcomed almost 40 new members in the year, taking us up to 610, an all time record. We have lost a few to the crisis but gained more. It is particularly gratifying to see not only members from new countries the emerging markets but also several important companies from our traditional European base. I would particularly like to welcome back LeipzigerMesse which, like my own company, was one of the 20 founder members of UFI back in 1925. The fact that 17 of them are still UFI members is a clear sign of that resilience I mentioned.

I was very pleased to be able to join the Latin American industry when its regional association AFIDA met with their Spanish and Portuguese counterparts in Porto this year. There is a great deal going on in that part of the world, we are making good progress in developing our membership there and I know that there is a lot more than my successors will be doing.

My other key focus has been finding more ways for us to promote the power of exhibitions to the broader business community, government and the public at large. The Associations Committee has been focusing in particular on exchanging best practise on industry promotion among the more than 50 national and regional organisations who are its members. There will be information on the UFI website for all member associations to use about the many interesting and innovative approaches they are taking to promotion.

We have also been talking to those in the financial community who follow our industry. Many of you have told us that it's often frustrating to find how little these influential people know about our industry. So, we've been talking to analysts about what we do and why using UFI research to illustrate our points.

We have also been talking to governments. As you all know, government is an important partner in many aspects of our business and upgrading UFI's government affairs capability has been an important priority. In India, a team from our Executive Committee and group member companies has been working very actively behind the scenes at the most senior levels of the Federal Government to promote the value of building large, modern exhibition facilities in the two largest cities. We are optimistic that this initiative is beginning to bear fruit.

And, closer to my home, I was very pleased to be able to sign at our June meetings in Hamburg the agreement with EMECA to form the European Exhibition Industry Alliance. This represents a very important step in strengthening our presence in Brussels to ensure that our European members' interests are well represented there. The European Chapter has just been discussing this and we will wait with interest to see how this important initiative evolves.

So, in closing, I would like offer my thanks to fellow Trio members, the UFI Executive Committee and our Board of Directors for all of their support during a busy year. I would also like to add my thanks to the entire UFI team in Paris, Kuwait and Hong Kong who work very hard on your behalf to ensure that UFI adds value to your business and provides a good return for the time you invest in it. Finally, a big thank you also to my team at Jaarbeurs in the Netherlands whose great support has allowed me to focus a lot of my time on UFI work this year.

I offer my very best wishes to Chen Xianjin who will I know bring his great energy and organisational skills to his year as UFI President. I look forward to my continued involvement in the Trio as Outgoing President for one more year and working with Mr. Chen and Renaud Hamaide with their work programmes.

Thank you and enjoy the rest of the Congress.