[Edited substantially to text as delivered]

**WORLD CONGRESS ON ADULT CAPACITY 2022**

**7 - 9 JUNE 2022**

**EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE CENTRE**

**OPENING PLENARY “ADULT CAPACITY – THE PRESENT AND FUTURE”**

**TUESDAY 7 JUNE 2022**

**9.00 – 9.10**

**“Congress opening and welcome”**

**by**

**Adrian D Ward MBE LL.B**

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Good morning all. I am Adrian Ward, President of this Congress, and I am delighted to welcome you all to the World Congress on Adult Capacity! [Useful housekeeping information provided at the outset.]

It is four years since the last World Congress. Much has changed for all of us since then, but we must start by celebrating that 263[[1]](#footnote-1) of us are all here together from across the globe, and that this event is happening.

I don’t have a figure for those who wanted to come but couldn’t for reasons beyond our and their control. A few have had to cancel at the last minute, resulting in some adjustments. An addition to the programme is that a 33-minute film on the experiences of elderly people in care homes, and their families, during the initial phase of the pandemic, here in Scotland, will be shown from 12.30 each lunchtime in this area.

Two who were ready to come to the Congress, then had to cancel, are Professor Makoto Arai, whose vision and commitment created the first World Congress in Yokohama, and the worldwide series following upon it; and Isolina Dabove. Even her prodigious commitment and energy could not overcome the hurdles that prevented the 6th World Congress from happening in Buenos Aires in 2020 or 2021, so that we look forward to it in 2024.

The heartfelt disappointment expressed by both of them that they cannot be here is matched by ours. Makoto will present by pre-recorded video, and we hope that last-minute arrangements will be in place in time for Isolina to do the same.

Many of you have faced challenges to be here. We as organisers have faced challenges to put on the event at all. We have had to do our best to concentrate on the core content of the Congress itself, rather than additions such as have enhanced previous Congresses. Without the generosity and support that we have received, this Congress would not be happening at all.

At the outset the Law Society of Scotland showed total commitment towards what we strive to achieve, by becoming our Gold Sponsor. It is splendid that the Society did that, notwithstanding all the constraints of helping its members through the pandemic. Later, when despite our best efforts we were on the verge of cancelling, the United Kingdom Government stepped in with the support necessary to ensure that the event would indeed happen. Tom Pursglove, United Kingdom Minister for Justice, will join us towards the end of tomorrow morning’s plenary session. We are grateful also to all of our sponsors and exhibitors listed in the Congress programme. Time limits me from mentioning each specifically, but we are hugely grateful to every one of them: please do read about them fully in the Congress programme.

Our subject is as old as humankind, but at the same time it is new, only developing as a subject in its own right during the course of my professional life. During that time, it has made a fundamental journey away from treating people with disabilities that affect their capacity, or that make them particularly vulnerable, as people set apart; set apart by their disabilities from the mainstream of human life, and denied the rights, status and opportunities that others have. It has travelled away from that towards recognising that they are full citizens with the same status, rights, protections and opportunities as everyone else; and towards striving to achieve that in reality. That is the ideal which we all seek to achieve, across the world. This Congress will, I hope, help us all, individually in our own ways, and collectively, along that hugely important road that we tread together.

Any of you who were at the 2016 World Congress in Erkner, near Berlin, might remember that even then I suggested that our Congresses were moving substantially beyond the original focus on guardianship. We have continued to explore and develop all ways of supporting the full exercise of capacity, so that – seeking to retain a valued “brand identity” – the title “World Congress on Adult Guardianship” has become the “World Congress on Adult Capacity”, a significant change achieved by altering only one word.

We are delighted that this opening session will now be chaired by Lord Wallace of Tankerness, still better known to many of us as Jim Wallace. I was among those who lobbied him in the 1990s for our Incapacity Act. Upon creation of the Scottish Parliament, he became Scotland’s Deputy First Minister and Minister for Justice, steering that Incapacity Act through a brand-new Parliament as its first major piece of legislation. It was seen as world-leading at the time, but our subject has continued to develop, and here in Scotland we have perhaps delayed too long in catching up. In some of our sessions you will hear about our own strenuous efforts to do that now.

Jim has kindly agreed to chair the remainder of this opening plenary session. Jim is a politician who is highly respected across the political spectrum and beyond. He is highly, and often quietly, effective, and has stayed with issues in the long term, so that from time to time I have been able to access his help when critically needed, not least to save this Congress when we seemed to have run out of possibilities to make it viable. It is typical that beyond impeccably discharging his public duties during his recent year as Moderator of the General Assembly of our national church, the Church of Scotland, last month he was personally present in Ukraine giving church support there.

Now, let the work of the Congress begin.

Over to you, Jim.

[Jim Wallace, Lord Wallace of Tankerness, took over as Chair of the opening plenary session and addressed the meeting, prior to introducing the other speakers]

1. Actual attendance 274. See my closing address for further details. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)