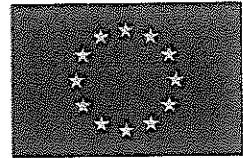


Mr Barack Obama
President of the United States of America



Dear Mr President *Barack,*

I am very happy to present you with this copy of *The World Book of Happiness*. This book gathers the insights of 100 researchers of happiness from 50 countries. It comes to you not only with my wishes for a 'Happy New Year', but also with my request to you as world leaders to make people's happiness and well-being our political priority for 2012. While the initiative for this book comes from a Belgian, it is today an international bestseller and is being translated for readers across the world.

Positive thinking is no longer something for drifters, dreamers and the perpetually naive. Positive psychology concerns itself in a scientific way with the quality of life. At stake are not only the happiness and well-being of individuals, but also those of groups, organisations and countries. And above all, in today's global world we can all learn from one another. It is time to make this knowledge available to the man and woman in the street. Not in a populist way, but in a realistic, long-term and inspiring manner. Policymakers, leaders and politicians bear an important and ethical responsibility in this matter.

People who think positively see more opportunities, perform better, possess greater resilience, take more often correct and sound decisions, negotiate better, have more self-confidence, maintain better relations, take greater responsibility, have more trust placed in them and so on. In short, they give more hope to others because they experience it themselves. In order to release this positive energy, people need oxygen. Society can offer this oxygen. Positive education, positive parenting, positive journalism and positive politics play a crucial role here. This oxygen we can also create ourselves by a balanced existence or a religious or philosophical rooting.

Why not address women and men from all angles of their multiple intelligence? How and when do we excite their sense of curiosity, intelligence, passion, perseverance, friendship, simplicity, authenticity, honesty, creativity, excellence, values and humour? I know the cynics will immediately dismiss these proposals as naive. But they are not. By addressing men and women who are on a growth path, we all become better and happier people. We then do not turn every incident into a trend and every anecdote into a general truth. As a consequence our governing will stimulate self-knowledge, reflection, sense of responsibility and commitment.

Positively inclined people see everything in its right proportions. They put things into perspective and are not envious of others. They do attach importance to those things that give meaning to daily life, but they tend to focus more on others than on themselves.

For this reason I am very happy to give my support to the worldwide activity of Lord Richard Layard (www.actionforhappiness.org), which offers all of us starting-points for more happiness. It is an international movement for positive social change. Thousands of men and women in more than a hundred countries are committed to it.

I wish you and the people for whom you are responsible happiness, well-being and quality of life.
May *The World Book of Happiness* stimulate us all on this path.

Happy New Year!

Herman Van Rompuy
Chairman of the European Council