



Opening Address

Elsinore, May 27, 1992

Professor *Giovanni Romeo*,
President of the ESHG

Dear colleagues,

Twenty-five years after the founding of the European Society of Human Genetics and its first meeting in Copenhagen in November 1967, it seems to me quite appropriate that we reconvene in Denmark. This opening ceremony gives us the unique opportunity to celebrate, at the same time, the 25th anniversaries of the founding of our society and of the Kennedy Institute. In a few minutes, our colleague, Dr. Margareta Mikkelsen, who is also President Elect of our society and the host of this congress, will speak about the history and achievements of the Kennedy Institute, which is one of the most respected European institutions in the field of medical genetics.

It is my privilege and honour to briefly summarize for you the history of our society from its foundation to the

present congress. According to the personal recollection of one of our founding members, Dr. Anthony Edwards, from Cambridge, UK, who is present among us today, the idea of a European Society of Human Genetics arose during a conversation he had with Dr. Jim Renwick in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1966. With Dr. Edwards permission, I am using his description of this conversation: 'We were bemoaning the fact that European human geneticists seemed most often to meet each other in the United States, and we thought that a European society might enable us to meet each other more easily in Europe. At the Chicago International Congress of Human Genetics, a few days later, we therefore suggested that the participants from Europe should meet and discuss our idea, which was enthusiastically taken up at the resulting meeting.'

After the preliminary discussion in Chicago, the Society was founded on March 15, 1967 by public announcement, and the first symposium was announced in the first issue of the Bulletin of the European Society of Human Genetics in August 1967. The programme consisted of invited lectures scheduled for November 18 and 19, 1967, and of oral communications scheduled for the afternoons of the same days.

Professor Jan Mohr was, on that occasion, Chairman of the Organizing Committee, and he served afterwards as Secretary of our society until 1990, when he retired from active academic duties. To him and to all the other founding members of our society I want to express, as President of the European Society of Human Genetics, our gratitude and thanks.

In 1990 the Society went through a major reform and the new statutes prepared by Professor Albert de la Chapelle (Helsinki), Professor Martin Bobrow (London) and Professor Jan Mohr

(Copenhagen) were finally approved at our last meeting in Leuven one year ago.

Following the first symposium held in Copenhagen in 1967, regular meetings were held almost every year afterwards in different European cities. The wandering of our scientific meetings throughout Europe clearly documents the European vocation which inspired our society from its very beginning. At that time no one could have imagined the changes that were to take place on our continent in 1989 and in the following years, which have profoundly affected our scientific relationships. We represent here human genetics from all over Europe or, to be more precise, we represent that branch of science which has been growing at the fastest rate on a continent which has been going through the fastest changes that have ever occurred in its modern history. For this very reason we are obliged to live up to the expectations of our times and provide our society with all the instruments which will allow us to

contribute to the construction of a modern, united and, most important, peaceful Europe.

Dear colleagues, we have convened here from 25 different European countries, and also Australia, Canada, Japan and the USA. As geneticists we are all aware of the axiom that states that without variability, that is, without differences among individuals, genetics would not exist – and I should add that life itself would be quite boring. Following that line of thought, I would like to add that without our different origins, cultures and languages, Europe would not be the same. It is our scientific responsibility to keep alive in the united Europe the future of our cultural heritage, and at the same time to be able to speak, in every field of our endeavours, the common language of peaceful competition and scientific excellence. In this spirit I declare the 24th annual meeting of the European Society of Human Genetics open.