



Friday 27 March, 2020

Dear RJC Members,

I am writing to you from sunny spring-time London. Except it is a very strange spring and all of London is eerily silent. Right now, my thoughts are with our members, all of our stakeholders and their families around the world. On a personal level, not being able to visit Belgium to see my son and my parents who are both in their 70s has been a bit challenging.

My thoughts are especially with beautiful Italy- the heart of creativity and design in jewellery, which has so far taken such a huge hit from this crisis. It's difficult to believe that it was only a few weeks ago that I was there, visiting Vicenzaoro.



We are living in entirely unprecedented times. The scale and impact of this rapidly unfolding crisis was unimaginable to most of us just weeks ago. And within a matter of weeks, the engines of the world's economies seem to be screeching to a halt as entire populations are locked up inside their homes.

There is no doubt that first, we must deal with the clear and present danger – addressing the public health emergency that is upon us and protecting those in our communities who are most vulnerable. At the same time, this crisis has the potential to reshape entire societies and economies in dramatic ways. In these inherently uncertain times, we don't yet know how this reshaping will unfold, but one thing is certain: our collective response to this global crisis will have an impact that will echo for years, and most probably decades, to come.

2020 is the year that RJC celebrates its 15th Anniversary – a milestone that has now acquired a new meaning. We were founded on a collaborative platform in 2005 by 14 inspiring leaders. Today, we have more than 1200 members. We have a dedicated hard-working team that embraces our Members First strategy. And now more than ever, we are prioritising collaboration, partnerships and conscious engagement with our members. Our membership team is following up closely on how we can support you.

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The English word 'crisis' comes from the Greek "krisis", which means 'decision'. I have no doubt that the decisions made today, across all industries, will dramatically impact the supply chains, the people, the processes and the overall ethos of doing trade tomorrow. From the mine to the end customer – our industry touches a wide array of lives, livelihoods, communities, and ecosystems. We work in the business of beauty and emotions, and this makes it even more important for our industry's future that we take care of the people and the planet, through the eventual recovery phase of the Covid-19 outbreak. It's only by doing so, that we can be confident of our industry's long-term success.

One of the lessons to emerge from our current situation is how deeply interconnected we are – from Botswana to New York, and from Italy to India. This is a lesson we know in our minds and hearts, but often forget. And already, we are seeing enormous acts of generosity and courage from the Richemont Group that has decided to make available its Italian leather-goods production capabilities to produce protective masks, where 1 million masks will be donated to the most affected regions in Italy, LVMH dedicating three of their perfume and cosmetic factories to producing hand sanitizers, to Italy based jewellery producer MAKAL pledging to donate 15% of online sales from selected items to help fight the Covid-19 outbreak.

The past few days my team and I have had so many inspiring conversations with industry organisations around the world on how we can accelerate partnerships. We are all in this journey together. This alone is cause for great hope.

As I reflect on this crisis, I realise that times like these force us to think about what really matters. In the new world order that will emerge, we know that we will have a higher need for creating long term sustainable business ecosystems, for nourishing collaborative platforms and for fostering collective responsibility as an industry. At the most fundamental level, our industry fulfills people's need for beauty – one of our most innate needs as a species – and this also gives me great hope.

*Be safe,  
Kindest regards,*



Iris Van der Veken  
Executive Director,  
Responsible Jewellery Council

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