The 49th annual World Boxing Council convention opened this morning at Mandalay Bay Resort & Casino in Las Vegas. A huge crowd was in attendance - estimated at 1,200 - and included around 90 former or current world champions and 70 promoters from all around the world.

The emcees for the opening ceremonies were **Jimmy Lennon Jr.** and **Colonel Bob Sheridan**. The masters of ceremonies were WBC Executive Director
Mauricio Sulaiman
of Mexico and Special Legal Counsel to the WBC Board of Governors
Robert Lenhardt
of the United States.

Former heavyweight world champion **George Foreman** addressed the morning assembly and said, “I’m so happy to be with you, and I’m so happy to be with all the great champions of the past and the future, but most importantly, I wouldn’t have made this trip - because I’ve got enough money I can just sit home and eat beans and rice - but because of the great
Mr. Jose Suliaman
. He invited me and I could not resist.

“I can remember, it was 40 years ago or thereabouts, when I was invited to just sit in at this most humble meeting at that point. And as I sat there, I was asking just for a chance to fight for the heavyweight championship of the world. I didn’t have a powerful promoter, all I had was just this meager manager named **Dick Saddler**, and Mr Sulaiman stood up and said, ‘Look, the rematch can happen with **Muhammad Ali** and **Joe Frazier**
, but we’re going to give you, Joe Frazier, so many hours to make a match with George Foreman. And I got my chance to become heavyweight champion of the world because this humble man held this humble position.

“Since then, you hear them talk about ‘alphabet’ championships, but this is no alphabet – this is most powerful and the most gracious and humble, with integrity, the WBC. I want to thank you for coming out and supporting this great man, Mr. Sulaiman. He speaks from his heart, and he’s got a son to follow right behind him. God bless him.”

In his annual opening speech, President Sulaiman said, “All of the WBC people know me well and they know that I improvise, so whatever speech that I wrote might not be good.

“First, I would like to address and give my thanks to the Board of Governors, to the dear friends of mine that came from all over the world, and I would like to give my heart to the biggest heroes that I have had in my life – the WBC champions. I don’t know how to pay you, only with my heart, for you being with the WBC at this time.

“I remember George Foreman many years ago when he was a kid, after winning the gold medal of the Olympic Games, jumping into the ring with the United States flag, when at those Olympics many went with black gloves. When they didn’t want to give him an opportunity for the title and we had to give Joe Frazier, God rest his soul, 48 hours to sign a fight with George Foreman in Jamaica.

“I remember **Sugar Ray Leonard** when he won the first championship in the welterweight division against Benitez. I went in the ring to present him his green belt, and he looked at me and said, ‘I’m taller than you.’

“I remember **Larry Holmes** when, after beating **Ken Norton**, he went into the swimming pool at the Hilton Hotel with his robe, his trunks, his shoes, and his belt.

“I remember **Carlos Monzon** when in Paris, took the antidoping test and the report of the laboratory was that it was champagne.

“I remember **Cuyo Hernandez**, one of my greatest mentors, pushing one of his fighters on the scale so he would make the weight. Nobody saw, but one of the photographers took the photo.

“There are so many incidents in my life with all of them that when I see their faces, they make me smile and enjoy and be very proud, because they are boxing. They are the kings of boxing - nobody but boxers. They are my devotion and my life.

“The worst moment in my life, but that showed the type of organization that is the WBC, is when I could not sleep all night because I had to strip Muhammad Ali from his championship because they broke the rules to fight Ken Norton in his fight against **Leon Spinks**. That was the saddest moment of my life because Ali has been a dear brother of mine.

“I am very happy that this convention is in Nevada because in Nevada, we have had many, many close relations. Nevada was a founder of the WBC in 1963, with **Jim Deskin**, God bless his soul. Nevada had also in the WBC several vice-presidents. The first one was Jim Deskin himself, then
Sig Rigich
and
John Davis
. We are very happy because we have had 274 championship fights in the state of Nevada. We have had 166 regional and final elimination fights, to make a total of eight fights of the WBC every year for 49 years, and that is history.

“The passing of my life through the sport of boxing is when I was a child and I had to fight in the hors d’oeurves fights to get in, because I didn’t have money to go the shows, and in five years I got a broken nose, a broken jaw, and I decided to go as a commissioner. I was not a good fighter.

“I hope that you understand that at my age, I have left behind many, many, many things in my life. The 36 years that I have been president - only last week – I don’t know where they went. They went away faster than the wind, but here I am.

“Do you believe that the WBC is going to hang up the gloves? The WBC is going to continue to fight. We have many, many things to do. The WBC has changed the world of boxing from a violent legalized sport with the rules of those days, to a most protective boxing of today.

“I remember **Marvin Hagler** saying, ‘Why in the world did you reduce the fights to 12 rounds?’ He never fought 15, so why was he protesting? He’s here.

“Yesterday, the Board of Governors approved to start by the month of May of next year, a World WBC Cup. We have 10 Continental Federations, and each champion of their division of those continental federations are going to fight for the title, and we are going to add the Silver Champions and WBC International champions. I believe that this is one of the greatest steps we are going to do for all those great people that are coming up and will be stars one of these days.

“The WBC has also implemented the WBC International Visa, because today it is a disgrace what is happening in the world - agents sending boxers that are sick, that have no authorization from their commissions, that have been suspended, sending a featherweight to fight against a welterweight. In this matter with the International Visa, no commission should allow any visiting fighter coming to fight if he does not present the documents so we can protect their health, and at the same time protect the public. We expect that the boxing commissions will follow this very important safety action.

“We also are implementing a medical web so that all the doctors of the world have a way to communicate with each other and know any physical problem that a visiting fighter might have.

“We also want to have the gloves examined, because many of the gloves that we have seen in the world do cause problems in the faces of the boxers. There are some that are so rough, and boxers use the stitches – they use whatever they can to try to win. But we want everybody to go in the ring, regardless of the brand, with a top-quality glove so we have no advantages.

“One of the most important things, and my only objective of the rest of my life, will be to bring a pension plan for retired boxers. We want to have the World Cup for that income to help in creating a world fund.

“I am at this convention also inviting all the promoters of the world to help the WBC by accepting to charge or donate one dollar for every fan that goes to any WBC fight in the world. With that amount and the amount of the World Cup, we will have a pension plan because boxers, unfortunately, believe that because they fought today, they can expect that they can win it in the next fight. Suddenly, the lights are off, no more fights, and they have to live with tears, just thinking of the glorious past, but have no way to live a decent life.

“Here, I would like to extend my deepest congratulations to Mexican humanitarian **Carlos Slim**,

because he has just approved five more WBC world champions living in poverty, and he has 27 champions of the world with a life pension, and a life hospital assured for all of them. And that will be my work for all the former champions. We want them to come to the world with dignity. We want them not to come to the world talking to the walls, or cauliflower ears, or not being able to buy a Coke. The WBC promises to devote, as long as I'm the president, our very best efforts to be able to help the retired boxers. We owe that to them. They have been the glory of the sport. They have been the glory of many countries of the world. It is our obligation not to allow this to happen anymore.

"We have seen many unfair things happen in the ring. The referee is not a God. The referee can only do what he sees, but he does not see everything. We are not going to accept unfairness to continue. That's why the WBC is implementing an instant video replay. With instant video replay, the WBC will have a way to find justice. Recently, my friend **Chad Dawson** pushed off **Bernard Hopkins**
and pushed him to the canvas and he hurt his left elbow. Nobody believed it, but Hopkins' report was that he had been hurt. The referee declared a knockout. The WBC declared it a technical draw. It is not fair that any world champion lose his title on a foul.

"We are also going to implement the announcement of the scores at the end of the fourth and the eighth rounds. Baseball scores runs, basketball scores baskets, football – touchdowns. Diving is immediately scored by the judges. Even gymnastics is immediately scored. Why should boxing continue being a mystery? How many losers would have won the fight if they would have known by the eighth round how they were going, or by the fourth round how they were going? I don't believe that are many boxers in the world that would have not liked to know, because at the end of the fight, everybody thinks 'I won,' and they lose. Why this mystery? It is a mystery that we cannot accept anymore, because we do not know what's behind. I never lose any trust of the judges. They are great people, but at least this offering - the knowledge - to the fans, and to the corners especially, will bring a new confidence to the world and respect.

"We also do not like what AIBA is doing in amateur boxing. They have no trust and no confidence anymore from the world of amateurs - no great champions, like those that are born at the Olympic Games in the past and became great as professionals. No more. And old men like me, being one of five, pushing a button when they see that somebody scored the punch - why, if one was sleeping, they didn't punch it at the same time, so we have at the end of the fight, like a baseball game, 3 to 2. That's ridiculous. We have to change that. And I'm going to see during the following year if the WBC can start a Golden Gloves all over the world. We need new heroes. We need new boxers. Now there are no tournaments in Latin America. They all have to go and play football instead of being boxers because there are no tournaments. The WBC wants to be very active also in amateurs.

“We also are thinking of a world tournament of preliminary fighters, four and six-rounders, because four and six-rounders only go to fight for peanuts. They win, they put the money in their pocket, they spend it in a month. If we have a tournament for the preliminary fighters, they will also have a championship in their minds - the pride that a championship is to a boxer.

“And we have many other things that the WBC is planning to do. One other thing that is a deep concern of mine – television and promoters want to control boxing. Now if a television company says, ‘I don’t want your challenger, you have to fight X.’ So they step on the international organizations. How can we hurt a boxer that is getting two million to fight with someone else, because the television did not accept the challenger? Also promoters – to me, boxing would not exist without promoters - promoters are very important for boxing. It’s about time that they buried their hatchets, that they stop swearing at each other, and that they start using everybody’s fighters, using for the best of boxing the best boxers to box. We want to try to sit down with the television also, to bring rule and order to the sport of boxing. The WBC cannot allow being handled and manuevered. To me, it’s over. If a champion does not want to give the WBC title, he’s free to go. But if he wants to stay, he has to realize that he’s the best champion in the world of his division, like all those that are here have been in their lives.

“In my life as President, I have learned many things. I like to read biographies and of the heroes of my life, I learn what made them succeed. For that, I have learned also my commitment to listen carefully to anyone that comes to see me for a meeting. The poor people have a problem as big for them as the biggest and most important promoter. To me, you all know that I am open and always willing to talk to everybody, because without you, there would not be boxing. If we commissioners and promoters, if we do not participate, there is no boxing. And for me, it’s very important to hear any opinion that anybody has.

“I have learned though my father and my mother that humility is the king of mankind. He who is arrogant is mediocre. Humility and simplicity are the best zeal of any human being. Look at the champions. They are followed by hundreds of people - pictures and signatures, pictures and signatures. They all are ready to do it always. Regardless if they get tired, they continue to try to be good to the people, because the people made them. Simplicity and humility are what I always recommend.

“In my life, I am not a fighter in the desert. You know me – I’m a warrior. It there’s someone who wants to attack the dignity and the honor of the WBC, they will find a fight. But in life, I like to prevent rather than to be sorry for doing something wrong. I always believe that every problem

can be resolved. I always believe that there should be an intermediary to make both parties understand that they should fix the problems without wars.

“The WBC got away from the courts of justice of the United States by imposing in our rules the court of arbitration of sports that is in Switzerland. It’s much cheaper, it’s faster. So that has been the official organization that resolves the WBC’s problems.

“I cannot forget, I told my friends and we made a toast yesterday because of Rocchigiani. Rocchigiani was a good fighter, but he did not fight for the WBC title. He fought for another title, an interim title. And because we did not recognize that, because **Roy Jones**, I saw him here, was the champion. He did not resign his title of the WBC. But we had a New York judge – red color, brilliant blue eyes, that selected four red color, brilliant judges, and he decided that the WBC was to blame. Let me tell you, I like red color. And he decided that and he charged the WBC with 35 million dollars to pay to a boxer that was in a high prison, who let him out to come to the United States to court, with even his passport to travel to the United States. Arriving in New York, one year after the towers’ destruction, that was manuevered in Germany, as he was allowed in this country. Since the very beginning, the judge said, ‘I’m sorry, but I lived in Germany for five years and my wife was an opera singer, also from Germany.’ I told my lawyers, ‘Let’s go.’ They said, ‘No, no, no.’ The judge said 35 million dollars. What is that? Only Sugar Ray and George know what 35 millions dollars are. Finally we finished the problem, about $500,000 a year for several years, and we had the last payment for some very important amount and this thing is over. I hope that you will help us all not to fall into something like that in the future, because 30 boxers that lived in poverty stopped receiving a pension plan that the WBC was giving to them because we didn’t have the money.

“I have always accepted to be flexible in many cases, but the only matter for which I am not flexible is honor and dignity. I would not accept my honor and my dignity be stepped on, because that is absolutely unacceptable. I believe that it is exactly the same thoughts of all the members of the WBC.

“Having said all that, I would like to ask your forgiveness for remembering today is December the 12th, the day of the Virgin of Guadalupe, the day that multi-millions of Mexicans go to visit every year because she gives warmth, she gives peace, she gives hope.

“We have brought many different boxing titles because today everybody wants to promote a 12 round fight. No TV company that I know would support boxing if it did not have 12 rounds. In

history, many, many of the boxers have had to fight for money only and nothing else. The WBC created a WBC Muay Thai, which has been very successful, and a WBC Youth World Championship for those not older than 22 years. We have created the Latino, the Americas, the Mediterranean titles, and those are functioning very well. I would like to congratulate all the chairmen of those regional titles who have worked so hard.

“My life has been a life of dreams. When I was a kid, I used to dream that I had an accident so the beautiful lady I liked would feel sad for me and come and caress me. I used to dream that I was fighting Muhammad Ali, and I would knock him out. I would dream about the beautiful girls that I have met in my life, with my excuses to my sons, and my life has been a dream life. I am sure that all the people here are also dreamers. Who of the boxers, when they start, do not dream of becoming champions of the world? What I recommend is never stop dreaming. To the last day of our life, we must continue dreaming, because dreaming makes happiness. Dreaming makes you get off of the chair to fight. Dreaming is the best thing that you can do. It’s a picture in your mind for everything that you want to accomplish. And that’s one of the things that I would like to leave as a message, and very especially to my champions - very especially to all of you - because you’ve been the greatest. One day it was dark. Your greatness is gone, but you have to dream, that your greatness remains in your mind and you continue being champions of the world to the last day of your life.

“I believe also that a leader is committed to the service of others, very especially those people that need it. And you should be of service without ever expecting anything in return. When you do something for others, that’s your satisfaction. That’s your payment, because you should serve other people and not yourself.

“I’m very sorry for the translators, because everything I said, I didn’t follow my script - it came from my heart.

“But I would like to end by saying that boxing has become a sport of gossip, abuse, of bitterness, envy, and unfortunately, I had it many times. If a boxer doesn’t do something, the promoter gets mad. And if the WBC cannot support it, we get everything that he’s been through. It has been my great honor in my life to help everybody if I don’t hurt a third party. If Muhammad Ali and Leon Spinks would have not been hurting Ken Norton, I would not have voted with the WBC to strip Muhammad Ali. How could I do that? But they were hurting Ken Norton. And Ken Norton had a commitment from Ali and Spinks that the winner would fight him, and they didn’t. I could not break the rules, and I could not be unfair to the man who was waiting for his opportunity, and it was not given to him.

“George Foreman came to the WBC convention in Las Vegas many years ago. He wanted the rematch with Muhammad Ali. I didn’t know Muhammad Ali at the time very well, but we sat down to talk and he was very nice to George Foreman. His mind – ‘Oh, okay. I’ll make one voluntary defense and them I’ll fight old George.’ There is not a way that we should break the rules to hurt other people. If you don’t hurt anybody, then you have to help. That has been my commitment.

“I’m sorry for the length of my speech. I let go by my heart, and I didn’t read what I have taken about a week to write. But let me tell you, you cannot imagine the happiness that I have when I see every face that comes to say ‘hello’ to me. Because every one of you have been part of boxing, and have been part of my life.

“And about the boxers, my heroes, every time that I see the face of everyone, a memory comes to me, because they all have many memories. They all have gone through many good things, and not so many good things in life.

“I have made many mistakes as President - I’m a human being. But I assure you that all of them have been in good faith. And I do apologize for those mistakes to all the people who I might have hurt during my time. I just pray, and thank God for all this enormity of delegates and champions, and writers and promoters who are at this convention.

“Whatever God gives me for my life, I will keep devoting it with my profound love for this sport that is in my blood since I was born. I thank you so much, and I ask God to help you and protect always my champions. Thank you.”