

29 October 2017, No. 111/2017

Steinmeier sees Prizewinners as Protagonists of Ambitious Future Visions for Our World

DBU: Highest-endowed European Environmental Prize presented today in Braunschweig by German President

Braunschweig. "The program *Agenda 2030* challenges our world with a truly ambitious vision of the future. To all of those who no longer believe in that ambitious vision, who view the future with doubt, or even with fear, today's prizewinners send an encouraging message: a 'Green Belt' has grown out of the division of Europe, and out of 197 individual voices has come a great climate protection agreement. And from local inventiveness, technologies have developed which reconcile economy and ecology. Yes, the future may be uncertain, but as our prizewinners demonstrate: ultimately, it is what we make of it." – With these words, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier today honored the new recipients of the German Environmental Prize awarded by the German Federal Environmental Foundation (Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt, DBU). Steinmeier personally presented the award in Braunschweig to the entrepreneurs Bernhard and Johannes Oswald (of Miltenberg) and the conservationists Inge Sielmann (of Munich), Dr. Kai Frobel (of Nuremberg), and Prof. Dr. Hubert Weiger (of Fürth). It is the highest-endowed environmental prize in Europe. The DBU's Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award, endowed with 10,000 €, was awarded posthumously to the late former Foreign Minister of the Marshall Islands, Tony de Brum.

"I think that this is an especially impressive post-reunification story"

Before some 1,200 guests at the ceremony – including Federal Environmental Minister Dr. Barbara Hendricks and Lower Saxony's Lieutenant-Governor Stefan Wenzel – Steinmeier reminded the audience of the upcoming anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. Germany's decades-long division left scars, he said – in families and in the economic and political spheres -- whereby many of these scars are invisible, whereas others can be readily seen. These include scars in the landscape. With walls, barbed wire, and patrol vehicles, a broad dividing strip was said to have been laid through Europe across fields, mountains and forests. In this shadow of history, however, a natural inheritance which is unique in the world developed between automatic spring-guns and

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Press Release

watchtowers, it was stated; fortunately, as early as the 1970s Frobel came up with the idea of making a 'Green Belt' of hope out of this Terror Strip. This idea gained energetic support from Inge Sielmann, the Sielmann Foundation, and many others – and today it is a reality. And soon, thanks to Weiger's commitment, the 'belt' was no longer only a German idea, but a European idea. Steinmeier: "Among the many stories in circulation, I consider this one to be an especially impressive post-reunification story."

"Ultimately, this is about the global sharing of opportunity in life, and about the possibility of a more peaceful future"

Environmental and climate change are leading us increasingly in the direction of natural catastrophes and famine, which would drive countless millions of people to flee their homes, the Head of State continued. The growing scarcity of resources, and environmental issues, have long since become not only matters involving climate protection and migration policy, but also issues of security policy, he said; but that is not the only reason that we must work for the preservation of our natural resources worldwide. Steinmeier: "Ultimately, this is about the global sharing of opportunities in life, and about the possibility of a more peaceful future. Protection of the environment and the climate is practical work toward a more fair and just globalization. And that is something we need."

Paris follow-up negotiations are an especially significant matter for Germany in particular

The 2015 Paris Climate Protection Accords showed that the world is capable of agreeing upon common goals in environmental policy. The Paris follow-up negotiations in November in Bonn will be, especially for Germany, a particularly important matter. The goal is for the community of nations to demonstrate its commitment to the needs of smaller countries in particular, which have no voice in the "great world concert". The small island nations, especially, are desperately concerned for their lands in light of the rising sea level. Tony de Brum, the former Foreign Minister of the Marshall Islands, gave their interests "a voice which could be clearly heard and which gained worldwide respect", the President stated.

An example of family businesses which enrich Germany

But according to the President, treaties and laws can only represent a first step; ultimately it is much more important to fill out the legal framework with good ideas. As innovative representatives of medium-sized and small businesses in Germany with special expertise in electric motors, the OSWALD firm has successfully developed a drive system for industrial use which is up to 50 percent more effective, he said. This was described as an impressive achievement which deserves great respect – particularly as the work of a family entrepreneur who must finance this development through the ongoing operations. The OSWALD company stands, in an exemplary manner, for all of the small- and medium-sized family businesses which so enrich Germany, and not only economically, the President stated. Operators of medium-sized businesses such as the Oswalds make tremendous contributions to their communities, said Steinmeier: they are part of their local civil society, who assume responsibility not only

Press Release

for their employees, but also for the city and the region in which they produce.

Jury praised the award winner's commitment

As members of the jury for the German Environmental Prize, based on whose proposals the Board of the Foundation selects the prizewinners each year, Prof. Dr. Heidi Foth (Martin Luther University of Halle-Wittenberg, Member of the Council of Environmental Experts) and Dr. Andreas Bett (Fraunhofer Institute for Solar Energy Systems ISE; DBU Environmental Prize recipient), spoke about the achievements of the 2017 Prize recipients. Bett paid tribute to the OSWALD company as a prototype of the very impressive medium-sized business community in Germany. These companies are not easy to manage, he said, but they are the ones which drive the innovation process. He gave Bernhard and Johannes Oswald, with their broad civic commitment, credit for having achieved far more than just technological development. Foth praised the enthusiasm of the "Green Belt" conservationists, who were said to have recognized the special ecological life system in the "Death Strip" at an early stage, to have found allies in the East and West, and to have taken advantage of an unbelievably small window of opportunity, in order to preserve things which would otherwise have been lost.

Driving force behind an alliance of developing-, emerging- and industrial nations

Prof. Dr. Heinrich Bedford-Strohm, Bavarian State Bishop and Chairperson of the Council of Evangelical Churches in Germany, paid tribute to the late Tony de Brum, recipient of the DBU Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award, who died at the end of August. With great energy, de Brum dedicated himself to the struggle against global warming and for the protection of the environment, said Bedford-Strohm. De Brum was described as having been the driving force at the 2015 Paris Climate Conference behind an alliance of developing, emerging, and industrial nations, which gave the countries and regions which will be most strongly affected by the climate changes a common voice.

De Brum "did a great service to all of humanity"

There were said to have been personal reasons for de Brum's strong commitment: as a child, he had been an eyewitness to the catastrophic after-effects which the testing of the hydrogen bomb "Bravo" had produced on the Bikini Atoll. That is said to have been the motivation for his first crusade, for nuclear disarmament – for which, together with the people of the Marshall Islands, he was recognized with the "Alternative Nobel Prize", the Right Livelihood Award. Thus, the longer it went on, the more strongly he was affected by another experience affecting the Marshall Islands: that of the direct effects of climate change on the living conditions of the Pacific Islands, extending to their threatened submersion under the sea. As a warning voice, he did all in his power to stop climate change. Bedford-Strohm: "Today we honor a man whose life and works are closely associated with the issue of preserving our natural resources, the environment and the climate. He knew that it is 'all or nothing' in this matter, and for that reason he was a tough negotiator. But he also knew that there is no single, simple solution. I salute his life's achievements. He did a service to all of humanity."

Linking ecology, economy and social issues "does our world good"

Press Release

In films made during the official ceremony and in discussions with moderator Judith Rakers, the prize recipients again made their positions clear. Johannes Oswald pointed out that his motors save 1.5 terawatt hours of energy annually, which approximates the amount consumed by a million persons in Germany. His vision is one of convincing other people that "it does our world good" when ecological-, economic-, and social issues are united in a positive relationship to one another.

Protecting nature "between loaded weapons, both here and there"

Weiger stated that the fall of the Wall represented a great opportunity for an awakening in the area of nature conservation in Germany. "We have a unique historic opportunity to preserve the terrible heritage of our own past as a living monument. We can do more than tear down barriers, we can also positively overcome limitations, and we can recognize that Europe's strength lies in its diversity." Without the voluntary and committed work of hundreds of people, however, none of this would have been possible, he stated. Frobel, too, addressed the "desolate state of conservation in Germany at that time". Observing the natural world on the "horrible border" meant protecting nature between loaded weapons here as well as there, he said. Inge Sielmann emphasized that there could be no better monument to the overcoming of the division between the two German states than the "Green Belt".

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