



**Speech by  
Dr. Pia Beckmann,  
Lord Mayor of the City of Würzburg,  
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I'm very honoured to be invited as a speaker to your Conference "Women as Global Leaders".

As you could read on the web-site of Zayed University, my name is Pia Beckmann, I'm the Lord Mayor of Würzburg, a city in the middle of Germany, only one hour from Frankfurt. Würzburg is the 4<sup>th</sup> biggest city in the State of Bavaria.

### **Short look back in history**

The theme of your Conference this year is "Communities in Transition". Let me look a little bit back in history.

Many things have changed during the last 150 years in Germany.

Germany is usually considered an advanced and modern country. It is all the more surprising that only 150 years ago it was part of common knowledge to believe that women are unable to think properly as – when weighed – their brain, compared to the brain of men, is substantially lighter; - as if the sheer weight of a brain was the only measurement for intelligence and reason, cleverness and wisdom.

Indeed, for a long time it was not at all possible for women to go to University or to pursue any higher education at all.

It took hundreds of applications and another fifty years for women to finally be able to enrol for academic studies. As a matter of fact, it was only in the year 1903, that women were allowed to register at our University in Würzburg. But ever since 1903, it is doubtless that women have become a strong academic force.

After World War II, education was hard to get for most of the people, -because they often did not even have enough money to pay for their living altogether.

With the economic boost in the 60ies and 70ies the situation changed. This supported University studies for women in a big way, with rates ever increasing. And in fact, when you look into the matter, you find that in Würzburg, since the year 2000, almost as if to greet the new millennium, women for the first time have outnumbered their male fellow students at

University. This development is keeping up, so as of today, which is only a few years later, we have already 2500 female students more compared to male students.

But the changes we are facing within the next 30 years will be just as far reaching. Germany, as some other European Countries too, has to deal with an extremely difficult demographic situation.

Today every 5<sup>th</sup> person in Würzburg is older than 60. In 10 years it will be every 3<sup>rd</sup>, although we have a very high percentage of students in our city. The birth rate in our town is at 0.9. This means, that the average couple has less than one single child. The problems that will arise are evident: many, especially very old people to be taken care of; not enough young people who will do the jobs. Not enough young people will earn money in order to be able to pay for our social welfare system, so that it could be in balance over the next years. The difference between the poor and the rich will grow. And because of the lack of young people the number of people with a migration background will increase: People from different countries, different cultures, different religions.

To avoid a clash of cultures, it is very important to take these challenges as chances, - facing the situation of a lot of poor people as opposed to only few rich people in the future, - facing the situation of potential jealousy and the potential feeling of injustice.

As you can see – our communities in Germany and Europe are also in transition. What could be the role of women in leadership positions in such communities?

One thing I have experienced, was, when a situation became very difficult, often women were asked to do the job, or they just did it in order to find solutions to a problem. With their decisions they frequently took on responsibility for future generations.

### **Lifelong learning**

In this context let me tell you a bit more about my personal background and what I call the lifelong learning of women to give you an example:

I have lived most of my life in Würzburg. At school I established an exchange with a girl in France that lasted many years, and after finishing school I joined University in Würzburg. Because of good grades I won a scholarship and studied German as well as Romance literature and linguistics. During my early days at University, I met a very nice law student who was to become a judge and to cut a long story short, I can today account for 21 years of marriage, four children, (the first and the second to be born before we finished our studies), seven years of lecturing in Linguistics at the University, one PhD, 11 years as a head of a catholic family organisation and at the same time 6 years as a town councillor in an honorary capacity, as well as numerous social and political activities.

Of course in these years many challenges have come into my way, like for example how to manage time at an optimum, how to deal with difficult situations, how to lead a small company, how to deal with so called friends who become enemies because they are jealous, how to motivate people, how to resolve conflicts without hurting people, even if you have to say very clear words ...

And certainly one thing I had to learn, especially when you feel as if everybody is against you, was: Never to give up!

Somehow it seems, that these busy years were a preparation for what I have achieved today, even if I didn't always realise it at the time. All that I have learned so far helps me to fulfil my job as Lord Mayor. We are learning during our entire life and we have to be open minded, in order to be able to learn new things every day.

I am telling you this, because I want you to know, that everything is possible, if you really have a clear vision and goal. What you need, is a few good people who share your aim and are willing to support you.

### **Managing a crisis**

When I was running for Lord Mayor, I had a particularly difficult time. My predecessor wanted to be re-elected and there were in total eight candidates. I was the only woman. At that time, the city was in a terrible financial crisis. Instead of promising all kinds of organisations, groups and individuals that I would give them large contributions after the election, I only promised to do everything to consolidate the budget. That meant not everything could continue as before, restrictions were necessary, and new visions for the city's development had to be implemented.

Even though it was really hard, I used all public discussions to point out my opinions and eventually, I was able to convince the representatives of the press and the citizens of Würzburg.

When I won the elections I became the first female Lord Mayor in the 1300 year old history of our city. As Lord Mayor I'm the chief of the council and at the same time the chief of the entire municipal administration which employs more than 2500 people.

When I took over the official duties, I was confronted with tremendous problems. But now, after four years of hard work and big changes, our town has a budget which is in balance again. The awareness of our citizens has changed and this is why – despite the miserable economical situation – many good things have emerged and developed.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Often people ask me what my personal recipe for success is, and I guess it is that I try to argue objectively about advantages or disadvantages and that I always say what I mean in a clear and friendly way.

I think it is easier for women to make use of what we call the emotional intelligence: to sense how you can convince people in the best way, how you can get your point across without hurting anybody's feelings, how to find a compromise which serves all ends.

Because of that, often enough one finds women working in personnel departments, be it in a company or a local authority.

Emotional intelligence helps in judging situations; the ability to communicate ideas and to win supporters helps in convincing even the most persistent opponents.

As Lord Mayor I am directly confronted with problems ... In fact every day I am involved with citizens who address me with a particular problem or with councillors who analyse my decisions. So I need to be present, alert and available, always open to conversation and ready to convince, in order to be able to realise as many of my political visions as possible at the end of the day.

As it is, Würzburg does not have much industry, but many service orientated businesses and many high tech companies dealing with New Materials, Life Sciences and Information Technologies. Our University, which is more than 600 hundred years old, is internationally renowned and in fact amongst the few specially chosen elite universities in Germany. Some very important research centres are situated in Würzburg as well.

But Würzburg was also early on established as a religious centre with many churches and chapels constructed and a bishopric that was founded more than one thousand years ago. Würzburg is a city with a rich cultural heritage and a vivid cultural and open minded life. Because of our central location in Germany, the special structure and the university, people from many nations have made Würzburg their second home. This means that several religions are bound to live side by side, which is both a challenge and an opportunity.

### **Twinings for overcoming borders**

Being as communicative as possible, our university keeps up 55 partnerships with universities worldwide, and schools in Würzburg maintain about 40 twinings with comparable institutions abroad, one is even linked with a school in Jordan (Franz-Oberthür-Schule, Städt. BBZ I with the Jordan Applied University in Amman)!

Our city, I am proud to say, has 9 official twin towns in four continents, the earliest, like Dundee in Scotland, having been established in 1962. 44 years have gone by, since then. Many of us associate the year 1962 with the Cuba-crises, bringing the world to the brink of a nuclear war. Bearing this horrifying danger in mind, one must state that it was just as important in those days to build up international relations as it is nowadays.

What we do, with our twinings, and what you do – with your idea of multiculturalism - is indeed very important today, - facing war, unrest, political tension and bad news concerning our world.

### **Dialogue instead of Controversy**

With joint efforts we want to build bridges in order to overcome fears and prejudices about other cultures and people.

As the meaning of borders in a growing Europe and in a globalized world diminishes, the tasks are increasing. We have to go on learning more and more about foreign cultures and histories.

This presents a challenge as well as an opportunity: it is a well known fact that nothing is more important than personal experiences, especially concerning the young generations. Scientific exchanges, economical exchanges, language exchanges, networking as well as other common activities are contributions against hostility towards strangers. One instrument we should promote is women-networking. Your Conference could be an initiation for a

worldwide network of women. All these activities promote liberal minds and tolerance and are therefore very important for living peacefully together.

At present, this need is particularly urgent as the cartoons controversy has poisoned the relations between Muslims and the western world.

People have to understand that they have to respect each other in their differences, doesn't matter if they are Agnostics, Christians, Muslims or from another religion. The more we know about each other, the more we respect each others views, the better we can understand each others positions. And such an understanding leads to an insight which is the basis for all I do: we have to begin with sharing what we have in common. And I know there are really many things we do have in common.

### **Your Vision of Multiculturalism**

The honourable Professor Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, Principle and Vice-Chancellor of Al-Maktoum Institute, impressed me very much when he talked about his beloved country, about Dubai and the United Arab Emirates as a model for a modern country which has established itself very successfully during the last 35 years. Indeed, he is an excellent ambassador for his country.

I was also very pleased to hear that the Al-Maktoum Institute in Dundee was established by H.H. Shaikh Hamdan Bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, Deputy Ruler of Dubai, to serve as a bridge between nations, peoples, religions and cultures. I discovered that there are many similarities to what I try to do in Würzburg. So I'm truly proud of the recently established relationship between the Al-Maktoum-Institute and our University and the first steps towards a relationship with our diocese and of course the city of Würzburg in order to pursue intercultural and interreligious understanding.

Hopefully all efforts will help to achieve the fundament for peace and tolerance, without loosing one's identity and culture. This would be an enrichment for all sides.

Your summer training school in Dundee in Multiculturalism and Leadership in the last three years, your exercises about global cross cultural understanding and cooperation, your discussions with senior people, your Congresses at the Zayed University with leaders, in your case especially women, add another element to what you call "The Vision of Multiculturalism".

And this is, what I try to do too as Lord Mayor of a German City which was nearly totally destroyed in World War II:

I would like to always be committed to the spirit of mutual understanding, in order to realise what I call the „Vision of the one World“.

Let's do everything within our power and within our possibilities to keep contributing to this goal!

Dear friends from Abu Dhabi, Dubai and the United Arab Emirates, dear participants of this Conference, I look forward to developing a good working relationship with you.

We wish you all the best and great success in your future professional and personal endeavours! Find your own way and keep going, even if the going gets tough.

Peace be with you. Salam.

