

Laudatory speech by Karoline Linnert

Dear Ms. Flory, dear Mr. Ronnefeldt, dear Ms. Latsoudi, dear members of the *schwelle* Foundation, ladies and gentlemen,

I have had the privilege of speaking here several times in recent years on the occasion of the awarding of the Bremen Peace Prize, and the fact that the award



ceremony is taking place today for the 10th time is worthy of special thanks. The *Threshold* Foundation has managed to make a name for itself even beyond Bremen. The award ceremony in this room, the good public relations work and the approach of having donors select the award winners for encouraging initiatives certainly contribute additionally to making the proposed projects known.

That is why my first thanks, also on behalf of Bremen, go to the people who represent the *Threshold* Foundation and who have been selecting examples of convincing peace work for 20 years, who award the peace prize and ensure that the projects receive attention and that the persons who are behind the projects receive appreciation. The *Threshold* Foundation has become one of the most important addresses for practical and theoretical peace work - which is needed today more than ever.

In preparing for today's award ceremony, I thought about what the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine means for this award ceremony and realized how difficult it is to find words for it. The horror about the fact that it is *not* universal that borders recognized under international law are not touched, that it is not the general standard to spare the civilian population and to respect its right to self-determination, and how little value is attributed in totalitarian regimes to the principles of modern statecraft, namely the endeavor for general well-being, runs deep. And this raises the question of whether the West was too naïve, and people must ask themselves whether they simply did not want to see that Russia as a state and a society remained in the views of nationalism and disregard for the rights of individuals that were widely held in Europe in the last century.

After the German war of aggression against Russia on June 22, 1941, the unimaginable crimes committed by the Germans against the civilian population and the murder of millions of Russian Jews, reconciliation between the two countries was and is for me one of the most important goals of German foreign policy. But today I would say that some things indicate that the desire for reconciliation and the love of peace were also a universally accepted façade for comfort and feeling of guilt. We knew that war crimes were being committed in Chechnya, that puppet

regimes were being kept in power as in Belarus, we knew that Russian warfare in Syria was merciless against civilians, and of course we knew that the annexation of Crimea violated international law. Thinking about whether psychological repression really worked so differently from our grandparents' affirmation and support of the Nazi regime, to whom my generation felt so far morally superior, gnaws at me and demands new insights and consequences.

What has remained, however, is the certainty that peace is much more than the absence of war with the use of armed force, that unrestrained wealth and the plundering of our livelihood is just the modern way of waging war, and that it is right to confront a new image of "the Russian" as the enemy.

The award winner in the category "grassroots peace worker" is Jacqueline Flory. Ms. Flory, who lives in Munich as an interpreter who is also fluent in Arabic, is the founder and chairperson of the board of "Zeltschule e.V.". She started an initiative to help people who had to flee from the Syrian war zones in Syria and in neighboring Lebanon, also because many Syrians want to stay in their own cultural area. In this way, you have saved many lives because they were spared the dangerous journey to Europe.

Lebanon has 4 million inhabitants and hosts 2 million people from Syria. There are 2,000 refugee camps in the country - this is far away from Europe, which is so absorbed by the Corona crisis and now the war in Ukraine, thus preoccupied with itself. You, Ms. Flory, contribute to the fact that we do not forget the consequences of the war in Syria, in which the Putin regime also was involved.

You have recognized that the situation as a refugee carries the danger that the next generation will also have a very hard time if no educational opportunities are provided. Illiteracy is the basis for poverty and radicalization in adulthood. So in 2015 you founded the association "Zeltschule e.V.", which builds schools for refugee children and supports their families with water, food and wood so that the children do not have to work. Since their parents do not receive work permits, many families rely on their children's meager earnings as harvest workers. Because Syrians in Lebanon are also not allowed to erect permanent buildings, classes are held by Syrian teachers in tents.

In the meantime, there are also projects of "Zeltschule e.V." in Homs, Syria. Today, 30 schools are operated in Syria and Lebanon, teaching more than 7,000 children between the ages of 5 and 14. More than 25,000 people are provided with basic necessities of life. The association "Zeltschule" ("tent school") does very impressive public relations work and publishes under the name of "Lage(r)bericht" an informative and at the same time stirring podcast. I listened to a few of these podcasts in preparation. One is moved by the joie de vivre of the people who have

their say there and with what dignity they face their very difficult situation. A key to this was a statement by you, Ms. Flory, about the great importance of the tent schools for the camp. They give the whole camp a future and hope and thus have an importance far beyond mere educational work. I am pleased that you are receiving the award for "grassroots peace work" today.

The award for the "Ambassador for Peace in Public Life" goes to Clemens Ronnefeldt. Mr. Ronnefeldt has been a peace officer with the German branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation since 1992. For years he has been traveling the world, talking and negotiating with political and religious leaders in crisis regions. He speaks with refugees, gives lectures and talks, and runs a You-Tube channel "Friedensfragen mit Clemens Ronnefeldt" (Peace Issues with Clemens Ronnefeldt) with now over 130 broadcasts on current peace issues and the world's major conflicts. He also moderated the International Munich Peace Conference for many years, which always takes place in parallel with the NATO Security Conference. There, alternatives to war and violence are presented. Mr. Ronnefeldt has participated in many peace delegations to Iran, Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Afghanistan and Israel in recent years and trains observers for human rights issues.

Dear Mr. Ronnefeldt, your competence, your persistence and your persuasiveness deserve high respect. You are committed and experienced and approach people with a mindset of wanting to understand and not condemn, certainly on the basis of your Christian faith with a radical commitment to neighborly love. In the heated atmosphere about arms deliveries of what kind and by whom to Ukraine, the question of supporting civil resistance must not be lost. I wish you a loud voice!

The experience of the war in Afghanistan in particular shows indisputably how wrong it was to rely too unilaterally on military operations - if one could believe at all that the West could have achieved anything meaningful there. If, in the end, the Afghan army defects to the Taliban without a fight and the corrupt government supported by the West flees, then we must conclude that this is not the way to go and that the values of peace, equality, freedom of opinion and democracy could not be convincingly conveyed by the warring parties in this way.

You stand for the hope that consistent peace action and humanity can not only prevent wars, but are also an alternative to armed force. For the war in Ukraine, this means granting asylum to Russian deserters, supporting civil resistance in Russia and Ukraine, and expanding civil peace work. For this you need support, and this Peace Award will be part of it.

The donors' award for encouraging initiatives goes to the organization Lesvos Solidarity - an oasis for refugees, which is represented here today by its founding member and director Efi

Latsoudi. Since 2012, Lesvos Solidarity has been providing dignified shelter and support to refugees on the island of Lesvos. The self-organized camp PIKPA was built with the aim of providing shelter for people in particular need outside the notorious state shelter Moria. Up to 400 unaccompanied children and young people, women and people with disabilities lived there in humane conditions, most of them from Afghanistan and Syria. Special emphasis was placed on schooling, cooking together and cultural activities. Openness, transparency and environmental sustainability are guidelines of the work.

From the beginning, Greek civil society was involved, yet violence by some residents and racism was a constant challenge. The official Greek policy of deterrence through poor reception conditions was countered by PIKPA with an obviously "dire threat", that of humanity. On October 30, 2020, the PIKPA camp was stormed by armed police and the residents were taken to the Kara Tepe camp - many of them newly traumatized. The work was banned. What a shame for Europe! I particularly admired that you did not give up. Now there is the Mosaïque Support Center in the old town of Mytilene. There, language courses, legal advice and cultural activities are organized for refugees, again with openness to the local population. In addition, refugees are supported in their search for housing.

Lesvos Solidarity holds up a mirror to Europe, it is not true that "we" do not want these people. It is rather true that people get involved, do not want to scare off refugees, but want to give them better starting conditions and show that it is always possible to oppose barbarism.

Dear Ms. Latsoudi, thank you for your impressive work and I hope that the prize will give you strength, that you will receive broad support and that you will be taken seriously for showing official politics that things can be done differently. If Europe really wants to be an alternative, it is people like you who show how it can be done and give hope.

Congratulations to the award winners, thank you for being here and listening to me. I'm looking forward to the conversations that will now follow.

