Dear Anjum Raza Mattu, dear Imran Anjum, dear Petra Titze, dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

This evening, the *schwelle* Foundation presents the Bremen Peace Award to the Insan Dost Association from Pakistan. This decision delights me in for several reasons. Firstly, for the organization's activists whose work I will tell about in a moment, but also because it allows us to take a look at Pakistan in a way that other aspects than we perhaps would have believed, now become visible.

What do we know? Pakistan is the Indian state of Muslim faith. Its existence is the result of the ultimate failure of the fight for freedom on the Indian subcontinent. This struggle originally had two aims: Firstly, the retreat of the British colonial power, and secondly, the creation of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual state within the borders of the British viceroyalty of India. This was unique in the history of the anti-colonial fight for freedom. The first aim was achieved, the second failed and much of what we think we know about Pakistan comes from this failure.

Therefore, it is good that we can learn something today about people who oppose everything which we know about Pakistan.

According to the last census, 132 million people live in Pakistan, but realistic estimations count about 200 million. These people speak 50 different languages and most of them follow different directions of the Muslim faith. The average age is 20, the percentage of under 15´s is 39% - Pakistan is a very young country. Up until a few decades ago, Pakistan was an agricultural country with only two metropolises, Lahore and Karatschi. The same is true today, and yet things have changed dramatically.

In the 1950´s, Karatschi had 600,000 inhabitants, today, about 60 years later, the city is the size of the Saarland and has around 20 million inhabitants. This is known as rural depopulation and urbanization, the strongest historical dynamic process, not only in Pakistan but on a global level. This cannot only be seen in the huge growth of the mega cities, but also in the urbanization of the country, in particular, of the city roads. Many of these roads today are populated both left and right, on each side often only with one or two rows of houses, shops, workshops and cheap restaurants.

The reason for this massive rural depopulation and urbanization is that the living conditions in the country have become unbearable People there are victims of the merciless feudalism of large land owners and fleeing to the city is their only way of escape.

Because this is the case, and now I come directly to the Insan Dost Association, because this is the case, the whole country is strewn with brickworks. From a great distance, one can see the chimneys of the huge kilns and the wide expanses of fields where the freshly made bricks are stored. Pakistan is a country permanently in need of bricks to build the houses, workshops, shops and restaurant of its large cities where people can find somewhere to live.

The Insan Dost Association is an organisation fighting alongside the people who work at these brick factories, or to put it correctly, are forced to work there. According to the IDA, there are about 16,000 brickworks in Pakistan where 4 million people work, amongst them 1.1 million children.

Insan Dost are Urdu words, “Insan” meaning “person” and “Dost” meaning “friend”. It could be translated as the “Organisation of the People´s Friends”. IDA itself suggests the translation “Association for Humanity”. That sounds too simple and I will come back to what I mean by that later.

The majority of the 4 million workers are bonded labourers forced into slavery by the debts they owe to the owners of the brickworks. The main facts are quickly told: For 1000 bricks, a worker usually gets 300-400 Pakistani rupees, which are less than 4-5 Euros. If everything goes well, a worker can manage 1000 bricks per day. The first step is to collect the clay which can be up to 2 or 3 kilometres away, to water it and pour it into the mould. The most important factor to be taken into consideration is that the target of 1000 bricks cannot be met if the workers are alone, but only if the whole family helps, including mother, father and children from the age of 8 onwards, from morning until night, six days a week and of course, without holiday. The family can just about survive on the money that the family earns. “Just survive” means that they have humble quarters usually very close to the brickworks and usually only one meal a day. These families, all of these families, cannot do without two things. They sometimes need medical help and medication. And, they have to organize celebrations for birthdays, weddings and funerals - the only events which are not a part of their work dominated lives. They cannot afford either of these on the money they earn. The only place they can get the money they need is from the brickwork owners who readily give credit, pre-payments or peschgi as they are called in Urdu. The debt service begins immediately and includes unpayable sums of interest.

Full stop. End of the story. This is how slavery begins, this is the circle of slavery from which no one can ever escape – unless something is done about it – not even through death as the debts of the parents are passed on to their children, who in turn, have to pass this burden on to their own children.

To end up in debt bondage means to be in a situation completely without rights. The brick owner has total control, from this moment on, not only over the labour, but also over the entire life of his workers, and I hardly have to go into detail as to what that means for the women and children in particular.

At this point, it is important to say that such conditions are also forbidden in Pakistan, and have been so for the over 20 years, but this fact is not put into practice. One of the reasons for this is that the brickworks owners do not register their factories, which means that legally they do not exist. This is made possible through state corruption,

including the police force. Another reason is that the brickworks owners have their own armed gangs and prisons, just in case. Whoever contradicts, or even offers resistance, directly risks their life.

For this reason the brick factory workers cannot profit from what they are legally entitled to. There is a legally designated minimum wage for brick workers of 750 rupees for 1000 bricks, which is more than twice the amount they actually get. They are also not given the legally stipulated social security and pension cards which guarantee them a minimum level of health care and pension fund. And, they often do not even have an identity card and therefore cannot leave this piece of land where they were born into unpayable debt, or at least not legally. What is more, they do not count as voters.

The work of the Insan Dost Association is to give these people recognition, or to be more exact, the work of IDA is to help these people to give themselves recognition. IDA does not work throughout the whole of Pakistan, but in the province of Punjab in the division Sahiwal with its over 6 million inhabitants. There are an estimated 254 brickworks here with 25,000 workers of whom 70% are Christians. Due to the fact that 98% of the population Sahiwal is Muslim, the economic and political problem of debt bondage is at the same time a religious one.

The first problem which IDA has to solve is the problem of “slave mentality”. I quote from one of IDA´s documents: “Exclusion over hundreds of years results in the creation of a bondage or slave mentality, which makes the oppressed believe that the social differences are not made by man but by God. As a result, many workers in debt bondage could never even imagine that they have fundamental rights which they have been robbed of for hundreds of years”. In its fight against “slave mentality”, IDA provides education in the true sense of the word and makes it possible for children to at least attend a primary school. In the meantime, IDA has enabled thousands of children to have access to primary education. The adult population also profits from educational work, especially the women. It begins with information on hygiene and health and finally always includes political education.

The most important school for political education is, however, is to commit oneself to political activity. This includes, like us, public gatherings and demonstrations under red flags. An important element is also the involvement of those concerned. IDA is not a trade union, in Pakistan trade union means a company organisation. One essential element of IDA´s work is to establish and support such trade unions and, outside the grounds of the brickworks, to found community self-organisations in the workers´ settlements. The path away from an inherited and perpetual “slave mentality” into a common self-assertion of personal freedom, which in itself is a freedom which cannot be lost, becomes more concrete, as can be understood by the word humanity as it is used in the name Insan Dost, Association for Humanity. This does not only mean the charitable care of people who no one helps, but support for people who are beginning to stand up for themselves.

An important part of activism and political education is to mobilize the workers to claim one of their fundamental rights, the right to vote at elections. In order to do this, it is initially essential that the authorities issue the workers with identity cards. This may seem self-evident for us, but it is still one of the elementary political struggles in Pakistan.

In an effort to proceed in this and other battles, IDA also tries to appeal to the responsibility of state and government officials, police officers, lawyers and judges, and also the media. This includes so-called “district vigilance committees” which have the task of monitoring the working conditions in the companies and which should always include trade union members.

Another point is the registration of the brickworks – this is where IDA has perhaps had the greatest success of its history. Meanwhile, 200 of the 254 brickworks in the division of Sahiwal are registered; a goal unattained anywhere else in Pakistan.

This kind of "democracy in action", as IDA describes its own work, is also true for individuals. One example among others is the story of the brick worker who had debts of 38,000 rupees, 350 Euro, meaning 127 working days for the whole family. The worker fled with his family to relatives in the division's city centre. The brickwork's owner followed him with his thugs and kidnapped the 15-year old sister of the worker on the 7th March. He turned for help to IDA, which was in the process of organizing demonstrations for the 8th March, the International Women's Day. The kidnapped woman's release and the punishment of the perpetrators became the central demand of the demonstration, turning it into a concrete action and a successful method of resistance. This time, the police became involved, freed the woman and arrested the perpetrators. Democracy in action in Pakistan is still a life-threatening affair. In September last year, the Frontlinedefenders and the Asean Human Rights Commission, two recognized institutions for the defence of human rights, published urgent appeals for the protection of IDA. The reason was the charge filed by a brickwork's owner who accused our award winners Anjum Raza Mattu and Imran Anjum of blasphemy – a crime punished in Pakistan with life-long imprisonment or death. False accusations are one of the means employed by the many different kinds of rulers to try and protect themselves from democracy in action. This time the charges were dropped, but were still enough to arrest and torture the accused not for the first time and probably not for the last.

As such, the award ceremony in Bremen is also possibly a life-saving intervention. Publicity can save lives. I regretfully have to mention this at this point as, in 2011, I also had the honour of giving the laudatory speech for the Bremen Peace Award, which went to the human rights activist and feminist Shreen Saroor from Sri Lanka. I would like to take the opportunity to greet today's award winners from Shreen Saroor. I hope I have been able to make clear that only then do we understand countries like Pakistan or Sri Lanka when we realize that they are the homes of people like Anjum Raza Mattu and Imran Anjum, who in turn stand for an uncountable and unnamed group of others. People like this teach us through their own example that it is only possible to live in our world when it remains a place of democracy in action shown in a variety of shapes and forms – in a different way in Pakistan, but then perhaps not so very differently to here at home.

Thomas Seibert