

Speech Dr. Heinrich Bottermann

12 March 2013, 6:00 p.m.

Duration: 15 minutes

**Awards as an instrument for
environmental communication**

Ms. Jagger,

Mayor Salomon,

Professor Töpfer,

Professor Weber,

(Moderator),

Award Recipients,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and honor to address you today at the Fourth International Convention of Award Recipients – especially in this beautiful city and pearl of architecture.

This building is nearly 500 years old – and when 500 years of history looks down on you, you have to wonder what it might look like 500

years from now. To me, it is an inspiring symbol for today's special event.

500 years is such a long time .We can only imagine which direction this journey will take us.

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Humanity faces a multitude of global challenges that we have encountered since the beginning of industrialization.

If you consider our geological history, it has always been subjected to change. The environmental conditions have changed over and over again, at times the change was dramatic.

The last 10,000 years, those of the Holocene, was a stable period from a geological perspective.

However, since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution, man has changed the environment

to an extent that exceeds the limits of the planet's tolerance. At times the Earth's complex systems react to changes rather gently and slowly. On the other hand, Some of the Earth's sub-systems react abruptly. When certain limits are exceeded systems can shift.

Man has become one of the most important influencing factors on Earth's biological, geological, and atmospheric processes.

Therefore, we have to take action if we want to enable future generations to have a world that is worth living in .

In principle, we have no problem with identifying challenges and negative developments. We already have vast knowledge; the facts are on the table. And that is reassuring. Many paths are outlined that can lead us to solutions.

However, the drive to do the right thing is lacking.

So, how do we get the world to develop in a direction that is generation-friendly?

For this question, dear award recipients, there are people like you: Individuals who dedicate themselves to making our world a home for everyone in the long term.

It's not always easy to gain public attention through messages, concepts and strategies in support of environmental protection and preservation. But public attention through political and social awareness is of special importance .

I would like to quote the former Federal President, Johannes Rau, who said:

“We should not pretend to our children that the world is perfect. But we should awaken in them the confidence that the world can be healed.”

We should not sugar-coat the challenges, but we should safeguard the confidence in finding solutions.

And good examples of this are much more helpful than horror scenarios – I think so anyway.

Examples that show what is possible and that something is possible. And, for that, we need ambassadors who can convey the examples to the right places.

To this end, people and projects that have accomplished big things, that stand out from the rest, have to be brought to the public's attention again and again.

And that happens with the help of awards.

“Good role models make a greater impression than strong warnings”: this Jewish proverb accurately describes the basic purpose behind honors and awards, even environment awards.

This may be one reason why the number of

environment and sustainability awards bestowed in Germany has increased immensely in the last 20 years. Thus, placing environmental awards in the limelight.

What all environment awards have in common is that they give exposure to best practices and turn them into good role models.. Environment awards thus have great importance for the perception of environmental topics in the general public and can raise their status in public discussions.

Thus the instrument of distinctions and award ceremonies relies on the clear emphasis of positive examples.

ladies and gentlemen, environmental protection must be something society wants to do.

We do not get people to campaign on behalf of nature and the environment by blaming ,

banning and more rules. We know that we achieve better results when we enjoy doing something.

Awards are meant to be an inspiring and motivating.

Pioneers often have to fight for the recognition and acceptance of their ideas. Anyone breaking away from the 'norm' often has to face hostility. An award contributes to the lone voice crying in the wilderness... being heard after all. Unconventional ideas can be accepted.

On this subject, I would like to cite one specific example. But first, allow me to digress somewhat and say a few words about the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt (DBU) – the German Federal Environmental Foundation. The DBU was created in 1990 by the federal government as a foundation under private law.

Since 1991, we have promoted outstanding and innovative projects in environmental technology, environmental research, nature conservation, environmental communication, and cultural heritage protection.

With an endowment capital of €2 billion, we are one of the largest environmental foundations in Europe.

Since 1993, we have presented the German Environment Award endowed with €500,000 every year. Two people normally share this award, which is presented by the federal president.

By the way, I am delighted to see so many recipients of the German Environment Award here today. We even honored the patron of today's event, Prof. Töpfer, with the German Environment Award in 2002.

But now I would like to come to the example.

Prof. Claus Mattheck received the German Environment Award in 2003. Prof. Mattheck is a physicist at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) and was dedicated to bionics. This subject combines biology and technology, and converts biological processes to technical products. He calculated the mechanical strength of trees using the example of their stability and resistance to breakage. that information shaped developments and computer programs that are applied today in the automotive industry, washing machines, artificial hip replacements, and dental implants. In the beginning Mattheck was not taken seriously and criticized for his ideas by the scientific community. In addition, Mattheck has the talent to present scientific and technical information, in a way that they can be understood by laypeople. His many publications also appeal to a young audience. This is often criticized and seen as not serious among

experts in the field. After being honored with the German Environment Award, Mattheck's ideas were respected by experts. Thus, the award caused his ideas to be accepted.

However, the prestige of an environment award largely depends not just on whether but also on the fact that the awarding organization is credible in the eyes of the target group.

The awarding organization therefore has to have a credible legitimation and be clearly committed to the topics and content related to the award. The (expert) public is very sensitive and precise about whether the motives for bestowing an award and the public relations work based on it are consistent in the long term and congruent to conventional business operations and whether they conform to the entire field of activity of the awarding organization.

An awards ceremony shines the spotlight on the environmental topic and its possible solutions.

We will not be able to save the world with an awards ceremony. But we can always contribute towards doing so.

So, it is also important to honor personalities over the years who stand for different, competing ideas. For example, Thematic plurality comes to mind.

As Albert Einstein said:

“An evening on which all those present are in complete agreement is a lost evening.”

We need the discussion, the debate, the friction. That is the only way for us to come to a solution on controversial questions.

The award recipients also reflect society to a certain degree in which topics and solutions are debated and disputed. When I look at the different personalities that have been honored with the German Environment Award, I recognize a consensus in many areas, as well as differences. Through the German Environment Award, we bring people together to engage in dialog... who would otherwise most surely not encounter each other in everyday life... but who are united by a common topic. Together the award recipients are important ambassadors for the environment ... Respected and honored in their individual fields of expertise.

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My dear award recipients, you have all gone beyond the call of duty with your accomplishments and are highly acclaimed in your respective fields. I am delighted that this

convention has brought together so many exceptional individuals.

This convention is the only event of its kind worldwide. It offers you – esteemed environmental award recipients from all over the world – a one-of-a-kind platform to meet each other, establish networks, and to share information on a global scale.

To lend even greater support, the DBU and the European Environment Foundation have, since the beginning of the year, been working together on a project to establish a new cooperation exchange for international award recipients. The DBU is supporting this project with around €100,000.

Beyond this annual convention, we would like to offer , an active cooperation platform. The aim of this platform is to enable award recipients to enter into lasting networks.

By doing so, it is our hope that we can provide the best-possible support for the respective individual projects run by the different environment award recipients and offer an enhanced possibility for exchange.

Our goal is to establish a more efficient transfer of knowledge and experiences between award recipients and to achieve a long-lasting, ongoing exchange not just between award recipients but also the awarding institutions.

The details of this cooperation exchange will be presented tomorrow, so I don't want to say too much on this topic for the moment.

But I do want to take this opportunity to wish the cooperation exchange the very best of luck.

Whilst the exchange platform is an idea for the future, in the here and now, I wish you all an exciting, interesting, and pleasant convention, and a lively exchange of views and opinions.

And who knows: Perhaps at this same place in the year 2532, a happy event will take place marking the 1,000th birthday of the historical Kaufhaus Freiburg where people will gladly remember events like this one and contemplate how difficult people initially made things for themselves back then with global environment changes, only to do the right thing after all.

Allow me please to close with the words of George Bernhard Shaw:

“We are made wise not by the recollection of our past, but by the responsibility for our future.”

Thank you.