

Welcome Address

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**Opening of the international academic conference on the occasion of the
20th anniversary of the foundation of BICC
"Facing Organized Violence: Research Agendas and Conversion Potentials"**

Bonn, 27th October 2014

Check against delivery.
(Duration about 15 minutes)

Dear Professor Schetter,
Dear Professor Nordstrom,
Dear Professor Rhyner,
Dear Mr. Göbel,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Dead and injured on the streets of Kobane in Syria, shootings in Donetsk or explosions in Gaza – organized violence has many faces and we are confronted with it almost daily. Terrible pictures of human misery as a result of war, expulsion and hunger are reaching us from Iraq, from Libya and Afghanistan or from African states such as Mali, Niger or Chad. Scarcely a day passes without news of new disasters from the crisis-hit regions of this planet, which give us reason for major concern. In West Africa, Ebola is adding to the suffering and misery. These crises have dramatic consequences for the whole world.

The UN Refugee Agency speaks of over 50 million refugees worldwide. There have never been so many since the Second World War. Development policy is faced with gigantic challenges – as is the whole of society. Everyone is asking in what world we wish to live together over the coming decades. What do solidarity, justice and participation mean in future?

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are talking about nothing less than the shaping of globalization which Willy Brandt demanded over 30 years ago when he presented the “North-South Report” or - as it is otherwise known - the “Brandt Report” – a ground-breaking document in international politics. It was also Willy Brandt who – with his “Independent Commission for International Development Issues” - named a global domestic policy as the fundamental requirement for world peace and prosperity. In view of the vast trouble spots, it is both impressive and sad at the same time that this Commission’s report has lost almost nothing of its relevance from 1980 up until today. It is the same old and familiar questions which arise time after time, but which reach us with increasing urgency. They reach us through terrible pictures in the news and the Internet. But they also reach us right on our own doorstep: Namely when protests by Kurds in Germany for more international support in the fight against IS terror end in riots with knives and machetes. Or when self-appointed Sharia police flout the German state’s monopoly on the use of force.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We can no longer blind out organized violence in the crisis-hit regions of the world nor the questions and problems connected with it. Even if we turn off television, stop reading newspaper and ignore Internet postings: Global conflicts are still even then reflected on our own streets. A global domestic policy as called for by Willy Brandt over 30 years ago serves not only the interests of peace in the crisis-hit regions of this world, but also peaceful co-existence here in Germany. Apart from which, as one of the world's economically strongest industrial nations we have a global responsibility.

The end of the East-West conflict made a lasting change to our world order. Quarter of a century later, the question of international security and stability is taking on a new dimension. Across the world, entire nations are in danger of imploding. Expulsion, terror and mass murder are rocking entire regions in which the desperate population is already faced each day with hunger and poverty. Terror and expulsion give cause to additional misery and do not stop at national borders when so doing.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Our global responsibility is not restricted to times at which somewhere in the world there is the threat of military conflagration, genocide or epidemic. And the extent of our action can by no means stop at just supplying weapons to selected crisis-hit regions. Germany is today sending weapons to fight fanatics and criminals who partly pursue their crusade with weapons which we – or rather more our alliance partners – dispatched to these regions yesterday for completely different reasons. And what are we going to do tomorrow? Surely we have to ask ourselves: What is going to happen tomorrow with the weapons which we are handing over today? And within this context we must also ask ourselves the question which Willy Brandt formulated as long ago as 1980 in his introduction to the 'North-South Report': "Is it not at least macabre that the fastest and most dynamic transfer of state-of-the-art equipment and technology from rich to poor countries has taken place in the area of killing machines?"

My opinion is: Yes, at least that. As long as we are unable to eliminate poverty, hunger and misery in the crisis-hit regions of the Earth, peace, international security and stability are unthinkable. Or – once again in the words of Willy Brandt – "Development in a broader sense, as another word for peace, can enable us to recognize conflicts and to handle them in such a way that it is less probable that they tip over into military or economic wars. [...]"

There is no reasonable alternative to a policy which de-escalates tension and brings about a greater degree of cooperation.”

If the German government has now decided to deliver weapons to northern Iraq – we have all struggled greatly with this – then a lot of question marks also and precisely against the background of Willy Brandt’s words remain, which I suppose will only be answered in the coming years.

Ladies and Gentlemen

This cooperation of which Willy Brandt spoke is in our own most fundamental interest. It is the reason why global crises are also a topic for our federal state politics. As a major industrial region in the heart of Europe, North Rhine-Westphalia has close links and economic relations to the entire world. Each war and each international crisis endangers this network. That is why a world at peace must be of interest to us as well, apart from the humanitarian aspect. In addition, the crises across the globe are topics which move people. They expect guidance – and they are right to do so. As a key location for science and research with the highest density of universities and research institutions in Europe, we have the potential in North Rhine-Westphalia to make an appropriate contribution through an interdisciplinary and practice-oriented approach.

Part of this potential is also the Bonn International Center for Conversion. Founded in 1994 on the initiative of Johannes Rau, it is now celebrating its twentieth birthday and is today one of the top addresses for peace and conflict research in Germany. Conversion research, which will be illustrated by the conference starting today with the title of "Facing Organized Violence: Research Agendas and Conversion Potentials", stretches a conceptual framework within which topics are investigated and correlated with each other. They range from the question of future and presence of war to the mobilization and demobilization of combatants, control of small arms as well as cross-cutting themes such as natural resources and migration to classic conversion topics. Structural transformation processes in military facilities and in the armaments industry, for example, are topical issues now as before. The matter of defining more restrictively policy regarding arms exports to crisis-hit territories raises questions concerned with industrial policy and brought Sigmar Gabriel, Federal Minister for Economic Affairs, together with union and industry representatives at the beginning of September. Armaments conversion is very complex and must also be part of the debate on our society’s future.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We have outstanding researchers and scientists in this field in North Rhine-Westphalia. This undoubtedly also includes the BICC staff in Bonn. With its high-level, application-oriented and trans-disciplinary research, it is a valuable enrichment for our federal state's research landscape. In Bonn, this international UN location with the United Nations University, the Center for Development Research and the German Development Institute – to name but a few – BICC finds itself in a synergetic environment in which it is contributing to the investigation of major global issues. Its findings are in demand both at national and international level. In the past years, it has numbered amongst the top 100 worldwide in the Global Think Tank Ranking.

I would like to thank you most sincerely, Profesor Schetter, as well as your entire team for this tremendous commitment. Together with BICC you are all a great enrichment for Bonn as an international science and research location and an enrichment for North Rhine-Westphalia.

My congratulations on your twentieth anniversary and I wish you well for the continued success of your so very valuable work.

Thank you!