

Speech by Dr. Volker Moenikes
at the occasion of a farewell reception held
in honour of outgoing KAF Snr. Programme Officer,
Mr. Bern Guri,
at the residence of the KAF Resident Representative,
on 21 December 2006

Dear Mrs Guri and Mr Guri, our friends Juliet and Bern,
Dear Klaus and Tanja Loetzer,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure and an honour for me to have been asked by the Representative of Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation to say a few words at this occasion.

It is an honour, because - after having served many years in the Foundation - I still feel very much attached to the values and the principles, which the Foundation is standing for and will continue to stand for.

It is a pleasure because it gives me the floor to speak about a person who is very dear to my heart. Indeed, I have repeatedly said that, Bern Guri is my oldest friend in Africa. We have known each other for more than 20 years and we have met in different positions, at different places and under various circumstances. We have always made plans together, we shared visions, and, maybe the most important thing, we have criticised each other, always in the spirit of helping one another vis-à-vis the challenges which we are faced with. The latter, I believe, is the essence of every real friendship. So ours is indeed a real friendship, which since a long time does also include our wives and children.

It is in this spirit, and as the floor is given to me, that I have an opportunity also to make a friendly complaint. All too often, my dear Bern, have you been siding with my wife when she criticised my frequent absence from family life. Today, on behalf of your wife and, of course, with a smile, I would like to ask you to apply the same principle to your own family. I am sure, Juliet, that you and the children agree with me.

The reason for your frequent absence from home, of course, dear Bern, lies in the deep commitment to the development work that you have been doing throughout your life. Despite many set-backs and problems and often faced with apparently unnecessary institutional or personal difficulties you have dedicated your life to the betterment of the living conditions of poor people, especially in the rural areas.

When I first met you, you were working at the Department for Socio-Economic Development of the National Catholic Secretariat. That was in a period when this country had just started to recover from a severe economic crisis. I was a consultant to the Ministry of Finance by then, and you volunteered to take me along in your car to Wa and other places in the Upper West Region, your home area.

After having been involved so much in all the structural debates that were going on in the capital, it was for me an eye-opener and a relief, indeed, to see the many concrete activities of rural people that you were promoting in a number of villages. You did that not only from your official position and as a professional duty. You added a lot of your extra time and went the extra mile sharing your profound knowledge of agriculture and rural life and your conviction that development has to come from the people themselves. Dry-season gardening, shea-butter production, dam

management, organizing the people to work together and many other activities, which cannot all be mentioned here, were of direct help for men, women and children. Observing you I learned a lot and I started to admire the unique combination of a highly professional approach with a humble and down-to earth relationship with the people. Those who know you since that time know that you believe in development. You refuse any sort of afro-pessimism.

But you are also a no-nonsense person. The sheer theoretical debate and the attempt to change the world only from the writing desk, are not your business. You want and you need the contact with those human beings who we talk about, when we say "development".

I would like to mention also, that in those days you have been substantially contributing to a very controversial study that MISEREOR, the German Catholic Bishops' Conference development Agency, launched under the title "Sustainable Germany". It was an attempt to see the path that Germany has chosen for her own development, with the eyes of partners from the South. The responsibility which the industrialized countries bear with regard to an ecologically balanced development all over the world and their contribution to a more equal distribution of the international common good was debated. Quite radical but constructive proposals were made in order to change some of the imbalances that do characterize our world order. Some of the ideas that were developed in your study groups have nowadays become common ground for international debates. In those days, however, this way of developing ideas together was still very innovative. And your contributions, dear Bern, were of highest value, once again, because they came from a profound knowledge of concrete realities.

To summarize this period in your professional life, I can say, that you were a very important asset to the development efforts of the Catholic Church in those days, and I know that this has not been forgotten. From time to time, requests are still made to you in order to help in evaluations and analysing certain situations. These requests come from Ghana as well as from development partners in the North.

It was, of course, with lot a regret, not to say anger that the National Catholic Secretariat accepted your resignation in 1992, when you decided to embark on another international assignment.

I had just become the Head of Konrad Adenauer Foundation's regional programme to promote Democracy in West Africa, a position that Klaus Loetzer has later been holding until the beginning of this year. It was the period when fundamental changes in the political systems of many African countries towards the rule of law, democracy and social market economy took place.

The question that I asked myself when I was starting that programme, was very simple: how can we promote democracy in such a way that it becomes meaningful for the peoples' actual living conditions? If democracy is the best system in order to achieve a more balanced and more participative development, then this must be felt by the citizens at all levels. Justice is always concrete. And equitable development must be demonstrated in the concrete living conditions of human beings not only through the multiplication of institutions and documents aiming at that development.

As simple as the question seemed to be, as important it was to me to find somebody who would be able to represent that perspective in our team. Moreover, in a regional perspective, it was crucial to have the sometimes very different conditions in French and English speaking countries represented in our regional approach. So I came to Accra, and I was very happy, that I could convince Bern Guri to become a programme officer in KAF, a position that he has held until today, i.e. for almost 15 years.

As I said, the church in Ghana was not very happy with Bern's departure and, in a way, I am paying the bill now, as I have made myself available as an advisor to the very Secretariat, where Bern was working.

Our co-operation in Benin was one of the best times I ever had in my professional life, and Bern Guri contributed a lot to the success of the programme. Not only did he make an effort to learn French and to communicate directly with the French-speaking colleagues - an effort which should be made by many more Ghanaians giving the socio-geographic position of this country, but Bern also became a very important colleague as regards the efforts to combine the promotion of democracy on the higher levels with efforts to make an impact in decentralized political structures. Moreover, we had fascinating debates based on the difference between the sometimes very theoretical and institution-oriented approach of our Beninese colleagues and the practical down-to-earth points of view that Bern was promoting. Bern showed a tremendous sense of humility and perseverance at the same time. He was really at his best, showing all his qualities of being a very good listener, a polite contributor to debates, a structured organizer and a level-headed analytical person. In addition to that, he has this enormous capacity to mediate in conflict situations and to encourage people in situations of

frustration and distress. Without him, the office in Cotonou would not be what it is today. This morning I phoned to some of the former colleagues in Cotonou and they asked, no they urged me to express their feeling of appreciation and gratitude for what Bern Guri has done at the occasion of this party. I hereby extend their greetings to you, Bern, combined with an invitation to Benin in order to continue the dialogue.

Of course, we all understood when Bern then left our office in Cotonou in order to make a contribution to the development of KAF's programmes in Ghana. But we missed him also quite a lot.

In Ghana, Bern became a very important advisor to a number of representatives of KAF. In fact, he has guaranteed that, the development of programme work in Ghana is continuous despite the change of representatives. And he opened a lot of new perspectives. The Foundation's contribution to the decentralization process, the promotion of the social teaching of the church, which is by the way, the single most important philosophical background of Christian democratic thinking, the establishment of viable programmes for civic education especially in the North of Ghana, the co-operation with the traditional leaders in this country, the launching of debates with citizens in uniform, and not to forget the advise to the Christian Mothers' Association are but a few of the initiatives, that Bern either took himself or helped to implement.

I got to know from various visits to Accra, that the loyalty and the straightforwardness of Bern were appreciated by all representatives of KAF in Ghana.

And again, in addition to his work for KAF, Bern went an extra-mile. He was instrumental for the founding of ECASARD, an NGO

aiming at building up organisational capacity for farmers to defend their own rights in the Ghanaian economy.

This was done in addition to his work as a programme officer, and the same applies for the most recent creation of CIKOD. Here Bern tries to be instrumental in bringing together modern democratic principles with those traditions in the Ghanaian society, which are so dear to people's hearts and life perspectives, that they must be considered in the political development of this country. Bern is again showing, that it is not enough just to make declarations of general order, requesting the respect for traditional values and structures, but that a critical and constructive dialogue has always to be based on the fundamental question, what the benefit and the advantage of different lines of development for the concrete situation of human beings really are. Congratulations, Bern, for having, maintained the energy and the commitment to always asking new and pertinent questions and to developing new and more adequate ways to make development aid meaningful.

When I arrived in Accra four months ago, Bern and I had a very profound discussion, not only analyzing the situation in Ghana, but also evaluating the contribution that both of us have made in the last twenty-five years of being engaged in our profession. It was for the first time, that I felt some kind of frustration in Bern's arguments. I understood very well, that the impatience, which Bern showed in that discussion as regards the pace of development in Ghana is not due to the fact, that he is also becoming older and would like to see the more immediate results of his personal efforts. What he claims, in the contrary, are more tangible improvements in the ordinary people's life.

It honours you, Bern, that your self-critique is not a weakness at all. You are able, maintaining your self esteem to critically analyze the concrete impact of your own work and to admit that many of the hopes shared by many of us in the eighties have remained hopes and that many of your, or should I say our visions are still far from being realized in practice. You make that statement, which is so easily expressed in most of the projects and programmes of local, national and international development agencies, namely that development can only come from the people themselves, the *ultima ratio* of your own self-evaluation and you dare not only to criticize others, but also to look for deficiencies in your own approach, when the real impact of development work is evaluated. I wished all of us, had the same critical approach to ourselves and that we were as well able to have this realistic view on our own contributions. Here, we have to learn a lot from you. I thank you for always emphasizing this critical perspective. And more than that: when others try to reduce their own efforts, you encourage them to go ahead and not give up.

You are now leaving KAF - a sad moment for the Foundation, a real loss. But the main feeling which we as former and actual colleagues of KAF want to express today is that of gratitude and acknowledgement for everything you have contributed to our professional work and maybe more important even to our own personal development.

You dare to go ahead with your NGO. You will no longer depend on the payroll of an international institution, but you follow your conviction that things can and must be done by Ghanaian institutions and Ghanaian women and men themselves. As Ghana is heading towards its 50th anniversary, I believe that this is exactly the approach which this country needs. Let us develop our own vision of development! Let us define our values, combining

traditional experience with a response to 21st century opportunities and challenges! Let us not only look at macroeconomic figures but at the concrete justice that is done to the people of Ghana! Let Ghana and Ghanaians be proud of themselves in developing their own answers to the questions of the nation! This is your message to your country fellowmen - and we have understood it very well.

Not only Ghana, you also will celebrate your 50th anniversary next year. Am I wrong, when I say, that this is the time in a man's life, when the rich experience of the past will now bear fruits in the final phase of the professional life?

You will stand on your own and you want Ghana to stand on its own feet as well. May God bless your contribution to this vision, may he bless your family and the colleagues in your organization! May he bless Ghana and KAF! May God bless our friendship!

On behalf of all those here present, I would like to say, thank you for all you are doing, our friend Bern Guri. BARKA