

24 January
Jeff Shesel

BONO
REMARKS ON RECEIVING
THE GERMAN MEDIA PRIZE
BADEN-BADEN, GERMANY
24 January 2006

Introduction

Guten abend. Danke schon.

Thank you, Joschka Fisher, for that introduction. You are a great inspiration to all who care about the environment... and, I might add, for those of us who care about footwear, fancy footwear... I believe in Hessen you signed up for the job in a pair of white converse trainers.... nice one.

I have to admit I am a little nervous tonight. You know im not used to speaking to crowds of less than 50,000.

Nice place Baden Baden. I've been told on more than one occasion that I should take one... a bath that is...

Thankyou Karlheinz for being such a great host. The world needs more Kogels. |

I have great love and respect for this country. I have been coming here, performing here, writing and recording here for some time now... but this for me is the best time of all to be in Germany. There's something in the air. A sense of possibility; a feeling that the future might be better than the past.

Maybe it's a woman chancellor. The Merkel effect. Maybe it's the world cup. The Ballack effect. And as an activist I love the fact that Germany is handing the tournament over to Africa for 2010.

The World Cup may get more media coverage, but next year you're playing host to something really big too: the G8 summit. Africa will be there—either as the invited or the uninvited guest. Even at that rich man's party, the poorest of the poor will have a presence... their lives and fates will turn on decisions we make.

But it's not just their fate—it's ours. Because those two things are more bound up together than ever before. In a very real way our own peace and prosperity will turn on the decisions we make about Africa.

These are dangerous times. Never before has the west been so scrutinized. Our values, do we have any? Our credibility has been under attack around the

world. There's not just a moral imperative to act in Africa—there's a strategic imperative, and an economic one as well.

This G8 is an amazing opportunity for Germany—an amazing opportunity to be the honest broker in a new deal, a new partnership between the haves and the have nothing at all.

Germany is good at coalitions now... and uniquely qualified as a result to put together a grand coalition for Africa.

This country may play the most crucial role of all—certainly in Europe—in winning the defining struggle of our generation. The end of Extreme Poverty...

But first, let me tell you how I got here. If you're curious?

As KarlHeinz was saying... after the Live Aid concerts I went to work in Ethiopia with my wife Ali for a few months. I remember strong regal people brought to their knees by a brutal combination of extreme poverty cold war politics. But even then they didn't lose their sense of humour. I was known as "the girl with a beard"... dont ask.. It's true...at the end of my stay a man offered me his son to take with me, he knew he would have a better chance if I took him home to Ireland, and its true... I had to say no, but its not true that I haven't carried him with me since. I have never forgotten him... I will always remember those beautiful royal people of Ethiopia, smart savvy entrepreneurial people, and that magical shining continent that is Africa.

In that moment I started this journey, in that moment I became the worst thing of all.. a rock star with a cause... except.

The Emergency

Six and a half thousand Africans, dying every single day from AIDS, a preventable treatable disease, for lack of drugs we can get at any chemist. That's not a rock star's cause, that's an emergency.

12 million aids orphans in Africa, 18 million by the end of the decade. A whole missing generation of active adults, wiped out, children bringing up children. That's not a cause, that's an emergency.

Today, every day, 9,000 Africans will catch HIV because of stigmatization and lack of education—9,000 today. This is not a cause, it's an emergency

What we're facing in Africa is an unprecedented threat to human dignity and equality.

So let's be clear about something. Let's be clear what this problem is and what this problem isn't.

This is not about charity, it's about justice.

And that's too bad.

Because you're good at charity. Germans, like the Irish, are good at it. We like to give, and we give a lot, even those who can't afford it.

But justice is a tougher standard. Africa makes a fool of our idea of justice; it makes a farce of our idea of equality. It mocks our pieties, it doubts our concern, it questions our commitment.

Look at Southeast Asia the tsunami takes 150k lives – the world mobilizes. In Africa there is a tsunami every month and that's just AIDS, not a natural disaster but a completely avoidable man-made catastrophe. Because there's no way we can look at what's happening in Africa and, if we're honest, conclude that it would ever be allowed to happen anywhere else. Anywhere else. Certainly not here. In Europe. Or America. Or Canada.

There's just no chance.

The Imperative

I talked about more than 10,000 people dying a day—that's Africa's crisis. But the fact that it's not on the nightly news, that we in Europe or America are not treating it like an emergency—well, that is our crisis... What does that say about us?

I know some of you think wishing for an end to AIDS and poverty in Africa can seem like wishing that gravity didn't make things so damned heavy. We can wish it, but what can we do about it?

Well, more than we think.

We can't fix every problem... but the ones we can, we must.

Africa's number one problem is corruption...

But in some places this is really changing. The Nigerian Finance Minister, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, who I'm seeing later this week, just got a big oil windfall. Do you know what she's decided to do with it? She's using the money to pay down Nigeria's debts. That's Nigeria, for so long the very symbol of corruption.

Yes, Africa's number one problem is still corruption...

But not just theirs. Ours too.

That we, until recently, demanded the poorest people in the world pay back the debts of their grandparents, old loans that we pushed into the bloodied hands of Cold War dictators. That was our corruption.

That through unconscionable trade laws we don't let the poorest of the poor put their products on our shelves, while we flood their markets with ours. That while 2.7 billion people live on less than \$2 a day, the average European cow receives about \$2.50 a day in subsidies. Yes, I said 'cow.' Can you believe that? Our cows in Europe live better than most people in Africa. Wow.

As I said, we can't fix every problem... but the ones we can, we must.

And *because* we can, we must.

The fact is that ours is the first generation that can look disease, look extreme poverty in the eye and not flinch, and not blink. We have the resources, we have the know how, we have the technology to partner with the poor and help them beat extreme poverty... if we have the will. And if we have the will... This could be our great adventure. It is as exciting as the space program was in the 60's -- and with far bigger benefits for the future of this planet.

Germany's Role

Now, I'm getting a little grandiose, here... aren't I?

And if there's one thing people told me before I came here tonight, it was, 'Don't get grandiose. Germans are practical people. Don't preach, don't recite poetry.'

Well, I have some poetry for you tonight, it's not mine, for me up there with Goethe with Rilke, it's by a promising new author from the east.

PLAY MERKEL VIDEO HERE.

"This value-based understanding of politics is also the guiding principle for our development cooperation. We know that problems will reach us at home if we don't solve them elsewhere. We certainly need money for that. This is why we committed to provide 0.33% by 2006, at least 0.51% by 2010 and to raise the ODA quota to 0.7% GDP by 2015.

"I know what I am saying here. These are ambitious goals. But we have to learn that problems rush to our shore if we do not succeed in applying solutions elsewhere."

B repeats in German –

"Wir wissen dass uns die probleme zu hause erreichen
wenn wir sie nicht woanders lösen"

Now that, my friends, is a beautiful lyric.

Im looking forward to meeting this poet of pragmatism, Angela Merkel in the next few days. I'm not asking her to be an angel for Africa, but I am asking her to be an architect for a new partnership between the us and them here. .

What we need, after all, is not grandstanding, but standing up—for what's right and getting the job done. Im told the chancellor is a great deal maker, an honest broker. Shes not a wishful thinker. Well, as activists let me tell you, we're over wishful thinking, we're over day dreaming about equality, holding hands for fairness. I'm not a dreamer. I'm not a hippie.. I do not have flowers in my hair. I come from punk rock. The Clash, remember them.. they were like public service announcements with guitars.. lets cut the crap, what's the hook, whats the melody line? The more I think about this, do you think Agela Merkel listened to the Clash? I'll ask her....

What's my point... oh yes..

I believe Angela Merkel embodies Germanys pragmatism. That's my point.

BUT lets not get too carried away with national stereotypes. Germans are passionate as well as pragmatic.

Beethoven wasn't French, or Italian; he was German. And he wasn't called a 'Pragmatist,' he was called a 'Romantic.' Maybe this balance, YOUR balance, of pragmatism and passion is exactly what the world needs now. Now is the time. And it may just be the right time to take this next step in Germany's remarkable journey. At the start of this new century, the weight of history feels less burdensome than before. The limits it imposes on action—and imagination—are less constraining than before.

No one in the world has gone through what Germany has gone through in the past century and come out the other side—but today, there can be no question: you are on the other side.

Now, as I said, is the time. The future of a lot of people—here in Europe; in Africa; and around the world—hangs in the balance. And Germany's the country that can tip things the right way.

Let me tell you why.

I was in Gleneagles in Scotland, at the G8 meetings last July. It was in many ways a ridiculous picture. You had 8 of the most powerful men in the world, on a golf course in Scotland. And you had rock stars chasing them from hole to hole, hiding behind every tee and bunker. LOOK, THERES BONO AT a par 3 THERES SIR BOB GELDOF AT par 5... LOOK OUT HERBERT G. AT THE eighteenth HOLE...

It was comedy, but we were serious. We were there to represent millions of activists who wanted their leaders to strike a better deal, a fair deal, for the

worlds poor. And we heard a lot of promises. Most of them were only that. Promises.

But when Germany pledged itself to increase the aid it gives to the world's poor—getting to 0.7% of GDP by 2015—people sort of stopped in their tracks and said, well, all right, now, this is getting real. Everyone knows that when Germany puts its signature on a piece of paper, you don't do it lightly—you do it because you mean it.

So your contributions can be measured not just by what Germany promised at the G8 at Gleneagles, but what Germany, by the weight of its influence, got other countries to commit.

And what did they commit to?

Well...apart from dealing with the debt burden, near universal AIDS treatment by 2010... an end to Malaria and the launching the concept of free basic education for every child in Africa.

When Germany moves on this stuff seriously, all of Europe moves with you.

It's important, then, that you keep moving forwards—not backwards.

I need you to know: that's been called into question this past week.

Not by jaded rock stars or over-demanding activists, but by your own government, casting doubt on its ability to meet this country's promises. But I, for one, just don't believe it. I don't believe you will let the world down. I don't believe that this Chancellor—or the people of this country—are going to allow that to happen.

Because there's more than money at stake, here—more, even, than Germany's credibility. Because the world is watching—history is watching—to see what we do. Whether we in the West are good as our word.

Of course there are difficulties. 0.7 sounds like a little, feels like a lot.

And over the years our aid hasn't always bought what we thought we were paying for. Sometimes it's bought a BMW for a health minister instead of a health clinic for poor villagers. We know that. That's why there are now strict qualifications on who gets help – countries who make a real fight against corruption and support democracy, accountability, and transparency.

Now, I haven't forgotten this is a media prize. So let me make this challenge to the media: we need your help. We have a story to tell—it's an exciting story, an adventure—and we need your help in getting it out there. You have an awesome power—the power to raise the profile of these issues, to get the facts out, to implant them in the popular culture, the zeitgeist. And this is the ask... Could you

give us some advertising and airspace... free? This made a big difference in the UK. I ask on behalf of Deine Stimme Gegen Armut. 300,000 Germans have signed up to this campaign. With your contribution... that could be a million tomorrow.

I want to thank my music industry friends here especially Frank Briegmann, for your ongoing support for the campaign:

To the students here today, or watching at home: raise your voices... tell your friends... and sign up at DEINE STIMME GEGEN ARMUT.DOT.ORG. Please join this grand coalition. We need you... we need you to give permission to the politicians to be bold... and to spend your national purse to beat this emergency.

The Right Side of History

I'd like to close with a personal story about how you can, with the wrong directions, end up on the wrong side of history.

Like so many people, from so many countries, I was first drawn to Germany as the Wall was coming down, and I stayed a while; U2 recorded a whole album in Berlin, at Hansa Studios, right in the shadow of the Wall. Of course, the whole of Europe was in the shadow of the Wall, but we were right there up against it, just as it crumbled; the dust is under the fingernails of that album.

We arrived on the very last flight into the old divided city. It was a remarkable moment. The streets were flooded with people. It was totally overwhelming and we wanted to be a part of it.

So this ragged bunch of Irish musicians went out to celebrate with the people of Berlin, East and West. You know, I'd heard about bierfestivals and bohemia, but as I looked around, I thought, this is no fun at all! Everybody seems depressed... Maybe the rumours about Germans working too hard are true. Or maybe they're worn out from dancing on the wall.

I was wrong. We had just, somehow, joined the wrong parade: the one group in Berlin that was *protesting against* the Wall coming down. So briefly, there, I was on the wrong side of history.

Tonight we're talking about getting on the right side of history.

Not just me, but all of us. I wrote a song here... a song called one, its not a song about unity, it's a song about difference. I don't know if you've heard it... "We're one but we're not the same, we get to carry each other, carry each other". It's written about the compromises we make in love, in life, to stay together in difficult relationships. I wasn't thinking about the SPD and CDU, when I wrote it. I am now.

Look, point is...

I'm a song writer... I get to write songs. Chancellor Merkel, gets to write history.
If you let her she can write a chapter we can all be proud of.

Thank you for this honor. Thank you for listening.

Danke schön.

#