

Barbara Unmüßig, board of directors, Heinrich-Böll-Foundation

**Opening speech
Femme Globale - Gender Perspectives in the 21st Century**

**Ladies and Gentlemen,
dear Christina von Braun,
dear friends,**

on behalf of the Heinrich Böll Foundation I would like to warmly welcome you to our international congress "Femme Globale - Gender Perspectives in the 21st century".

An international women`s congress with participants from more than 30 countries, with speakers from Eastern- and Southeastern Europe. from Southeastasia and Southasia, from the Near East, from East-, West and Southafrica, from Central- and Latinamerica, from Western Europe and Northamerica: this has not taken place in Germany for a long time. My gratitude and special thanks go to all of you for your attendance, your interest, your contributions to this congress.

I sincerely hope that Germany, Berlin, the Heinrich Böll Foundation and Humboldt University will be good hosts to you.

The idea to initiate this congress evolved merely two years ago. The political evaluation of the platform for action ten years after the Peking World Conference on Women drew closer. Worldwide it was still argued whether we should jointly fight for a fifth UN-World Conference on Women. This question was highly controversial among international feminist networks and those networks concerning women`s politics.

Already then the Heinrich Böll Foundation decided to go public with its own political contribution.

What do we want to achieve with this international conference?

- We want to mobilise women- and gender political involvement and thereby broaden the horizon beyond our own national context. Gender politics and gender equality can today, in the course of economic and cultural globalisation, only be understood and analysed against a transnational background. Therefore we aimed for an international congress right from the beginning!
The fact that this congress now takes place at the peak of electoral campaigns in Germany could by no means be foreseen. Now we are glad about this fact.
We absolutely understand this congress as gender political interference into an electoral campaign that is not addressing women- and gender politics in any way, and if so - as it has been customary in this country for a long time - almost entirely referring to it as linked to the keyword of family policy. This is by far not enough. We will prove over the next two

days that gender equality is more than the indeed important debate about family policy and the consistence of family and work.

- Especially for the German public we want to outline gender- and women political perspectives within crucial political and economic topics and make clear their international dimension.
- We selfconfidently and offensively claim our women- and gender political demand for designing the most important topics of the presence and future: with regard to foreign affairs and security, concerning the global trade and financial politics, with regard to labour market and social policies, concerning international migration-, knowledge- and bio policies.
- We have a gender sensitive knowledge which must not be ignored. Neither politics nor management decisions are neutral with regard to gender. We want to contradict this widespread myth by our conceptions of a gender equal world. Therefore we urgently need more public discourse about the respective impact of political and economic performance on gender.
- We want a constructive dialogue which is critical and rooted in the fight for gender equality. This means:
 - Resistance against worldwide economic injustice and social exclusion,
 - The demand for a gender equal redistribution and for a independent, autonomous and secure existence for both women and men,
 - Striving for an implementation of political, economic, social and cultural human rights in all countries worldwide. We do not accept cultural relativist approaches towards the violation of women`s rights!
 - The demand for gender equal participation on all levels of the political decision making process.

Looking back and ahead

At first sight women- and gender political perspectives indeed seem to have penetrated many sectors of society. Women have benefited from emancipatory movements and education reforms. The institutionalisation of women- and gender political questions and claims is not merely a western European phenomenon. With the 1995 Peking platform for action and the 1979 Antidiscrimination Convention an international framework has been established which women in almost all countries can refer to. Progress, for instance concerning access to education, can be witnessed worldwide.

Still: there hardly is any international document or international conference which does not prove that injustice between the sexes is growing.

Economic hierarchies are increasing - instead of decreasing, legal achievements and normative courses, as have been marked by the Peking platform for action, are questioned, ignored or even reversed.

UN-Secretary General Kofi Annan at the 2002 presentation of the UN-report on women, peace and security stated: "In no society women have an equal status to men". Yet: the UNO itself is unable to massively confront this fact, neither within the organisation nor politically. An eloquent example for this are the Millenium Development Goals which are particularly dissatisfying concerning women policy and who lag far behind the level of knowledge and the claims of the Peking platform for action. The suggestions for UN-Reform programme-wise include hardly anything that could contribute to overcoming injustice among the sexes.

But why do we let ourselves be pressed into defensive in the face of this chastening performance? Why is there such a weak lobby for women- and gender politics? Moaning and complaining won't help! The depoliticization of gender related topics that has been detected in many places is observable.

Yet I am thoroughly convinced:

The necessary repoliticization of gender- and women political networks cannot be achieved in an abstract way. It has to take place alongside concrete topics. Core political fields of action and future tasks such as global bio- and knowledge policies, Security-and peace politics, labour market- global economic and fiscal policies, human rights and migration policies have to be put on the agenda. We have to interfere into these bitterly disputed topics, formulate our demand for participation and design and show alternatives. The commandment of the hour is: To make publicly visible the fund of existing gender-knowledge and to discuss strategies as to how this knowledge can challenge and influence the political mainstream. That is what the agenda of the coming days stands for.

It is also true: feminism has lost much of its strength as a driving force critical to society, it is struggling hard for answers to economic and political challenges! We have to start asking more questions again - also towards ourselves, we have to newly formulate our social criticism, to newly develop our strategies.

Create room for reflexion and discussion of future strategies

With Femme Globale we want to offer room for discussion concerning "old" and "new" questions:

Have we been relying too much on institutionalised politics and thus forgotten that gender equality is a social process of negotiating for power and resources? What does gender equality mean in the context of economic globalisation?

In which ways do we let ourselves be intertwined into the radical and market-oriented logic of efficiency and competition of global economic policies? How do we confront them?

Do we not have to name the various conflicts of goals that result from us being embedded into technological and economic developments, more offensively?

What does for instance an increase in autonomy linked to a job in a textile factory mean, if hazardous working conditions are the price? What does gaining autonomy through mobility mean if ones very existence is endangered by continuous lack of rights in the country of destination? What is the price for more autonomy through reproductive technologies, which stands against the alienation of ones own body?

We cannot ignore regional and social differences with regard to these considerations.

The female population can hardly be encompassed by the term "women" alone. What does the single headmistress from Munich have in common with the Philippine housemaid that is doing her household here in order to pay for her children`s education back home? What do the landless woman from Brazil and the policewoman in Rio have in common?

Finally gender political and feminist networks address these questions. In the course of Peking+10 worldwide discussions on the localization of women politics and feminism take place. As difficult as this is due to social and cultural differences, we have to newly justify our conceptions of solidarity.

The congress „Femme Globale – Gender perspectives in the 21st century“ wants to be understood as one of several places where discussions about the things we have in common as well as about the things that separate us take place.

Self-interest of the Foundation as a gender political and feminist player

Before I close, a few words concerning the “institutional self-interest“ of the Heinrich Böll Foundation: Gender democracy has for many years been a core model of the Foundation. This is reflected in the development of strategies and programmes as well as within the organisation itself. With 25 offices abroad we are ourselves a small international network and we support worldwide to a great extent women-political, feminist and gender democratic networks and non governmental organisations. For many years we have supported their political concerns and sponsored them financially. Within the Federal Republic of Germany we counsel organisations and institutions concerning the implementation of Gender Mainstreaming and gender democracy. Within the relevant gender political networks we are an important competency.

The Feminist Institute of the Heinrich Böll Foundation has besides its political focus of “Gender and Security“ become an important place of feminist theory and practice through numerous events and publications concerning up to date topics.

Therefore it was only a small step to ask ourselves in the first place: How do we, here in Germany but also worldwide, implement this core model? Which obstacles are we confronted with? What impact do economic, political, social and cultural basic conditions have on our work in the respective countries where we cooperate with partners? Concerning this which are our experiences within the Federal Republic and Europe?

The Foundation itself is in process of self-reflexion and we hope that “Femme Globale“ will offer many ideas with regard to our own orientation. Gender democracy and feminist politics will in future remain a lively concept of the Heinrich Böll Foundation which enables us to intervene politically.

I am delighted that you have accepted our invitation to this conference in such large numbers.

Special thanks go to our cooperating partner the Centre for transdisciplinary Genderstudies at the Humboldt University. And to 30 additional organisations such as Amnesty International, feminist attac, Türkischer Bund Berlin-Brandenburg and Womnet, to name just a few who have on their own account with a great deal of enthusiasm and dedication organised workshops and many more things.

Conceptionally and organisationally this big and international conference has posed great and exceptional challenges on us. A project group at the headquarters in cooperation with our offices abroad has prepared the main focus as regards content. Our conference office has targeted the immense logistic challenges, our public relations office has seen to the distribution of advertisement and public relations work. To all of them my warmest thanks. “Teamwork at its best.“

Without the coordination, esprit, advisedness and strong nerve of Ingrid Spiller, Judith Strohm and Gundula Fienbork this congress would not be what it is. They are the heart and centre of all our preparations.

To all of you goes my deepest gratitude!
Now it is up to us to make the best out of it!