

MacBride Prize Ceremony of the International Peace Bureau

City Hall Potsdam

October 29, 2011

The Shawn MacBride Prize 2011 – In praise of Peter Becker

Laudatio by Otto Jaeckel\*

Dear Ms. Breines,

dear Mr. Magnusson,

dear Ms. Edwar,

dear Peter,

Ladies and Gentlemen

When I saw Peter for the first time nearly 40 years ago I thought to myself: how can he be a politician of the Free Democratic Party, the German liberals – he looks like being a member of the band of Jimi Hendrix.

Only later on I got to know, that he is a very gifted musician indeed. At that time he played Jazz and Rock and Roll. This year I heard him play Chopin.

This is typical of Peter. He sets himself always the most difficult goals and never gives up striving for the highest perfection.

As a young lawyer he was a specialist in the law of higher education and constitutional law. He fought to get the University entrance for hundreds of students who did not fulfill the formal requirements. Many German Physicians owe him the possibility to have studied medicine.

In this way having become well known all over Germany since the early seventies he became the first choice for anti-nuclear activists seeking legal advice in the struggle against the construction of nuclear power stations.

The expertise he collected as a litigator in many law suits which he filed to the Federal Administrative High Court and the Federal Supreme Constitutional Court was the basis to build up one of the biggest law firms in Germany.

In fact “Becker Buettner Held” is probably one of the biggest law firms in Europe specialized in Energy Law. Now he still remains committed as a senior consultant and lectures in Energy Law at the Humboldt University in Berlin.

Throughout all these years of hard work he remained a passionate fighter for peace and human rights. As his career as a parliamentarian of the FDP came to an end in 1982 when Hans Dietrich Genscher and Otto Graf Lambsdorf turned the page of west German history from Helmut Schmidt to Helmut Kohl, his new political career as the leader of NGOs started. Let me add: thank god and thanks to Genscher and Lambsdorf.

After the change of the FDP from a left wing social-liberal to a right wing neo-liberal Party, Peter remained a social liberal “solitaire” who he is still today.

His fame as a lawyer and his great political experience enabled him to open many doors and bring together people of different convictions from communists and social democrats to liberals and Christian democrats. This is one of his outstanding talents.

At the beginning of the eighties he became speaker of the Marburg Peace Pressure Group.

Later on he was one of the Cofounders of the International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms (IALANA) Germany and its chairman for over 20 years. Now he is one of the Co-Presidents of the International IALANA and still the honorary chairperson and treasurer of IALANA Germany.

I am convinced that one of the main reasons why Peter can make all this – the work in his office and his civil-society engagement - is that he has a wonderful wife Professor Marita Metz Becker and three beautiful daughters Jenny, Lena and Lesley by his side.

IALANA is the organization which initiated the world court project together with IPPNW and the IPB. Peter was one of the main promoters of the campaign in Germany.

In this way he took over the baton from Shawn MacBride in our world- wide relay team for nuclear disarmament. Following an initiative of Shawn MacBride over 14.000 Signatures for nuclear disarmament of jurists from all over the world have been collected in the eighties.

Peter has now filed a lawsuit against the German government in order to abolish the B 61 Atom bombs still deployed in Germany. Day by day Pilots of the German army in Büchel are trained to drop these bombs. So he tries to make use of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice from 1996 about the Illegality of nuclear weapons. Practical steps need to be taken to put the advisory opinion into practice. And Peter is the one who has the courage to bring this question to court.

The so called “nuclear sharing” of the German Army is a clear breach of the Non Proliferation Treaty and of the advisory opinion of the ICJ.

From the beginning Peter also objected to the wars against Yugoslavia, Iraq and Afghanistan. Under Peter’s leadership IALANA Germany provided peace activists and politicians with lots of legal expert opinions and aide memoires against the wars, based on international and constitutional law.

Our critical position concerning the illegality of the war against Iraq was even shared by the German Federal Administrative High Court.

Last Friday President Obama announced that he would withdraw all U.S. forces from Iraq. As we could read in the Washington Post of October 21 Obama said: “The rest of our troops in Iraq will come home”, adding that they “will be home for the holidays”. “After nearly nine years, America’s war in Iraq will be over”, he said at the White House.

But in the same article only a few lines further down we read that about 16.000 civilian contractors will remain posted in Iraq. Are these really conditions which allow us to speak of the end of the armed conflict? And can we now really speak of the re-acquisition of the full sovereignty of Iraq? I have my doubts.

The same goes for the announcements of the speakers of NATO concerning Afghanistan. On the one hand they tell us that they are going to decide on the withdrawal of the troops from Afghanistan during the Summit on the Petersberg near Bonn at the beginning of December. On the other hand the German defense Minister De Maiziere is asking for “strategic patience” in this matter.

At this point I’d like to quote a few lines from the book of Mohamed ElBaradei “The Age of Deception”. At the beginning he describes his last conversation

with officials of Saddam Hussein. Blix and ElBaradei said in this encounter: "Help us to help you... We need more evidence. The more transparency you show, the more documentation and physical proof you can produce, the better it will be for Iraq.

And Husam Amin, the head of Iraq's UN-interface group responded: "Let us be frank. First we cannot give you anything more because there is nothing more to give.

But, second, you cannot help us, because this war is going to happen and nothing you or we can do will stop it. Whatever we do, it is a done deal."

ElBaradei continues: "In the years since, multiple sources have confirmed that the premise for the march 2003 invasion – the charge by the United States and the United Kingdom that Saddam Hussein's Weapons of Mass Destruction programs represented an imminent threat - were groundless." And he concludes: "What we need is a commitment to nuclear diplomacy".

Peter Becker would say that he is right but diplomacy will not be enough.

I say this in consideration of the proposal which he has developed during the debate on a European Constitution.

He proposed that no state should be allowed to go to war against another state before having brought the conflict to court and having attempted a peaceful settlement.

Imagine what would have happened if the United States and the United Kingdom had been obliged to show their forged proofs to the International Court of Justice in the Hague. The Judges would not have been betrayed as easily as the members of the Security Council in Colin Powell's darkest hour.

I am convinced Peter's proposal would be an important step to the prevention of wars. Every conflict should have to be referred to the International Court of Justice in an obligatory way and this should not only be taken into consideration as it is said in Article 36 of the UN Charter. We have to demand this of our Governments.

We need such steps very urgently because we can already see the preparation of the next war against Iran coming at the horizon.

The prevention of war is not an easy task. But I know we can make it because we are the 99%!

Finally I'd like to thank the members of the steering committee of the International Peace Bureau for their wonderful decision!

Dear Hanaa Edwar, dear Peter Becker, I warmly congratulate both of you from the bottom of my heart!

Otto Jaeckel is the Chairperson of the Board of Directors of the International Association of Lawyers Against Nuclear Arms Germany and Treasurer of IALANA International

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