

**13 January 2011, Addis Ababa**

**Special ceremony organised by the foundation Menschen für Menschen**

**Dirk Niebel, Member of the German Parliament, Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development**

Check against delivery!

I am delighted to be here with you this evening. We have a double reason to celebrate: we are embarking together on a new development project in the Borena region, and the foundation Menschen für Menschen is celebrating the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its existence.

What we in Germany call a “round birthday” is a wonderful thing. It is a time to look back at what has been achieved and to make plans for the future. It is a situation in which I am very well able to put myself right now.

Although there is a while to go until I personally reach my “half century”, the German development ministry of which I am the head is celebrating its 50th birthday this year. The Ministry was founded in 1961 by the first Free Democrat development minister, who later became the Federal President, Walter Scheel. A picture of Haile Selassie with a dedication still hangs in Walter Scheel’s office today. Ethiopia was one of Germany’s earliest partner countries.

30 years of Menschen für Menschen, 50 years of the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development: together that adds up to 80 years of development cooperation experience. 80 years during which we have been continuously developing and learning how successful development cooperation works. We now bring this combined experience to our project in Borena. That is something which makes me confident that the project will be a success.

30 years ago Karl Böhm made a wager on German television that “*fewer than one in three viewers would donate one German mark or one Swiss franc or seven Austrian shillings for people in need in the Sahel zone.*” Just a few months later he flew to Ethiopia with 2 million marks in donations and thus began his involvement in development policy work. The foundation “Menschen für Menschen” was born. What began as a call for donations on the television has become an effective development organisation of international repute.

The idea behind the foundation is revealed in its name: “Menschen für Menschen” means “people for people”. Giving people hope for the future, that is what Karl and Almaz Böhm and the people working with them strive to do. Instead of just accepting poverty, hunger and suffering, they are taking action and motivating others to make a commitment to take action. They are an example to us all.

Our motivation for getting involved in Africa is not purely a humanitarian motivation. Our involvement is also partly because close cooperation with Africa is in our own interest. In the closely linked world of the 21st century, our future in Germany is more than ever closely interwoven with the future of our neighbouring continent.

What is important for us when it comes to cooperation is that our partner countries take responsibility for their own development. People must have the opportunity to develop freely and to act on their own responsibility. For that we need all forces – state, civil society and the private sector – working together. That is because development needs diversity.

State structures are necessary in order to create a stable environment. However, we also need a strong, dynamic private sector. Businesses create jobs and income, they pay taxes, and they provide training opportunities. For that we need to strengthen the private sector and we need companies that are prepared to invest in Africa – foreign companies and local companies. In addition to that, churches, political foundations and CSOs have a contribution to make towards development. Numerous ordinary people, business people, patrons and philanthropists can also do their part.

Much is possible with civil society – without it almost nothing is possible. I have set myself the goal of strengthening civil society – in Germany and in our partner countries – with the aim of giving people more freedom and responsibility. The projects organised by the foundation Menschen für Menschen are an impressive example of civil society at work.

Yesterday I visited the development project in Abdi Buch and was able to see for myself how successful it is. I am pleased that with the support of German development cooperation another of these projects will soon start in the Borena region.

The holistic approach of “Menschen für Menschen” has convinced me. The various activities in the fields of agro-ecology, health, water supply and education complement each other and are closely interwoven. This holistic approach is exactly what is needed for sustainable development.

Education in particular is the key to development. That is why education is a focus of German development cooperation under my leadership. What is more, we want to build up our cooperation with the private sector. On the one hand we want to make use of the strength of the German economy for development. On the other hand we want to boost the economy in our partner countries.

Our biggest and most important programme in Ethiopia is the Engineering Capacity Building Programme (ecbp). The aim of the programme is to foster the development of the private sector. In order for the private sector to be able to develop, the overall climate for business needs to be improved even further so that the private sector can develop freely. In addition to that, qualified workers must be available. That is why we are also supporting reforms of higher education and technical and vocational education and training under the ecbp.

Agriculture is the most important sector of Ethiopia's economy. Part of the Ethiopian population is still dependent on food aid. Food crises occur again and again. In order for that to change, we are supporting the Ethiopian Sustainable Land Management programme. Degraded land is being rehabilitated and innovative methods of sustainable land management are being introduced. The aim of the programme is to increase agricultural productivity and farmers' incomes, so as to help them move beyond subsistence farming.

In essence, development policy is about creating conditions that allow people to draw on their own resources to lift themselves out of poverty. The successful African businessman Mo Ibrahim once said: *“Aid is like aspirin, it relieves acute pain and that is sometimes necessary – but it doesn’t cure the problem.”* Aid alone is not enough. The will and the strength to achieve development must come from within the societies of our partner countries.

I firmly believe that Ethiopia has that will and that strength. This country has enormous potential. That is shown also by the impressive economic growth figures of 11 per cent on average over the last five years – despite the financial crisis.

It is not only Ethiopia that has enormous potential. The whole of Africa has enormous potential. Africa is like no other continent in the world in its ability to stand strong in the face of adversity and keep looking forward. During my numerous visits to Africa I have frequently met people who have impressed me by the courage and energy with which they manage to improve their situations themselves, despite the greatest difficulties.

Africa is a continent that wants to realise its own potential itself. We want to support those efforts. Africa is the focus of German development cooperation. Germany is currently engaged in development cooperation with 25 partner countries in Africa. Some 50 per cent of our global bilateral development funding goes to sub-Saharan Africa.

Africa is facing huge challenges for the future. The only way to meet those challenges is with joint efforts. Which brings me to the motto of Karl Böhm’s foundation: *“Menschen für Menschen”* – “people for people”.

The former German Federal President Horst Köhler once said: *“The world’s humanity will be measured by the fate of Africa. Karl and Almaz Böhm give us hope and encouragement.”* I would like to endorse those sentiments. I wish the foundation *“Menschen für Menschen”* every success for its continuing work.