

PRESS RELEASE

Prize of Peace of Westphalia awarded in Münster

"Peace is work, endlessly hard work"

Münster/Westphalia, October 25, 2014 - The Prize of Peace of Westphalia was awarded today in Münster City Hall to the crews of the International Space Station (ISS) and to the youth work of the German War Graves Commission. Dr. Thomas Reiter (Germany), Michael Lopez-Alegria (USA) and Pavel Vinogradov (Russia) accepted the Peace Prize on behalf of the ISS crews from laudator Tom Buhrow. In his laudatory speech, the former Washington correspondent and current WDR director paid tribute to the achievements of the ISS. For him, the peaceful cooperation between the nations on the ISS is an important sign, especially in the current global political situation: "The astronauts up there do not limit themselves to their scientific mission, they also see their work as a political mission." He is personally convinced that it takes much more than a foundation of mutual dependence to achieve technological and scientific excellence.

Federal Foreign Minister Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, who presented the Peace Prize to three young people from the German War Graves Commission, recalled the current conflicts in Europe and underlined the importance of peace work "in a truly turbulent time, in which it almost seems as if the world has come apart at the seams.

Addressing the award winners, he said: "We need your work for peace more than ever!" The young people would build bridges - not only between peoples, but also between the generations whose memory they would keep alive: "Peace is work, infinitely hard work," said Steinmeier, referring to the fanatical young people currently fighting for the IS militias in Syria and Iraq. The young award winners, on the other hand, gave a voice to the reminder of peace that the military cemeteries throughout Europe represented. According to Steinmeier, they are "the counter-voice to the preachers of hate". David Hellwig, Chairman of the Federal Youth Work Group, Dorothee Kraske, spokesperson for the NRW Youth Work Group, and her deputy Julia Nitsche accepted the prize on behalf of the young adults: "For us, the prize is both an award and an incentive for the work we still want to do," explained David Hellwig.

Dr. Thomas Reiter was the first European on board the ISS: in the summer of 2006, he lived and worked on the International Space Station for six months together with Michael Lopez-Alegria and Pavel Vinogradov. "We have such great challenges ahead of us that no one can solve alone - it would be nice if we could concentrate on that," emphasized Reiter after receiving the Peace Prize.

Dr. Reinhard Zinkann, Chairman of the Economic Society for Westphalia and Lippe, pointed out that not only the current state of war, but also the growing doubts among people in many EU countries about the beneficial effects of European unification should encourage everyone to realize that lasting peace can only be achieved through a united Europe. is not a sure-fire success. "We are all called upon, each in our own place, to make our contribution to peace and international understanding," said Zinkann, praising the outstanding work of the two award winners in this context.

Stanislaw Tillich, Prime Minister of the Free State of Saxony, emphasized that 25 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, both award winners had managed to overcome borders and adopt new perspectives. "Those who look at the earth from space see no borders," Tillich stated. This applies not only to the crews of the ISS, but also in particular to the youth work of the War Graves Commission: "With their work, they overcome trenches that they themselves have not torn open," said Tillich.

The Lord Mayor of the City of Münster, Markus Lewe, praised the jury's "wise decision". He pointed out that the conflicts in eastern Ukraine and the advance of IS fighters showed that "peace is not a law of nature", but must be established again and again. "This year's prizewinners have - each in their own special way - rendered outstanding services to peace and remembrance," said Lewe.

One of the highlights of the event was the recording of an interview by presenter Sabine Scholt with the German astronaut Dr. Alexander Gerst, who is currently on board the ISS. The Peace Prize is a great honor, Gerst emphasized. "It is such a successful collaboration and the space station works so well - it is a great example of what international cooperation can achieve," he emphasized. The cooperation between his two colleagues and himself is extremely cordial: "The best moments on the ISS are those of friendship." The crew is following the current conflicts with great concern. "We can actually see rockets flying and cities on fire," explained Gerst. All of this affects him and his colleagues deeply.

The Peace Prize has been awarded every two years since 1998 and is endowed with 100,000 euros, which is divided equally between the prizewinners. Past winners of the prize include Helmut Schmidt, Kofi Annan, Daniel Barenboim, Helmut Kohl and Vaclav Havel. As in previous years, WDR broadcast the award ceremony live on television.

Note for editors: Printable images of today's press release can be found at www.friedenspreis-presse.de.