

# Introduction

*Claus Kreyß*

Late in 2020, Stephan Hobe, my esteemed colleague from the Faculty, called me. He had just completed reading Benjamin B. Ferencz' recently published "Parting Words. 9 Lessons for a Remarkable Life" and he was thrilled. What is more, he had a splendid idea to share: Cologne Law School, he thought, should honour Ben's unique achievements by awarding him an honorary doctorate. Would it not be fitting, he asked me, that a German Law Faculty would do so and, more in particular, the Law School of the University of Cologne, the history of which is, through its former members Hans Kelsen, Hermann Jahrreiß and Carl Schmitt connected, though in most strikingly different forms, with the founding Nuremberg precedent of international criminal justice?

I could not agree more with Stephan and the same was true for our esteemed colleague Angelika Nußberger with whom we shared the plan just a little later. Not at all to our surprise, but much to our joy, the Law Faculty of the University of Cologne reacted enthusiastically and unanimously decided in accordance with our suggestion. Thankfully, also our Rektor, Axel Freimuth, immediately signaled us his entire support.

When I turned to Ben to ask him whether he would accept our award, I was hopeful and yet a little nervous. For, I was perfectly aware of the fact that it was rather about Ben giving us the privilege to become part of our college than us offering an honour to him. Not to mention Ben's already shining list of awards, distinctions and honours. But characteristically, Ben responded in the greatest kindness and modesty – and, so fortunately for us in Cologne, he responded positively.

We were under no illusion that a ceremony in Ben's presence was no option. While Ben's good health at the age of 100 (!) was stunning, long-distance travelling had obviously become cumbersome for him. And needless to add: we were still in the midst of a global pandemic. But we thought it imperative not to let pass this special occasion to pay tribute to Ben. Beyond that tribute, we considered it befitting and in Ben's spirit to also reflect on the dark times of our faculty and university history. These dark times include, as it should be duly emphasized in connection with Ben's life and work, the deeply sad fact of Hans Kelsen's dismissal

from the university right after the Nazis had come to power. This was the background of our decision to embark on the adventure of a digital ceremony in honour of Ben, in which the memory of Hans Kelsen should play an important part.

We cannot thank enough Donald Ferencz, Ben's son, for all his help to make the ceremony of 15 February 2021 happen and for representing his father at the occasion. Very shortly before the ceremony was scheduled to take place, Don called me to let me know that his father had decided that, whatever the difficulties, he wished to convey a message to us and, most importantly, to our students. This was certainly not an opportunity to be missed and so I almost immediately met with Ben for a digital conversation. The display of parts of Ben's observations during this conversation no doubt constituted the absolute highlight of the ceremony.

We could experience another memorable moment after the ceremony: Many of our students had attended the ceremony and listened to Ben's words directed to them. These words would resonate, as it has so often been the case when Ben met with the youth. Cologne's law students' association chose to thank Ben and sent him a video message after the event. This message is so heartwarming and it tells us so much about Ben's inspirational force that we have included it in this documentation.

In order to allow readers with (awakened) interest, but without too much knowledge, especially in international law, to learn a little more about Ben's life and work than was said in the speeches made at the ceremony we have, with the kind permission of Cambridge University Press, added a reprint of a fairly recent chapter by Ben. In this essay, Ben takes his readers on a fascinating journey through the main passages of his momentous life and, in doing so, he offers them, in the words of Stephan Hobe's *Laudatio* "the sum of his wisdom".

With this documentation, we seek to treasure a moment which will remain memorable both for the Law Faculty and the University of Cologne. Through this volume, we also wish to share this moment with all those interested in Ben who could not attend the ceremony. May the pages that follow give to our readers a vivid idea of Benjamin B. Ferencz' truly exceptional life and work.

The numerous guests of honour, who followed our invitation and attended the ceremony, are mentioned in my subsequent opening words to the ceremony. Let me therefore take this introduction only to extend my very warm thanks to Stephan Hobe and Angelika Nußberger for their wonderful co-operation in the lead-up to the ceremony, to Irmgard Blumenkemper and Tim Heckmann for their masterful technical support of the ceremony, to my team member Tabasom Djourabi-Asadabadi for

her most circumspective assistance in preparing the ceremony and, last but not least to Tabasom Djourabi-Asadabadi and to another member of my team, Anthea Forsen, for their dedicated and thoughtful collaboration in co-editing this volume.

Claus Kreß, in November 2021

