

Speeches at the Occasion of the Ceremony Honouring Benjamin B. Ferencz

Opening Remarks

Claus Kreß

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Magnifizenz,
dear Elisabeth, dear Scott,
dear Mr Lehrer, dear Professor Lehner,
dear Dr Frank,
dear Dr Wasum-Rainer, dear Dr Koch, dear Dr Bertele,
dear Mr Rackwitz and dear Dr Dittrich,
Spectabilis,
dear Faculty,
and above all, dear Don,

This is a special moment for Cologne University as it is for its Faculty of Law. Today, we have come together in honour of Benjamin Ferencz, in order to celebrate his Cologne honorary doctorate. It would have been splendid if we could have come together in person at this happy occasion, with Ben at the centre to inspire our students. But Ben's advanced age of 100 years – I repeat: 100 years – does not make it possible for him to be with us today. And the pandemic requires us to gather in digital form.

Yet, we shall hear from Ben in the course of this ceremony through a recorded conversation which I have had with him a few days ago. We are also very grateful to you, dear Don, for giving us the pleasure and honour of your distinguished company today and for doing that also on behalf of your father. Donald Ferencz is himself a lawyer. He has been accompanying the work of his father for decades and he has made his own important contributions to the cause of international justice. For example, he is the convenor of the Global Institute for the Prevention of Aggression. Thank you so much for being here today, Don.

A word of gratitude to our other guests of honour: May I begin with Elisabeth Kaul. The last time, you were here in the university, Elisabeth, we celebrated the Cologne honorary doctorate of your husband Judge Hans-Peter Kaul, a dear friend of Ben. Sadly, Judge Kaul has departed much too early. We think of him, too, today and feel honoured by your presence, Elisabeth.

It is wonderful to have you with us today, Scott. Professor Scott Shapiro is a distinguished colleague from Yale Law School. A few years ago, he delivered the memorable inaugural Hans Kelsen Memorial Lecture on International Peace and Security Law here in Cologne. I shall return to this lecture at a later point of this ceremony.

It is a precious and much appreciated gesture that you, Mr Lehrer, and you Mr Lehner, have accepted our invitation to take part in this ceremony. Abraham Lehrer is Vice-President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany and President of the Jewish Community of Cologne. Professor Lehner is member of the Board of the Jewish Community in Munich and Bavaria. Both Mr Lehrer and Mr Lehner are children of survivors of the Holocaust. Thank you both so much for giving us the privilege of your company today.

It is also a wonderful signal that Germany's Federal Prosecutor General has immediately accepted our invitation to pay tribute to Benjamin Ferencz through his presence. Thank you, Dr Frank, for being with us today.

Dr Christoph Eick, the Legal Adviser of the German Government, had also immediately accepted our invitation to join us. Unfortunately, he has been called for consultations with the incoming US Legal Adviser just for this very hour so that he had to send his regrets. We are all the more grateful that Dr Joachim Bertele, the Deputy Legal Adviser, had also answered favourably to our invitation. Germany's diplomacy has been maintaining a relationship of friendship with Benjamin Ferencz since decades. These bonds were cherished and nurtured also when Susanne Wasum-Rainer and Michael Koch were the Government's Legal Advisers. Today, Dr Wasum-Rainer is Germany's Ambassador in Israel, and Dr Koch is Germany's Ambassador to the Holy See. Thank you, Ambassadors, for being with us this afternoon.

I also salute you, Mr Rackwitz and Dr Dittrich. Klaus Rackwitz and Vianne Dittrich are director and deputy director of the International Nuremberg Principles Academy. The Academy's mission includes preserving the legacy of the Principles resulting from the Nuremberg trials. Needless to say that Ben has been central to the Academy's work and that he has repeatedly delivered charismatic addresses to Academy audiences.

It is good to know that my dear colleagues from the faculty, Angelika Nußberger and Stephan Hobe, are also with us here today. Stephan, it was your splendid idea that has brought us together today – and Angelika you have enthusiastically supported the initiative from the outset.

Let me now pass the floor to the Rektor of the University of Cologne, Professor Axel Freimuth, for his address. Magnifizenz, you have the floor.