

Laudatio

President Carter and the Role of the Citizen in Today's Civil Society

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| Redner: | Prof. (HSG) Dr. Sascha Spoun, Präsident |
| Ort und Anlass: | Eröffnung des Leuphana Colleges, Lüneburg |
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| Hinweis: | Es gilt das gesprochene Wort! |

President and First Lady, Consul General Mrs Johnson, Deputy Minister Lange, Mrs. Sehgal, Mr. Sehgal, Mr. Bartke, Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Thank you for joining us for the inauguration of Leuphana College today. It is my great honor and sincere personal pleasure to welcome you, President Carter and First Lady, members of the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Partnership Foundation, to Lüneburg. Welcome.

Today marks the beginning of a new chapter: With the inauguration of Leuphana College, we aim to dedicate a new standard of education to a new generation of students. The College aspires to instill in its members firm ethical standards and a sense of moral and political responsibility. We seek to educate young people with creative minds, passionate thoughts, and practical ideas. In short: We are aiming at furthering students' efforts to grow into responsible citizens and active members of today's and tomorrow's civil society.

It is a great honor that one of the most accomplished moral and political leaders and an outstanding global citizen is here today to address the first generation of students in Lüneburg's new Leuphana College and share his experience and vision with us.



President Jimmy Carter has dedicated himself to improving the living conditions of people. The range of his exceptional achievements for human rights, democracy, and peace throughout the world is far too long for even a cursory listing here. It ranges from diplomatic negotiations of the kind that lead to the Camp David accords to health campaigns, such as the effort to eradicate Guinea worm disease. It further includes using his good offices and his reputation as an honest broker in missions to strengthen and support stabilizing forces in countries as diverse as Haiti, Bosnia, Jamaica, North Korea, and Panama.

Throughout his political career, President Carter has initiated programs, mediated negotiations, promulgated ideas, and sponsored action plans that have all had one overriding goal: To help better the conditions of individuals and families on all six continents. Rooted firmly in principle and faith, his understanding of politics was never about power – it was always about dialogue, reconciliation, and partnership.

Emblematic of his approach to world affairs large and small is a quote from the time when he was a candidate for the presidency of the United States. Jimmy Carter vowed to create “a government as good and as honest and as decent and as competent and as compassionate as are the American people.” The success of his many undertakings before, during, and after his presidency is rooted, I believe, in this very understanding of the role of the citizen. It speaks of a deeply humanistic understanding of politics to make the individual the measure of what a government can be and should be. This firm belief in the willingness and duty of citizens to help form the course of political events has informed and influenced his missions throughout.

To him, it was an affair of the heart to draw on the wisdom and expertise of America’s citizens when he was leading them. At a time when trust in government was low and the belief in the administration’s ability was shaken, his office trusted and believed in the people, listened to them for ideas, for criticism and advice. He consulted with them in times of crises and talked to them when important decisions needed to be made.

Carter's political actions have been marked by the fundamental democratic conviction that no president can lead “without the support and consent of the people” within the United States and beyond. No inter-governmental peace treaty can be called successful if citizens of these countries are denied basic human rights. No conflict between political leaders can endure if their citizens' demand for peace can be made to hear. Democratic politics need to be informed by the goals of civil society – without them there can be no lasting stability.



The presidency of the United States is often considered an office whose influence is difficult to match. Jimmy Carter proved that it can also be a starting point when he pursued his political goals with vigor and verve in the years and decades after leaving the White House. Embarking on this phase of his life, Jimmy Carter said he would “take up once more the only title in our democracy superior to that of President: the title of citizen.” Joining forces with his wife, President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalynn Carter have brought an outstanding commitment, dignity, and reputation to the title and the office of the citizen. Long since, they both have become citizens of the world and a beacon of humanitarian values in the face of conflict, oppression, and greed.

Sharing and selfless giving are essential elements of citizenship, globally and locally. The work of the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter Partnership Foundation seeks thus to initiate active community engagement by those privileged to have access to higher education. It is this very idea of active academic citizenship that we aim to inspire in students at the Leuphana College. We are very much looking forward to hearing your thoughts, Mr. President, on the contribution of students, scholars, and university to civil society.