

Laudatory speech by Dr. Eva Nowotny for
Dr. Gerald Rockenschaub

(the spoken word prevails)

I feel honored and privileged that I have been asked to give the laudation for our honoree Gerald Rockenschaub, and I will gladly do so. But before doing so, I would like to share with you a few observations of a more general nature.

As Vice President of the Bruno Kreisky Forum I am very pleased that for the 20th time we award today the Bruno Kreisky Price for achievements in the field of human rights. And I am very pleased not only because in doing so we honor life and work of this great politician for whom upholding and defending human rights was an integral part of his politics. His constant involvement in the Helsinki Process speaks for itself. But I am also that in this day and age it is extremely important, yes essential, to constantly uphold the relevance of human rights, to pull the work for human rights into the limelight, to give it visibility and to underline our commitment to it. The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 which then became the basis for the whole comprehensive edifice of international human rights laws is one of the great success stories of the United Nations. And rightly so, this is also recognized and mantra like repeated in many political

statements. At the same time we have to be aware – and this is a sobering realization – that in the political climate of today it would be impossible to repeat this exercise. Since its inception the Declaration of Human rights and the human rights discourse which developed on this basis was often target of criticism, criticism by voices who saw the human rights discourse only against the backdrop of a colonial past and a post-colonial present. Now, however, the attack is more fundamental. On the forefront of the critique on human rights, which more and more turns into a political confrontation with the West, we see China. President XI said quite openly that the unity and stability of China are more important than human rights. Many countries especially of the so-called global south are rallying behind it.

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration enshrines the right to a healthy life and to medical care, and this brings me now closer to our subject matter, because it is the World Health Organization which became the center of Dr. Rockenschaub's professional life. When one thinks of the United Nations, it is primarily the Security Council and perhaps also the General Assembly which come to mind. But for a large part of the people of this world there is a different picture – it is the picture of the United Nations truck which brings food or water, and the doctor of the World Health Organization who brings medicine and vaccination. Of this organization which by some politicians in

this country is accused of preparing a global takeover and a world government! (And this with altogether 9000 staff members)

Gerald studied medicine at the University of Graz. He joined WHO in 2004 and very quickly became Director for Health Emergencies in the European region, thus being responsible for humanitarian aid and assistance in emergency situation. But Dr. Rockenschaub was never one for the quiet life in the European hotbeds of seething rest. In 2014 he became Head of the Office of WHO in the occupied Palestinian territories, id est the Westbank and Gaza, a position which he held till 2021.

Although the larger Middle East was and remains central to Gerald Rockenschaub's professional life, it deserves mention that he was also involved in other trouble spots of this world, such as Ethiopia or Albania.

Providing and organizing basic health care, standards of hygiene, avoiding the outbreak of epidemics and protecting the most vulnerable groups of a civilian population in an area characterized by military intervention, turmoil and upheaval is a task of monumental dimension. The successful conduct of the Polio vaccination of thousands of children in Gaza in a climate of war and destruction serves as a good example. And we should bear in mind that it is not only the present catastrophic situation, but that this was the political reality in Westbank and Gaza for decades. Doing exemplary work there, Gerald

Rockenschaub formed personal relationships which persist till today and gained insights into the daily reality as well as the background and the roots of this terrible conflict.

The extent to which his profound knowledge and his personal commitment is appreciated led to his nomination as WHO expert and consultant in the task force of Sigrid Kaag, who on the basis of Security Council resolution 2720 was mandated humanitarian relief and destruction coordinator, and has just been prolonged for another six months.

It is my pleasure and privilege to hand over to Gerald Rockenschaub the Bruno Kreisky Price for achievements in the field of human rights, and I congratulate you most warmly!

Vienna, October 4, 2024