

Auckland, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2010

**DAAD Alumni-Meeting in Auckland "Bridging The Distance"  
New Zealand and Germany in Dialogue**

Hon Minister, Mr Vice-Chancellor, Herr Dr Bode, dear Peter Hamilton, distinguished guests, Ladies & Gentlemen,

with everyone waiting to enjoy Liszt and after inspiring remarks of the previous speakers this is certainly no easy task. But I will try and do my best.

Let me first of all welcome Dr Bode and his delegation to NZL. I understand that this is not your first visit to this great country and I do hope you will enjoy your stay here once again. I dare say that without the support of DAAD keeping up the very high standards of German language studies in NZ would not be possible.

I thank the Vice-Chancellor, Auckland University and of course our lector Dr Yannick Müllender for their excellent preparation of this event.

Distinguished guests: Allow me to quote Nikita Khrushchev who once said "Politicians are the same all over. They promise to build a bridge even where there is no river." that. "Bridging The Distance" between New Zealand and Germany is the comprehensive theme of our reunion. Seeing all of you – being DAAD-Alumni – at the Fale Pasifika today, one has to draw the conclusion, that the distance between our two countries has already been bridged.

"Far away so close" as was the title of Wim Wenders' masterpiece about 17 years ago might as well be a suitable way to describe our cooperation and relationship.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

It may have taken James Cook three years to sail from Europe to New Zealand and back. Today, the airbridge between New Zealand and Germany extends over 23.000 km. It brought more than 60.000 German tourists and close to 800 German students to New Zealand in 2009 alone. For many Germans travelling to NZ is the dream of a lifetime!

More than 200 German scientists work at New Zealand Universities and Crown Research Institutes. Although it is (almost) the farthest journey possible on earth, today it can be done in under 30 hours.

In the last decades, the internet has revolutionized the working methods of most scientists around the world. Thick fibre optic cables have increased the speed of communication in the past years making the "undersea-cable-bridge" the method of choice for most scientists working on bilateral programs.

Technical advances open up great new fields of knowledge. Fields, whose impact on future human life we can hardly imagine today. Technical advances help to bridge great distances, but remain lifeless without the people behind it. We want scientists to open up the future for us, overcome our illnesses, and to find solutions to climate change. But scientists need world-class research communities and they need funding.

This is a truth that is sometimes difficult to convey to the public: Without funding there is no research. And without talented students looking beyond their own horizons, no new continent (of knowledge) will be discovered. So Khrushchev was wrong at least in this regard. We need a financial bridge to span the distances. This is where the German Academic Exchange Service and other institutions step in. Germany and New Zealand share the same fate: Neither possesses a wealth of natural resources apart from the knowledge of our people. That is why after 30 years of cooperation the "Science and Technology Cooperation Agreement" between New Zealand and Germany was reviewed in 2007, identifying several priority science areas including Food, Agriculture and Biotechnology, Climate Change and Marine Sciences and Antarctic Research. Many exciting bilateral partnerships cover those topics: The GFZ Potsdam works with GNS a.o. on energy, geological hazards and climate change. The "ring laser" co-operation between the Universities of Munich and Canterbury promises excellent outcomes. And sometimes scientists even have to go back to the way James Cook bridged the distance to reach a deeper understanding: Our research vessels FS "Sonne" and "Polarstern" visited Auckland and Wellington a few months ago to conduct marine research. And only last year, scientists of Waikato and their partners at Bremen

received funding of 2,4 million Euro from the German Research Council to establish an International Graduate School in the area of marine sciences.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Despite Email and Skype facilitating communication, scientists also need personal contact to their international counterparts. Formal arrangements exist between New Zealand institutions, the German Research Foundation and the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. With 115 fellows, New Zealand boasts the highest number of Humboldt Fellows worldwide in relation to its population. In return, in 2005 New Zealand introduced the „Julius von Haast Fellowships“, giving renowned German scientists an opportunity to work in New Zealand.

And – last but not least – the DAAD finances numerous scholarships for New Zealand students and professors per year in various long term and short term programmes.

I do realize that many New Zealanders travelling through Europe during their OE at least make it to the Munich Oktoberfest – but to be frank with you - we would love to see a few more kiwis at German Universities. Maybe this meeting will give us the opportunity to ask some of you who have studied in Germany about their experiences and impressions.

In order to conclude just one more quotation this time of Georg Foster who came as an 18 year young man in 1772 aboard Captain Cook's "Resolution" to New Zealand. Despite his youth, he was a great observer and draughtsman, he was also a writer and he developed a vision of New Zealand which I would like to share with you. In 1787 he wrote in his essay on "Cook, the Discoverer" about New Zealand: (I quote) "A summer like in England whose heat never oppresses, and a winter like in Spain's temperate provinces which actually is not a winter at all make the climate there most agreeable. No location could be more advantageous for the developing trade connecting different parts of the world than that which is in the midst between Africa, India and the Americas. Imagine a state in New Zealand with England's glorious constitution, and it will be the queen of the Southern hemisphere."

On this very positive note:

Once again a very special thank you to all organizers of this Alumni-Meeting. And I wish all of us two thought-provoking and intellectually very stimulating days.