

Current Concerns

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How to Spread the Idea of Humanity and Peace around the World

Welcoming speech by Landammann¹ Jakob Brunnschweiler on the occasion of the Dunant-year Opening Celebration on Saturday, 8 May 2010

Dear Dr. Kellenberger

Dear Councillors of State from Appenzell-Ausserrhoden and Innerrhoden

Dear Mr. Communal President

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear Guests

I likewise bid you a warm welcome to the Dunant-Year 2010 opening celebration here in Heiden. As its president, I am delighted to be able to convey to you the greetings of the Appenzell-Ausserrhoden cantonal government. The Governing Council very willingly supports the activities in compliment to Henry Dunant in the context of its government program. They thus spread the ideas of humanity and peace in the canton, in Switzerland – and in the world.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, I think you agree with me in this: humanity and peace have their sources in the communities, are rooted in microcosms, in the individual, in the families, and in the circle of friends. As a government we are convinced that a suitable communication of visionary thoughts and humanitarian deeds can affect the development of a society in a positive way; especially so in the case of school children, students, and young people in general. Dunant as a role model: that is the message in the anniversary year.

Henry Dunant had an indomitable, a visionary, spirit and a soft heart – and the courage to act truthfully and fairly. Dunant's ideals, like humanity, solidarity, and civil courage, were outstanding. Dunant was an outstanding personality. Unfortunately, these ideals – humaneness, community spirit, and gallantry – are increasingly disappearing in our modern-day society.

I am particularly thinking of the supposed leaders in our globalised society. Their often displayed lack of consideration for others, their solo runs and their disregard of societies and of the national economies bestows quite a large image problem on them, which is enhanced by reports about wealth grabs, bonuses, and the exploiting of privileges. But these debates will accompany us into the future. We will have to live with them – however, we will have to watch out that our whole social life will not to be invaded increasingly on all levels by patterns of profitability and efficiency.

For notions like "balance sheet", "capital", "rate of return" and "resource" do not belong to all spheres of life. Otherwise a reckoning will take place even in families, in relationships and with regard to our children: What will this cost me, what do I get in return?

I believe that we will reach an impasse if we shape all spheres of our lives merely according to economic laws. This way, we will miss basic things in our lives. Let's take school for an example: School is not an enterprise. And this applies to the university as well! Education is more than a mere exercise in functioning and transfer of knowledge. Education should help young persons to be successful in their jobs, but beyond that it should help them to develop and unfold their personality and to assume personal responsibility.

Or take the example of a hospital: A hospital is not a health machine. All people who are ill or who have had an accident must be given assistance, be they old or young. Healing and nursing the sick means more than can be expressed in rigid nursing standards. Time and humaneness are required.

Nor are families enterprises. Family means having a home. Family means a feeling of being at home, secure and snug. In a family, you reserve time for each other; families live by the exchange of ideas and by festivities, by conversations and mutual understanding – and forgiveness.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen: A society thrives on its flexibility and its ventures, on curiosity and new departures! But it also thrives on loyalty, reliability and mutual commitment, on solidarity, on shared values and devotion. These values release the stream of warmth that we all live on.

That is why I think that the orientation towards humanitarian values must once again be in the focus of our thoughts and actions.

For humanity is at risk of being marginalised or becoming nothing but empty phrases of avowal. Yet in a society where competition is progressively keener – particularly in professional life and in education – recalling humanity becomes necessary.

In the name of "Land und Lüt" (the country and its people) I cordially thank those who have helped with this opening celebration and with the organisation of the Dunant-Year; I especially thank Communal President Norbert Näf. And now I am very much looking forward to the ceremonial address of ICRC president Dr Jakob Kellenberger. I hope you will all enjoy the start up event and I wish you all well! Cordial thanks. •

¹ Landammann is a German title meaning "Amtmann of the land", used by the chief magistrate in certain Cantons of Switzerland and at times featured in the Head of state's style at the confederal level.

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