

Max Schmidheiny Foundation

at the University of St. Gallen

Speech by Prof. Dr. Peter Gomez, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Max Schmidheiny Foundation, on the occasion of the formal presentation of the Max Schmidheiny Foundation Freedom Prize to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Kofi Annan, at the University of St. Gallen

November 18, 2006

Secretary-General,
Federal Councillor Merz, Your Excellencies,
Dr. Schmidheiny,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Students of the University of St. Gallen

On behalf of the Max Schmidheiny Foundation, it is a great honour for me to extend a warm welcome to the Secretary-General of the United Nations in St Gallen.

I announced the award of our foundation's Freedom Prize to Kofi Annan at the St. Gallen Symposium in 2003. Unfortunately, Secretary-General, you then were not able to travel to St. Gallen. For our foundation, the fact that you can today honour our alma mater with a visit and accept the Freedom Prize in person, means all the more.

Before I go any further, let me first of all thank the Schmidheiny family: Dr. Thomas Schmidheiny and Dr. Stephan Schmidheiny have been generously supporting our foundation for the past decades and thereby set a perfect example of taking on responsibility for the pursuit of freedom world-wide. And then, I would like to thank the students who have made a ceremony in this setting possible: namely, the ISC, the International Students' Committee. As a professor at this university, I am very proud that we have students who are willing and able to accept the challenge of realising occasions like this one; for an event of this calibre to be organised in such a way is probably unique.

In 1978, on his 70th birthday, Max Schmidheiny established the foundation that bears his name in order to support endeavours to safeguard and strengthen economical, political and social freedom throughout the world. Since then, the Max Schmidheiny Foundation has honoured individuals and institutions from different walks of life with its Freedom Prize – they include, amongst many others, Nicolas G. Hayek (it is a special pleasure to know that you are with us today), N.R. Narayana Murthy, Hernando de Soto, and The Economist. There are qualities that link all those who have won the Freedom Prize, which is today being presented for the 25th time:

- They have embraced the key issues of their time;
- They have initiated debates on these issues, and entered into a dialogue with the most diverse stakeholders, a dialogue that extends across geographical and cultural boundaries and fields of influence;
- In their daily lives, by taking personal responsibility for ideas and projects, they have demonstrated their resolve when tackling these challenges;
- They have thus made an outstanding and exemplary contribution to the preservation and further development of a free order.

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Ladies and gentlemen, the Max Schmidheiny Foundation is convinced that the sustainability of our liberal economic and social order will largely depend on a combined approach by business, politics and society to the major challenges now facing the world. Freedom as a guiding concept means that entrepreneurial, political and social freedom is mutually dependent. Allow me to take a brief look at the entrepreneurial aspect:

More than ever, those who accept entrepreneurial responsibility must take an active role in examining the economic, political, technological and social environments of their activities. They must seize the opportunities and recognise the relevant issues in good time, before they develop into incalculable risks. It is these thoughts that are behind the Max Schmidheiny Foundation's decision to place a special focus on "Entrepreneurship and Risk" in various projects both now and in the coming years. By analysing the entrepreneurial environment, it seeks to make a contribution, so that the opportunities currently available worldwide can be exploited in peace and freedom.

Ladies and gentlemen, 15 years after the end of the Cold War and the apparently unstoppable march of freedom, it is currently quite obvious that, each and every day, the struggle for freedom must begin afresh. The pleasure is thus all the greater, for me personally and also for the Max Schmidheiny Foundation, to award the Freedom Prize to one of the leading figures of our times, who has contributed so much to maintaining the energy for this daily undertaking. Our foundation would like to pay tribute to Kofi Annan as an example for those who, untiringly and with determination and perseverance, stand up for their ideals and beliefs in a time that is marked by great uncertainty, and also as an individual who has given a human face to the idea of a world community, a concept which often seems illusionary.

Before I read the eulogy, it is a great pleasure for me to invite the Secretary-General to join me on the podium.

I should now like to read you the laudatio honouring the prize-winner:

„The Max Schmidheiny Foundation at the University of St. Gallen awards its 2003 Freedom Prize to Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations,

- the diplomat whose shining example has caused the work of the United Nations to be associated with steadfastness, trustworthiness and propriety, who with unique flair has pushed through reforms to dismantle bureaucracy and simplify internal structures, bolster the openness of the United Nations towards non-government organisations and, in the final analysis, increase the efficiency of peacekeeping missions, and who has also inspired his countless diplomatic, peacekeeping and welfare staff with renewed confidence in their common cause;
- the world citizen of exceptional quality who – patiently yet tenaciously – calls for responsible action from the power-wielding states and corporations of this earth, reminds them of their commitment not only to their own citizens but also to the health of the global soul and, as a standard-bearer of human rights dedicated to the idea that "humanity is indivisible", accepts the challenges of the U.N. as a world organisation in order to place the protection of individual human dignity at centre stage regardless of race, religion or gender;
- the beacon of hope to a battered world who, in the light of contagious diseases, persistent famine, unprecedented ethnic hotspots and the clash of entire civilisations, endeavours to raise the awareness of those who live in relative

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affluence and peace concerning the plight of the poor and war-ravaged and, through perseverance, courage and compassion combined with a deep-rooted faith in the concept of a moral world order, motivates governments and interest groups with inexhaustible energy to seek pro-active answers to harrowing conflicts and thus make a meaningful contribution to the freedom of each and every human being, a freedom that extends beyond all geopolitical boundaries.”