

**Message of greeting
from Federal President Johannes Rau
to the World Congress of Union Network International
Berlin, 5 September 2001**

When one sees the pictures that have just been shown here, one would like to say a great deal, particularly because one has experienced much oneself. One would like to talk about the situations of which these moving images have reminded us. One would like to explain. One would like to ask questions about some of the pictures.

That's how it is: people have their history. Peoples have their history. People are measured by the extent to which they remain identical to their history, to that which has happened and built up over the centuries: how it changes their faces, modulates their language, what they become, what format or profile they have. This applies both to nations and to people.

Moreover, words too have their history. Today at this Congress we are using words which did not exist when I was a child and young man. The word "globalization" cannot be found in any dictionary dating from the 1950s or 60s. It is not found even in the 70s or 80s. But suddenly this word is like a much-used coin: everyone has used it and no one is really aware that it is completely new and that it describes what amounts to a changed reality. That is what globalization is: a changed reality, not a completely new one. There were signs of the phenomenon which the word globalization describes back in the 19th century, perhaps even at the end of the 18th century, but certainly from the middle of the 19th – it was just called something else: "internationalization". What was meant was the exchange of goods between different countries, and no one was quicker to latch on to this than the trade unions.

Trade unions have always regarded themselves as international. And rightly so. This was necessary, because many of the problems, issues and demands they were concerned with did not stop at national borders.

Now there are entirely new words. I first learned the word "Internet", which is used by my children as if it had always existed, when I was over 60. Not every new word is pleasing.

For a few months now – I don't know if the Germans present here are already aware of this – there has been a new term, at least in the news broadcasts, namely "profit warning". I had never heard that term

before. How can you warn about profit? Clearly something else is meant. This term "profit warning" draws our attention to the fact that we are living in an age, as the word "globalization" indicates, of almost incessant acceleration.

Everything goes terribly fast. The faster things go, the more dispensable standards become. Then we get contradictory reports. We get a report that so-and-so has merged with so-and-so in order to be stronger and that, wanting to be stronger, they get weaker in one area, namely the labour market.

And I fear the time is not yet over in which we learn from the first report at annual company press conferences, from self-congratulatory managers, that profits have increased, and in the second we hear about job cuts. That cannot be the sense of doing business. I am convinced that this is incompatible with the social market economy as we understand it; it cannot be right that managers' top priority should be to maximize profits at the expense of jobs. Rather, the two ought always to go hand in hand: the justified competition for high profits and the indispensable competition to give people jobs and income, because not only workers are needed, but also customers. That causes some irritation. Not a few trade unionists have had to find it in their hearts to make difficult decisions.

I deliberately said hearts, not heads. I experienced this myself when I was mayor of my home town, where there was a large textiles and chemical textiles factory. The word was that so-and-so many jobs were to be shed. I said I would drive right over there. When I arrived I got this answer from the very friendly manager: "The decision won't be taken here. It will be taken in Utrecht."

During my years as Minister-President of my home state, North-Rhine/Westphalia, I often had to realize that such decisions were taken not in Düsseldorf or Cologne, but in Pittsburgh or London or Cape Town. This is obviously the new reality expressed in these new words, to wit that internationalization and globalization cover virtually all areas of our life and all sectors of the economy.

One can well imagine how capital races around the world twenty-four hours a day, thanks to the differing time zones of Tokyo, New York and Berlin. When we fix the stopwatch, we get a kind of still-frame: how is the dollar doing now? What is the euro worth now? How is the DAX doing now? We know that everything will look very different in twelve hours' time. In twelve hours' time companies will have very different structures and economic trends will be very different from their depictions in the newspaper yesterday.

News, goods, services and capital race around the globe. No-one can stop them. No-one wants to stop them, because we are living in one world, and this one world cannot be reduced to my small piece of property, my small constituency, my family. No, it would be nonsensical to stop them.

It would be equally nonsensical, however, to forget that while goods, services and capital can race around the globe, people cannot. We need to have our feet on the ground. We need our homes and our homelands. We need neighbours and neighbourhoods. That is what breaks the heart: on the one hand I am standing up here today for workers, for wage increases, for improved working conditions, and at the same time I know that my decisions and my successes now have repercussions for people in the same situation, in situations of equal or greater dependency, in other countries, in other parts of the world.

Because there is this obligation to change what must be changed and to improve what can be improved on the ground and because all people have an international responsibility for one another, the internationality of trade unions is an irrefutable claim.

We cannot afford to counter the internationalization of capital with a constant provincialization of workers' rights.

And that is why one grows giddy at the numbers we have just heard: 150 countries, 15 million members – I can't recall all the figures, and they keep changing anyway. But we know that no-one can withdraw. No-one can say "I just want to look after myself". Everyone who looks after himself also has responsibility for others.

We must not allow capital, money, shareholders to become internationalized and at the same time anonymous, while we hide away from the fact. That is why it is important that you have taken this approach with UNI. That is why I was pleased to come here to send you on your way with my greetings. Not because I agree with every trade union demand. I have never been able to do that. Not because I am knowledgeable about all the fields which you represent in your many countries and sectors. But because I believe that if it is no longer true that the economy is there for the people – if, in other words, people are merely there for the economy – then this world is no longer a humane one, but it is supposed to be humane. That is why the economy must be there for people, not the other way around.

There is a second reason why I came here this afternoon: Kurt van Haaren. I do not know how long we have known each other. He has always treated me in keeping with the Biblical saying: "The Lord delivered thee into my hand today." And he never let me go, not through many, many years when I held various positions of responsibility. After this Congress he will give up and hand over his work in national

trade unions. Not so that he can do nothing, but in order to discover new horizons and to assume social responsibility in another function. I thought that it was more than worth the trip to the Sonnenallee to thank him publicly.

Kurt, I wish you all the very best. Stay healthy, and promise to remain at least as active as you are now.

And now I should like to extend a warm welcome to this congress, not only to Berlin, the Federal capital, represented by Klaus Wowereit, but to Germany, this lovely and difficult fatherland between the sea and the mountains, with all its different people, temperaments, talents and dialects, a country in the process of drawing together east and west, between young and old. It is a pleasant and exciting place to live. That we have had peace in this country for 56 years – longer than ever before in the history of our people and country – is reason for deep gratitude. That is why, in the future, we want to remain a people and a country which serves peace, promotes peace, stands against hatred, renounces violence and every day happily practises living together in harmony.

Good luck with your Congress.