

Award Ceremony German Female Founder's Prize 2018

Wednesday, 16 May 2018 in Nuremberg (Germany)

Acceptance Speech of Ise Bosch



Ms. Landgrebe, thank you for that lovely speech.

I shouldn't look too closely at the front. My family is sitting here. Five siblings, two cousins, nieces and nephews – and even my mother, who at 91 said she'll only travel to see relatives now. And here you all are. We do a lot together, especially not-for-profit work, but we are rarely in places like this. Thank you for coming. And so many friends here, too!

I would like to thank the Association of German Foundations for choosing me. As Felix Oldenburg can testify, I was honestly surprised and delighted. I see this award as an outstretched hand. Not just for me – someone who is obviously part of the philanthropy scene – but also for the issues that are important to me: international engagement, human rights, and gender diversity.

Girls, women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and trans and intersex people. What a joy to say these words in all their glory up here on this stage. Aah, feminism!

Why is it such a joy? I consider myself to be part of this community. It has shaped my life, and even though I am, by virtue of my family, enormously privileged, I know very well how marginalization works. How open can I be? Will people react badly? Those kinds of doubts. Please do not underestimate how immensely obstructive they can be to one's sense of well-being. And here and now, I see that I am welcome. Thank you. And I know that I am not the only one who is happy about this outstretched hand.

Have you ever thought about this: So many minorities are discriminated against. In general, we accept that this is not okay. Yet the right of sexual and gender minorities to live perfectly normal lives like everyone else is constantly called into question. For me personally, that means being somewhat more vulnerable than other people. In most parts of the world, it means living under constant stress and being openly hated and hunted down. The police play along, and feel like they are in the right. Today, 2.7 billion people live in countries where homosexuality is actually a punishable offense. It is high time that this changed.

This is Betu Singh. The daughter of an Indian military officer. Her father was her best friend, and her voice was probably deeper than his. I accompanied her as she visited her parents' home for her father's wake. He was laid out in the middle of the room with the family sitting around him. When Betu entered, the tension was almost unbearable. Here was a daughter from a conservative home who cut her hair short, wore shirts and pants, and loved women. As the eldest sister, she had family responsibilities – but because of who she was, she counted as a bad influence. Betu Singh was ... yes, was ... I'm sorry to say that she died too young ... a pioneer of India's queer community. She created a small but powerful space for women who were in relationships with other women. An apartment in a New Delhi suburb with a veritable nursery of potted plants in the yard. The garden was how she was known and loved in the neighborhood. She traded plants in those dusty surroundings, and she needed that good reputation for her work. The apartment was always filled with tape-recorded songs from a Hindu service, and the smell of camphor filled the air. Upstairs were a few rooms where young women could stay. If she could, Betu would find them their own apartments and jobs. These were young – very young – couples from the country who were literally being pursued by their families. I will never forget the sight of Betu, just barely five feet tall, standing at the gate among all her plants, driving an angry gang of family members away with nothing but her deep bass voice.

Betu Singh's friendship changed my perspective. I supported her project, but I also understood that I had to think on a much bigger scale. The world needs safe places like the one Betu created, but they are not possible without inside knowledge of the scene, and not on a part-time basis. Since then, I have been carefully sharing the power that comes from my inherited wealth with many people – and am increasing it as I go. In 1996, I launched a support fund that has so far given almost €16 million in small sums to 500 groups in 99 countries.

I cannot imagine doing my work without international networks, and I am astounded at how little German foundations participate in the networks that exist between human rights foundations.

This is how I know Sunil Babu Pant. He is Nepalese, a lawyer, a member of parliament, and the founder of the Blue Diamond Society for sexual minorities. Nepal was the first country to allow a third gender category on ID cards. This provides more protection to its sex workers in particular, and allows them to vote. I asked him: Why Nepal, of all places? A country where structural discrimination is so strong? "It wasn't that hard," he replied. "We only legally introduced a second gender a few decades ago!" Before that, women had very few rights. So a third gender was not such a big deal.

I am sure you're familiar with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. The goals pledge to "leave no one behind." Foundations must also focus on those who have received too little attention to date.

Yes, I know. Foundations are peculiar beasts. Maybe they're a little like turtles – they define themselves through their dogged perseverance rather than by applying themselves to new tasks. And I can understand that. There's always enough to do as it is. Money is invariably short, and the better you know your traditional field, the clearer that becomes.

But the way I see it, times are really starting to change and there are good reasons to sharpen our political profile. In Germany, more and more people are lining up against "the system." They criticize foundations for being 1) not particularly relevant, and 2) part of the "evil power elite" – even though these two accusations are a logical contradiction. The pro-democratic consensus, which of course also guarantees us our tax privileges, is eroding. As in other countries, more and more people in Germany believe that democracy should protect majorities and that it is right to exclude minorities. What are we foundations doing to oppose this? We need to dramatically increase our support of pro-democratic activities.

Hungary could be a good test case. Civil society there is under threat. Some organizations clearly want to keep operating from Germany. They need office space and support from colleagues. Can we manage to organize that?

Unfortunately, I can only mention one point here, but I must at least do that: "mission investing," in other words, investing money to achieve a social goal. Our endowments are not insignificant in size, yet much of German philanthropy's vast wealth remains untapped.

It is not just threats, but also opportunities that are on the rise. Digitalization is enabling many more people to join the conversation. #MeToo is leveraging this and has put violence against women more clearly on the agenda than ever before. However, foundations are providing little support here. One in three women in Germany has this problem – and if that sounds too abstract, think about your young daughter, your grown-up daughter, your nieces, or the woman sitting next to you here. Of course they shouldn't suffer sexualized violence. None of them should!

Perhaps it really is a question of who makes the decisions. The Association ran the numbers. In Germany's 35 largest foundations, there are only three women directors – and just one woman CEO. The Association has been addressing this matter since the 2000s. Now we have a baseline, and it is crying out for concrete goals, a timeline, a campaign.

Sonja Schelper, executive director of filia.die frauenstiftung, is sitting here today. She can confirm what I am about to say. We are still regularly asked why we only support women and girls – which we don't actually do because it has been proven that supporting women is an especially effective way of supporting human communities – but whatever, we still get asked the question. And when we respond by asking, "How do you support women and girls?", the answer is often: "We don't keep track of that – we just support 'the best'."

There's something wrong with this picture. When else are we ever so modest in our desire for knowledge? Foundations are actually experts at dealing with social prejudices – but on this matter, they all too often look away.

Women's foundations in other countries also start out with relatively little money. They grow by collaborating with large foundations in their own country that in turn use the model to essentially outsource women-specific expertise. Here in Germany, neither we nor others like us have managed to do this.

I have with me here tonight a copy of the Rainbow Philanthropy study, hot off the press. This is our recurring survey of who in Germany is supporting sexual and gender minorities at an international level. Dreilinden has been conducting the survey since 2008. Back then, five German foundations were providing this type of support. In 2016, it was ... four. Four out of 22,000 German foundations.

"Leave no one behind." This pledge refers especially to the marginal groups that are not explicitly named in the individual development goals. They include sexual and gender minorities. One reason for this is surely that we simply still don't know each other well enough.

So it seems fitting to end my speech by inviting a few colleagues and friends, some of whom would not be properly served with either the masculine or the feminine form of these words in German, to come up on stage, quickly and very briefly. My method as a donor is to include people with personal experiences of the issues I work with and let them participate in decisions. With that in mind, I want to ask them what "leave no one behind" means to them personally.

I introduced Betu Singh to you at the start of my speech. I can no longer ask her any questions, but here is her picture one more time.

I would now like to ask two friends to join me on stage – they are the co-authors of our new book *Geben mit Vertrauen* (Giving with Trust). I've brought some copies with me, and they'll be out on the book table tomorrow afternoon!

Justus Eisfeld is a trans activist. He's from around here, but lives with his partner in New York City. He co-founded a global as well as a European organization for transgender issues. Justus, tell me, what does "leave no one behind" mean to you personally?

The second is Claudia Bollwinkel, an expert in feminist project management and gender-sensitive evaluation. It would have been great if her husband, Tsepo Andreas Bollwinkel, could have been here too, but he's also giving a talk today. He's a non-binary trans man, a person of color, and a trainer for "critical whiteness." I'm forever asking both of them questions. Claudia, what does "leave no one behind" mean to you personally?

Dan Christian Ghattas runs things over at Organisation Intersex International Europe, which is based in Berlin – and, incidentally, not funded by a German foundation but by one from the U.S. For me, Dan's advice on all things inter is indispensable. His background is in teaching. He's a classical philologist and an extremely patient teacher – even when it comes to explaining the difficulties faced by people who are born with physical characteristics that are not clearly male or female. Dan, what does "leave no one behind" mean to you?

Matthew Hart has traveled here from Paris. He's director of the Global Philanthropy Project, a collaboration of 19 human rights foundations that promote human rights for sexual and gender minorities. It is a mixture of large and small foundations, but there are definitely too few German members (there is currently just one, Dreilinden). Matty, would you be so kind? I'll translate, so please make it short and simple! Tell me, what does "leave no one behind" mean to you?

And now, to everyone who works with me to advance human rights for women and girls, who is committed to increasing gender diversity, and who is willing to give a face to this multifaceted struggle: Come join me up here and give the audience a wave. Quickly, please! My time's up!

"Leaving no one behind" starts with each of us individually. So don't hang back! Let's work together to end exclusion.