

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Peter-André Alt

**Meeting of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi with the Burmese Community
Greeting by the President of Freie Universität Berlin
April 13, 2014 at 10:00 a.m.
FB Wirtschaftswissenschaft, Garystr. 21, Hörsaal 101**

- Es gilt das gesprochene Wort -

Dear Daw Aung San Suu Kyi,

Dear members of the Burmese community in Berlin, Germany and Europe,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very grateful for the invitation to join you at today's meeting and I am delighted that Freie Universität Berlin can offer its hospitality on this wonderful occasion. It is an eminent honor for us, dear Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, to welcome you on our campus, and it is a great pleasure that we can be host for this historic gathering with your Burmese countrymen and –women here in the city of Berlin.

This city, as is well known, has had a very specific history of division and reunion in the second half of the 20th century, a history that is still very much present. Freie Universität played a very significant role in this history and thus, as its President, I would like to say just a few words to introduce you to your host today. As you will see, this institution's origins are closely tied to the struggle for freedom and democracy, as it took place in Berlin during the decades of division and Cold War.

Veritas – Iustitia – Libertas or, in English, truth – justice – liberty. These are the three normative ideals of Freie Universität's founding motto. During the founding years of this university right after World War II, these were by no means just high-sounding or academic ideals, but an urgent need and a plan for political action.

Following the end of World War II, Berlin's traditional university found itself in the Eastern part of the city controlled by the Soviet Union. Political and ideological pres-

ures were rising, and they soon resulted in severe discrimination and suppression. And so, in response to these pressures, Freie Universität was founded in 1948 in the western part of the city not by a government decree or a decision of a ruler, but by students and professors who were calling for just that: a free university. Their simple-sounding appeal to the ideal of freedom had a very concrete meaning under the threatening circumstances, and it was the simplicity of this call that formed part of its force. Thus, the founding history of Freie Universität is also a lesson on how normative ideals can forcefully articulate the need for action and change.

There is one element that I need to add to complete the picture. A key reason why the founding story of Freie Universität was successful was the international support that the initiative of our founding students and professors received. This was our good fortune, for the support came both locally from the Western allies in Berlin, and from abroad, especially from the United States. And so it is not surprising that one of the most memorable hours in this institution's history during the Cold War was the visit of the United States President John F. Kennedy in 1963, just two years after the construction of the Berlin Wall and just a few months before his tragic assassination. Based on this founding history, Freie Universität has later seized opportunities to help other academic institutions and individuals internationally. As a recent example, let me just mention our activities in the network called "Scholars at Risk," which strives to offer safe havens for those scholars and researchers who face persecution in their home countries.

Today, Freie Universität is a full-scale research university with 11 faculties plus a joint medical faculty with Humboldt-University. Altogether, Freie Universität has more than 70 institutes and offers more than 150 programs of study. Although its founding year 1948 is quite recent, the origins of academic work here in this part of the city are much older. The fact that Dahlem is home to not just to Freie Universität, but also to several Max-Planck-Institutes and other federal research institutions, makes it into one of Germany largest and strongest locations for science and research.

Let me now come back to the founding heritage of Freie Universität and the central role played by the ideal of freedom. Freie Universität has always considered it an eminent honor and a privilege to welcome and recognize those who have rendered service to the cause of freedom and democracy around the world. Given this background, it surely won't come as a surprise to you that we were deeply grateful and at the same time delighted when the opportunity arose to offer our hospitality for today's meeting.

You, dear Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, as only few others in our contemporary world, have come to personify the struggle for freedom and democracy. You have pursued your cause with eminent strength, greatest courage, and unwavering endurance that now spans decades. Through your example, you have been an inspiration and hope to the people of Burma and to many others around the world. I am delighted that one of your stops on this current visit to Germany's capital takes you to a university setting, a setting, as I know, that has been close and important to you in your life. Let me simply say that it is my sincere hope that the history of this institution and my few words of greeting on behalf of this academic community may make you feel warmly welcome. Thank you for coming to Freie Universität.