

Greeting of the Swiss Ambassador Dr. Thomas Borer-Fielding at the opening of the exhibition of DESSA at the Berlin Cathedral, 8. November 2000

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to hold the patronage of today's benefit featuring the H.M.H.-Symphonic Orchestra and the paintings of DESSA, because the Berlin Cathedral is an equivalent to cultural commitment and tolerance. Please allow me to stress the importance of cultural openness in a civil society these days.

We know it all: as in many other countries of Europe, unfortunately as well in Germany and Switzerland, the number of encroachments of extreme right-winged groups against foreigners has increased in an alarming way. They hinder and threaten the peaceful development of our open society. I am convinced that civil society has the necessary tools to stop these trespasses, but resolute action is required.

The problems of right-wing radicalism are extraordinary complex. I would like to dwell on two aspects only. First of all to the basics: "The dignity of man is inviolable". The inviolability of man's dignity is the foundation of our culture. An intentional violation of this basic value is quickly eroding civility. Therefore it is necessary to absolutely and radically restrain those violating the dignity of man .

But it is not enough that police and judiciary take drastic measures. We all are required to act as supporters of civil society in our very personal sphere of influence.

- Citizens, for example parents and educators in their everyday life or in public as witnesses of encroachments
- companies, e g by introducing and maintaining a working atmosphere that is open to foreign workers
- we ambassadors by building bridges between our countries
- and especially church and politics.

Brave artists like Viktor Ullmann feature among the trustworthy pillars of an open civil society. Their work is an indispensable source for consolation and hope even in difficult times. I especially think of the continuing artistic activities by Ullmann and other artists in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt.

Today's benefit shall remind us of the catastrophic aftermath that happens when an open civil society is destroyed, and that acceptance and tolerance even today are not guaranteed automatically, but must be lived every day. I therefore would like to warmly thank everybody who has contributed to the success of this evening, especially the artist DESSA, the H.M.H. Symphonic Orchestra Berlin conducted by Fred Buttkewitz and their soloist Lala Issakova, and last but not least the *Domkuratorin* (curator) of the Berlin Cathedral Margrit Hilmer who is at the same time president of the Lions Club Berlin-Roseneck.

I would like to conclude by citing Rolf Bloch, president of the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities who said about DESSA's paintings:

“By looking at these works of art you will not be surprised to know that these painting were inspired by music, a particular piece of music that was created by Viktor Ullmann in the concentration camp of Theresienstadt. This music does not only remind us of the Shoa, but at the same time it is a testimony of the spiritual resistance during this nightmare, an answer to the humiliation of man and to death. This music, this testimony is transformed by DESSA's paintings into a legacy of great importance, an appeal to humanity, that touches and concerns us.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

in this sense I wish us all a contemplative evening.