



We were promised unlimited energy. The promise was a delusion. What was given to us is a restriction of our freedom as inhabitants of this planet: We can no longer drink just any water and we may no longer step out onto any ground. For many people it has become dangerous to breathe deeply. There is no such thing as the so-called peaceful use of nuclear energy. We owe it to ourselves and to those who will come after us to put an end to the use of nuclear technologies forever. May The World Uranium Hearing in Salzburg contribute to that end.

Claus Biegert

Opening Speech on the Eve of the Hearing

*Claus Biegert, Fed. Rep. of Germany. Journalist,
founder of The World Uranium Hearing.
(This speech was held originally in German)*

Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends from all over the world! Welcome to Salzburg!

This is a city with a long history: A fort in the 11th century -- a cultural and economic center since the 13th century -- a Baroque bishop's see in the 17th century -- birthplace of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart -- for Americans, the home of "The Sound of Music". But the city on the Salzach, where nearby salt is still extracted, has another history which has its place in this coming week. On September 21, 1909, Albert Einstein delivered a lecture to the Society of German Naturalists and Physicians which was to represent his entrance into the community of scientists of the time. The lecture was entitled "On the Development of our Conception of the Essence and the Constitution of Radioactivity".

Since the 1970's, the Salzburg regional government has held a negative position towards atomic energy. This led scientists and critics of nuclear power from around the world to hold their first "World Conference for a Nuclear-Free Future" in 1977 in Salzburg. At the end of the 1980's, in resistance to the reprocessing plant in Wackersdorf situated outside the Austrian borders, it was made clear that the refusal to accept atomic power has a history in this city. It is no wonder then, that, following the advice of Robert Jungk, we chose Salzburg as the location for this Hearing. The support we have received in the last twelve months from this city and this state has confirmed our decision.

At this time, I would also like to thank those who supported us when all this was merely an idea and investing money in this idea represented quite a risky venture. I'd like to say a few words about this venture called "The World Uranium Hearing":

Two central experiences shaped the last five years of preparation, one good and one bad. First, the bad one: I'd like to quote here the Iroquois philosopher John Sotsisowah Mohawk. He says: "Everybody wants to save the world, but nobody wants to pay for it." We who have worked for The World Uranium Hearing have received a worldwide pat on the back, fantastic promises were made to us, but we nevertheless felt as if we were at a tennis game: Two people work themselves to death while thousands look on. But then there is the other experience: It gives one strength to see how much can be accomplished through the efforts of a few. A handful of people decided to give voice to the unheard people of the atomic age and did not allow themselves to be dissuaded from achieving their goal. I thank everyone here in this room for their endurance, their loyalty and their recognition of priorities.

Why are we here? Because the nuclear age threatens our future. During our work on this project, we agonized over the wording of this or that. We wanted to call for the end of the nuclear age and suddenly realized that we will not be able to rid ourselves of this radioactive inheritance of 50 years. Even if there does come an end to the use of nuclear technology someday, the earth will remain contaminated -- for millennia.

What is the goal of our meeting in Salzburg? An image is kept alive for the public which is wrong: Atomically generated electricity is cheap and safe. On the contrary: It is expensive and dangerous. In the next four days, those affected from all over the world will present the evidence for this. From 27 countries and 25 indigenous nations, testimonies will be delivered about the daily destruction. Even if no reactor explodes, all is not right in the world: Uranium mining and the storage of radioactive waste result in making this so-called cheap power the most expensive in that its cost includes the daily death of human beings.

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