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Greetings for the Celebration of the 10th Anniversary of the Opening of the Israel-Office in Tel Aviv

November 3, 2008

- It's a little bit more than ten years ago, when we established our office here in Tel Aviv. Maybe it would be a little bit overstated to say that all Israel impatiently had waited for us, but I remember quite well a remarkable crowd frequenting our opening reception.

Thanks to our founding director **Claude Weinber** and some friends, it was a splendid

start: **Shimon Peres**, already then a living legend, gave the welcome speech, commemorating his relationship with Heinrich Böll;

he then was followed by a round table with **Naomi Chazan** and **Moshe Zuckermann** on "civil society and its role in democracy" which I had the pleasure to attend.

- The themes of this opening night already reflected some main topics of our work in the last decade:

- We were part of an ongoing dialogue on **past, presence and future of German-Israeli relations** in their different (and still complex) dimensions

- We have been promoting **civil rights and political participation** of all societal groups living in Israel. The very first Israeli project supported by a predecessor of our foundation in 1993 has been **Kav LaOved**, providing legal assistance especially to Palestinian workers in Israel. This cooperation is still going on today. It's a good example for the kind of sustainable partnership we are looking for.

- We participated in a lively, open-minded, sometimes controversial debate on a wide

range of domestic and international issues, fostering **exchange between people from different communities**: NGO-activists, academics, politicians and artists; Jews and Arabs, Israelis and Germans.

- According to our political values and convictions, we made some efforts to **inject green ideas into the Israeli politics**: I leave it to you how successful this sometimes Sisyphean-like effort has been.

- And of course we tried to be supportive to different attempts of **improving Israel-Palestinian relations** and to work out an historic compromise between the two parties. Among others I want to highlight the Geneva Initiative, which we still see as a blueprint for a two state solution to come.

- During the first years, it helped that our arrival in Israel coincided with another start up – at the same time, the **Red-Green government in Germany** came into power, and we were in the lucky position to explain the unexpected. And of course it helped a lot, that the champion of the German Greens, **Joschka Fischer**, in his capacity as Foreign Minister was perceived as an honest broker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and a true friend of Israel, which is not at all a contradiction in itself.
- From the beginning our heraldic theme was **to make a big impact with a small, but ambitious staff**, supported by dozens of talented and highly motivated interns and trainees during the past decade
- As a convener, we reached out to a wide political spectrum; we are proud of a **rich and diverse spectrum of partners** with civil society groups, think tanks, academic institutions and government entities, and we are quite aware that our outreach widely is depending from their support.

- We are specialists in **linking themes** which usually are treated separately, for example ecology and economy, climate and security, environment and justice, and we like to see **opportunities** where most people only see threats.

That applies very much to Climate Change and the environmental crisis in general: It's a real threat to human security and political stability, but in the same time addressing the challenge of sustainable growth offers a huge economic opportunity.

We are quite confident that green technologies, products and services will create the next economic boom, the next long wave of innovation and jobs, and we would like very much Israel to become much more ambitious in this area.

Our achievements over the last years are the success of all the colleagues working with us – their dedicated activities, their knowledge as well as their readiness to learn and to discover.

Let me extend my gratitude especially to the directors. I already mentioned **Claude Weinber** - together with our program officer for the Middle East, **Bernd Asbach**, who came from Berlin to join us tonight, he found a wonderful spot for our office on Nachalat Binyamin Street.

In 2001 he was followed by **Julia Scherf**, who expanded our work during the difficult times of suicide attacks and almost daily violence during the Second Intifada. Her successor **Joern Boehme**, being in charge since 2006, is engaged in German-Israel-relations since almost 30 years and still didn't lose his passion for that relationship. All three of them are remarkable personalities, have set specific priorities and reached out to new partners in Israel.

Indeed, there is a lot to discover at all these vibrant places, think tanks, universities, grass-roots movements in Israel. You have to be here to learn about the **rich variety of the Israeli political and intellectual landscape**.

This land may not always be a pleasant place for peaceniks, tree huggers, gender vanguards and devotees of social equality – but in times of frustration it's always encouraging that there are many different voices and many voices different from main stream.

This is a country where **hope and disappointment** are following each other in short intervals. Since 1998, we have seen the election of Ehud Barak, the failure of Camp David and the Second Intifada, the election of Ariel Sharon, accompanied by heavy suicide attacks and Israeli intervention into the Westbank as well as the Geneva Initiative and the unilateral withdrawal from Gaza.

In these years, Yassir Arafat died and Ariel Sharon fell into coma. We faced violent clashes within the Palestinian political scene and the take over of Gaza by Hamas, the second Lebanon war, the Annapolis Conference and the end of the Olmert government. What will come next? Fortunately, the course of history never is to predict mathematically, so there is always hope that we are not condemned to repeat the failures of the past.

From the beginning, establishing an office of our foundation in Israel was a clear statement: **we want to contribute to a reliable, serious and lively partnership between Israel and Germany.** Until today, this is the mission statement of our presence here. It doesn't mean that we have to refrain from critical reviews on Israeli politics and society. But it does mean that we are very aware of our historical responsibilities, and that our relationships with Israel are based on a deep-rooted sense of empathy with the Israeli people. That's why we are here, and this spirit will lead us in the years to come.