

Laudatio Peter Hünemann Preis 2019

Honorable Bishop Wilfried Theising, Representative of the German Bishops Conference,

Honorable Prof. Dr. Peter Hünemann, Former President of KAAD and Founder of the Peter Hünemann-Foundation,

Honorable Prof. Dr. Eberhard Schockenhoff, President of KAAD,

Honorable Dr. Hermann Weber, General Secretary of KAAD,

Honorable guests of this Jahresakademie, and

Honorable scholars from countries all over the world,

In the year 2019 the award of the Peter Hünemann-Foundation goes for the first time to an association. Its name is MyanKAAD, in full “Myanmar-Catholic Academic Exchange Service”. Its history is as follows: in 1994, Dr. Heinrich Geiger visited Myanmar and met with Bishop Sotero Phamo, the Bishop of the Diocese of Mawlamyine; in 1995, KAAD selected two candidates from Loikaw Diocese; in 1996, the two candidates studied in Germany; from 2000 to 2010, regular annual meetings were held for KAAD Alumni in Myanmar; in February 2011, KAAD Alumni Myanmar, MyanKAAD, was formally formed in Yangon; on November 9-10, 2012 the first KAAD Alumni Myanmar Seminar on “Strengthening Capacity of Civil Societies in Myanmar” was organized at the center of the Catholic Bishop’s Conference CBCM in Yangon.

Here with we would like to express a warm welcome to 9 of the Alumnae and Alumni who are engaged in this association, most of them since long. Ms. Aye Aye Htun, Ms. Mary Jacquelin, Ms. Ja Hkwang, Ms. Hanni Htun, Ms. Claudia Api, Ms. Lin Lin Nyein, Ms. Cecilia and, last but not least, Mr. Saw Han and Mr. Om Ki. Two of them had been or are still studying in Germany, seven of them had been studying within our so called “Third country program” at Assumption University in Bangkok, Thailand which is run by the Montfort Brothers. As the administration of Assumption University does not ask for tuition fee and the Diocese Regensburg supports the living of the scholars, we were able to

support a considerable number of young scholars from Myanmar. Thanks to that scholarship program which is based on a fruitful cooperation between three church partners – Assumption University, Diocese of Regensburg and KAAD - all together 63 scholars could qualify themselves either with a Bachelor's or a Master's degree since the year 2001, when our scholarship program started in Bangkok. Msgr. Saw Francis and Fr. Noel Saw Naw Aye, two of the three General Vicars of the Archdiocese of Yangon, are accompanying the Alumnae and Alumni of MyanKAAD. Thank you for giving us the honor to host you. Also a warm welcome to them!

When we talk about the so called “developing countries”, quite often we use the term “south” in the meaning of the “global south”. From the “south” in Germany we may welcome also an important guest: His name is Mr. Gregor Tautz, who is the responsible person for the contacts with Myanmar in the Diocese of Regensburg, which is located in the south of Germany. Without the support of the Diocese of Regensburg and the personal engagement of Mr. Tautz the story of our scholarship program with Myanmar never would have been as successful as it has been and as it still is. Mr. Tautz, please express our sincere thanks to the Bishop of the Diocese of Regensburg, Rudolf Voderholzer, its present General Vicar, Michael Fuchs, and its former General Vicar, Dr. Wilhelm Gegenfurtner who always had been very supportive for our program. He is well known in Myanmar as “Father William” and the man who brought wonderful CD's from the “The Regensburger Domspatzen”, the choir of the Cathedral of Regensburg. Now the people of Myanmar can listen to Christmas songs in a tropical setting.

Why was MyanKAAD selected to receive this renowned award? First, because it is a well-functioning, institutionalizing organization that provides services to the needs of people in Myanmar under very difficult conditions. I still remember many talks with Prof. Peter Hünemann when he still had been the acting president of KAAD. He always underlined the importance of the “institutionalization” of the work of KAAD. MyanKAAD is a best practice example for that. Further on it had been considered by the selection committee that MyanKAAD always tried to be an independent, self-reliant institution. It collects fees from its members and runs, by these means, several outreach programs. The second reason for selecting MyanKAAD as the awardee of the award of the Peter Hünemann-Foundation 2019 is, that its activities

give hope to a beautiful country made up of diverse ethnicities and religions. MyanKAAD is the representative of a rainbow nation. Unity in diversity: It has modelled as a microcosm of wider society. It is working together with Buddhist and Muslims of varying ethnicities to build up a Myanmar that is genuinely at peace with its diversity and that celebrates what we may call the dignity of difference.

*

Myanmar is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious country, with a majority Burman, Buddhist population. Theravada Buddhism pervades its culture. But, from the time immemorial the people of Myanmar sought the spiritual experience in nature. Christianity has melted with the culture of Myanmar, as it serves through its schools and hospitals the nation and it worked long among the poor, the ethnic communities. As we may state, the Catholic Church is one of the few organizations found among all cultures and people all over Myanmar.

At this point more about the history of the country: Myanmar which is better known as “Burma” was for about a century a British colony. Then, on 4 January 1948, it gained its independence, and for a decade had democracy, even though it was fragile and conflict-ridden. In 1958 the democratic, civilian government handed over power, allegedly willingly and allegedly temporarily, to the military under General Ne Win, with the hope that they would bring stability to the country. In 1960, fresh elections were held and power returned to a civilian, democratically elected government. But, in 1962, power-hungry Ne Win launched a *coup d'état* and for almost fifty years – half a century – Myanmar was under direct military rule. Elections in 1990 – the first in decades – were overwhelmingly won by the democracy movement led by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, which had emerged two years previously through a series of mass demonstrations which had been brutally suppressed. But the military regime refused to accept the results of the 1990 elections, imprisoned most of the victory, and continued its grip on power. In 2010, so-called elections were held but they were a total sham, a fraud, and the government that was elected was a military-led, military-backed regime made up of former Generals who had simply exchanged their uniforma for suits and ties. And yet, that military-backed government surprised us all when, finally, it came to the point of opening up, beginning to reform, releasing political

prisoners who had been in jail for years for demonstrating for democracy, and in November 2015 the first credible elections were held. Aung San Suu Kyi, after over 15 years of house arrest, led her party to another overwhelming victory, and this time the military accepted the result. A new government took power in March. But this is not end of the story. The journey has not ended. The people of Myanmar have simply entered into a new chapter in their continuing struggle for freedom, democracy, human rights, human dignity and peace.

*

The list of challenges is enormous. Let us thank the members of MyanKAAD that they made themselves available to them. Poverty, education, human trafficking, drugs, protecting freedom of expression, health care – these are all just some of the challenges which they are confronted with in their daily life and work. Dear Prof. Hünemann, it is surely a good decision to award MyanKAAD with the Peter Hünemann-Award of the year 2019.

And, not to forget, it is a precious opportunity that those of former KAAD-scholars from Myanmar who had never been in Germany could be invited to attend the annual gathering of KAAD-scholars this year. Let us express our sincere thanks to the Diocese of Regensburg and to the Peter Hünemann-Foundation which have been financing the travel expenses of them. Dear scholars, please make use of your stay in Bonn to get the experience of KAAD as an institution of the World Church. Hopefully also other KAAD-Scholars who are studying within a “Third country program” will get this opportunity in the future, too.

Thank you for your attention.