



## Wittenberg Center for Global Ethics

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**Welcome Address**  
**Horst Köhler**  
**Federal President of Germany,**  
**Africa Forum 2006 "Fostering Entrepreneurial Spirit"**

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Without entrepreneurial spirit there can be no economic development. Every major impulse for development in economic history – the industrial revolution, individual mobility and digitalization would not have been possible without entrepreneurs, without their vision and without their courage to take ground breaking steps. It is not without reason that in the year 2000 the European Union decided to tackle the important topic of fostering entrepreneurial spirit. Compared to the U.S. we Europeans are lagging far behind: According to figures from the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe, UNICE, only 5 out of 1,000 Europeans are self-employed or run their own business, in the U.S. the figure is 10 out of 1,000.

The small digression to Europe shows clearly, that we Europeans definitely cannot act as the taskmasters in this field. I'm all the more pleased that the Wittenberg Center's Conference "Fostering Entrepreneurial Spirit" has been planned as a dialogue forum. I also welcome the fact that many entrepreneurs will be presenting their own experiences at the conference. It is important that we do not talk parallel to each other, but that we enter into a real dialogue with each other.

Entrepreneurial spirit cannot be separated from one's local culture and mentality. Entrepreneurial spirit is also always an expression of this local culture and the mentality of its people. Max Weber impressively proved this in his study, which is well worth reading still today, on the breed of the European entrepreneur and his conditioning through Protestantism. This cultural conditioning is the reason why many of the European "recipes for success" cannot simply be transferred to other cultures. Local entrepreneurs will always have the decisive edge: they are familiar with the local people's mentality and market conditions. This holds true for Africa as well. Let me give you an example: the rapid spread of cell phones with all its positive side effects would not have been possible without successful African entrepreneurs.

In the course of my trips throughout Africa I have seen a lot about what goes to make a successful businessman: willingness to take great risks, creativity and expertise, profound knowledge of the market and a willingness to learn.

One fact which many people, who can only visualize the scenes from the Canary Islands, do not know is that the continent is characterized by great inner-African mobility. These are all good prerequisites for the development of local entrepreneurship.

However, there are still many obstacles. A problem which has often been described to me is the lack of legal security and the absence of stable governmental structures, which only causes entrepreneurs to shirk away from the risk of long term investments. The case is similar as far as the availability of trained and reliable labor is concerned. In addition the infrastructure is often quite poor. The donor countries also have to allow such critical questions as "what are the consequences when skilled workers emigrate to Europe or the U.S., even though they are desperately needed in their own country?"

Without entrepreneurial spirit there can be no economic growth. Without economic growth poverty cannot be defeated in a sustainable manner. Therefore I appreciate that the Wittenberg-Center for Global Ethics has taken up this important and complex theme. I wish all participants an enjoyable time, interesting discussions and a successful conference.