

*The spoken word shall prevail.*

-address-

I am very pleased to welcome you this afternoon in the Jan-Wellem-Saal of the Düsseldorf City Hall. We have come together to pay tribute to Mr Helmut Weiß.

Dear Mr Weiß,

In recognition of your decades of commitment in the field of interreligious and intercultural understanding, I have the honour today to award you the Cross of Merit on Ribbon of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

With the Federal Cross of Merit, the President of the Federal Republic of Germany honours women and men who do extraordinary things for their fellow human beings and who serve society in a special way. As you have been doing for a long time in an exemplary manner, dear Mr Weiß. Your civic commitment deserves thanks and recognition.

For this I may now present you with the honorary award immediately afterwards - combined with the congratulations of the Minister President of the State of North Rhine-Westphalia, and on behalf of the District President.

I will now quote from the explanatory memorandum.

It states:

"Mr. Helmut Weiß has earned merits worthy of distinction above all through his many years of voluntary commitment in the field of intercultural and interreligious understanding.

Mr Weiß is married and has four sons.

He was still a toddler when his family fled from Romania to Germany during the Second World War, where they found a new home in Uffenheim (Bavaria) in 1944.

Professionally, Helmut Weiß was a pastor of the Protestant Church since 1972. Mr Weiß has been retired since 2007.

In addition to his professional work as a pastor, Helmut Weiß held numerous honorary offices. In 1974, for example, he and others founded the Rhenish Working Group for Clinical Pastoral Care Training with the aim of bringing together the findings of psychology and pastoral psychology and thus bringing about a professionalisation of pastoral care. Here he was chairman of the working group from its foundation - and also after its transformation into the "Rheinische Arbeitskreis Seelsorge Pastoralpsychologie und Supervision" - until 2003.

Since 1986, Mr Weiß has organised annual seminars on intercultural pastoral care and counselling in various countries in cooperation with the Protestant Academy in the Rhineland and the Pastoral Care Seminar in Halle/Saale. Due to his own biography, he was particularly interested in establishing contacts with countries in Eastern Europe, so that until 2000 Mr Weiß organised international seminars in Hungary and Poland, among other places.

In 1995 he founded the non-profit association "Gesellschaft für Interkulturelle Seelsorge und Beratung e.V." (abbreviated to SIPCC) in Düsseldorf, of which he has been chairman since its foundation. Helmut Weiß has also been responsible for organising numerous seminars on behalf of this association, both in Germany and worldwide, such as in Israel in 2009 and in Tanzania in 2012.

Through his tireless efforts, many more seminars followed, including those that were intended to enable people from developing countries to participate. Under the chairmanship of Helmut Weiß, the promotion of international exchange, learning from each other in pastoral care and counselling and the importance of interculturality in these fields were always at the forefront of the association's work. Furthermore, Mr. Weiß trained numerous people to work in the sense of cross-cultural "care for the individual", whereby Mr. Weiß organised training and courses in countries where there were no opportunities to work as counsellors or pastoral workers until

now. Helmut Weiß' intensive commitment had a very lasting effect, so that his activities subsequently made it possible to build up their own structures and networks in the individual countries. In addition, in 2013, under the chairmanship of Mr Weiß, the SIPCC association became the coordinator of the European Union's learning partnership with the topic "Social integration of people from different religions through intercultural and interreligious cooperation in the field of pastoral counselling". In Germany, Helmut Weiß also worked with the Islamic Theological Institutes and the Universities of Osnabrück and Tübingen and supported the development of Islamic pastoral care concepts through joint conferences and publications. For the first time in Germany, his significant efforts made it possible to run a 6-week course according to the standards of Clinical Pastoral Care Training (KSA) for Muslim volunteers of a hospital visiting service in Essen.

In his honorary posts, Helmut Weiß always distinguished himself by his great commitment to forging international, intercultural and interreligious relationships. Mr Weiß was and is equally appreciated for his perseverance and competence as well as for his high level of theological and psychological expertise, which he passed on to other pastors and counsellors at home and abroad through his manifold commitment. The Foreign Office was involved."

You have dedicated a lifetime to serving people. As a pastor, you have dedicated yourself to your fellow human beings. You have always shared your wealth of experience with others. You have brought people together across religious and national boundaries. In this way you have helped to create a climate of togetherness and trust.

For your exemplary commitment, I would like to express my thanks and appreciation to you today on behalf of Düsseldorf's city society and on a very personal level.

I congratulate you from the bottom of my heart on the award of the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Also in the future, I wish you all the best, good health and the continued energy to work for your fellow citizens, for social cohesion and for the common good.