

Laudatory Speech

The Federal Chancellor
Willy Brandt Foundation

Laudatory Speech by Professor Peter Brandt,
member of the Board of Trustees of the
Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt Foundation
2020 Willy Brandt Documentary Film Prize for Freedom and Human Rights
7 pm, Friday, October 9, 2020
BUFA campus

Dear Documentary film lovers,
Dear Njeri Mwangi and Sam Soko,
ladies and gentlemen,

We are gathered here today to honor an outstanding documentary film and award the 2020 Willy Brandt Documentary Prize for Freedom and Human Rights.

As a professional historian, member of the Federal Chancellor Willy Brandt Foundation Board of Trustees, and Willy Brandt's eldest son, it is my great pleasure to present the award again this year. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the festival organizers. It is wonderful to have the Human Rights Film Festival in Berlin for the third time.

Thank you very much!
I think they deserve a round of applause. (Applause)

Ladies and gentlemen,
The Documentary Film Prize commemorates Willy Brandt's achievements as German Chancellor and international statesman. It celebrates filmmakers whose work is exemplary of Willy Brandt's principles.

Throughout his life, Willy Brandt worked for peace and freedom, domestic and global social justice, the promotion of democracy and the reconciliation and understanding between peoples.

Fifty years ago, the West-German treaties with Moscow and Warsaw were the break-through for the new *Ostpolitik of the German Federal Republic*. For this, he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize a year later. On December 7, 1970, the day the treaty was signed in Warsaw, he participated in a wreath-laying ceremony at the monument commemorating the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In an inspiring move, he knelt to commemorate the millions of victims of the genocide committed by Hitler's Germany. He, who was personally not responsible for the horrendous crimes committed but was rather actively fighting against the Nazis.

The picture of his *Kniefall* resonated around the world. A Christian gesture, asking for forgiveness for his people, his kneeling in Warsaw is one of the German Federal Republic's symbolic moments. Some even consider it one of the most notable gestures of reconciliation and humility ever made by a head of state.

Those who know me well know that, as a close relative, I am reluctant to speak about Willy Brandt. Nevertheless, I can say with complete conviction that in view of today's existential problems humanity is facing, we could all – not just his party members – use him today. We all can learn something from him: from his way of dealing with other people, even those with different views and values.

Much of this was reflected in the competition films. People become activists and fight against oppression and exploitation, and standing up for freedom of speech and democracy, just to name just a few of the topics.

I am very pleased to welcome Njeri Mwangi on stage this evening, as well as Sam Soto, the director of the film. "Softie" may be a nickname for Njeri's husband, but it is her strength as an activist, as a mother and as a partner that gives the film that special something.

Only an outstanding director can bring all this to the screen. Sam Soko not only accompanied an activist for over 7 years. He also created an extraordinary work of filmmaking about people caught between personal convictions and values, and threats to their and their family's lives. Up to the last shot, the film illustrates the importance of the decision to stand up for democracy.

Willy Brandt fought for his values and democratic convictions during Germany's Nazi dictatorship. Like the family in this wonderful film, he also fled into exile. Later, he returned to politics, and like Softie, had to endure many defeats before becoming the German Chancellor and a Nobel Peace Prize laureate.

The world needs people who fight for freedom and justice. Some even succeed in changing the world.

Today, human rights and democracy are facing great challenges. Even in the US and more and more countries in Europe, authoritarian governments and populist parties of the right are challenging democratic values and rules.

Look into your heart and ask yourself: how can I make a difference? The film "Softie" and its protagonists are a shining example of people's power to do good. They are a reminder to us all not to take democracy for granted, but rather, as Willy Brandt famously said, "dare more democracy."

Ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to present the 2020 Willy Brandt Documentary Prize for Freedom and Human Rights for the film "Softie."

Congratulations!