

Laudatio by Reiner Braun  
On the occasion of awarding Ann Wright  
with the international ethecon Blue Planet Award 2018



Ladies and gentlemen, Dear Ann!

Let us remember:

On 15 February 2003, more than 15 million people throughout the world demonstrated against the Iraq war, which was contrary to international law. They were the greatest actions of the peace movement in the long history of this social movement. More than 500,000 were here in Berlin on the streets, hundreds of thousands also in Washington. The New York Times spoke of the peace movement as the 2nd superpower.

Nevertheless, this worldwide unique, diverse and international movement could not prevent the brutal war of the USA and the so-called coalition of the willing against Iraq.

On 20 March 2003, the USA invaded Iraq.

But were the impressive pictures of these worldwide actions by millions of peace-moving people perhaps the last impulse that kicked off the letter that Ann Wright wrote to the Foreign Minister on March 19, 2003 to her supreme employer?

On this 19.03.2003, one day before the start of the war, Colonel Ann Wright resigned from her post in the Foreign Department and the armed forces in protest against the Iraq war. She had served in the US Army for 29 years, worked in the US Diplomatic Service as a diplomat for 16 years, most recently as Deputy Ambassador to Mongolia.

In a comprehensive letter to Foreign Minister Colin Powell, she explained the reasons for this step:

"I disagree with the Administration's policies on Iraq

I wrote this letter five weeks ago and held it hoping that the Administration would not go to war against Iraq at this time without United Nations Security Council agreement. I strongly believe that going to war now will make the world more dangerous, not safer."

How right she should be! To put it bluntly, no IS without Iraq raid! How much suffering, how much destruction would have been spared the people, how much money could have been spent for survival and not for killing. The answer to this has already been given in the last 15 years: the so-called war on terror was terror and war.

In her letter, in which she generally dealt with the international politics of the USA, the main features of her future engagements in the peace movement can already be seen.

I quote the headlines from the letter:

-I disagree with the Administration`s lack of effort in resolving the Israel-Palestinian

conflict

-I disagree with the Administration`s lack of policy on North Korea

-I disagree with the Administration`s policies on unnecessary Curtailment of Rights in America

She then summarized:

"I have served my country for almost thirty years in the some of the most isolated and dangerous parts of the world. I want to continue to serve America. However, I do not believe in the policies of this Administration and cannot defend or implement them. It is with heavy heart that I must end my service to America and therefore resign due to the Administration's policies"

Already in the letter it becomes clear that there is no frustrated, disappointed and resigned diplomat here, no Ann remains the committed one, the fighter. Only now is she working for the US and the global peace and human rights movement. Let me say it from my point of view: she changed sides!

Now who is this Ann Wright:

Born in 1947, she attended the University of Arkansas with a degree in law. At the US Navy College followed a Master in "national security affairs". For a further 26 years she worked and served in the US Army and made it to Colonel. In 1987 she moved to the Foreign Service, the Department of Foreign Affairs and served as a diplomat.

In her letter of resignation, she describes her extensive international activities in a forceful and committed manner. I quote from her letter of resignation:

I have been a diplomat for fifteen years and the Deputy Chief of Mission in our Embassies in Sierra Leone, Micronesia, Afghanistan (briefly) and Mongolia. I have also had assignments in Somalia, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Grenada and Nicaragua. I received the State Department's Award for Heroism as Charge d'Affaires during the evacuation of Sierra Leone in 1997.

Everyone should consider for themselves what such a step would mean in their own personal, professional and political life.

An old world has collapsed, contacts and joy have broken away, many things need to be developed, discovered and shaped anew. This step requires courage and moral courage. Conquering a new world for the peace movement requires courage. This is what distinguishes Ann Wright's further journey.

"Zivilcourage" is a 1956 work by the then US Senator of Massachusetts John F. Kennedy.

Using the example of eight different senators from US history, Kennedy describes that civil courage is the most important quality of a human being. The biographical texts

deal with people who have acted against their previous convictions, against the line of their party or against public opinion.

Ann stands with her life, her actions in this tradition of resistance and commitment, she is a prime example of civilly courageous action.

We can justifiably say that where peace was threatened, where violent conflicts shaped the lives of many people, where personal and social commitment was necessary, meaningful and helpful, Ann Wright was and is also there, she is to be found, talks and works.

The list of actions, protests, actions of civil disobedience is long and always incomplete. Therefore only a few actions of Ann Wright's engagement in the peace movement should be remembered, which symbolically underpin what Ann Wright today receives the prize for:

- Ann was with us in Ramstein in protest against the drone war and the US Air Base. "It is your country and yet it is used by the USA to kill people all over the world" Ann said to justify her participation in the actions "Stop Air Base Ramstein".

- She sat with the activists outside the gates in Okinawa and the military bases in South Korea, especially on the Jeju Islands. The actions of civil disobedience in which Ann participated out of deep personal conviction - who wants to count them? They have become an inseparable part of her life, somehow a part of herself.

- She protested against the illegal base and the torture prison in Guantanamo, she went to Cuba out of solidarity with a people who still have to fight for their independence and autonomy.

- She was repeatedly part of the Gaza Flotilla to protest against the inhumane living conditions in Gaza. She strongly opposed the Israeli occupation. She, too, who was so committed to the friendship of the peoples, was insulted as an "anti-Semite" - like many who stand up for justice also with the Palestinians and for peace in this region, which has been so suffering for decades.

- Ann was in Afghanistan, she showed the drone victims of the USA and their families the face of the other America.

- She visited North Korea with a women's delegation to promote peace and reconciliation. "We must also reach out to you," Ann said. She has helped to promote a process that is developing so hopefully as far as North and South Korea are concerned. Not only there, but also in Iran she was one of the bridge-builders.

- Time and again, whether in Brussels or Warsaw, she took part in protests against the world's largest military alliance at NATO summits and promoted friendly contacts with Russia - even during a visit. Peace in Europe is

unthinkable without peace with Russia, these words of Willi Brandt are also hers.

- The promotion of women's commitment to peace has always been a special concern of hers. That is why she is so closely associated with the courageous women's organization Codepink. She has been arrested and imprisoned several times with her comrades-in-arms. For her, peace work also means making personal sacrifices.

She hates war and oppression, persecution and injustice - both small and large. Therefore we found her in the second half of 2016 in Standing Rock in North Dakota in solidarity with the indigenous people in their struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The defense of peace and human rights was and is the focus of a restless life, which finds peace in her beloved Hawaii only for a short time.

Ann Wright is a role model for us.

-In the courageous struggle for peace all over the world.

-in a tremendously comprehensive, breathtaking commitment

-in their dealings with all those who think and act differently

-She interacts and brings together and lives what she fights for.

You always remind us to continue and strengthen our actions, not to give up when it becomes difficult, when courage and perseverance are required. In this sense the current President Trump is also a special challenge for you for a better, solidary and democratic America.

For me personally, dear Ann, you are the example that is worth individual commitment and will be successful.

Your civil courage, your commitment is the model for many in the peace movement. I would like to congratulate cordially you on this award.

Berlin, 10 November

Reiner Braun