

Visit to the Redeveloped Mining Sites in the Lake Region of Lausitz

Friday, 31th of August 2012

Invitation of the Personal Representative of the German Chancellor for Africa,
Günter Nooke for H.E. the Ambassadors of the African Embassies in Berlin

Opening Remarks

Excellencies, dear African Ambassadors,

Ladies and Gentlemen, Members of the press, dear Colleagues!

First of all I would like to warmly welcome you. And also on behalf of Dr. von Bismarck thank you very much for your interest and accepting our invitation today. I am really appreciated that so many Ambassadors are be able to join us. Among us are also two German Ambassadors based in African countries. I am happy that Peter Eigen, founder of the Advisory Council of Transparency International and the renowned Initiative EITI (Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative) was able to join us.

I am sure an exciting day filled with interesting experiences awaits us. We are going to see much relating to the lignite mining industry in the area of Lausitz, also known in English as Lusatia, the region I come from, where I was born.

In particular we will be visiting sites where the German Democratic Republic, the former GDR, East Germany operated open cast lignite mines and processing plants.

These former mining sites were not privatised after the collapse of the GDR in 1989/1990, but rather rehabilitated in the last twenty years with money from the German taxpayers and German know-how.

There have been several considerations for inviting you on this excursion today:

First and not unimportantly is the idea that such a day trip provides us with the opportunity not only to see and learn new things together but also to have time to get to know one another and chat with each other.

But, of course it's not just for fun. It will be for business purposes, as well.

You've already received a program for today and Dr. von Bismarck, my former boss, will go into the details later.

The main idea behind this invitation was my personal and professional involvement in the issues of mining and reclamation, both here in Germany and in Africa.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before the Fall of the Wall I was a civil rights activist fighting against the irresponsible use of lignite for electricity production and heating and the incredible devastation of the rural landscape. Many villages vanished completely. Huge amounts of polluted water were pumped into rivers, the level of the ground water sank and power stations filled the air with poisonous sulphur and dust.

After our successful struggle and the peaceful revolution in 1989 the reunification offered us the opportunity to receive founding to repair the wounds of a dictatorial regime and an inefficient economy and allow the land to heal almost free of scars.

Nevertheless, the landscape was changed and hundreds of people have lost the place they called home for ever.

In 1994 a steering committee and a support unit, the Federal and State Agency for the Redevelopment of Lignite Mining Sites, were established. From 1995 to 1998 I worked for this agency as a project manager in optimising the entire process. This Agency, headed by Dr. von Bismarck, was and is still responsible for these highly sensitive issues.

I should say correctly, this agency *together* with the steering committee and the company LMBV. The steering committee consists of the members/staff from different ministries at the federal and state level. The primary responsibility is in the hands of the Federal Ministry for the Environment and Nature Conservation and the Federal Ministry of Finance.

The mining company LMBV operated on the ground - that means environmental rehabilitation above ground and below ground. That's exactly what we're seeing today.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

In the last two years in my position as the Personal Representative of the German Chancellor for Africa I have visited numerous mining sites in different countries on your continent. The use of raw materials and mining is a crucial topic for the development of many of your countries. I think at this time I should not go into a detailed discussion of the curse and blessing of raw materials in a developing country.

However, this visit is to sensitise us to challenges and opportunities of mining on the whole and what is possible, if responsible mining is practised.

Another consideration was to bring together staff from different ministries and agencies dealing with raw material issues, to share experiences, to discuss the challenges you are facing in your countries and to exchange information about mining and reclamation in general.

Lastly, this visit is also an opportunity to show one of the most outstanding success stories of German Reunification, also to the German press, since we need to increase public awareness of this biggest environmental program in Europe. I'd like to say thank you to all the journalists from Germany and abroad, especially from Africa, joining us today.

I'm not sure, whether this programme could be used as a model for African countries. But the best way would be to negotiate all the details with the mining company and private investors. They need to put money aside for the reclamation decades beforehand. If I am not mistaken, this is also enshrined in most of the mining laws in your countries.

In my personal opinion, Germany is able to play the role of an *honest broker* in supporting you and African countries in this endeavour.

There are several reasons for that:

Germany is an old mining nation. The first mining academy in the world was founded in Saxony in Germany in the 18th century. Today, companies from Germany are no longer running mines abroad. They sold their mining branches in the 1980s.

But there is still a lot of know-how and one of the world biggest lignite mining and mining of Kali und Salz (K & S Group) is taking place in Germany in the time-being.

And there is a substantive interest of the German export-orientated industry that raw materials be extracted and traded fairly.

And with this, I'd like to hand over to Dr. von Bismarck, our guide for today.