



“Respect for and responsibility towards one another”

**Christian Wulff,
President of the Federal Republic of Germany,
at the opening of the exhibition “Changing Perspectives”
(Perspektivwechsel) as part of the Berliner Glanzwerke
days of action sponsored by Listros e.V.
on 26 October 2010 in Berlin**

What do you think of when you see a young shoeshine boy in Africa? Do you see a symbol of poverty? Of exploitative child labour and humiliation? Or do you see a human being who doesn't give up? A service provider who is using his income to try to create a better life for himself and his family?

The Changing Perspectives exhibition during the Berliner Glanzwerke days of action seeks to inspire viewers to consider different points of view. The initiator, Mr Dawit Shanko, knows what he's talking about. He himself started shining shoes as an eleven-year-old boy in Ethiopia. Today he is an architect and artist living in Berlin – an asset to our country. From shoeshine to architect – it sounds like a variation on the familiar American dream. A dream that is by no means limited to the country known as the Land of Opportunity. Brazilian President Lula, for example, also worked as a shoeshine boy in his youth.

I don't want to sugar-coat anything here. Millions of children and youth in Africa work out of sheer need, many of them struggling simply to survive. Many shoe shiners count among them. The number of shoe shiners in Ethiopia is estimated at about 50,000. Many of them not only support themselves, but also are depended on by others. Despite their heavy workload, many attempt to attend school and complete vocational training. This determination merits the greatest respect, societal recognition and support. Which is exactly what the organizers of this exhibition are offering in Ethiopia. They support shoe shiners in

school, create job training opportunities for them and establish partnerships with former shoe shiners.

At the exhibition you can read about shoe shiners' "Dreams in a box". One 18-year-old girl, for example, writes: "I work so that someday I won't be poor any more. That's why I sit at the feet of others today. Still, I have worth. There's no doubt of that."

The multiple Olympic gold medallist and world champion Haile Gebreselassie also stands for a dream that came true. He comes from a humble background and worked his way up through talent, diligence and personal ambition. The Ethiopian long-distance running legend has thus become a role model far beyond Africa. Mr Gebreselassie, I am delighted that you join me today in opening this exhibition.

But there's more to the change in perspective that the Berliner Glanzwerke offers: on one of the days of action, students from Berlin schools will shine the shoes of passers-by at many locations around the city. The students will thus take on the role of the Ethiopian Listros, and will later report on their experiences to us and to the Listros. Proceeds from this action will benefit after-school lessons for shoe shiners in Ethiopia. Additionally, technical arts students from the Berliner Technische Kunsthochschule have engaged intensively with the lives and work of shoe shiners in Ethiopia. You can see the results of their project in the exhibition, along with a selection of works on the same topic by sculptors, painters and photographers.

The Berliner Glanzwerke works to promote people's interest in, respect for and responsibility towards one another. To promote a world where no child has to shine shoes to survive. Where every child receives education and training even if they don't earn any money. And a world where people who courageously take responsibility for their own future receive the respect they deserve.

I wish the exhibition and the days of action every success.