

18th Bremen Solidarity Prize

Speech in honour of the laureate Hamira Kobusingye on October 9, 2023 in  
Bremen

Keynote speaker: Prof. Dr. Raimund Bleischwitz, Leibniz Centre for Tropical  
Marine Research (ZMT)

Ms Kobusingye,

Mayor Bovenschulte,

Dear audience,

In these days, we have to acknowledge that 20,000 children worldwide are fleeing extreme weather every day. Whether floods, storms or droughts: the natural livelihoods are under threat and can often no longer guarantee survival. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that in recent years more than 40 million children and young people have had to leave their homes,

at least temporarily. There may be a variety of reasons for this. At the same time, it is clear that human-made climate change is a major cause of overexploitation and extreme weather, which in turn fuel armed conflicts, and that the number of children in need will increase in the years to come.

It is deeply unjust and shameful to see that the causes of climate change do not lie in the countries and population groups that are exposed to the consequences in such an alarming way. A country like Uganda emits around 0.14 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per capita each year while we in Germany contribute more than 60 times as much to the climate crisis at around 9 tonnes per capita. This is not a matter of national self-accusation: according to the French economist Lucas Chancel, it is the top 10 per cent of the world that causes 50 per cent of climate change.

Today we are honouring a woman who has made climate justice her subject. I am very pleased that the members of the Board of Trustees have chosen you, dear Hamira Kobusingye, as the laureate of the 18th Bremen Solidarity Prize. You are a voice of courage, commitment and unmistakable energy of young Africa fighting for climate protection. You impressively demonstrate the climate commitment of youth - in your country and with many other international voices.

You grew up in Kireka, a suburb of Kampala, which is the capital of Uganda, where many people have no access to education. In an NGO, you supported women to grow vegetables so that they could pay school fees for their children. Time and again, your project - and thus also food supplies and the access to education - has been threatened by drought. This is what ultimately made you a climate activist who is equally committed to women's rights and health issues.

Your courageous work also highlights that various dimensions of action must intertwine in order to achieve real and permanent changes. Climate protection is inseparable from access to resources and gender equality. A holistic perspective is required. Together with many others, you organised strike hours in which you explained these connections to people. As the pandemic reached Africa, you continued your activities on social media.

One of your particular concerns is to prevent the planned East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP). This pipeline shall run almost 1,500 km from Lake Albert in northern Uganda alongside the valuable ecosystems of Lake Victoria to the Indian Ocean. Estimates suggest that the subsequent combustion processes of the extracted oil would generate additional CO<sub>2</sub> emissions equal to Australia's annual emissions, not to mention the considerable environmental risks for

Uganda and Tanzania. From the climate protection perspective, the question to ask is - who is doing something like this and why?

Dear Hamira Kobusingye, you have personally experienced the consequences of the oil boom in Nigeria, with all its terrible health effects. You showed the poster of a family from the Niger Delta whose baby already suffered from a contaminated lung. These, ladies and gentlemen, are the consequences of a “resource curse”, when a greedy and corrupt elite plunders a country's natural resources.

In Uganda, it is the French oil company Total that is pushing ahead the expansion of the oil pipeline with financial support from China – even though both France and China themselves have committed to climate neutrality. It is therefore understandable that the French company TotalEnergie is currently facing legal action from NGOs that are addressing these contradictions and claiming human rights violations: Reports indicate that around 100,000 people in Uganda are affected by the first drilling operations in the Tilenga region and are to be forced to leave their homes. In the same region, you find the largest national park in Uganda, the Kabalega Waterfall, whose region has a high biological diversity and at the same time is one of the Nile's tributaries.

I would like to repeat the question: why is the oil company “Total” putting environmental safety and human rights at risk through EACOP, when at the

same time the long-term business perspective must be the withdrawal from oil and this is increasingly being demanded by investors and the public?

*Rise up!* is the name of the movement that you, Hamira Kobusingye, co-founded and which is dedicated to these issues. You engage with women's groups and in communities that are affected by the oil pipeline. You are connected with activists from all over the world, especially via "Fridays for Future MAPA" - the Most Affected People and Areas.

In this context, it is encouraging to see that there are alternatives. For instance, the African Union has recently advocated a five-fold increase in renewable energy capacities on the continent by 2030 at the Nairobi Climate Summit. And at the same summit, the African Youth Assembly called for a new, very different pipeline: a pipeline of support for young companies in climate protection, for education and training, for sustainable agriculture and sustainable ocean use.

On the way to achieving these goals, we can also point to a pending court case in our neighbouring city of Hamburg, where nine Pacific island states filed a lawsuit before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) and demanded an expert opinion on the climate protection obligations that arise for the contracting states from the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. One of the questions is whether carbon dioxide emissions absorbed by the oceans

can be considered as pollution and, if so, what obligations do the polluting countries have to prevent this.

You can see, ladies and gentlemen, how promising Hamira's activities are and how much she is driving forward these developments for climate justice, women's and human rights.

May it also remind us that the Federal Constitutional Court has been urging German politicians to speed up the pace of climate protection since its judgement in 2021. Young people had brought an action to the German Federal Constitutional Court. The judgement requires that important steps in climate protection should not be delayed beyond 2030 and thus attributed to younger people. So once again, the judgement underlines the need for solidarity across generations when it comes to climate protection. Today and here, we can also put it like this:

- Let us share the indignation of young people when their and our common future is threatened.
- Let us be understanding of activities that can be perceived as a “disturbance” in everyday life
- Let us work together to accelerate climate protection.

If we were able to bring Hamira Kobusingye into a dialogue with the philosopher Axel Honneth, for example, the inspiration for us would be: "understand individual freedom not as a private pursuit of interests, but as a solidary complement.

The Bremen Solidarity Prize is a good opportunity to reflect on freedom in solidarity. A solidarity that focuses on responsibility and on complementing each other's actions, here in Germany and internationally. A solidarity aiming for a common world in which people are inextricably interconnected and treat natural livelihoods with care by making ecological limits and justice the maxim for changes in their behaviour.

Finally, let me give you some food for thought that should encourage us to show more solidarity in everyday life and in politics:

- In the recent Covid pandemic, more than a million lives could have been saved if the vaccines had been distributed more evenly.
- According to Fanning & Hickel, the total amount of the global North's climate debt sums up to 192 trillion US dollars - which is a multiple of the total annual military expenditure worldwide. What if a future international court or treaty were to make this sum mandatory as a solidarity payment to the Global South?

It is clear to me that we need to change the way we think solidarity. Certainly, this will be about transfer payments to the Global South, which is hardly responsible for but suffers from the consequences of climate change; certainly, the “solidarity-based complement” will be about investments through which the young generation of Africa can realise its visions of a green continent. One glimmer of hope, nonetheless, is the prospect of greening the Sahel region as a result of climate change.

Besides financial transfers and investments, political leadership will also be an issue. In this context, the impetus provided by the Bremen Solidarity Prize has been and continues to be important. More can also be done at sub-state levels of society and companies! Clean supply chains for the energy transition. Civil society co-operations. Changes in lifestyle among wealthy people. The activities of Hamira Kobusingye remind us of Mahatma Gandhi's statement: “The world has enough for everyone’s need, but not enough for everone’s greed” – in this respect, we can learn from you, Hamira Kobusingye, and from the Global South!

The French philosopher Corine Pelluchon outlines the importance of hope for our everyday lives in her latest book “Hope, or the Journey of the Impossible”. A hope that is based on questioning traditional and established patterns of behaviour and that can open up new paths - possibly even radically new paths.



Corine Pelluchon thus differentiates between "hope" and a naïve optimism that would merely postulate "business as usual - but with green technologies".

So awarding the Bremen Solidarity Prize to Hamira Kobusingye today can be an opportunity for us all to rethink traditional ideas and establish a new "principle of hope". I am very pleased, dear Hamira Kobusingye, that you were able to come to Bremen with your mother. May this and your commitment motivate us all to continue standing up together for climate and gender justice with courage, speed, conviction and solidarity.

Once again, congratulations and all the best for you, Hamira Kobusingye!