

## **High award for private commitment in Africa**

### **Cosmopolitan Bernd-Dieter Fridrich honored for his sustainable work in Côte d'Ivoire**

#### **n appreciation of Dr. phil. Koué Alphonse Yaba, Abidjan**

Gagnoa / Abidjan (17.09.2009) - As the first German citizen, the publicist and former university lecturer, business and government consultant Bernd-Dieter Fridrich was awarded the second highest order of merit that the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire has to award for his special services to the reconstruction of the former Ivory Coast, which was ravaged by civil war. At the invitation of the Ivorian government, the Chairman of the Board of Directors (Directeur du Directoire) of the African non-governmental organization "Fondation AMAN-International" (FAI), headquartered in Abidjan and active on an honorary basis since 2003, received from the hands of the Minister of Solidarity and War Victims, Louis André Dacoury-Tabley, in the presence of numerous ministers and ambassadors, high representatives from business, science and international organizations such as UNESCO, UNDP / PNUD or Global Compact, as well as Ivorian civil society, the insignia of an "Officier de l'Ordre du Mérite de la Solidarité de Côte d'Ivoire". Together with Fridrich, the Vice President of the National Assembly was admitted to the officer rank of this internationally recognized order of merit, which has previously been awarded to very few personalities on August 25, the "Day of National Solidarity." This year, the central national celebrations took place in Gagnoa, the capital of the department of the same name.

In his laudation, he said that the Order Committee had wanted to honor Bernd-Dieter Fridrich, a communications psychologist and historian, an economic and environmental expert, and a specialist in technology transfer, for his numerous initiatives on behalf of unemployed young women, often single parents, who were particularly hard hit by the civil war, and children disadvantaged by society, including orphans and former child soldiers with few opportunities for education. Fridrich, who has spent more than 20 years on a wide variety of missions in more than fifty countries on four continents, expressed his thanks in fluent French, sometimes with very critical words about the practice of development aid on the part of the G8 states and some groups of states in the wider circle, as well as the Geneva World Trade Organization and the World Bank, which sometimes takes on "neocolonial" features; He also took a critical look at German development cooperation organizations, which are largely publicly financed and whose foreign directors often behave like "les petits rois" (the little kings) in their host countries.

## **Waste of money on a grand scale**

Referring to Bundestag document 16/14026, he sharply criticized the "pleasure trips" of a disproportionate number of fellow travelers to the G8 summit in Heiligendamm (2007), which - without measurable results - had cost the federal government alone 81 million euros, without taking into account the costs that the state of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania and the taxpayers of the other seven participating countries had to bear. He recommended that the Federal Court of Auditors, the Taxpayers' Association and similar institutions for monitoring public spending should increasingly scrutinize all development aid funds, of which a wide variety of institutions are happy to make use

themselves to a not inconsiderable extent, and in doing so take a much more critical look at their funding by the public sector, noticeably reduce payments in individual cases or cancel certain parts of the budget altogether.

At the Goethe-Institut on August 28, in the presence of several ministers and state secretaries, business leaders and academics, as well as the UNESCO Secretary-General for Côte d'Ivoire, Professor Lou Mathieu Bamba, he gave a keynote speech on the blessings and curses of government development aid that attracted national attention. Instead of wasting millions on mostly unproductive show events, which often only served to improve their personal image in their own country, political actors should make more frequent use of video conference technology and thus contribute to saving money or use the money to finance concrete projects for sustainable development. In doing so, he quoted South Tyrolean writer and director Luis Trenker, who died in 1990: "The only summit meetings that really make sense are those of alpinists."

During the event at the German Cultural Center in Abidjan, the UNESCO representative praised the exemplary work of the apolitical, The UNESCO representative praised the exemplary work of the apolitical, non-denominational Fondation AMAN-International (FAI), which is open to all races and ethnic groups, in Côte d'Ivoire, a former West African model state still suffering from the aftermath of the civil war. Together with Fridrich and FAI founding president Marie Ginette Amani, he handed out FAI diplomas recognized by UNESCO to thirty graduates of the four-semester training course "Corps Humanitaire. This is one of several special programs run by the Fondation, which focuses on strengthening people's abilities to reintegrate into society after the long period of civil war.

The Minister Louis-André Dacoury-Tabley, who is responsible among other things for people affected by the civil war, thanked the entire FAI team in very moving words for their voluntary work for this aid organization, which is now also active in other countries, and which has succeeded in helping to restore to some extent the image of Côte d'Ivoire as the "Switzerland of West Africa", which used to be positive abroad. FAI President Amani and FAI Director Fridrich, who is also responsible for international government relations, have played an immeasurable part in this, which is why the government of his country already honored the work of the organization last year by appointing Marie Ginette Amani a "Chevalier (Knight) de l'Ordre du Mérite de la Solidarité de Côte d'Ivoire," the third highest level of this award.

During his self-financed trip to Africa, Fridrich completed a mammoth program of more than thirty official appointments in two weeks in the former state capital and business metropolis of Abidjan, including meetings with twelve ministers or their deputies, heads of educational institutions, leading representatives of the private sector and numerous civil society organizations, in order to sound out increased German cooperation or investment opportunities with Ivorian partners.

Commitment to communication, education and science

Journalism continues to fascinate Bernd-Dieter Fridrich to this day, he who actually wanted to become a diplomat but then turned down a career as a civil servant in the late 1960s in favor of what he considered a "more exciting" professional life after meeting Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. The African-

American civil rights activist had invited the then young student to participate in the historic "March on Washington" on August 28, 1963, for the purpose of peacefully demonstrating for the rights of black Americans, and had also written the foreword for his high school graduation thesis on the American civil rights movement of the last 200 years. Like his spiritual mentor, Fridrich always had a great dream, namely to fight for the great goal of more justice in the world through tireless, sometimes daring personal commitment, without initial financial support from third parties, true to the motto that was still valid for the FAI decades later: First get something going yourself before asking others for help.

In addition to his almost forty years of journalistic work in Bonn, Brussels, Washington and other metropolises of international politics, Fridrich has made a name for himself in the field of education, professional training and communication. He is the author of more than 19,000 articles in German- and foreign-language newspapers and magazines, trade publications, and PR manuals, and has also written more than 1,400 speeches for well-known politicians and business leaders, for representatives from science and technology, and a few dozen speeches for his own speaking engagements as well.