

Liz Mohn

**Speech given at the award ceremony for the 2011 Reinhard Mohn Prize
Thursday, June 16, 2011**

Dear Chancellor Merkel, your excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear guests:

I am very happy to now have the opportunity to present the winner of the new Reinhard Mohn Prize with this year's award.

Through the prize, we are honoring the city of Recife, Brazil, for its extraordinary commitment to involving the public in its urban and school development efforts.

Every year more than 100,000 adults and young people take part in its Participatory Budget program, thereby playing a key role in determining how the city and its educational institutions develop. I would like to express my congratulations to everyone involved!

For my husband, Reinhard Mohn, it was always important to include as many people as possible and to listen to what they had to say – above all, when it was time to make changes. His experience as a prisoner of war in the United States after the Second World War made a lasting impression on his thinking and his life.

What do people need? That is the basic question my husband always considered when making his decisions.

He was convinced: Ordinary citizens have an important role to play in a democratic society. More involvement – that has always been an important concern of mine as well. It's a goal we are still pursuing at the Bertelsmann Stiftung today, since we believe that society becomes more stable and dynamic when its citizens have greater opportunities to get involved.

As a result, we've begun focusing this year in our project work on the topic of citizen participation as well.

We've looked all around the world for exemplary approaches. Our goal is to build a bridge between the political sphere, on the one hand, and ordinary citizens, on the other. After all, ordinary people are willing to get involved and take on responsibility. For example, one of our surveys recently showed that, in Germany, 81 percent of the population wants to have more of a say in policymaking decisions.

In Germany it has become clear: In schools and businesses, on the Internet, in the streets and other public spaces, people once again want to be heard during policymaking discussions and to have an impact on decision-making processes. People don't want politicians alone to make the decisions.

"Vitalizing democracy through participation" is the topic of the 2011 Reinhard Mohn Prize. I believe if we support people in their efforts, we can convince many who have been disappointed to become involved and participate in politics once again. For my husband, an active civil society was a key part of ensuring that society has a viable future. By using this prize to spotlight groups that promote deliberative democracy, we are continuing to advance his thinking.

I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations to the mayor of Recife on this successful approach to citizen participation. You have shown us what it means to "live democracy." By bestowing this award, we want to help people in Germany and other countries learn from your example.

It is becoming clear that globalization is generating new ideas about how people can live together. I firmly believe that the next 100 years will not be a European, American or Asian century, but a global one. As always, the most important thing is the way we think about others, as a foundation for how we act. Like my husband, I too am convinced: Considering others is the best approach! That is the key to our future together.

And now I would like to ask our prizewinner, the mayor of Recife, Mr. João da Costa Bezerra Filho, to join me, so I can present him with the 2011 Reinhard Mohn Prize.

Thank you.