

In Memory of Prof. Dr. Horst Köhler

The IJP e.V. mourn the death of former Federal President Prof. Dr. Horst Köhler. It is with deep sadness that we bid farewell to Horst Köhler, who passed away on February 1, 2025 at the age of 81 after a short, serious illness in Berlin. Our thoughts are with his wife and family.

As a former Federal President of Germany and former Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), he leaves behind an important legacy. The IJP are very grateful to him for having taken over the patronage of the Southern African Journalist Exchange Program for many years.

Four years ago, on February 26, 2021, I had the opportunity, as a member of the IJP board, to conduct one of the few in-depth interviews with Horst Köhler (<https://www.horstkoehler.de/reden-texte/africa-and-europe-a-new-partnership-for-a-post-covid-world/>).

“The most important step for me is to see Africa as a true partner, not as an object of care or fear.”

That was one of Horst Köhler's key messages. But he also offered specific solutions when asked:

“Which steps towards a new partnership are particularly important?”

I see three essential steps – and some extremely urgent measures:

- 1) Europe must change its perception of Africa and adjust its attitude.*
- 2) Both sides must assume their respective responsibilities (Africa: good governance and structural reforms; Europe: no double standards and corresponding structural changes).*
- 3) We must develop a strategic economic partnership so that Africa can develop into a global center of growth.*

Urgent measures: Provide Africa with access to vaccines, monetary liquidity and debt relief.”

Four years later, none of these points has lost any of its relevance. In a few very personal encounters, I always got to know and appreciate Horst Köhler as an honest, upright and reliable person.

In 2004, the economist Köhler was elected the ninth Federal President of Germany. He was the first incumbent to not come from party politics and brought a fresh perspective to the highest office in the land. His tenure was marked by clear, often uncomfortable speech as well as a deep commitment to the African continent. He consistently emphasized the need for equal partnership with Africa and called on Europe to overcome colonial thinking.

Even after his presidency, Köhler remained internationally engaged. As UN Special Envoy for the Western Sahara conflict, he worked towards peaceful solutions. Together with his wife Eva Luise, he established a foundation to support research into rare diseases and was a strong advocate for climate protection.

Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier praised Horst Köhler as a “stroke of luck for our country” and emphasized his courage in speaking uncomfortable truths. Former Chancellor Angela Merkel was impressed by his “drive, confidence and ideas.”

His work and integrity will be remembered and serve as an example. With the death of Horst Köhler, Germany has lost an outstanding statesman and a dedicated global citizen.

