I am pleased to welcome you to the Piazzetta of the Historical City Hall on the occasion of the 32nd International Geographical Congress.

I extend my congratulations to Professor Kraas from the Geographical Institute and her whole team for their successful application for hosting the congress here in Cologne. It is a special honour for us that the international congress is taking place here in our city and for the first time in Germany after more than 100 years.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Cologne is one of the most significant scientific and university cities in Germany. Science and research have a long tradition here – mainly developed by the University of Cologne which was founded by citizens in the 14th century. It is one of the oldest and largest scientific institutions in our city – and I would say it is one of the gems of the scientific location Cologne. At the moment about 80,000 students are studying in our city. Of these, 40,000 alone study at the University of Cologne. Natural sciences have always had a long tradition and have been of great significance, not just since a physicist has become the Rector of the University.

Around this beacon various other universities and research institutes, some of them very specialized, have settled here in the course of time. Among them are the DLR,
the German Research Centre for Aeronautics and Space, which has its headquarters in Cologne, the CECAD as well as four Max Planck Institutes located in Cologne. If you look a little bit further, the ABCD Region - with the cities Aachen, Bonn, Cologne and Düsseldorf with their university and scientific institutions - is one of the leading science regions in Europe. Today, 1,800 leading scientists and another 6,700 research assistants research and teach in Cologne.

Ladies and gentlemen, only a few weeks ago we could celebrate a great event with the University of Cologne. The university was awarded the status of a "University of Excellence". This is a great success for the University and the whole scientific location which will attract more national and international scientists to Cologne.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Cologne is a lively and cosmopolitan city which enjoys receiving guests. People from more than 180 nations live in Cologne. I am sure that you will feel welcome here in Cologne during your conference.

Moreover, the trips and excursions offered within the congress will give you an interesting insight into the history of our city. In addition, you will have the opportunity to get to know the region. I wish you a lot of fun with this varied programme and a successful congress with inspiring presentations and interesting talks.