Cologne was founded by the Romans two thousand years ago. Right from the start Cologne was an international city. Today, one million people live in Cologne. They come from all parts of the world. In fact, 180 (one hundred eighty) nations are represented in my city, making Cologne a tiny replica of the United Nations.

One million inhabitants! This includes people with different social, educational, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, different religions and different sexual orientations, young and old, rich and poor, people with disabilities, people with jobs and people without. They all have the same human and civil rights.

The first article in the German constitution says: „Human dignity shall be sacred. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority“. This article represents the most important lesson we learned following the liberation from the anti-Semitic and racist madness of the Nazi regime.

**Diversity may present challenges to society, but it is dangerous to live without it.**

Our local government focuses on the management and nourishment of this diversity. Mutual tolerance is the key to its success. If we fail to meet and respect each other as equals, we betray the social fabric of our communities. We lose our humanity. Social inclusion and togetherness do not fall from heaven. Out of need, these qualities are born in our cities. It is up to us to help them grow.

As some of you may know, Cologne is the German capital for the annual carnival celebration. But we are also proud of our large gay and lesbian community. In Cologne we have a nice saying: “Jeder Jeck is anders”, which means: Every jester, every human being is different. We all have the right to be different.

Diversity is the essence of life. Mutual respect is the pre-condition for peaceful neighbourhoods. These are the key themes of the parades during Carnival and Christopher Street Day, which are celebrated by several hundred thousand people every year as a joyful expression of freedom and happiness.

In Cologne’s two thousand year history we have had very dark periods—times when we forgot the principles of humanity. The darkest chapter ended only sixty-eight
years ago: In Cologne alone, eleven-thousand Jewish people were deported to concentration camps and murdered by Nazis and their supporters during the years between 1933 and 1945.

As mayor of Cologne, I can now stand before you and say that our city now fights against any kind of racism, anti-Islamism or anti-Semitism. It is the daily task of our local government to sustain and support opposition to racism. We support human and civil rights for all of our residents.

To deal with the challenges of diversity, we have formed several committees within the City Council and taken a number of administrative measures within the administration.

One example is the `Integration Council` which represents the interests of migrants. Another example is the `Council of Religion` which currently represents twenty-five religious groups. As mayor of Cologne, I take a “hands-on” approach to issues that concern these groups. If anyone is interested in the progress we have made, I’ll provide details in future sessions. ***

We copied the idea of the `Council of Religion` from our sister city in Liverpool, England. There is so much we learn from each other! For me, round table discussions like this one are very inspiring. You will probably all agree: In the world of local government, best practices have no copyright.

In addition to these two councils we have a number of current working groups which bring together local politicians, staff and representatives from local NGOs, such as the `City Consortium for Disabled People` and the `City Consortium for the Gay, Lesbian and Transgender Communities`.

The Cologne government has also decided to combine these structures in a joint `Diversity Division` which will place the issue of diversity even higher on the agenda of the City Council.

Cologne was the first German city to sign the so called “Charter of Diversity” in 2007. This charter was initiated by four private companies in 2006 and was inspired by the French Diversity Charter.

It may surprise you that private companies have played a pioneering role in developing our diversity policy. But if we look at the core interests of businesses it makes sense: Without a peaceful environment in the labour force a business will not
succeed in manufacturing products of high quality. And without a diversity strategy companies will not succeed in reaching out to the wide range of customers and their different interests. **Diversity management pays off!****

In the meantime, the Charter of Diversity has been signed by more than one thousand and five hundred companies, cities and NGOs in Germany. Similar initiatives have been launched in many other European countries. This expands and strengthens the network between the public and private sector on local, national and international levels. How great is that?

The `Charter of Diversity´ is a clear commitment to equality and mutual respect. The City of Cologne adapted it to the specific needs of our administration. We want to raise awareness among our employees about diversity issues. The needs and interests of people coming from 180 (one hundred and eighty) nations are not all the same. If we want to provide good services to our citizens – and this is our duty as mayors – we must embrace diversity and interact with our residents according to their diverse needs.

We promote the respect for diversity with our twenty two international sister cities and within the European and international city networks. We must also be aware of disrespect for diversity wherever it happens. For example, the growing discrimination and oppression of gays and lesbians in Russian cities worries and concerns us in Cologne. We are one world. Our cities should stand together on issues of human rights and respect for diversity.

Let me conclude:

Diversity is a reality in our cities. Diversity is not a problem. It is a challenge. When we accept diversity we open our doors to the future and all of its potential. Diversity helps improve quality of life for our citizens. It makes businesses stronger and helps tourism. It upgrades the image of a city. **When we say YES to diversity, we say NO to discrimination.**

Human beings are unique individuals with unique personalities, talents and dreams. When our cities acknowledge diversity we prosper. By feeding our individual talents we grow. Our communities become stronger. Together we become a beautiful tapestry, woven by threads of different colours. An isolated community, with no diversity, is a tapestry made of one colour. It might function, but it will never be admired. **A tapestry created by the threads of diversity reflects the dreams of those who help weave it.**
We should try our best to create and sustain a democratic and plural society. Above all, we must respect the human rights anchored in international law and in our respective national constitutions.

To conclude: **Diversity is the key to preserve democracy in our cities. The humanity of our cities depends on it.**

As the great anthropologist Margaret Mead once said:

“If we are to achieve a culture rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole range of human potentialities, and so weave a social fabric, one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place.”

Cologne, Germany is a fitting place for diversity.

Thank you.

***Integration Council Examples***

Special elections—immigrants elect representatives for their own groups. The individuals elected meet four times a year with me to discuss issues of importance.

For instance strengthening native language skills in local kindergartens.

Our part of Germany—NRW now has a law that says all cities must have an Integration Council. Cologne did it voluntarily 8 years ago.

In August alone, Cologne accepted 560 refugees from Bulgaria, Romania, Somalia and Nigeria.

We are now providing asylum for 125 families from Syria.

***Religion Council***

As mayor I meet with representatives of 25 (twenty-five) different religious groups. In the past year we built a non-denominational prayer room at our Cologne-Bonn Airport. All religious groups are welcome to use the prayer room. I am very proud of this achievement.

***Disability Council***
In the last year all of our trains and busses have become wheelchair accessible.

Streetlights now have a built-in audio signal for blind people.

We offer a special carnival event for our blind residents.

***Gay, Lesbian Transgender Council

Our annual Christopher Street Parade attracts visitors from all over Germany.

Members of the GLT community visit our schools to warn about the dangers of bullying and intolerance. This very successful program teaches young people about the need for diversity and acceptance in our schools.

****Charter of Diversity and Businesses in Cologne

Private companies have realized that it makes good business sense to tap into the diverse talent pool of residents in Cologne. They know that sales depend on delivering a wide variety of products to a diverse customer base.

FORD makes an effort to find many employees from the migrant population in Cologne—resulting in Cologne becoming FORD’S European Headquarters.