

Thaler – International Science Prize Acceptance Speech, Mosbach, 10 October 2024

Ladies and gentlemen, good evening.

I would like to begin by expressing my deep gratitude to Dr Hans Günter Brauch, to the Lord Mayor, and to everyone who has worked so hard to organize this event and to welcome us here in Mosbach. Thank you.

I am honored to be with you this evening to accept the International Science Prize for my book, *Saving a Rainforest and Losing the World: Conservation and Displacement in the Global Tropics*.

This book is a product of global research, and global problems, like tropical deforestation, can seem very distant from our everyday lives. But the point of the book is to show how everything is connected.

For instance, there's a good chance that everyone in this room has used palm oil at some point today, and industrial palm oil plantations are one of the principal drivers of tropical forest destruction. So, this global problem touches each of us very directly in the foods we eat and the other products we consume as we go about our day.

We can make personal decisions – and we can take collective political action – that makes things worse, or that makes things better. Every day we live, we have the opportunity to make the world more sustainable and more just.

And our actions should not look only to the “global” level, to our connections with distant places. In the past seven years teaching environmental politics to university students, I have seen how an awareness of the magnitude and complexity of our global problems can be disempowering. In the face of something that seems so big, it can be tempting to give up. But that temptation must be rejected.

Indeed, fatalism is a product of faulty analysis. Fatalism says, “If we can't change the world today, the world will never change.” But of course, the world does change, and with millions and billions of people doing their part, in their way, in solidarity with others, the world will change for the better. Global change is possible.

There is, moreover, a second great problem with fatalism in the face of global crisis, and that is the belief that only global actions are important. Yet the decisions that we make every day matter not just for their role in global processes – they matter much more immediately, tangibly, and significantly for the people and ecosystems around us.

If I throw litter on the ground, that matters for the health and well-being and ecology of my community, just like it matters if I see litter on the ground and I pick it up. If you plant trees, or plant a garden, or support a local farmer, or share knowledge with your neighbors about the

ecosystems you live in and the other life forms who share your home, you are making your corner of the world a better and more livable place. Local change matters.

For these reasons, I especially admire the work of the Hans Günter Brauch Foundation. Peace and ecology, the Foundation's focus, are both questions of relations. To achieve a peaceful and ecologically thriving future, we must recognize that everything is connected, and work to improve our relations with each other and the world around us.

The Foundation's focus on both science and art also resonates deeply with me. Ultimately, doing good science or good art requires us to place our common humanity and moral values at the root of our endeavors.

And lastly, I admire the Foundation's decision to act both globally and locally, for as we recognize our global connections and build our global networks, we must at the same time always maintain our commitment to place, and to improving the community where we live.

The Hans Günter Brauch Foundation is exemplary in these respects, which makes it an especially great honor and privilege for me to be with you all today and to accept the 2024 International Science Prize for *Saving a Rainforest and Losing the World*.

I want to thank you all again for being here this evening. I treasure this dialogue with you, and I am heartened to know that here in Mosbach there are so many people dedicated to the causes of peace and ecology.

Thank you.