

## **Bettagsbegegnung 2024**

### **Hauptreferat von Dr. Elona Prroj**

Dear Federal Councillor Mr. Beat Jans,  
Dear President of the National Council Mr. Eric Nussbaumer,  
Honorable Members of the Swiss Parliament,  
Excellencies, distinguished Guests,

Today's topic, **the power of hope and reconciliation**, is a most important but at the same time a most challenging one. In view of the global problems, conflicts and growing tension in society, this words seems far away from the actual reality. The need for good leadership that inspires hope and leaders who lead with the spirit of reconciliation is greater than ever. This means more than just negotiating peace treaties or resolving conflicts—it involves cultivating a culture of understanding, compassion, and mutual respect. It means recognizing the inherent dignity in every person and working tirelessly to ensure that justice and fairness are extended to all, regardless of background or beliefs.

We are meeting here because in 1848 at the latest, after a period of great unrest in Switzerland, the Federal Day of Thanksgiving, Repentance and Prayer attained its full significance. Thanksgiving, repentance and reconciliation were intended to promote cohesion in Switzerland and did so. It was a call for joint action based on shared values

A quote on which some of these values where based can be found in 2 Cor. 5:18-20:

*2 Corinthians 5:18-20a NIV*

*All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors (...).*

The power of hope and reconciliation has a source, an origin, a foundation, that needs to be discovered. I would never have imagined that my journey would be so life-changingly good, but also so difficult. As we ourselves know, any lasting change, any kind of transformation in life must begin within us. This is especially true for leaders. I had to walk a long and difficult journey, and I am still walking that path, toward forgiveness and reconciliation. I want to share with you part of this journey and some principles I've learned along the way.

I was raised in Albania during one of the harshest periods of communism in the world, living in extreme poverty. But the greatest poverty we experienced wasn't physical—it was spiritual. Our souls were empty, and our moral compass was lost when we decided to deny God and declared Albania an atheist country. There was no hope, and people were ruled by fear. No one was to be trusted, I mean absolutely no one.

In 1991, when communism fell, I heard for the first time how much God loved me—that He gave His Son, Jesus, to die on the cross for me so that I could be reconciled with Him. All my existential questions were answered when I realized there was more to life than what we had been experiencing. My heart was filled with hope when I chose to believe in and follow Jesus. At that moment, I thought, "Now life will be easy and full of joy."

But it wasn't like that. And that's not what God promises. He doesn't promise an easy life, but He does promise His presence to walk with us through the valleys of life.

I got married in northern Albania, and my husband and I pastored a church in Shkoder. The communities there were suffering from a 500-year-old phenomenon called blood feud. It's a cycle of revenge that doesn't stop with the original murderer but extends to every male connected by blood for up to six generations. It's an "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" mentality. In 90% of cases, they don't even take revenge on the killer—they choose the youngest or the best man in the family to cause the greatest pain.

"It's all about honor and shame. According to this phenomenon when someone kills a man, they bring shame to that family and disrupt the social balance. To restore honor, this family is encouraged to seek revenge—blood must be washed away with blood."

During an argument, my husband's uncle killed a man, and from that moment, 25 men from my husband's family had to hide themselves in their homes. They could never leave, as the first one to come out would be the target of revenge.

For four years, my husband, as the pastor of the church, never went outside. Despite the fact that the ancient code forbids the killing of children, women, and clerics, he stayed inside. After those four years, we had an opportunity to move out of Albania and live in England, but we came back only 2 months later with the decision to stand and fight against this phenomenon. My husband would always say, "I am out, helping others, bringing the right definition of what innocence means and serving the Lord, and if the Lord says it's time for me to go home, I will go home."

As his wife, my mission became to be wherever he was. I had read that if a man is accompanied by his wife or children, they would never kill him because if they witness the crime, there can be no forgiveness.

But there came a day, one year after he first left the house, when he went alone to the church. As he was leaving the church, the brother of the man his uncle had killed shot him, ending his life at the age of 34.

One week before he was killed, my husband asked his brother to promise that if he died, they would forgive his blood. And the next week, he was killed.

### **What do you do in situations like this?**

As humans, our natural response is to seek revenge and pursue justice. But there is a higher definition of justice than the one we hold. The Lord says, "Vengeance is Mine."

Does that mean I find peace with God only if He takes revenge for me?

This was one of the reasons I was initially able to forgive—I was asking the Lord to take revenge for me. But one day, He opened my eyes to understand that God's vengeance is different from mine. He revealed to me that the real enemy wasn't Mark, the man who killed my husband—Mark was a victim too.

Together with my children, we began the long process of healing and reconciliation. Keeping our eyes on Jesus and the way he has forgiven us on that cross before giving his last breath, when he asked the Father:

"Father forgive them for they don't know what they do"

It's hard for us to forgive because we often misunderstand what forgiveness really is.

### **What is forgiveness?**

**Forgiveness is a lifelong process, not a one-time event.**

Revenge happens once and is over, but forgiveness requires us to choose to forgive the same offense over and over, every day.

**Forgiveness is not a feeling – it's a decision.**

Story of Gabriel in front of the Court of Appeal. (she will bring a story here)

**Forgiveness is not forgetting. It's choosing not to remember.**

And even when we do remember, we use it as an opportunity to forgive again.

Forgetting is an unconscious action. When we forget something at home, it's not intentional, we don't want to forget. However, choosing not to remember is a conscious decision and a fully deliberate action. It is a choice we make.

### **Forgiveness is not reconciliation.**

While they are related, they are different. Forgiveness is a personal decision that brings inner healing and freedom. Many scientific researches on forgiveness show that it plays a critical role in mental, emotional, and physical health, fostering stronger interpersonal relationships and contributing to overall well-being. New hope grows out of this process. While forgiveness is a personal decision, reconciliation on the other hand involves all parties working together to restore the relationship. We are commanded to forgive, not necessarily to reconcile. If reconciliation happens, it is a beautiful thing.

When we have a true understanding of forgiveness, we can work toward it more effectively.

In our family's tragedy, it was expected that we would continue the cycle of revenge. But we chose to break the cycle of hatred, and we forgave not only the family of the killer but the killer himself.

For the last 10 years, we have lived, spoken, and taught about this topic, founding a foundation called "No Blood Feud, Yes to Life," to help families suffering from this ancient cycle of revenge. But I can testify that speaking about forgiveness and actually living it are two very different things.

I experienced this firsthand when, last year, I accidentally met the man who killed my husband. This was my test: How would I respond? Would I act on what I preach, or would I run away? I had coffee with Mark that day and told him, "Because of Jesus, for me and my children, you are forgiven."

We don't need to experience tragedies like mine to learn and live forgiveness. Yet, forgiveness remains one of the most neglected practices in our society. Perhaps as you listened, challenging situations from the past came to mind that still feel like a heavy burden. I experienced the power of hope and reconciliation in trustingly letting go and letting God do it. In doing so, we will be equipped with the strength to continue to move forward courageously as bearers of hope and bridge builders.

In conclusion, I hope and pray that these verses and my testimony will inspire your leadership. May you lead with the heart of a reconciler, seeking to unite rather than divide, to heal rather than harm, and to build bridges rather than barriers. Remembering that the ministry of reconciliation is not just a spiritual mandate—it is a call to action that can transform our world, one decision at a time.

May God grant you the wisdom, courage, and compassion to fulfill this noble calling. Thank you.