

## World Knowledge Forum 2012

### October 10, 2012 – Christian Wulff: My Leadership Story

During his speech at the 13<sup>th</sup> annual World Knowledge Forum, Former President of Germany, Christian Wulff, focused on learning from the past as well as from each other so that, “the world we live in today will hopefully be a better world tomorrow.”

Mr. Wulff began by outlining nine factors that have contributed to Germany’s success. The first factor he noted was the notorious tendency of the German people to be unhappy and quick to complain. “Thinking about the negatives can be helpful,” he explained. Due in large part to this constant stream of criticism, he said, Germany has been able to avoid complacency in the global economy.

The second point President Wulff described was the number of family-owned small and mid-size companies in his nation, which he cited as being a driving force for innovation in the German economy.

The next aspect discussed was the idea of building long-term solidarity and trust within the work force. Mr. Wulff emphasized the importance of labor unions and the willingness to sacrifice on the part of both management and employees in order to maintain security.

Mr. Wulff’s fourth characteristic built upon the previous one by underscoring the value of a mutual decision-making process. He elaborated on this by stating that “each individuals’ talents and ideas are respected, and we try to realize the potential in everyone.”

The strength and reliability of the German manufacturing sector was another contributing factor. “Germans try to make things that you can touch and feel,” he said. By doing so, according to the former president, Germany has been able to avoid the economic bubbles that are sometimes associated with intangible goods.

The sixth factor that Mr. Wulff mentioned was Germany’s dual system of education and training. German companies often utilize a system of apprenticeship wherein workers spend their initial years accumulating capabilities that enable them to make meaningful contributions down the road. Additionally, Mr. Wulff pointed out that Germany’s education system incorporates lifelong learning and that “there is no one that fails in our system.”

Mr. Wulff then moved on to structures of political governance by highlighting Germany’s complementary system of federal and local differentiation. He compared wholly centralized government to dinosaurs and decentralized government to ants. “Small is beautiful,” he said.

For the eighth factor, Mr. Wulff credited German fiscal soundness as being an important component of success. He noted that Germany, on the whole, excels at saving, and that the German people have a deep understanding of the reality that, “Bad times eventually come.” According to Mr. Wulff, this way of thinking ensures that future generations do not inherit the burdens of the present.

The final aspect Mr. Wulff brought forth was “German angst”. He pointed to Germany’s relinquishment of nuclear energy as an example of how angst can lead to positive change. “By giving up on one sector and moving on,” he said, “we have been able to increase our focus in other alternative energy sources.”

In conclusion, Mr. Wulff reiterated the importance of global collaboration by saying, “There are many crises around the world. We need to be together to resolve these problems. One country cannot resolve them alone.”