

Horst Köhler | A voice of Africa

Horst Köhler has died. After a short, serious illness, as announced by the Office of the Federal President. With Köhler's death, Germany has lost a great statesman. The world, and Africa in particular, has lost an important and significant voice.

Almost exactly a year ago, Horst Köhler spoke out. In an open letter co-signed by others, he issued a stark warning against the reduction of development aid. In the 2025 federal budget, development aid was cut by 937 million euros.

The budget of the Ministry for Development is to be reduced to 10.3 billion euros. This would be a significant reduction compared to previous financial years. The former Federal President himself had often criticised the type of aid given to the world's poor countries.

Participation was important to Köhler

He repeatedly called for better implementation of development projects. According to Köhler, insufficient attention was being paid to the specific needs and structures of African countries. He called for greater involvement of groups and countries right from the planning stage. This also applies to their implementation. His correct conclusion: Only in this way can it be ensured that support actually meets local requirements.

The open letter from February 2024 reads verbatim: 'Poverty, hunger and climate change must be actively combated and more resources invested in education and health. Germany plays a key role here and must continue to fulfil its international responsibility.'

Köhler wanted to see the 'ODA quota' implemented

The background to the open letter was the start of the Munich Security Conference. The main topic of discussion there was an increase in military spending. At that time, the figure of 'only' two per cent in the NATO countries was still being discussed. In the meantime, however, three to five per cent is considered a basis for discussion.

ODA stands for Official Development Assistance. The United Nations agreed on this in the 1960s. This rate is 0.7 per cent – measured against the national economic output of the participating states.

The signatories of the letter referred to the so-called 'ODA quota'. It is probably only known to a small circle of so-called development experts (see above for an explanation). Nevertheless, it is very important. It determines how much money the wealthy countries should spend on development aid. More precisely, it determines what percentage of a country's economic output is spent on development aid.

Germany rounds up the 'ODA quota'

The current German government claims that this rate is 0.83%. This sounds better than it is, because it also includes the costs of caring for refugees in Germany. This is how ONE presents it. ONE is an international organisation that works to fight extreme poverty, among other things. Without the aid for refugees, Germany's ODA rate would be just 0.73%. If you calculate the ratio of ODA per capita, Germany ranks seventh among donor countries – and not first, as former finance minister Lindner claimed.

The real ODA rate is lower than the officially stated one. | Source: ONE

Köhler was a lobbyist against extreme poverty

Such debates, figures and classifications may sound overly complicated to non-experts. For Horst Köhler, however, they showed one thing: we, the rich countries, are simply doing far too

little against extreme poverty. Yet, Köhler was also convinced that more aid would also be in our own interest.

Köhler always saw well-understood self-interest as a driving force for supporting development projects. It was clear to him that extreme differences in prosperity are not sustainable in the long term. He emphasised that the fate of poor countries also affects the security and stability of wealthy nations. In this context, he said in a speech in February 2017:

QUOTE HORST KÖHLER

'You suspect that your own house is not safe when your neighbour's house is on fire.'

The world map painted on two hands. | Copyright Pixabay

Only together – that was Horst Köhler's conviction | Photo © pixabay

Köhler's voice will be missed

There is no politician of renown in sight who could fill the role that Köhler leaves behind through his death. And yet we need someone like him right now. Yes, the world is in 'disorder', as everyone says. And the buzzwords are well known: China, Russia, the Middle East, Ukraine. China and Russia are striving for supremacy, for more influence worldwide. This quest for power is never about human dignity and fairness, which Köhler repeatedly called for.

QUOTE HORST KÖHLER

'The interdependence of everything that happens on this planet demands empathy and fairness, but it also demands an understanding of how our national policies and global conditions influence the opportunities of poorer countries.'

That is why it is important that Köhler's words and deeds are heard even more in the future than they were during his lifetime. He was also concerned about the economic interests of his own country. That is legitimate. But even more than that, he was concerned about the dignity and self-determination of people, especially the African population.

QUOTE HORST KÖHLER

'... I just don't want to see young Africans crossing the Mediterranean and drowning in the long term. It is in our own interest to help them stay at home and find work there. And that means they need help to help themselves, just as the Germans received after the Second World War.'

ThomasSchwarzBonn.de supports the non-profit organisation 'A Future for Slum Children'. You can find information about its work and impact [here](#).

This text was translated with deepL.