

**Embargoed
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**Welcoming speech by Ms Ulla Schmidt
Federal Minister of Health and Social Security
on the occasion of the opening session of the annual
conference of the Bone and Joint Decade**

Berlin, 30th October 2003

Ladies and gentlemen,

I cordially welcome you in Berlin and I appreciate that you have chosen the German capital as a location for your annual conference. It is a pleasure for me to comply with your request to address myself to you in a few words.

Also because I am convinced of the necessity that - in a globalised world in the 21st century - we need the exchange of experiences, an outlook reaching beyond our national borders, and that by joint efforts we will be more successful in our achievements.

For many of the problems in our countries are similar. Therefore it is indispensable to exchange experiences and to jointly look for methods of solving them.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Millions of people in our countries are suffering from bone and joint diseases... from birth... or caused by unhealthy habits... caused by accidents...

This means millions of pains and restrictions in everyday life, but also tremendous expenses for every national economy.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Against this background we have to appreciate that the United Nations proclaimed the „*Bone and Joint Decade*“ three years ago. In this way particular importance is attached to our matter of concern, that is improving the situation of people suffering from bone and joint diseases worldwide. Health is a unique and the most valuable possession for everybody - also for everyone attending today's event.

Health is a prerequisite for turning life chances, abilities and dreams into reality... it is a requirement for being able to work and for feeding one's family...and also for leading an independent life in old age.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Germany will support the goals of the Bone and Joint Decade within the bounds of its possibilities.

Muscle and skeleton diseases can be avoided at least partially by preventive measures. In the industrial countries this particularly applies to backaches, osteoporosis and accidents:

From surveys carried out by the Robert-Koch-Institute and extrapolations applicable to the German territory it was revealed that

- more than 60% of the respondents had suffered from backache within the past 12 months,

- 24% of the interviewed women older than 65 years stated that osteoporosis had been diagnosed

- in 2001 nine million women and men had been injured in an accident

These figures show the size of the problem but also the potential for its prevention.

For these reasons it was and still is an important matter of concern for us to support the idea of prevention.

To this end it is also essential that the media report in a substantiated manner on the goals of the „*Bone und Joint Decade*“.The citizens should be provided with comprehensive and competent information even on those pathological areas which are usually not in the focus of public interest, but of considerable importance with regard to the possibilities of prevention.

And this is the reason why we supported the journalists‘ workshops to strengthen a substantiated reporting by the German media.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In my opinion the subject of prevention in general is a key issue within the German health care system.

Therefore we created incentives for prevention by the recently adopted health care reform. And in addition we will launch an independent Act on Prevention.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Of course - other countries are facing different kinds of problem. These problems are even more dramatic, when I come to think of the victims of landmines.

But, nevertheless - I am absolutely convinced that we can all learn from one another to alleviate grief.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish you a pleasant stay in Germany and, first and foremost I hope that this conference will have a successful and productive outcome.

Thank you very much for you attention.