

**Grußwort von Staatsministerin Katja Keul  
zur Übergabe eines historischen Bugstevens aus Samoa in  
Apia, Samoa  
(10.07.2024)**

Excellencies, Vice Chancellor Prof Amosa,  
Honorable Wiebke Ahrndt,  
Honorable Matavai Tautunu,  
Esteemed professors, guests from academia and civil society,  
Ladies and gentlemen, Talofa Lava!

Today we witnessed the return of a historic prow to its homeland Samoa. It is a symbol of the varied relations between Samoa and Germany, then and now. It is my very special pleasure to be here in person to witness this moment. Although our two countries are 16,000 km apart, they look back on the legacy of a common history, and we share values and the goal of working together for a better future. So, to be here today, amongst Samoan friends, is an extraordinary joy to me! I am also glad to be here because my portfolio as Minister of State includes cultural heritage and addressing Germany's colonial past, not least by starting open and honest discussions and raising awareness. The Past is important because we all need to understand where we come from in order to know where we are going. Physically bringing back heritage items to Samoa today will hopefully help to make cultural heritage visible and tangible, here and now. In 2021, the Übersee-Museum in the City of Bremen approached the Foreign Office with an interesting proposal: To set up a cooperation project with the National University of Samoa, with the aim of conducting comprehensive research on the eminent collection of Samoan artifacts in Bremen, and creating digital records of the entire collection. The project, called "The Blue Continent- the platform", led to numerous encounters, exchange visits and fresh scientific insight on both sides. Its goal was to publish the findings in a digital exhibition that makes this part of Samoan heritage accessible to the Samoan people and to the world. I am especially happy to announce that a physical exhibition will see the light of day in Samoa in September this year. One major artifact from the Bremen collection is this wonderful prow, which was given to the museum in 1932 by a German naval officer. He had captured it during his service in the Samoan civil war in 1888, as we just heard in detail. The war canoe was taken by military assault, destroyed, distributed and the prow was taken to Germany as a trophy. It is a symbol of what should never have happened. The taking of the prow was part of the global looting of cultural heritage, which was a feature of unacceptable colonial behaviour.

The ongoing effects of colonial rule have become a matter of global debate. Returning cultural heritage is part of our commitment to coming to terms with Germany's colonial past – a process much overdue in German society. It is also a process that involves an inclusive dialogue with state partners, civil society and academia. The prow and the Bremen collection tells us something about the history of an appropriation which will now be reversed. Cultural artefacts are an essential part of the identity of every people. No one should be deprived of this aspect of their identity. This is the clear position of the German Government. You, the Samoan people, will retrieve and have full access to items that are part of your cultural heritage. All sides agreed on the significance of the project. It gives us the chance to reflect on our history and to exchange openly and trustfully on our shared past. We are grateful for your partnership and friendship. And we hope that the findings of this project will open up even new chapters of cooperation. Good cooperation with like-minded partners is more important than ever, when we look at today's challenges. In particular, we want to continue our joint fight against the climate crisis, as it is an existential issue.

Two years ago, on the occasion of a visit to Palau, Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock announced that Germany will step up its joint efforts with the Pacific Island States. As industrialized nation and high emitter we must recognize our responsibility towards those who contribute the least to emissions but suffer the most from their effects.

It is important to us to be on side, to listen to your concerns and take note of your interests, and to reassure you of our commitment to further increasing our political engagement with the Pacific Island States. The climate crisis was also the overall theme yesterday in the exchange with Climate Minister Cedric Schuster and an interested audience here in Apia. We note with the utmost respect the tireless efforts that Samoa has made on the international stage to keep ambitious climate goals and the interests of Small Island Developing States on the agenda. We have to be even more ambitious in the upcoming months. And we will be by your side, when it comes to pushing major greenhouse gas emitters and countries with the financial capacities to agree on a new ambitious climate finance target.

Ladies and gentlemen,  
Climate change is also a threat to our cultural heritage. Being aware of this threat, we value even more what has been handed down to us from the past.

And we look for ways to preserve our tangible and intangible cultural assets for future generations, because cultural heritage is part of our identity and tells us about our history and our roots.

As the effects of global climate change threaten to irreversibly change entire landscapes, concerns are growing about the level of damage and destruction to the cultural heritage. We therefore want to support Samoa also in its efforts to preserve its tangible architectural heritage.

The community in Samoa has taken the first steps towards the preservation of a wooden house, which was built in 1914 and used by a German technical expert at that time, and until a few years ago served as the residence of the Samoan Head of State.

The German Archaeological Institute is to help plan the restoration as a project funded by the Federal Foreign Office.

But now, let me conclude and let us all turn our eyes again to the beautiful prow which has found its way back home!

The return today marks the conclusion of a four-year cooperation project but it is not the end of our cooperation.

On the contrary:

The return of cultural heritage should always be intended to open up new chapters of cooperation, of growing understanding and friendship between our people.

The upcoming joint exhibition in September will highlight our friendship even further!

Of course, we would be very happy to welcome you to Germany, when the exhibition opens there in March 2025.

I want to express my heartfelt thanks to all the scientists and other parties involved for their staunch commitment, each and every one made an important contribution to Samoan-German friendship!

My special thanks go to

the Übersee-Museum in Bremen and its Director Professor Wiebke Ahrndt,

the Free Hanseatic City of Bremen – Mayor Dr Andreas Bovenschulte,

and the National University of Samoa – Director Dr Matavai Tautunu.

Let us proceed and let us open up a new chapter of our friendship now!

Thank you for your attention.