



Checkpoint Charlie Museum

December 17, 2003

Ambassador Coats

Mrs. Hildebrandt, it is a great honor to participate in the inauguration of this new exhibit space. Please convey our congratulations to your husband, Rainer Hildebrandt, on this addition to the Checkpoint Charlie museum. And also our very best wishes on the occasion of his 89th birthday on December 14th.

Marsha and I have visited the museum privately and always send visitors from America to Checkpoint Charlie to learn more the city that is symbolic of one of the greatest success stories of modern history.

As President Bush said when he addressed the Bundestag in May of 2002, "The history of our time is written in the life of Berlin." So much history has happened here. During the years that the Wall divided the city, Berlin was a symbol of repression and division. When the wall was torn down in 1989, Berlin became a symbol of freedom and opportunity. But Berlin is also part of a larger human story of triumph over tyranny.

A generation was called to shape great events, a generation shaped by vision, determination -- and patience -- a generation, Mrs. Hildebrandt, of men and women like your husband, Rainer Hildebrandt.

The Checkpoint Charlie Museum, which grew out of an exhibit in a small apartment in 1961, documents those human stories of repression and division, of freedom and opportunity and of triumph over tyranny. In the 21st century, we are re-visiting those same issues but in a very different context.

That is why the lessons of the past are still so vitally important for our future and the future of our children. The Wall, the most prominent symbol of the Cold War and the division of Germany and Europe, has been torn down but it cannot be relegated to the past.

As a newcomer to Berlin, I myself often wonder where the Wall was exactly. Today it is hard to imagine the course of that gray concrete barrier and strip of barren no man's land that once snaked its way 23 miles through the streets of one of Europe's proudest cities.

Here at the Checkpoint Charlie Museum those images of a divided city are documented for generations to come but, more importantly, we are reminded about what it was like to stand at Checkpoint Charlie and about the values that were kept dear during those long years.

The museum is a testament to the spirit that helped bring the Wall down and reunite Berlin -- and a testament to its founder, Rainer Hildebrandt. The Checkpoint Charlie

Museum has been his lifework, and on behalf of the entire staff of the U.S. Mission, I would like to thank him for his commitment and conviction. Mrs. Hildebrandt, our very best wishes to both you and your husband.