BEBUC press release of May 23, 2017

The Congo Activities of the University of Würzburg at the Africa Festival

How can one give new hope to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a country in Sub-Saharan Africa that is so rich in natural resources, but, at the same time, suffering from poverty? What are the historical and contemporary reasons for war, corruption, and destructive exploitation of sought-after minerals, like cobalt, coltan, and diamonds?

These and further questions are addressed by a scientific exhibition that has been designed by the Forum Afrikazentrum of the University of Würzburg, in collaboration with the excellence scholarship program BEBUC. The exhibition can be visited from May 25 to 28, 2017, at the annual Africa Festival.

The Historical Background

The exhibition titled "Bila elimu hakuna maendeleo na Amani" ("Without education no welfare and peace", Swahili), provides insight into the history, the culture, and the educational system of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The historic synopsis describes the time before and during the colonization by Portugal (from 1482 far into the 19th Century), by the Belgian King Léopold II (1885-1908) and, later, by the Belgian State (1908-1960). Another focus is put on the fight for Independence in the 1950s and on the postcolonial time, completed by a description of the present political situation. "The Congo has such a rich history. In the public perception, however, its beginning is usually considered as identical to the arrival of the first Europeans, at the end of the 15th Century. By our exhibition, we want to show an African perspective and emphasize that there had already been thrilling developments before this date", explains Dr. Karin Sekora, project responsible, who has, together with Dr. Julien Bobineau (romance philology) designed the historical part of the exhibition. The exhibition is, at the same time, intended to draw attention to the reasons for the crises in the Congo. Both, like also Prof. Gerhard Bringmann (see below), are members of the Steering Committee of the Forum Afrikazentrum.

The Excellence Scholarship Program BEBUC

The second part of the exhibition is dedicated to the Excellence Scholarship Program BEBUC, which offers a significant contribution to the reconstruction of the Congo, after no less than three civil wars during the past 20 years. The problem: The – previously excellent! – universities in the Congo have severely suffered from the difficult circumstances during the past decades. The buildings, the instrumentation, and the libraries are, in part, in a critical situation. Prof. Gerhard Bringmann from the University of Würzburg is, together with Prof. Virima Mudogo from the University of Kinshasa, the initiator of the program, which is organized by the German NGO Förderverein Uni Kinshasa (JUNIKIN) and is mainly financed by the German foundation Else-Kröner-Fresenius-Stiftung. "Even worse than the state of the university buildings is the over-aging of the academic staff. Young academics mostly see no perspectives for a
university career and often prefer the usually more attractive alternative abroad. We want to change this and break the vicious circle“, says Bringmann. BEBUC presently supports 187 young excellent students and pupils at 16 Congolese universities, seven secondary schools, and two primary schools. The support enables them to study efficiently and rapidly in the Congo, and later abroad. After their PhD, they shall return to Africa as young professors and shall further transmit their knowledge to Congolese students. They shall, thus, help to transform Congolese universities again into excellent places for research and education and shall, thus, become an engine for the reconstruction and development of the country.

The university pavilion is open daily from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

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On the Scholarship Program BEBUC and the NGO Förderevein Uni Kinshasa e.V.:
www.foerderverein-uni-kinshasa.de

A winner of this year’s BEBUC Award, J. Kamundala, student of applied technology in Goma and Speaker of all the BEBUC scholars there. (Photo: private)

Happy about their prolonged or newly granted scholarships: the eight female and four male scholars of Goma, in the east of the country. (Photo: private)