



Life is a Breath of Air

Speech of the President of the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft

Professor Dr. Patrick Cramer

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– Check against delivery –

Excellency,

Thank you for welcoming us here in this beautiful city and for hosting us!

Dear guests,

The great Brazilian architect Oscar Niemeyer, who shaped the very heart of this city, once said:

“Life is a breath of air, a blink of an eye.” This thought truly echoed in my mind on Sunday afternoon, standing high above the Amazon rainforest on the ATTO tower. This unique tower, located about six hours from Manaus, rises up to 325 meters – as high as the Eiffel Tower in Paris. It offers a breathtaking view. Surrounded by nothing but endless rainforest and clouds, I felt a profound humility. The ATTO tower was built for groundbreaking research. Did you know it has revealed why rainforests are rainforests? In simple terms, a rainforest is a cloud factory! Organic gases emitted from the forest undergo chemical transformations in the atmosphere, triggering cloud formation. So, the rainforest essentially produces its own rain. Isn't that fascinating? Isn't nature magical? Isn't science incredible?

But the ATTO project goes well beyond that. It plays a vital role in monitoring climate change and deepening our understanding of how the Amazon acts as a global carbon sink. This work is crucial as we prepare for the upcoming UN Climate Conference COP30 in Belém. Tomorrow, we will present the scientific evidence on climate change and propose urgent actions that need to be taken now. Another essential aspect of the ATTO tower is that it represents a true collaboration between Brazil's INPA, the National Institute of Amazonian Research, and the Max Planck Society. This partnership is exactly why we are here today: to strengthen our ties with Latin America, and especially with Brazil.

Our cooperation is already yielding remarkable results: in the past five years, Brazilian and Max Planck researchers have co-authored over 3,200 scientific papers! And the future looks even more promising. Brazil has recently experienced a powerful resurgence in scientific ambition and in policy engagement, with remarkable progress of scientists across many fields.



However, new geopolitical challenges emerge. For example, the recent U.S. administration complicates collaboration and talent exchange with Brazil. As Max Planck Society, we want to offer a welcoming, open, and mutually beneficial partnership. In this spirit, we aim to establish Max Planck cooperation centers here in Brazil. Just last week at the University of São Paulo, we exchanged ideas that already inspire great excitement. We look forward to turning these ideas into reality.

To close, let me return to Oscar Niemeyer. Did you know his very last project was in Germany, in the city of Leipzig? There's a major crane company in Leipzig whose CEO had immense respect for his canteen chef, a true artist in the kitchen. To keep this talented chef, the CEO decided to build a spectacular rooftop canteen - and asked a famous architect to design it. Remarkably, he turned to Niemeyer! Niemeyer was 103 years old at the time, yet he accepted the challenge. Today, you can see the magnificent "Niemeyer Sphere" hovering over the rooftops of Leipzig. And yes - the chef stayed! What is this story teaching us? One could say that two artists, the cook and the architect, created something extraordinary because the CEO believed in their talent and gave them creative freedom. I think science must follow this example. Like that company CEO, we must think freely, nurture talent, and believe in great ideas.

Before I finish, I want to thank my delegation who accompanied me during the last week – some of whom are here tonight: Ricarda Winkelmann, Thomas Duve, Susan Trumbore, Victor Caetano Andrade, Caro Abadie, Sebastian Hoepfner, Christiane Grimm, and especially Tobias Renghart, who coordinated this trip. Thank you!

So please, let's raise our glasses – to a shared future full of promise and collaboration. All the best!