

# German Unity Day a reminder to protect democracy, freedom: envoy

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MANILA -- German Ambassador to the Philippines Anke Reiffenstuel turned emotional as she recalled life growing up in East Germany during the Cold War, saying the forthcoming commemoration of German Unity Day is an opportunity to remind people of their responsibility to protect the values of peace, democracy, freedom, and the rule of law.

Speaking before students during her visit to the German European School Manila (GESM) in Parañaque, Reiffenstuel said Russia's war against Ukraine is not only just an invasion of another country but an attack on the world order that has an impact on all people's life and future.

She reminded students to learn the value of cooperation, mutual respect and of learning history.

“It’s so much more than German national day. It’s the end of the Cold War, it’s a new world. We got so used to it that we take it for granted, that’s now being intentionally being destroyed by Russia,” Reiffenstuel said after a video screening by GESM Campus TV on the fall of the Berlin Wall.

“We see that this is not just invasion, not just an attack on a sovereign state but it means destroying peace and the world order. It means destroying the structure we can rely on, a structure of trust and mutual cooperation, of the respect of other countries, bigger countries respecting smaller countries... all this is being destroyed now, is being attacked by Russia.”

Reiffenstuel underscored the relevance of the war in Ukraine on the lives of Filipinos and of the people of the world, as well as its implications.

“If we accept this, we will just live in a world with no peace, no order or where the order is dictated by big countries... and will not be able to choose our own future,” she said.

Reiffenstuel recalled growing up in East Germany during the height of the Cold War where people could not speak freely. While she dreamt of living and working abroad, there were only certain kinds of professions that students then could choose from. She explained there was a “ceiling” or limited number of jobs available, say math teachers or pharmacists, given the needs of the country then.

“We are always very cautious to speak up or to say what we think because we never know who in the room would be a spy. This was the environment I grew up in and this was an environment or country I would not have identified (with),” she said.

Reunification came at the right time, she said, having graduated from secondary school in 1987 and was in university when the Berlin Wall fell.

She eventually joined the German Foreign Service, serving in various posts in the German Foreign Ministry including postings in German embassies in London, New Delhi, Cairo before becoming Ambassador to Manila in 2019.

She has always had a passion for working and communicating with people and engaging in dialogue, she said, which would not have found an outlet had Germany remained divided.

“The opening of the wall was like the opening to the world,” Reiffenstuel said.

“Many East Germans can (then) see life where they have a freedom to do what they aspire to do.”

German Unity Day commemorates German reunification in 1990 when the Federal Republic of Germany (FRD or West Germany) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR/DDR or East Germany) were unified.

Germany's defeat in World War II was followed by its political division with East Germany being controlled by the communist Soviet Union, while West Germany by the capitalist and more democratic western powers.

The divide intensified during the Cold War, and during construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961 which restricted the movement of people between East and West.

Through political upheavals in the 1980s, the Soviet Union's grip and influence over its puppet states loosened. Eventually, in November 1989, the Berlin Wall opened and fell, helped along by peaceful protests and demonstrations.

On October 3, 1990, East Germany ceased to exist when its federal states officially joined the FRD.

Reiffenstuel was in the German European School Manila (GESM) as part of the school's commemoration of the occasion and of the reopening of school after two years of online learning.





Parañaque City Administrator Voltaire dela Cruz represented Mayor Eric Olivarez.

Welcoming them were officials from German European School Manila (GESM) including Board Member Roland Odenthal, Head of School Christoph-Boris Frank, Head of Administration Volker Ross, and Head of English Primary Viola Go-Buck.