



**City Hall Reception "One Year To Go - Invictus Games 2023"
on September 6, 2022 at 2:00 pm, Jan-Wellem-Saal.**

The spoken version is valid

[salutation]

It is my great pleasure to welcome you today here in Düsseldorf, the capital of North Rhine-Westphalia!

The hall we are in right now was named after Johann Wilhelm II, Elector Palatine, or Jan-Wellem for short. You can see his equestrian statue on the square in front of City Hall.

Esteemed Duke of Sussex,

Members of your family have visited Düsseldorf several times over the past few decades.

The visit of your grandmother, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and your late grandfather, Prince Philip, some 57 years ago (1965, later again in 2004) remains a treasured memory in the collective conscience of our city. Your grandmother is also the bearer of the Great Ring of Honor of the Council of the State Capital – an award that symbolizes British-German friendship after the end of the Second World War. On May 8, 1945, the Second World War ended after Germany's unconditional surrender. It ended the inhumane terror of the National Socialist regime. It also marked the end of an era in which the Germans and the British viewed each other as enemies.

A new era of reconciliation and reconstruction began – for the world, for Europe, for Germany and also for Düsseldorf.

In 1946 the British Military Government merged the former provinces of Rhineland and Westphalia to form the new state of North Rhine-Westphalia. This sealed "Operation Marriage". The memorandum stated: "Its capital will be Dusseldorf" - a fateful decision that marked the beginning of a much brighter future.

It was around the same time that the Royal Berkshire Regiment was stationed in Düsseldorf. The then-Mayor of Reading, Phoebe Cusden, recognized the need of the

people, especially the children, living in post-war Düsseldorf and put in motion a chain of events that started with a student exchange and culminated in a formalized partnership between the two cities in 1988.

Let me express in no uncertain terms that we will never forget the many acts of kindness from our friends in Reading.

After your brother honored us with his visit in 2016 on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the State Capital, we are delighted to welcome you here today. As you might have noticed by the reaction of the many citizens waiting outside upon your arrival, there is an undiminished enthusiasm for your family and your country in the City of Düsseldorf.

But let me assure you that we are not just excited about the fact **that** you are here but also **why** you are here!

In 2013, the Invictus Games were launched on your behalf and initiative. The games are a unique international multi-sport event for wounded, injured and sick servicemen and -women, both serving and veterans. By competing, each contestant gets to tell their own unique story. A story of resilience in the face of adversity. Of both vulnerability and strength.

The Invictus Games underline the power of sports and how it can help further the rehabilitation process.

At the same time, the Games illustrate just how dangerous military missions can be for the physical and emotional integrity of those who serve so bravely. You, being a military man yourself, know this from personal experience.

During a visit to our partner city Chernivtsi in Ukraine last week, I could see for myself the horror that war brings to the civilian and military population.

It is a pointless war of aggression on Ukraine, which contradicts international law and attacks our unifying European values of peace, freedom, democracy, human dignity and self-determination.

As long as this war continues, Ukrainian soldiers are not just defending territorial lines against the Russians, but they are defending ideas which we believed to be transnational consensus after the end of the Second World War.

Unfortunately, we were wrong.

So, standing in solidarity with Ukraine must be a matter of course for all free and democratic societies.

Today, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to all servicemen and -women who are committed to peace and freedom. Whether they are deployed for national or allied defense, on international missions, or at home tackling crises.

I hope that all of those soldiers will soon return home to their families unharmed. But in the event of injury or illness, it is our social duty to take care of them.

We want to give them **"A home for Respect."**

Dear Duke of Sussex,

In April, we attended the fifth Invictus Games in The Hague together. It was impressive to feel the spirit of friendship and fairness that everyone embodied.

It is our goal to create the same atmosphere here in Düsseldorf next year.

When we open the Invictus Games in twelve months' time, Düsseldorf will be the host city for athletes from all over the world. They all share a common burden. But in their actions as soldiers and in their athletic endeavors, they are role models to all of us.

Today, in this room with us, there are many of the people who will help to turn the Invictus Games in Düsseldorf into a celebration of triumph and togetherness.

The Bundeswehr, the Invictus Games Foundation, the City and the organizing agency D.Live are doing an outstanding job. I sincerely want to thank all of you for the effort you are putting into this worthy cause.

The constructive and trusting cooperation between the City and the Bundeswehr is impressive. Just a few days ago, I had the opportunity to see this for myself when I visited with the project staff.

My administration is delighted to contribute our experience as a host city for international sporting events such as the Grand Départ of the Tour de France, or the Maccabi Germany Games. These and many other events were realized by dedicated professionals and by the spirit of our citizens.

Dear Duke of Sussex,

Dear Duchess of Sussex,

I am humbled and honored that you will take the time and experience our beautiful city for yourselves today.

Please enjoy the scenery and the hospitality as well as many stimulating conversations – right here at City Hall as well as for the remainder of your time here in Düsseldorf.

One Year To Go - Invictus Games 2023 –

Let's do this together!

And now I would like to give the floor to State Secretary Möller, joining us here today from the Federal Ministry of Defense.

Dear Duke of Sussex,

thank you very much for your warm words!

I now cordially invite you and your wife to sign the Golden Book of the city - the official register holding only our most esteemed guests.