Message of welcome
from the Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development,
Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul,
Model United Nations
(DuEMUN)-RuhrMUN, University of Duisburg-Essen

About 180 students from South and Southeast Asia, from South and North America, from Europe and Africa are taking part in this year’s international Model United Nations Simulation Conference at the University of Duisburg-Essen. I welcome you to Germany and I am very glad that you will share with one another your valuable experience of political, social and cultural issues, your academic knowledge and also, I am sure, your visions for better solutions to global challenges.

UN simulation conferences are based on the principle that the delegates represent not the government of their home country but that of another country where not only the available means to exercise influence are different but also the mentalities and convictions. These conferences thus create a space to learn and understand more about the perspectives of other governments and cultures. Actual international conferences would benefit very much if this ability to empathise were more developed than is currently the case.

International exchange and cooperation between students and lecturers, such as occurs under the framework of UN simulation conferences, are very important steps on the road to creating global social networks for a better understanding and to preparing new generations of academics for their future careers in international relations. I congratulate the organizers and the participating international lecturers on their cooperation in organizing this conference. Over the next few days you will experience in a direct and vivid form the mechanisms, logic and problems of international government conferences, with all their vested interests.
At the opening ceremony the guests of honour and in the next few days the student delegates in their simulation of UN debates will focus on the links between global risks or crises and climate change, economic recession and poverty reduction. It is very necessary that we look at these topics as aspects of one great challenge for all of us.

The Millennium Development Goals serve us as a compass on the road to greater justice in globalisation. 30 years ago, the North-South Commission chaired by Willy Brandt called for a new, more just world. At the start of this century, the global community finally gave these ideas concrete form. With the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals, eight commandments for equitable globalisation were formulated and adopted, with binding goals and targets being laid down for the very first time.

The global community decided first of all to halve the proportion of people living in absolute poverty by 2015. Notable progress has been made in this respect during the last few years. However, right now I see a threat looming over the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals, particularly because of the present crises. There are already, today, 1 billion people facing starvation once again. There is a great danger that the economic crisis may turn into a humanitarian disaster on a continent like Africa, with thousands of starving people and thousands of deaths. That is why we need to act. That is why we have a duty to keep up our efforts in this area.

I am therefore glad to see that close to 200 students are willing not only to engage in an academic exercise but to commit themselves to thoroughly experiencing different views and to shaping common ambitions.

I hope you will experience productive discussions and the establishment of new close personal and professional cooperation between the participating student organisations, lecturers and universities.

Heidemarie Wieczorek-Zeul
Federal Minister for Economic Cooperation and Development