

On Friday 3rd of November 2017 we had to say good bye to our long-standing executive officer Maria Hirsch. From the very beginning she was "heart and soul" of our organisations and steered the Austrian Ugandan Friendship for more than three decades. Now, in order to spend her well-deserved retirement together with her husband Helmut, Maria decided to move the central point of her life and her place of residence to Berlin.

Maria Hirsch started her engagement for Uganda more or less by chance in 1986. Looking for a volunteer assignment in Latin-America she got to know Dr. Peter Jjumba from Uganda who was deeply involved in the organisation of the legendary meeting in Unterolberndorf of 1985. She agreed to provide the venue for the constitutional meeting of the "Project Group for the Rehabilitation of Uganda" in her library where at the end of the day Maria Hirsch had been elected the first chairperson of this group. From then she decided to focus her voluntary work on Uganda.

She visited the country for the first time in January 1987 and managed to establish sustainable contacts to Ugandan officials and other development organisations from which our association is profiting till today. At the same time Dolores Bauer founded the "Plattform Österreich-Uganda", a unique cooperation between governmental and non-governmental institutions and persons in which Maria Hirsch together with Dr. Michael Stadler played a key role for more than one decade.

For the biggest cultural project of the official Austrian development cooperation ever, the "Ndere Project" in Uganda, Maria Hirsch was appointed as the main coordinator from the beginning till the opening ceremony in 2004 by the "Vienna Institute for International Dialogue and Cooperation" (VIDC). A project which included development theatre to educate the illiterate populace, the construction of a cultural centre, the preservation of indigenous cultures and all this for the purpose to promote peaceful coexistence of the different ethnic groups in Uganda. In our days the Ndere-Centre and Ndere-Troupe are still very important and successful institutions in the Ugandan cultural scene.

In Austria itself Maria Hirsch guided generations of Ugandan students through their struggle with the Austrian bureaucracy and gave them a hold in case they were overwhelmed by the strange Austrian culture. She organized social meetings, countryside trips, Independence Day celebrations and many events more. The last important project, in which Maria Hirsch played a major role in was our publication "Partner Uganda" which was presented to the public in spring 2017. The book is a great document explaining the long-term relations between Austria and Uganda, where we are sure, that these unique relations would not be the same without the contribution of Maria Hirsch.

Up from November 2017 she is living in Berlin, honoured by all of us as Member of Honour for lifetime of our Friendship Association. We are deeply grateful for her untiring engagement and we admire with great respect her brave decision to go further once more. We want to thank her for this big part of her life she contributed to the Austrian-Ugandan relations and we wish her good luck and all the best for this new chapter in her life.

Farewell Maria!

Pictures and short movie clips of the great and worthy farewell party you'll find here:

[Photos 1](#), [Photos 2](#),