

A personal Obituary for PD Dr. Hans Günter Brauch

Still deeply moved by the unexpected death of Hans Günter Brauch—known at home and to us, his friends, simply as Günter—I find it very difficult to write a few coherent lines about his life in the face of the pain caused by his sudden passing away. Furthermore, it is very challenging to capture in an obituary his incredibly fruitful life and his tireless struggle for local and global peace—a struggle in which he advocated for a broader, deeper, and more sector-specific concept of security, rather than one limited to the military and police.

Throughout his life, he was a tireless researcher, professor, and editor of international and local books through his own publishing house, AFES-PRESS, and with Springer. He established a foundation to leave a lasting legacy of his long life among researchers working for peace and security through conflict resolution. I am struck by the memory of our half-century of collaboration, working through numerous organizations during which we sought to contribute to a sustainable and peaceful future in this complex world. Nor do I want to overlook the love and affection he showed my four grandchildren—Charlotte and Olivia in Munich, and Luca Kai and Jao Paolo Nalu in Cuernavaca—who adored their loving and indulgent Opa Günter. I believe it was an incredible privilege that my son and his family, who live in Munich, had the privilege and pleasure of spending the last weekend of Günter's life in Mosbach, where he was to the two girls like a true grandfather, always so affectionate. Here, too, my grandchildren wept when they heard the news and went to visit his desk, where he had so often held them on his lap.

In his professional life, Hans Günter Brauch turned his concerns about war and peace into concrete action when, in 1987, he founded and became president of the Association for Peace Research and European Security Studies (AFES-PRESS). Under its auspices we undertook the task of editing, beginning in 2005, the four Handbooks on Expanded, Deepened, and Securitized Security with Transitions toward Peace and Sustainable Security (*Globalization and Environmental Challenges*: 2008; *Facing Global Environmental Change*: 2009; *Coping with Global Environmental Change, Disasters, and Security*: 2011; *Handbook on Sustainability Transition and Sustainable Peace*: 2016), to which more than 400 authors from every continent contributed. This project proved to be a very demanding undertaking, and the series has become

internationally recognized as a standard reference work, physically weighing more than 15 kilograms.

We had the opportunity to present these manuals at the United Nations in New York, in Europe, Latin America, Asia, the Pacific, and Africa. The co-publication of these books helped us understand the complexity of wars, past and emerging conflicts, European colonization over the centuries, followed by U.S. control through the Monroe Doctrine (now known as the “Donroe” Doctrine) in Latin America, and finally, the internal colonization carried out by national agrarian, industrial, and speculative bourgeoisies around the world. The most striking results are a tiny elite with incredible wealth and the emergence of extreme poverty, environmental destruction, the loss of crucial natural resources, and the deterioration of social cohesion due to forced and economic migration, conflicts, and violence—ranging from individual households to the entire planet.

Together with Prof. Janos Bogardi, Günter helped consolidate the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS), where we trained hundreds of international students and postdoctoral researchers at MunichRe’s Water Castle on topics such as risks, socio-environmental vulnerabilities, and migration—and where the concept of water security was consolidated. Together with the UNCCD and the Spanish government, we co-authored a treatise titled *Securitizing the Ground, Grounding Security* in which we analyzed the dangers of increasing droughts worldwide and the lack of food due to climate change and water scarcity.

I cannot list all the books Günter wrote throughout his life, which can be found on his website: http://www.afes-press.de/html/download_hgb.html, where he explored potential and actual conflicts, as well as feasible negotiations and the limits imposed by these confrontations around the world. His entire life was devoted preparing young people to face the risks and dangers of this interconnected and complex world. Beginning in 1976, he devoted tremendous energy to educating university students in Europe, Asia, and Latin America, where he served as an adjunct professor (Privatdozent) in the Faculty of Political and Social Sciences at the Free University of Berlin until 2012—a position from which he retired to take on the task of editing books and offering critical perspectives on the evolution of the planet and its governments. In addition, Günter was a researcher at Harvard and Stanford Universities.

He was a visiting professor of international relations, international studies, history and international justice, global environmental change, and risks and vulnerabilities at the universities of Frankfurt am Main, Leipzig, Greifswald, the Erfurt University of Education, Darmstadt, Tübingen, Stuttgart, and Heidelberg. Since 2012, he was also a

visiting professor at the National University of Malaysia (2010, 2012) and at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok, Thailand (2012, 2013–2014), where we trained APEC civil servants in the Master's program in International Development Studies and organized a winter course in 40°C heat. We visited later these students in Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, and the Philippines. We also taught together at Sciences Po in Paris (2010–2012), the European Peace University (EPU) in Stadtschlaining, Austria (1999–2001, 2009–2012), and Aarhus University (2012) as well as at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, where we also wrote the book *Reconceptualizar la Seguridad en el Siglo XXI*.

A few years ago Günter transformed AFES-PRESS into the Hans Günter Brauch Foundation for Peace and Ecology in the Anthropocene (HGBS): <http://www.hgb-stiftung.org/> in his hometown of Mosbach. The Foundation was established on 8 May 2020 on the occasion of the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II and of the liberation from fascism, to combine a joint peace research and ecology perspective on the new challenges facing humankind's survival in the Anthropocene and to promote science and education to address these global environmental challenges. Günter's philosophical vision was to “learn and think locally in order to act globally.” in collaboration with teachers in Mosbach, Neckar-Odenwald County, Baden-Württemberg he promoted a local annual award about knowledge and cultural competitions for high school students.

In 2023, the HGBF launched the International Science Prize on Peace and Ecology in the Anthropocene (http://www.hgb-stiftung.org/html/Science_Prize.html). For the founder of the HGBS, the Science Prize and the student awards were initiatives designed to promote a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the problem and possible strategies for its solution. The founder's primary objective was to contribute, through education and the dissemination of scientific and educational knowledge, to reflection on our behavior and our role in the face of global environmental and climate change, with the aim of awakening and heightening awareness of our social responsibility to present and future generations (<https://hgb-stiftung.de/html/Preise.html>).

International submissions were evaluated by an international jury of experts in the fields of peace and ecology. The first winner in 2023 was Dr. Tobias Ide of Murdoch University in Perth, Australia, for his book *Catastrophes, Confrontations, and Constraints: How Disasters Shape the Dynamics of Armed Conflict*, published by MIT Press. In 2024, the International Science Prize (ISP) addressed the topic of Ecocide: Impacts of Wars and/or Climate Change on Food Security Since 1945. The prize was awarded to Prof. Dr. Gregory Thaler who, since September 2024, teaches at Oxford

University and to Dr. Victor Tsilonis (Thessaloniki, Greece). An honorable mention for their exceptional doctoral dissertations went to Dr. Annet Adong of Uganda, Dr. Melissa Quispe-Zuniga of Peru, and Dr. Christo Idowu Odeymi, who was born in Nigeria and studied in Australia and Japan. In 2025, submissions were evaluated on the topic “Impacts of Wars and Global Environmental Change on Food Insecurity, Hunger, and Migration,” with Dr. Angela Jill Lederach winning the award for her work on the conflict in Colombia with the book *Feel the Grass Grow: Ecologies of Slow Peace in Colombia* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2023), and Dr. Matthew G. Gillett for his book *Prosecution of Environmental Harm before the International Criminal Court* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022). When Günter died the Committee was preparing the 2026–27 award, which the HGBF was in the process of announcing.

Günter made a huge contribution to the arduous task of editing scientific books at Springer and AFES-PRESS Publishers in Mosbach. At Springer, an international publisher that releases 2,700 journals and more than 220,000 books, Günter launched the Hexagon Book Series (HESP), whose volumes became international handbooks on critical topics such as global environmental change, security, peace, the environment, social representations, and many others. Faced with the grueling task of editing a textbook with hundreds of contributors, Günter had developed a new series featuring short books, called Springer Briefs on Pioneers in Science and Practice: PSP. Out of concern for environmental degradation, climate change, and their impacts on the most vulnerable countries, he proposed the Springer Briefs in Environment, Security, Development, and Peace (ESDP) series, which reflected his global concerns, where forced migration and displacements played a significant role. Working with countries in the Global South, he promoted books on decolonization, internal conflicts, and displacement, through which he had championed many unknown authors in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to give them a voice they would not normally have with international publishers.

In addition to his many international contacts, he had collaborated with Editorial Lit, which published studies on the social sciences in German, and with Editorial Teri in New Delhi in English. In the half-century since I’ve known Günter, his love for books was expressed in 1988 with the founding of AFES-PRESS at his home in Mosbach, where he had established himself as a publisher of important books. He published series on peace research, global security, human-environmental security, climate change, and energy policy on which he also collaborated with Editorial Lit. He held seminars on these topics and subsequently published a report on the event or a book on the topics discussed, in which he was a pioneer in addressing the impacts of climate change.

He was an avid reader and had set up an annex in his three-story house—which he had built specifically for this purpose—to store all these books, which he had organized by subject and by floor. Günter had turned most of his house into a library, where there were tens of thousands of books on the most important issues in current thinking about security, peace, and international affairs, and he was a regular reader of the most important newspapers in the Western world. Buying books was Günter’s passion, and he would purchase the latest books on his topics of interest at any conference and in bookstores near the event venues.

In addition, he had set up an archive in the basement, where Thomas Blast—a friend and collaborator of many decades—had organized a massive collection and maintained the websites for the HGB Foundation and AFES PRESS. This archive included reports from numerous sources, some of which were difficult to access in Europe. Günter had become a specialist in chemical and nuclear weapons, however, in light of the terrifying consequences of these weapons, he had distanced himself from working on physical violence and destruction. Instead, he had become involved in peace research in Germany, in Europe, and within the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), and in 1977 he witnessed the founding of the Latin American Council for Peace Research (CLAIP) in Oaxtepec, Mexico, at a time when all governments in Latin America were controlled by military regimes and under U.S. influence. Only Mexico had been labeled by Mario Vargas Llosa a “perfect dictatorship,” where thousands of young people had disappeared as a result of state violence and the US Condor plan.

Over the five decades I’ve known Günter, he has promoted meetings, books, and seminars on peace; he explored the term Anthropocene with Nobel laureate Paul Crutzen—a concept with which I disagreed, insisting that we needed to explicitly identify this destructive *Anthropos*. Inspired by Betty Reardon of Teachers College in New York—who had linked violence and war to the consolidation of patriarchy—I proposed the term Patriacene as an alternative, because, thousands of years ago, powerful men had destroyed the care of children within matrilineal clans and had subjugated women and slaves under the control of powerful men, followed by colonialist, authoritarian, military, and capitalist regimes.

Günter had been actively involved not only in the publication of books but also in numerous peace events, where he participated in working groups on human and environmental security. He had been an active participant in nearly all IPRA and CLAIP peace conferences. He was a selfless collaborator; when economies in the Global South were unstable, currencies were devaluing, and interest rates were rising. He managed IPRA’s international funds through an account that a former Secretary

General of IPRA had opened in Europe years earlier. One example was the conference in Ahmedabad, India, where Günter had managed the conference's finances entirely on his own. This selfless work allowed me, as Secretary General, to devote myself to organizing and managing the conference. His dedication to service made him well-known among peace researchers, and now many have written to me, mourning his unexpected passing.

Günter had also organized numerous presentations of the books we had written or edited together, where our two worldviews—his German sense of order and discipline combined with a systematic approach, and my experiences of suffering in conflict-ridden countries, war-prone regions, and grassroots women's organizing—had sparked new ideas and unfamiliar concepts in Günter. Sometimes we would work for weeks to craft a complex introduction for a collective book that reflected the contradictions of the modern world. His travels to South Africa, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Zaire, Sierra Leone, Thailand, Cambodia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Laos, Mexico, Central America, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Costa Rica, and Colombia had made him acutely aware of internal colonialism and the centuries-long domination by colonizing powers. His discussions with Professors Pablo González Casanova, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, and numerous researchers and security experts had helped broaden his perspective and deepened his understanding of the complexity of current situations regarding direct and indirect forms of control and the multiple risks to which countries in the Global South were exposed.

As he looked back on his long life, rich in reflections and the books he had written or edited, Hans Günter Brauch had become a true scholar. He had been able to transform the knowledge he had acquired through quiet reading in his library and his travels around the world—where fieldwork visits to rural women, indigenous peoples, and numerous archaeological sites had allowed him to develop a complex understanding of the world and past cultures. He had come to understand that there were perspectives with numerous connections between known and underlying realities, which had shaped some parts of the world into developing nations and others into industrialized countries. He had been amazed by the generosity of the poorest people, who had shared a tortilla with salt with him, without wondering if they would have another one to eat tomorrow. This solidarity transformed his worldview into one where everyone shares with one another to live better in a world of scarcity yet marked by solidarity and environmental degradation.

His passing has left us with many reflections on how to foster a planet that cares for the most vulnerable, its natural wealth and existing cultural diversities. We will miss him every day, and we take comfort in the fact that his ideas will continue to circulate

throughout the world, promoting peace and human, gender, and environmental, this
HUGE Peace and Security. May he rest in peace!

Úrsula Oswald-Spring, Cuernavaca, Mexico, 14 of July 2026