

Female flood helpers attend a course as part of the foundation's River Búzi flood-warning project in Mozambique. Villagers use megaphones, whistles and drums to warn of floods.



Acting responsibly — Sharing knowledge

An interview with Dr. Hans-Jürgen Schinzler

As a member of Munich Re's Supervisory Board and Chairman of the Munich Re Foundation's Board of Trustees, Dr. Hans-Jürgen Schinzler has been closely involved in the foundation's work from the very outset. We look back on the first few years of the foundation's existence and forward to the issues it will address in the future.

The Munich Re Foundation commenced operations in April 2005. How would you sum up what has been achieved in the first five years?

The foundation quickly "found its feet", launching a number of important projects in areas such as micro-insurance, where much headway has been made with the help of the foundation's international conferences. The foundation has also scored some notable successes in the field of disaster prevention, the early-warning systems set up along rivers in central Mozambique, for instance, having functioned successfully on a number of occasions. Despite its global agenda, the foundation has also embraced a number of important issues close to home, here in Munich.

Can you give us an example?

One foundation dialogue forum entitled "The risks of living in Munich" was devoted to pandemics – currently in the news because of the new influenza strain – and the effects of fine dust and allergies in a city like Munich. Focusing on the Munich of tomorrow has yielded interesting perspectives of the future for areas such as education. To ensure Munich has a viable, open-minded education system in the future, geared to the needs of a major city, it is just as important to cater for disadvantaged children as to attract first-class academics.

Does one particular project mean a great deal to you?

I find it fascinating that large nets can be used to extract drinking water from fog in Eritrea. It's incredible that a net measuring only 40 m² is able to generate 200 litres of water a day. I'm also very keen on the Mozambique project because it gets everyone involved: district authorities, village communities and local youngsters. This provides the vital motivation factor that ensures a project succeeds. The flood early-warning system has prevented disaster on two occasions – when Cyclone Fabio struck in 2007 and during floods early in 2008. In the latter case, the community was so well prepared that it was able to assist neighbouring communities not linked to the system.

What will the foundation focus on in future?

The foundation's existing projects continue to demand our undivided attention. Much remains to be done in the field of development policy, for instance, where it looks as if the United Nations Millennium Development Goals may not be achieved after all. The results of the climate summit in Copenhagen also show that the impacts of climate change have not yet been brought home to all the decision-makers.

Reinsurers can be thought of as a kind of early-warning system, with tomorrow's risks already showing up on their radar. The same is true of the foundation. Its involvement with the UN University in Bonn has put migration well and truly on the agenda. Environmental migration is set to increase in the face of climate and environmental change. We will only come up with sustainable solutions to this problem provided we increase our knowledge of it and act in time.

Whilst on that subject, has the foundation lived up to its motto – "From Knowledge to Action"?

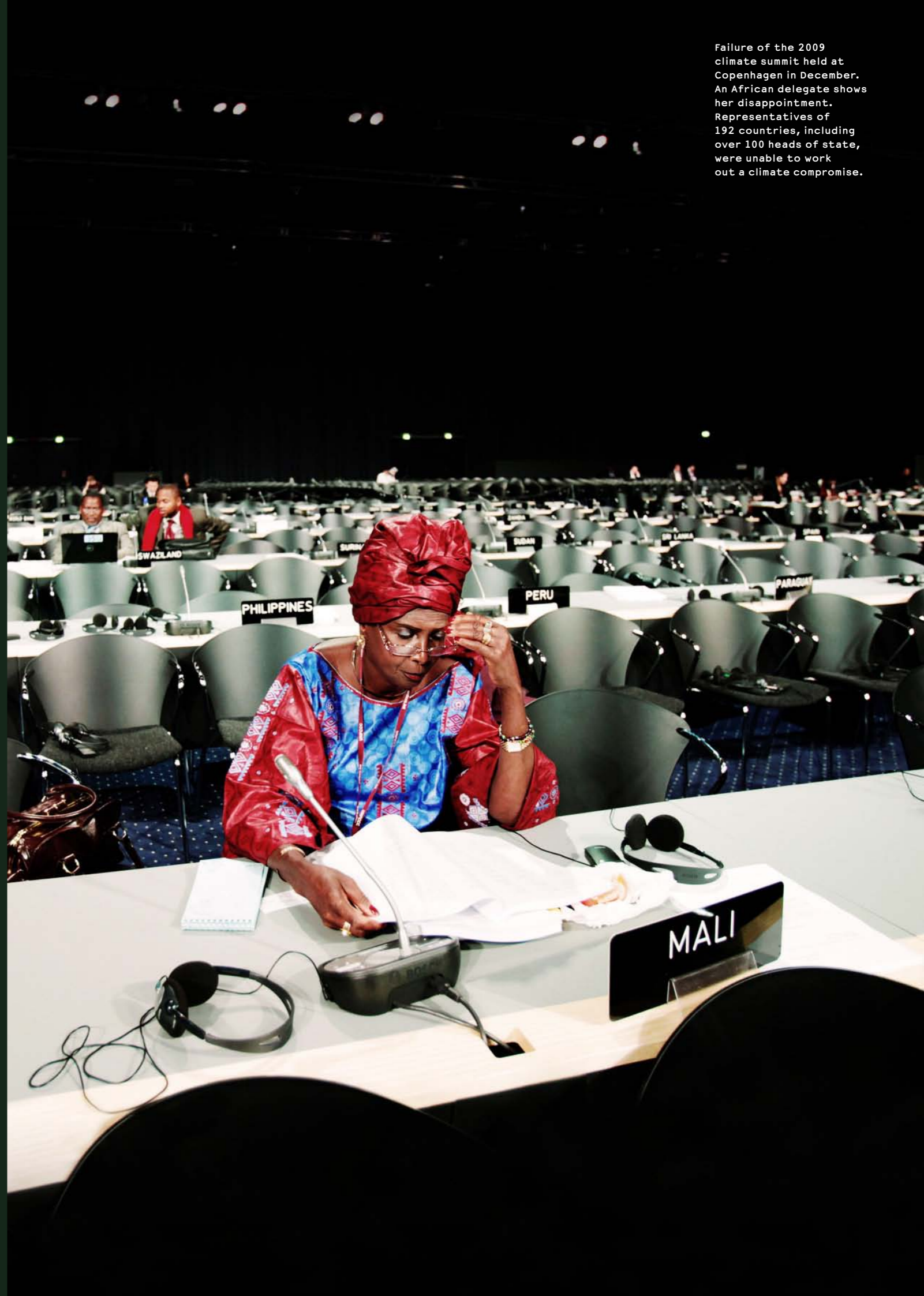
Absolutely. The foundation is able to tap Munich Re knowledge, such as the Geo Risks Research database. Knowledge is also contributed by Munich Re's agriculture, life and health experts. Thanks to the foundation, Munich Re's vast experience can also be deployed in countries otherwise closed to us because we have no clients there. The foundation's work is a prime example of what Munich Re Chairman, Nikolaus von Bomhard, was referring to when he said, "Companies with broad knowledge bear a certain responsibility, and acting responsibly means sharing that knowledge. As well as donating our money, we also donate our knowledge".

You chair both Munich Re's Supervisory Board and the foundation's Board of Trustees. How is the foundation perceived within Munich Re?

It is held in high regard, being considered a key aspect of corporate responsibility. It fulfils an important role and shows that there is more to the Munich Re brand than being a global risk carrier because the foundation is able to address issues outside the scope of Munich Re's normal, day-to-day business. The foundation's commitment epitomises corporate social responsibility at Munich Re. In times of dwindling public resources, the foundation shows that it also fulfils a key social role. Munich Re holds social commitment in high esteem – it is a long-standing tradition that we are keen to preserve.



Dr. Hans-Jürgen Schinzler, founded as CEO of Munich Re the Foundation. He chairs Munich Re's Supervisory Board and the Foundation's Board of Trustees.



Failure of the 2009 climate summit held at Copenhagen in December. An African delegate shows her disappointment. Representatives of 192 countries, including over 100 heads of state, were unable to work out a climate compromise.