Welcome address Rektor Prof. Dr.-Ing. Gerhard Sagerer, Opening CALAS Workshop: Structure and Function of Centers for Advanced Studies, 26.04.2017, 10:30 am, ZiF

Ladies and gentlemen,

As rector of Bielefeld University it is my privilege and honor to welcome all of you to Bielefeld University!

First of all I would like to take this chance and congratulate all of you who are involved in creating and developing CALAS (Center for Advanced Latin American Studies) to your project which successfully convinced the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research to provide substantial financial support for up to 12 years. This success has not appeared from nowhere: it is the result of trustful and well-established cooperation between institutions as well as a shared passion and hard work of researchers who did all the paperwork and thinking necessary to hand in a compelling proposal.

Speaking about fruitful and long-term collaboration I would like to warmly welcome our partners from Guadalajara University in Mexico:

Héctor Raúl Solís Gadea, Rector of the University Center of Social Sciences and the Humanities
Sarah Corona Berkin and Gerardo Gutierrez Cham who are both members of the CALAS Directory Board

It is a pleasure to have you here! Guadalajara and Bielefeld have a long history of cooperation both in research as well as in the context of teaching. We are looking forward to seeing this cooperation grow and develop in a strong and productive network. Thus, I am more than happy to also welcome and greet the other CALAS partners from abroad:

FLACSO Ecuador, Costa Rica University and Universidad Nacional de San Martín in Argentina as well as the German partners University of Kassel, Leibniz University Hannover and Friedrich Schiller University Jena. With CALAS your aim is to create a place – and literally more than one as there will be several regional hubs – for cutting-edge interdisciplinary and transregional research.

Obviously a first and essential step is developing a clear concept of CALAS’ structure
and function which is the reason you are meeting today. At this point I merely have to tell you one thing: There could not be a better place for this workshop than the ZiF (Center for Interdisciplinary Research) we are now at. The ZiF - Bielefeld University's Institute for Advanced Study was founded in 1968 (even before Bielefeld University) and at that time was Germany's first institution of this kind. It has been a model for many Institutes for Advanced Study in Europe. Normally, I say a few more words about the ZiF, but as Britta Padberg, ZiF’s Executive Secretary, will be here today to discuss with you about her experiences and I am sure that she will present you the ZiF far better than I.

Instead I would like to use this opportunity to stress the fact how much Bielefeld University benefits from the ZiF: The university’s strong interdisciplinary character would not exist to this degree without the ZiF. The intellectual creativity and productivity of ZiF Research Groups has inspired and encouraged a great many students and young scientists. Experiencing the vanguard of their field and following the discussion of well-known scientists – students have always been allowed to sneak into events in the ZiF’s big plenary room – has often been the initial point of yet another scientific career. We are grateful that with the ZiF our students have the chance to get in close contact with the scientific community at a very early stage. The lectures and work of ZiF fellows like Norbert Elias (who stayed at the ZiF for six years) have added to Bielefeld University’s visibility on a regional, national and even international level.

As you can see there are many good reasons for a university to have an institution like the ZiF at close quarters. With centers for advanced studies being far more common than 50 years ago, it might be both easier (because you can learn from past experiences) and more difficult (in terms of competency) to establish a new center, but I am sure that with the expertise gathered in this room, you will have a productive workshop and a sound foundation. Last not least I would therefore like to welcome the invited guests from the UBIAS network, the Merian Center in New Delhi and the Center for Advanced Studies in São Paulo (Brasil) who will share their experiences with you.

I wish all of you a lively and fruitful exchange of ideas – may the creative and productive momentum of this place inspire your plans for CALAS!